European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report Belgium (FR)

by Cécile Mathou

Cite this report as:
This country update has been produced by Cécile Mathou, as part of the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation, a project managed by ICF International (lead consultants: Jo Hawley, Iliona Murphy and Manuel Souto-Otero). The report has benefitted from feedback from the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) Members for Belgium (FR) as well as a quality assurance panel of experts and Cedefop (lead contact Ernesto Villalba-Garcia).

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, ICF International, the EQF AG Members or the members of the quality assurance panel. Neither the European Commission nor any person/organisation acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of any information contained in this publication.
Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................3
2 National perspective on validation ........................................4
  2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation ..............4
  2.2 Skills audits ..................................................................9
  2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation ..........................................................10
  2.4 National institutional framework .......................................12
  2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities ..........................13
  2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives .........17
  2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes ............................................18
3 Information, advice and guidance ..........................................22
  3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment ......................................22
  3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions ......23
  3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners ..........................................................24
4 Quality assurance and evaluation ........................................24
  4.1 Quality Assurance Framework .........................................24
  4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures ..................................25
  4.3 Evaluation framework ....................................................25
5 Validation methods ..........................................................26
  5.1 Methods used and the validation process ................................26
6 Validation practitioners .....................................................29
  6.1 Profile of validation practitioners ......................................29
  6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners ..........29
  6.3 Qualifications requirements ............................................30
7 References ..........................................................................30
  7.1 Organisations Consulted ..................................................31
1 Introduction

By way of introduction, it is important to note that the educational landscape is fragmented in the French-speaking part of Belgium and a very large number of local initiatives and training bodies coexist, under the authority of different administrative entities (French Community, Walloon Region, Federal state). From the learners’ perspective, the drawback of such a situation is the potential difficulty for individuals to have their learning outcomes recognised from one learning context to another.

The Walloon and French-speaking Community Governments are committed to putting lifelong training and education into practice, mainly by promoting synergies between education and training stakeholders, by cooperation with the world of work, flexible pathways and more targeted adult education. Cooperation is one of the key conditions that will make lifelong learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning (‘validation’) possible in the French-speaking part of Belgium. So far, cooperation has been the result of the progressive establishment of mutual trust between all education sectors and stakeholders.

In Belgium (Fr), validation is divided into different systems or ‘dispositifs’:

- Validation of competences (VDC) is carried out by continuous vocational training centres under the remit of a Consortium. VDC leads to the award of a Skill Certificate (Titre de Compétence), which is different from a formal VET qualification.
- Valorisation of experience (VAE) is used to grant admission into education pathways or exemptions and does not lead to the award of a certification or qualification. The authorities have retained the term of ‘valorisation’, referring to the notion of ‘enhancing’ experience, rather than using the concept of ‘validation’ used for example in France, where VAE can lead to the award of a qualification. In Belgium (Fr), different VAE procedures are in place in:
  - Adult education (Enseignement de Promotion Sociale),
  - Universities,
  - Hautes Écoles (higher education level).

Overall, validation in Belgium (Fr) has clearly moved forward since 2010 and significant steps have been made towards the establishment of cooperation between the four validation systems mentioned above. Following the momentum created by initiatives such as the Project ‘2013 - Year of competences’ encouraging the collaboration of all the education sectors, it can be expected that VNFiL is an area where more coordination will take place from 2014 onwards. There is a clear political will from national government (reinforced by European initiatives and incentives) to enhance such cooperation between the different systems, although it is not meant to result in uniform or standardised approaches and procedures. Different legislative frameworks regulate the four systems, which address different needs and target different groups, and this is not expected to change.

The system of validation in the vocational training sector (VDC) in Belgium (Fr) is highly standardised and benefits from formal recognition by central authorities. The stakes involved in the validation of skills have led governments to position the validation of competence mechanism in the public service sector. Because the system has initially developed in a top-down fashion, VDC has a strong institutional basis, with a central authority recognising the certification carried out by validation providers.

Starting from this highly standardised and centralised system, the VDC is now moving towards the development of more flexible arrangements and local experimentations to better suit individual needs and demands. The main issue that remains to be addressed is the ‘social’ recognition of VDC on the ground, by social partners and employers, which will ultimately determine the ‘market value’ of the Skill Certificates. Although recent

---


developments show that the level of awareness among labour market actors has improved, there is still untapped potential in the way Skill Certificates are recognised and valued by these actors. While the period between 2005 and 2012 was an experimentation phase for VDC – the mechanism was being set up and implemented – the next phase will focus on consolidation. Based on existing evaluations, audits and surveys, the mechanism has proven to be rather user friendly and robust (e.g. very few complaints or appeals against Consortium decisions), as well as transparent for all the partners. The next phase will be crucial for the institutionalisation of the mechanism, i.e. its recognition not only by institutional partners but also by labour market actors (companies, social partners etc.). Future developments will also depend on the establishment of sustainable funding arrangements to make the mechanism viable in the long term.

In higher education sectors, the validation system (VAE) is, on the contrary, highly decentralised and not standardised, reflecting the legal provisions concerning the autonomy of higher education institutions. The key challenge for VAE is to build trust between stakeholders in the sector and raise awareness among the public. In particular, VAE in universities rests on the trust that has been built between counsellors and other stakeholders (e.g. the Inter-university council of the French Community of Belgium - CIUF, Lifelong Learning – ETALV - Committee) with faculties, academic authorities, and administrative services. Thanks to this mutual trust, the system has managed to ensure that VAE has become an effective right in universities3. The main challenge is the lack of sustainable, long-term funding that is undermining the long-term development of VAE. Other key issues to be addressed are communication with external stakeholders (guidance services, Forem, Actiris etc.), the creation of tools facilitating the work of the VAE jury, the training of counsellors and better awareness among potential candidates.

Given the common issues and challenges faced by all VNFIL systems there is certainly room for cooperation, at least in the form of information exchange, if not in the harmonisation of certain mechanisms (e.g. common communication and guidance tools targeting the general public)4.

The information available in relation to the different validation systems in Belgium (Fr) varies. Responses to questions in this report have been provided for all systems, where available.

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

There is not one national system for validation in French-Speaking Belgium but four systems corresponding to different education sectors:

- **Validation des compétences** (VDC) in the field of continuous vocational training
- **Valorisation des Acquis de l’Expérience** (VAE) in
  - Adult education (Enseignement de Promotion Sociale),
  - Universities, and
  - *Hautes Écoles* (higher education institutions).

The table below summarises the key characteristics of each system.

Table 2.1 Summary overview of the four systems of VNFIL in Belgium (FR)

---


4 For further information on potential areas of development for VNFIL in the French Speaking Community of Belgium, see Mahieu, C. (2011). Rapport d’activités des projets soutenus par le Fonds social européen de validation de compétences et de valorisation des acquis de l’expérience en Belgique francophone. Centre interuniversitaire de formation permanente (CIFoP).
### Name of the system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation des compétences (VDC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003(^5) (effective since 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of VNFIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award of a Titre de Compétence (Skill Certificate) which can be used to access the labour market AND/OR to access further training in adult learning or vocational training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valorisation des acquis de l’expérience (VAE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991(^6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of VNFIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easing access to education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal training in EPS (+ exemptions to shorten training pathway)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valorisation des Acquis de l’Expérience (VAE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994(^8) (effective since 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of VNFIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easing access to education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal training in universities (+ exemptions to shorten training pathway)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Valorisation des                                   |
| 1995 (effective                                       |
| Type of VNFIL                                    |
| Valoration                                        |
| Main objective                                   |
| Easing access to                                  |
| Outcome                                           |
| Credit for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal training in EPS (+ exemptions to shorten training pathway) |

---

\(^5\) On July 24 2003, a Cooperation Agreement was signed between the authorities of the French-speaking part of Belgium (Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission), relating to the validation of skills in the field of continuous vocational training. This Cooperation Agreement aims, primarily, at implementing mechanisms which will allow for skills acquired by individuals through experiences in daily life, at work or during vocational training to be recognised.

\(^6\) Enseignement de Promotion Sociale (EPS) can be translated as social advancement education. Since 1991, training has been organised on a modular basis. EPS is sometimes described as « second chance » education. Formal adult education is traditionally called « education for social advancement ». It aims to support the social advancement of the individual by upgrading professional knowledge and socio-cultural competence. The organisation of formal adult education and EPS allows an important opportunity for adults to move one or more steps up in their qualification. For more information: http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=26391

\(^7\) Article 8, decree of 16 April 1991. Since then the Government of the French Community has specified the modalities for the recognition of competences for access to training in EPS (latest modifications adopted in 2011).

\(^8\) In higher education recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Acts of 5 September 1994 in universities and 5 August 1995 in the Hautes Ecoles (non-university higher education institutions). Universities were then authorised to organise, under specific conditions, the access, without holding the required degree, to a limited number of second-cycle programmes as well as to grant exemptions from certain courses (reducing the duration of the studies) in all their programmes. The article 1 of the "Bologna" Act of 31 March 2004 has given a legal foundation to the procedure and introduced the terminology Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE) for higher education, although some initiatives were already in place in some universities since the 1970s. According to Mahieu (2011) it is only since 2008 that VAE is taking place on a larger scale.
Despite this level of fragmentation, validation in Belgium (FR) has not developed in an inconsistent way; it is the result of initiatives supported at national level; it benefits from formal recognition by central authorities, and is framed by important pieces of legislation.

Different legal frameworks apply to each validation ‘system’. Each system has its own governance and steering arrangements, is driven by different objectives and follows a specific strategy. Therefore, important differences exist in the approaches taken to validation between these systems, and to some degree, between providers within each system. Intra-sectoral differentiation is more pronounced in adult education and in universities while validation in the Hautes Écoles sector is fairly harmonised. Finally validation in continuous vocational training is highly standardised and centralised.

VAE and VDC are different in several ways, with regard to their methodologies, objectives, and outcomes. In particular, it is important to make the distinction between the two concepts of ‘valorisation’ (to enhance and get credit for prior experience, in view of obtaining access to formal education and training) and ‘validation’, which gives access to a recognised title or certification.

The different procedures are described below in more detail.

**Validation of Competences (VDC) in the field of continuous vocational training**

On 24 July 2003, a Cooperation Agreement was signed between the authorities of the French-speaking part of Belgium (Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission), relating to the validation of competences in the field of continuous vocational training. The cooperation agreement was formalised through three decrees adopted by the authorities concerned at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004.

---

5 In higher education recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Acts of 5 September 1994 in universities and 5 August 1995 in the Hautes Écoles (non-university higher education institutions). Universities were then authorised to organise, under specific conditions, the access, without holding the required degree, to a limited number of second-cycle programmes as well as to grant exemptions from certain courses (reducing the duration of the studies) in all their programmes. The article 1 of the “Bologna” Act of 31 March 2004 has given a legal foundation to the procedure and introduced the terminology Valorisation des Acquis de l’Expérience (VAE) for higher education, although some initiatives were already in place in some universities since the 1970s. According to Mahieu (2011) it is only since 2008 that VAE is taking place on a larger scale.
This Cooperation Agreement is primarily concerned with implementing mechanisms specifically aimed at officially recognising professional knowledge and know-how acquired outside of typical training channels. This recognition is organised by a Skills Validation Consortium (CVDC) bringing together the five most important public sector training providers in French-speaking Belgium, and overseeing a network of training providers via Validation Centres which organise testing sessions which, when successfully carried out, lead to the issuing of a *titre de compétences* (skill certificate). All candidates benefit from an identical assessment procedure, on the basis of a single set of skills assessment indicators, no matter who is being assessed, where, when or how an assessment takes place. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skill or ability in a given occupation in a situation that is typical for the given occupation, in an approved training centre.

The *titres de compétences* is a legal document recognised by the three French-speaking entities. It may be used either for direct access to the labour market or for access to further training courses (in the five public bodies providing vocational training). It can be accumulated to obtain a qualification in the adult education sector, on the condition of passing an integrated final test (*épreuve intégrée*) organised by the Enseignement de Promotion Sociale (see below).

The latest Strategic Note (*Note Stratégique 2012-2014*)\(^{10}\) adopted by the Consortium highlighted a number of strategic priorities. Key priorities include:

- Improving the management of the Validation Centres, in particular on initiatives aimed to pool validation sessions.
- Sectoral conventions with social partners to improve the market value of Skill Certificates.
- Validation in/by companies (in particular, collective validation). The Consortium is planning to target more specifically private sector actors in its communication activities.
- Improving awareness about VDC among the general public and specific target groups.
- Improved cooperation with guidance providers (especially in public employment services, PES): one important aspect for the Consortium is to develop a comprehensive strategy for guidance, support of users, in cooperation with intermediary actors that intervene upstream in the validation process.
- The development of the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through vocational training (RAF, Reconnaisance des Acquis de Formation)\(^{11}\) leading to more Skill Certificates being awarded.

**VAE in adult education (Enseignement de promotion sociale - EPS)**

In Wallonia, social advancement education (EPS; *enseignement de promotion sociale*) is provided in 165 institutions spread over the region. EPS offers flexible courses for adults, organised into short modules, taught either during the day or evening. These courses are accessible to all and allow everyone to combine employment and training. The skills acquired through personal and professional experience are recognised and can therefore be accredited. EPS now has around 172,000 students\(^{12}\).

EPS is organised in modules leading to credits that can be accumulated and transferred. These modules are called Training Units (Unités de formation, UF). Training pathways are common to all EPS learning sites; they clearly establish the skills necessary to be admitted in a UF and the learning outcomes to be acquired to validate the UF. All learning outcomes can be recognised through VAE (except the learning outcomes corresponding to the

---


\(^{11}\) Learning outcomes acquired by learners completing a training pathway in a vocational training institution. The recognition of these outcomes can lead to the award of Skill Certificates, thereby avoiding the repetition of assessment. The idea is to facilitate bridges between validation procedures. Starting in 2011, validation through the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through training (RAF) has led to the award of 585 certificates, to 228 persons.

practical work that will be presented for the completion of the studies. See Section on Methods and Procedures.

EPS has recently adopted an official circular related to the automatic recognition, in all training centres, of the Skill Certificates delivered by the Consortium. Candidates can thereby be granted exemptions from certain training units (UF).

**VAE in Universities**

The Bologna Act (2004) defines VAE as the process of assessing and recognising knowledge and skills of an applicant in the process of accessing higher education. Through this process, higher education institutions assess and/or recognise knowledge, skills and competences acquired by an individual who wishes to be admitted to a higher education programme. The VAE procedure allows admission to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes, or exemptions in any higher education programme.

Two types of VAE exist:

1. VAE for admission to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes (mostly continuing training). To be admitted to a master programme, applicants have to prove five years of professional and personal experience (prior studies can also be taken into account). VAE for admission targets adults returning to education. The government is authorised to set up minimal conditions as well as the organisation of examinations while HEIs are responsible for procedures.

2. VAE for exemptions allows candidate to be exempted from part of the courses in all first and second cycle programmes, thereby reducing the duration of their studies. However, the duration of the programmes leading to the delivery of an academic degree cannot go below 60 credits. Therefore, applicants to this type of VAE will never be granted an academic degree based only on this procedure. This is the reason why the procedure is called ‘valorisation’ and not ‘validation’ (which is the term used in the French system).

The legal framework for VAE provides very decentralised implementation mechanisms, by academic authorities and most importantly, by VAE juries. Indeed, standardisation (for instance, of evaluation procedures) is not compatible with the principles of autonomy, academic and pedagogic freedom of universities. Therefore the key building blocks of VAE rest on mutual trust. VAE counsellors are the links connecting VAE candidates, juries and university administrations. The three academies (there are three university groupings in Belgium Fr) have set up different priorities and target different groups.

**VAE in Hautes Écoles (higher education)**

VAE in Hautes Écoles shares many features with VAE in universities, although it seems that the level of harmonisation in the procedures and methods used is higher among Hautes Écoles than among universities. VAE in Hautes Écoles is the most recent validation system in Belgium (Fr).

Under the new decree on the landscape of higher education in French-Speaking Belgium (adopted in November 2013), all higher education institutions (universities, Hautes Écoles, Art institutes) will have to collaborate under the remit of a new entity, ARES, which will be

---

13 Transfer of the credits gained in one EPS training body to another is possible to a certain degree. For instance, if a learner has been granted credits for obtaining a UF, he/she can decide to pass the integrated exam (Épreuve intégrée) necessary to complete the UF, in another EPS training body. In that case he/she will have to present the documents certifying that the learner has acquired the LO corresponding to the UF.

14 This might change following the implementation of the decree on the organisation of higher education (Décret définissant le paysage de l'enseignement supérieur et l'organisation académique des études, adopted on 7th of November 2013). The new authority in charge of coordinating higher education institutions, ARES (Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur) will be responsible for developing and coordinating collective structures dedicated to lifelong learning as well as to collect statistics. Available at: http://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/39681_002.pdf

15 For more information on VAE in Universities and Hautes Écoles, see Mahieu, C. (2011), op. cit.

16 Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur
Moving towards a more coordinated, national system

The existence of four systems, implementing different types of validation, using different methodologies and tools, reflects a certain level of fragmentation. There is no ‘national’ approach to validation as such. However Belgium (Fr) is moving towards a more integrated, coordinated system. This shift is being encouraged and supported by the European Social Fund. The government of the French-Speaking Community has taken concrete steps to foster such coordination.

As part of the Project ‘2013, Année des compétences’ – 2013, Year of Competences\(^\text{17}\) –, an initiative of the Walloon government and the French Community, all training providers were invited to implement actions to promote the various ways and opportunities whereby citizens can acquire competences. Validation was one of the themes of the Year. As part of this initiative, representatives of the four validation systems organised common events. They have also established the first steps that will make future cooperation operational. The Skills Validation Consortium leads the initiative. Five avenues have been given priority and are currently part of the reflection jointly carried out by the four sectors.

1- The first concrete outcome of such cooperation could result in better information about validation, via the creation of a common online portal providing information about all types of validation procedures in Belgium (Fr). This would improve the current situation which makes it very difficult for an individual to get an overview of the procedures in place in the different education and training sectors.

2- Concerning the documentation of individuals’ learning outcomes, the possibility of using a common portfolio as a common tool for the four validation systems is being examined (more information is provided in Section 2.6 on the common portfolio).

3- The development of common evaluation indicators across the four validation systems is being envisaged.

4- Common guidance procedures and mechanisms, to direct all citizens interested in validation towards the various validation systems, could be put in place.

5- Finally, the validation actors are looking at establishing a pro-active research network that will reflect upon the future developments of validation in Belgium (Fr). The network could bring together validation actors and practitioners, academic experts and researchers, social partners etc.

A White Paper should be published in 2014, listing recommendations and possible avenues for collaboration and common tools between the different systems, specifically in the area of data collection and follow up of beneficiaries, information to the public, and the role of ‘ambassadors’/intermediaries (personnes-relais in French) who can reach out to potential candidates and direct them towards the appropriate validation procedures.

At this stage however it is not anticipated that the country will move towards an 'integrated' system or framework for the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) as each system addresses different target groups and is governed by different legal frameworks. However there is a clear will, on both the political and practitioners’ side, to encourage education sectors to work together to at least establish common understanding about validation, exchange information about their respective procedures and find solutions to the common problems they are facing.

2.2 Skills audits

In Belgium, pursuant to its programme-law dated 30 December 2001, the Federal State implemented a worker’s right to the ‘appraisal of skills’. The law grants every worker a right to be assessed to identify and validate skills gained outside the formal education system. Officially entered into force in September 2002, this legislation grants every worker a right to

\(^{17}\) The project is supported by Wallonia region, Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Brussels region. It aims at enhancing the attractiveness of education and training pathways in a lifelong learning perspective. More information available at [http://www.anneedescompetences.be](http://www.anneedescompetences.be)
a *bilan de compétences* and to be assessed to identify and validate skills gained outside the formal education system.

Although the law on the *bilan de compétences* was due to enter into force towards the end of 2002, the need to develop appropriate validation and assessment structures meant that the system was not operational until the beginning of 2004. The instruments allowing this right to be exercised fell under the remit of Regions and Communities, and hence a Cooperation Agreement was signed on 24 July 2003 between the Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission, relating to the validation of skills in the field of continuous vocational training. This Cooperation Agreement aims, primarily, at implementing mechanisms that will allow for skills acquired by individuals through experiences in daily life, at work or during vocational training to be recognised.

What makes skills audits different from other initiatives in the area of continuous training is that it is a mechanism aimed at fostering professional development. The objective is to allow individuals to analyse their competences, not only professional but also personal, as well as motivations and skills, in order to define a professional project and ultimately, a training project. The advantage for workers is to be able to undertake new tasks in the same job position, or move to new positions (with the same employer or with a new company).

Specialised services provide information to individuals interested in skills audits:

- **ONEM (Office National de l’Emploi):** [www.onem.be](http://www.onem.be)
- **ACTIRIS (Office Régional Bruxellois de l’Emploi):** [www.actiris.be](http://www.actiris.be)
- **FOREM (Service Public Wallon de l’Emploi et de la Formation):** [www.leforem.be](http://www.leforem.be)

Skills audits are carried out by skills audits professionals. Skills audits can sometimes be free or means-tested. For instance the local employment office in the Brussels region supports jobseekers to elaborate a professional project ([www.bruxellesformation.be](http://www.bruxellesformation.be)).

A skills audit in Belgium is similar to the procedure in place in France. It consists of three phases:

- Early phase: the candidate confirms his/her commitment, formulates his/her request, assesses his/her needs, and is informed on the methods and techniques that will be implemented.
- Investigation: motivations, competences, skills of the beneficiary are identified and analysed, and assessed against the opportunities on the labour market and training provision in the region.
- Conclusion: the service provider (skill auditor) explicits the success factors of the project elaborated by the candidate, as well as the steps necessary for its implementation. The results of the skills audit are communicated to the beneficiary only, in the form of a summary document (which the beneficiary can choose to communicate to a third party).

### 2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

**Qualifications and qualifications frameworks**

Regarding measures to improve synergy between education providers and networks, the development of the national qualification framework (NQF) has resulted in increased cooperation between stakeholders. The NQF should facilitate the development of tools and instruments for transparency, notably validation of non-formal and informal learning and credit transfer. However currently it has been decided to include only qualifications which are delivered by public providers in the framework and it is not clear whether the framework may be opened up later to private or non-formal providers.

The French Community has been working on a national qualifications framework linked to the EQF since 2006, with work on a qualifications framework for the higher education sector,

---

18 Three decrees resulting in approval of the Cooperation Agreement were subsequently adopted by the relevant levels of power: French Community decree dated 22nd October 2003; Walloon Region decree dated 13th November 2003; Cocof (French Community Commission) decree dated 7th November 2003.

19 For more information see: [http://www.apefasbl.org/lapef/actions-et-projets/bc/bilan-de-competences-brochure](http://www.apefasbl.org/lapef/actions-et-projets/bc/bilan-de-competences-brochure)
linked to the Bologna process, taking place in parallel. In 2010, the governments of the French Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission (Commission communautaire française-Cocof) entrusted the task of creating and managing the Qualifications Framework to an intergovernmental working group by means of a cooperation agreement. The idea is to create a dual-entry French-Language Qualifications Framework that will include, for each level, the qualification indicators and descriptors together with both the educational qualifications and diplomas and the vocational training qualifications. The NQF will be based on eight levels (consistent with the EQF) and two entries (for education qualifications and vocational qualifications), compatible with the framework for Flanders and the EQF. This dual-entry common framework has the advantage that it meets the objectives of the EQF while upholding the objective differences between the two types of qualification, and in particular the fact that the education system has objectives that extend beyond gaining employment. In mid-2011, all major stakeholders agreed on these main principles of the framework.  

Credit systems

As explained above:
- A titre de compétences can be used towards a qualification but also carries an independent value in the labour market;
- As explained above, in adult and higher education credit for learning outcomes gained through experience can be used to support access or to award exemptions (i.e. to shorten a training pathway);
- In Hautes Écoles credit for learning outcomes gained through experience can only be used to support access.

Standards

Standards used in VDC

In vocational training the ‘validation’ process leads to the award of a Skill Certificate, which is a legal document, recognised by the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (Cocof).

The standards for validation are now the same as those in the formal system. A common body, the French-speaking Professions and Qualifications Service (Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications – SFMQ) is responsible for building these standards.

The SFMQ is in charge of producing common standards based on occupation standards elaborated by social partners (Profils métiers), and corresponding training standards (Profils de formation) elaborated by education and training stakeholders. Most importantly, the professional standards and training standards produced by SFMQ are to be shared by the different education and training providers (initial and continuous education) as well as by the VDC Consortium.

21 This is an area where important changes have taken place since 2010. The 2010 Inventory reported that unlike the French system where standards used for validation were based on existing diploma, the Belgium validation system had not established an automatic link between the Skill Certificates and existing qualifications in the formal system.
22 A cooperation agreement was signed in Brussels on 27 March 2009 between the French-speaking Community, the Walloon government and the Cocof concerning the creation of the Service. For more information on SFMQ: http://www.sfmq.cfwb.be/index.php?id=1436
23 The system previously consisted of job profiles developed by the French register of occupations in the labour market (ROMÉ) and by the ‘Commission Communautaire des Professions et des Qualifications’ (CCPQ). The CCPQ developed sets of qualification and training profiles, in consultation with sector representatives and the unions. Standards developed by the SFMQ (see before) are now used. The creation of the French-speaking Professions and Qualifications Service (SFMQ) in 2010 was expected to foster synergies between education and training providers and promote more efficiency. The objective was to increase cooperation between education providers, to rationalise and improve the coherence of the French Community education system.
These standards are expressed in learning outcomes and a system of units compatible with the ECVET system is intended to enable mobility between different operators and types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal). To ensure that all providers will use the profiles drawn by SFMQ as common reference standards, the job profiles are compatible with those developed by the French ROME system (Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois). Qualification and training profiles are developed in close consultation with sector representatives and the unions. These profiles specify the competences required for each occupational profile, together with associated indicators.

The principle of an articulation between the SFMQ and the procedures followed by the Consortium to produce the Skill Certificate is now established, but this articulation remains to be further defined and operationalised. This articulation will be essential for the transparency, legibility of the Certificates produced, and therefore for the mobility and flexibility of learners' pathways.

The Consortium has defined competences in terms of the set of measurable skills necessary to undertake certain tasks in a workplace situation. Following a procedure that was already in place in 2010, employers and labour representatives from various sectors and education and training providers form a Commission for Skill Unit Indicators (COREF) for each occupation subject to VDC. The COREF follows a methodology aimed at outlining the necessary criteria for the verification of the acquisition of skills.

Each profession is divided into several skill units. For example, the household assistance profession includes two skills units: on the one hand, upkeep of the home and on the other, laundry. This subdivision into skills units can be justified by the fact that a single person may only be an expert in one part of the profession but should, nonetheless, be able to seek employment thanks to their skill. It is these skills units, which will be subject to validation. This should allow candidates to have their expertise recognised for part or for all of the skills involved in a profession. Therefore, the commissions for skill unit indicators (specific to each profession) define:

- The Skill Reference Indicators: the profession involved and the key activities of this profession and the required skills for its undertaking.
- The Skill Units: each corresponding to a Skill Certificate. Each Unit corresponds to a Validation Reference Indicator.
- The Validation Reference Indicators: define the testing situation, the task to be carried out, the conditions for testing for each skill unit to be validated and the assessment criteria sheet, with assessment being undertaken via indication criteria.

**Standards used in higher education**

VAE in Belgium does not lead directly to certification. It only grants access to University programme or exemptions. The standards used for assessing the non-formal and informal learning are the requirements (in terms of learning outcomes) of the programme for which the applicant wishes to gain entry or exemption.

**2.4 National institutional framework**

As described in Section 2.1, there are four systems of validation in Belgium (Fr). The French-Speaking Government and the Walloon and Brussels Regions are involved in various respects but each system, governed by a specific legal framework, has its own institutional framework.

Therefore there is no overall framework or overarching national institution responsible for the validation systems in Belgium (Fr). Each ‘system’ (corresponding to the different education sectors, i.e. continuous vocational training, adult education, higher education) is structured differently.

- VDC is implemented by a Consortium bringing together the five French-speaking public providers in continuous vocational training. The entire mechanism falls under the absolute responsibility of the relevant Executive powers; namely, the governments of the French Community, of the Walloon region and of the French Community Commission.

---

24 Consortia d Validations des Compétences
• VAE in adult education (*Enseignement de Promotion Sociale*) falls within the competence of the Regions.
• VAE in higher education is highly decentralised as higher education institutions have a large degree of autonomy.

As noted in Section 2.1, the country is moving towards a more coordinated approach, which could gradually establish institutional linkages between the four systems. For instance with the adoption of the decree on the landscape of higher education in Belgium (Fr) (November 2013), a new body (ARES) will be responsible for accrediting all higher education programmes.

The allocation of responsibilities between the different institutions and VNFIL practitioners training bodies is further described in Section 2.5.

### 2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

#### 2.5.1 Please describe the allocation of responsibilities (at national, regional, local, social partner, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

A high level of fragmentation prevails in the French-speaking institutional landscape concerning education and training. Competence for education, childcare and continuing education lies with the Communities, whereas training is a Regional responsibility (Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region). Adult vocational training outside the school system (mainly for workers and job-seekers) falls within the competence of the Regions.

The Belgian Federal government has limited power with respect to education, and plays little role in the development and implementation of policies in the field of VNFIL. Federal legislation may for instance intervene if the issue of validation affects the relationship between employers and employees, that is to say, pertains to labour law issues. Federal law is also governing rights of workers concerning skills audits (*bilans de compétences*). In addition, it is a royal decree that integrated the validation of competences into the right to paid training leave (*Arrêté Royal* 10.11.2006).

**VDC in continuous vocational training**

Validation in the field of continuous vocational training has been developed by a Consortium of the five most important public sector training providers in French-speaking Belgium:

- **FOREM** (the Walloon Employment and Vocational Training Service, equivalent to the Flemish VDAB);
- **Bruxelles Formation** (Public sector training agency in the Brussels-Capital region);
- **Enseignement de Promotion Sociale** (Adult Education Provider in the ‘communauté française’ – i.e. Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Regions);
- **Institut de Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises** - IFAPME (Training Agency for the Self Employed and SMEs in the Communauté Française); and
- **Service de Formation des petites et moyennes entreprises**, SFPME, (Training Service for Small and Medium-Sized enterprises in Brussels).

The Consortium is a streamlined structure mobilising the largest platform in terms of vocational qualifications in French-speaking Belgium. Through the Consortium, procedures have been implemented allowing citizens to validate their competences acquired outside formal education and training.

The Consortium is responsible for designing the procedures, methods and approaches that will be implemented in Validation Centres, thereby ensuring a high degree of standardisation. Ad hoc Commissions for Skill Unit Indicators produce Validation Indicators. Furthermore the Consortium is responsible for providing information to the public (mostly through its website) about validation.

The Consortium oversees the network of centres which carry out the recognition and validation of competencies. It is responsible for implementing the accreditation of the

---

25 **Consortium de Validation des Compétences**
Validation Centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach. Validation Centres are training providers; they are accredited by a Consultation and Approval Committee for Validation Centres, and receive approval from the government. They are responsible for providing support/information to the candidate wishing to go through a VDC procedure (although they do not strictly speaking provide ‘guidance’ which does not fall under their missions). They organise the validation sessions and carry out the assessment.

Improving the steering of the VDC system to increase its efficiency was part of the strategic priorities of the Consortium for 2012-2014. Each centre receives accreditation for one or several occupations. However, all centres do not cover all competences units. The offer is spread across the whole territory. A better distribution was necessary to satisfy the demand of a maximum of candidates willing to take part in validation sessions, while having a comprehensive overview of the existing offer by the centres. The system has been rationalised through the development of a database on the units covered in all centres. Validation sessions are now planned ahead, at the beginning of the year. There is also a reflection on the advantage of reducing the number of centres, certain centres becoming Pilot Centres, cooperating with smaller centres, which would not need to renew their accreditation (thereby reducing the number of accreditations and related paper work).

**VAE in adult education (EPS)**

Adult education falls under the responsibility of the Regions. Each EPS centre determines the procedures used for treating and assessing VAE applications. Each centre also decides how to support candidates.

Ultimately, the decision to grant admission, exemption or certification is taken by the Committee in charge of each UF (Conseil des études).

Each EPS training centre has its own procedures for introducing and examining VAE applications. Each centre determines the methodology to support and guide candidates.

**VAE in higher education (Universities and Hautes Ecoles)**

The following institutions are involved in the recognition process:

- Higher education institutions are responsible for the operational implementation of VAE. Moreover, they also play a major role in the dissemination of information to the applicants and to the other stakeholders involved.
- Ministry of the French Community (DG Non-Compulsory Education and Scientific Research) plays an interface role with non-institutional stakeholders, facilitating the cooperation between those stakeholders and advisory bodies.
- Advisory bodies from institutions (such as CIUF, General Council for Haute Ecoles, Education and Training Council etc.) play a crucial role in the cooperation and dialogue between institutions (See 2.5.3).

The development of VAE in Universities is driven by the VAE-University project, an inter-university coordination project led by the LLL Committee of the CIUF and supported by ESF funds and Wallonia-Brussels Federation since 2008. To ensure that the VAE system would develop in a consistent way, the CIUF created a VAE platform, whose governance approach is meant to promote coordinated actions among universities, harmonised practices in terms of candidate support, and exchange of good practices.

Compared to universities, *Hautes Ecoles* have opted for a more integrated and harmonised approach. VAE in *Hautes Ecoles* is still in its early phase. The active part played by the inter-network VAE unit of the general Committee of the *Hautes Ecoles* (CGHE) aims at ensuring harmonisation of procedures and communication, as well as training the VAE counsellors. The 20 Hautes Ecoles are integrated to this VAE system. In particular, a special agreement

---

26 CVDC (2012) *Note d’Orientation Stratégique 2012-2014 du Dispositif de Validation des Compétences Professionnelles*

27 Study on formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Nuffic, November 2008

is determining financial conditions pertaining to the pooling of the costs incurred by the treatment of VAE applications.

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers
Concerning VDC, continuous vocational training providers are responsible for organising the validation sessions, providing support and making a decision on the award of a Skill Certificate.

Concerning VAE procedures:
- Training bodies in EPS decide within their own procedure to examine VAE applications. The decision to grant admission, exemption or certification is taken by the Committee in charge of each UF (Conseil des études).
- Higher education institutions have full autonomy to decide how to organise VAE. Ultimately the final decision concerning assessment and credits rest with the VAE juries. VAE in Hautes Ecoles is more harmonised, and the final decision (VAE exemption or VAE admission) rests with the Haute Ecole, not with the VAE jury.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

Social partners
In the past two years, the VDC Consortium has developed important cooperation initiatives with social partners. Recently, it has signed sector agreements with social partners. These agreements have led to the recognition of certain Skill Certificates, which were given equivalent status as sectoral qualifications (for instance, ‘industrial painter’ certification). This has an impact in terms of the rights that are attached to these qualifications. This has therefore brought VDC a step further than simply recognising and taking Skill Certificates into account (for external and internal recruitment).

Such agreements contribute to strengthening the legitimacy and credibility of Skill Certificates. Beyond their formal institutionalisation, recent developments have positive impacts on the ‘social’ use and market value of Skill Certificates. In turn this will increase the attractiveness of VDC for employees, jobseekers, etc.

Employers
Recognition of validation credits or Skill Certificates by employers is improving (See Section 2.7.4 on the survey that has been conducted with employers). Communication strategies targeting employers are a priority for the Consortium to improve the current situation.

Since 2010 requests are emerging directly from companies wishing to have their employees’ competences validated. VDC has several advantages for companies, for instance they can benefit from an external assessment of their employees’ competences.

The VDC Consortium is currently running a pilot project in a company to test whether ‘collective’ validation procedures could be implemented (pilot project with B-Post). If the added value of such validation becomes clear from the pilot test, such procedures could be further developed. This aspect was one of the strategic priorities defined in the Consortium Strategic Note for 2011-2014. Such a scheme needs to be a ‘win/win’ situation for companies and their employees. Partnerships with large companies interested in offering their employees tools to manage their competences could then be established. The steering Committee of the Consortium has identified companies where in-company validation could be trialled.

An important aspect for the Consortium is that the development of collective validation does not undermine the primary goals of VDC. Such collective schemes should take place in the framework of well-designed projects with a clear objective, for example a Company Plan for

---

29 The issue of ‘collective validation’ is further described in Section 5 on Methods.

the prospective management of competences within the company. Finally employees should fully adhere to the scheme (voluntary participation, no sanction in case of failure, etc.).

**Third sector organisations**

The 2010 Inventory reported that although associations working in the social integration sector had welcomed the validation procedures and Skill Certificates, no specific tools or processes had been set up by the third sector. The Consortium had engaged in information and awareness-raising activities geared towards the sector and it had planned to develop toolkits for specific organisations for instance working with illiterate groups.

Links between VDC and the third sector seem to be gradually developing. In the 2012 activity report of the Consortium, IFAPME reports that some candidates are sent by non-profit organizations (ASBL).

2.5.3 **Coordination between stakeholders**

**VDC**

The Consortium overseeing the implementation of VDC policy is a legal entity and includes three internal bodies:

- A Steering Committee; daily organisation and management of the mechanism.
- An Executive Committee; secretariat and functioning
- Ad hoc Commissions for Skill Unit Indicators where management and labour representatives from various sectors sit so as to produce Validation Indicators.

Two external bodies complement this structure:

- A Consultation and Approval Committee for Validation Centres, including inter alia inter-professional management and labour representatives and public employment services; general guidance, overall assessment, approval of centres.
- An Appeals Commission; to address appeals lodged by candidates and Validation Centres.

The entire mechanism falls under the absolute responsibility of the relevant Executive powers; namely, the governments of the French Community, of the Walloon region and of the French Community Commission.

**Higher education sector**

**VAE Platform**

A VAE Platform (Plateforme inter-universitaire pour la VAE) bringing together French speaking academic institutions was set up in September 2008. This platform is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The budget for the period 2008-2013 is EUR 5.6 million. The platform is steered by the ETALV Commission of the CIUF (Inter-university Council of the French Community) and is composed of one coordinator, VAE counsellors (11) and members of the Lifelong Learning Commission (ETALV). The missions of the platform are to:

- Inform the public of the VAE Procedure,
- Guarantee fairness in the way VAE Candidates are treated (harmonisation of procedures),
- Set up a network of partnerships (Universities, FOREM, social integration operators),
- Encourage exchange of good practices between Universities,
- Assess the VAE practice in the French Community.

The CIUF is a key building block in the VAE mechanism in universities. Overall, its role is to ensure that the highly decentralised approach to VAE in universities does not hinder the development of VAE and does not undermine fairness of treatment and equality of opportunities for all candidates wishing to engage in VAE with a university. The coordinator of the VAE project is a key interlocutor with all external actors, but most importantly, his or her mission is to allow consultation and exchange between VAE counsellors (exchange of

procedures, case studies, etc.). Together with the VAE coordinator, VAE counsellors gradually build professionalism and expertise that are essential to their mission.\(^\text{32}\)

**Inter-network VAE unit of the general Committee of the Hautes Ecoles (CGHE)**

The inter-network VAE Unit plays a key role in terms of coordination between the 20 Hautes Ecoles. The Unit (partly funded through ESF funding) has four staff. Its missions are to:

- Promote the development of a VAE Policy in all Hautes Ecoles in Belgium (Fr);
- Ensure convergence of practices, while respecting the autonomy of Hautes Ecoles (to ensure fair treatment of applications via a common procedure);
- Train VAE counsellors (there is at least one VAE counsellor per Haute Ecole).

A special agreement is determining financial conditions pertaining to the pooling of the costs incurred by the treatment of VAE applications. Five Hautes Ecoles are taking an active part in the VAE unit and have one member of their staff involved in the Unit.

### 2.6 Examples of national, regional, local or EU funded initiatives

It is important to highlight that ESF funding plays an essential role in supporting VDC and VAE in Universities and Hautes Ecoles. The development of these three VNFIL systems has so far rested on the combination of support from European funds and government subsidies.\(^\text{33}\) More generally, EU funds have been used as catalyst for change in French-speaking Belgium. European funds (Lifelong Learning Programme) are currently being used for the implementation of pilot projects supporting important, wider reforms (notably, the implementation of ECVET).\(^\text{34}\)

Concerning the use of European tools, the VDC Consortium is delivering EUROPASS certificate supplements to candidates.\(^\text{35}\) In contrast, European tools such as Europass are not currently used in VAE procedures, as universities and VAE counsellors have developed their own tools.

However with respect to the collaboration between the four VNFIL systems within the framework of the Project 2013 Year of Competences, these tools are the objects of increasing attention as they enable dialogue between the different sectors and sub-sectors of the VNFIL system in Belgium (Fr). The four systems are also anticipating the use of common tools such as the Common Portfolio developed by jointly by FOREM, IFAPME, the Validation Consortium, EPS and the French Community (See description below).

---

**A Common Portfolio for Lifelong Documentation of Competences**

The Common Portfolio for the lifelong documentation of competences (Cahier Individuel de compétences, CIC) or Individual competence booklet, is an electronic portfolio which allows a person to group and document, in the same file and in the same format, various information on his/her pathway (learning, short training, certificates etc.) and his/her professional or personal experiences. One added value of the CIC is that it generates automatically a EUROPASS CV. It is freely accessible for all individuals above 16. The user is the sole owner of the CIC whose confidentiality is ensured by the provider. The user creates and updates files and decides with whom they can be shared. Copies of certificates, references, and job profiles can be attached to the file, which becomes the ‘memory’ of a person’s pathway and can be used over a lifetime.

One aspect of the added value of the CIC is to better communicate this information when needed (e.g. to an employer, for recruitment but also for promotion) but also to ‘take stock’ of one’s career pathway at different stages of one’s life.

FOREM, IFAPME, the Validation Consortium, EPS and the French Community have developed the

---

34 Rethinking Skills – Belgium National report (Order 34). ICF International for DG EAC.
The CRF (Conseil Régional de la Formation) is planning to organise information sessions about the tool jointly. More information can be found at: [http://crf.wallonie.be/cic/](http://crf.wallonie.be/cic/)

### 2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

#### 2.7.1 Funding

**VDC**

VDC is funded by the government. Funding dedicated to VDC has been maintained at a stable level. However given the increase in the number of potential and actual candidates seeking to have their competences validated, funding has not increased proportionally.

The Consortium manages the funding dedicated to validation sessions. Each year a subsidy is received from the government. The funding is distributed to Validation Centres based on the number of validation sessions effectively carried out.

The number of validations continues to increase: numbers show a 13% increase for 2009-2010, a 25% increase for 2010-2011, and a 12% increase for 2011-2012. The related increase in administrative work is creating difficulties for the financing of the validation sessions. Currently, Validation Centres partly compensate for the discrepancy between government subsidies and the real costs associated with validation, using their own funds.  

**VAE in higher education**

VAE in universities is partly supported by regional funding, partly by universities and partly by European funds.

The VAE-University project (which is coordinating the VAE platform) received a total budget of EUR 5.6 million for the period 2008-2013. The budget is jointly funded by Wallonia-Brussels Federation, universities themselves, and the European Social Fund. The end of the project was planned for December 2013 however the project was funded for one more year (2014). Funding after 2014 is still uncertain.

According to VAE actors, funding received by ESF and Wallonia-Brussels Federation is not sufficient to fully develop VAE in universities, considering the number of staff involved and the level of involvement required on the part of the institutions. Without ESF and regional funding, the sustainability of VAE in universities could be undermined.

VAE in *Hautes Écoles* is equally supported by ESF funds.

#### 2.7.2 Distribution of costs

In all four systems of validation, the procedures are free for candidates. Details on the costs can be found in relation to VDC only.

The costs of the VDC procedure are covered by the government, which partly subsidises validation sessions. Indeed the procedure entails costs in terms of human resources for the centres organising the assessment.

Candidates have access to training leave paid for by the state (royal decree of 10 November 2006). Employees are entitled to eight hours per year.

As mentioned above, the Consortium manages the funding dedicated to validation sessions. The cost of validation sessions varies from EUR 110 to 390, depending on the competence unit of the occupation in question. For the occupations that led to the highest number of validation sessions in 2012, the cost varied between EUR 110 and 180.

---

36 CDVC Activity report 2012 (p. 21)
37 Data provided in the Activity report 2012 of the Consortium. A detailed breakdown of the costs, per validation centre, is provided, p. 22. The report did not include considerations on the efficiency of the validation procedures.
2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

VDC

The VDC Consortium has recently delivered its 10,000th Skill Certificate.

In 2012, more than 2,160 validation sessions were organised (a 12% increase compared to the previous year), with a success rate of 67.4% (stable compared with 2011). This is higher than the target that had been set, which was 1,800 sessions for 2012. In 2010, about 1,500 sessions were organised.

In 2012, 2,758 candidates registered to attend validation sessions and about 1,500 Certificates were eventually awarded (the target was 1,170 Certificates).

In terms of candidate profile, there is a higher proportion of male (55%), compared to female candidates (45%). This can be explained by the fact that the occupations opened to validation are occupations where male workers are over-represented. The majority of candidates were jobseekers (64%). Only 26% of candidates were active on the labour market (most of them were employed, self-employed candidates were a minority). The average age was 36 years old.

VDC is mainly targeting individuals with low levels of qualifications.

In 2012, validation sessions covered 37 occupations, covering 82 competence units. The top five in terms of occupations leading to the highest number of Skill Certificate was: administrative clerks; cleaning aide; accounting assistant; IT technician; industrial painter. In 2012, three new occupations were opened for validation (e.g. Car dealer). In total, skills standards have been developed for 53 occupations.

The number of candidates per validation session is increasing. The objective is to support this trend, mainly for organisational and financial reasons. Indeed the number of candidates not showing up at the validation sessions for which they were registered is increasing (absence rate of 21.6%), and is particularly high for certain occupations (accounting assistant, hairdresser). ‘No shows’ entail costs for Validation Centres organising these sessions.

There are 47 active Validation Centres (in total 52 centres have been accredited).

VAE in EPS

Data available for 2013-2014 are the following: a total of 14,775 candidates, undertaking VAE with the following:

- Portfolios (9049)
- Tests (4,664)
- Skill Certificate (977)
- Other (VAE Convention) (85)

VAE in Universities

The VAE platform collects data on the beneficiaries in the form of statistics as well as qualitative case studies on individual pathways. In the future, it is envisaged that the platform could collect data to follow up cohorts of students after their graduation. Data from the VAE platform indicate that from 2008 to 2012:

- 2,940 candidates benefited from guidance.
- 1,900 were admitted in a university programme.

---

38 Data is provided by the CDVC Activity report 2012, available at: http://www.cvdc.be/fr/dispositif/documents-utiles.html
40 In 2009, 1,364 applicants had registered for a VDC procedure.
41 It is possible to validate skills within many professions from the following sectors: Administration; Food; Automobile; Construction; Culture; Electricity; Non-Market; Green Sector; Technological Industry; Care services
42 Data collected between 1/09/2013 and 15/11/2013. Provided by EQF AG representative.
More specifically, more than 1,000 candidates were supported in 2012 compared to 696 in 2011 and 750 in 2010. In terms of admission, 662 were admitted through VAE in 2012, while this was the case for 485 candidates in 2011 and only 302 in 2010.

Nearly 70% were admitted in human and social science training pathways in 2012. There is a higher proportion of female candidates (55%) which is in fact similar to the general over-representation of women among university students.

Perhaps one of the key issues for universities is to attract unemployed candidates (this is one of the objectives of the scheme). Data indicate that this target group is still under-represented among candidates who have gone through a VAE process, although their proportion is increasing: 18% in 2012, against 13% in 2011 and 9% in 2010.

Although there are currently no statistics about the graduation rate of VAE candidates compared to regular students at the end of their study pathway, qualitative research carried out by Universities in Louvain, Liège and Brussels indicates that students whom access university programmes via VAE are less likely to drop out compared with other adults returning to education, and generally obtain higher grades than other students overall.

The retention rate of VAE candidates admitted to a university programme is a key issue. Indeed universities are partly funded through a fixed budget, and partly through subsidies based on the number of students. However, for students admitted through VAE procedures, universities only received the corresponding funding once the student completed his/her first year.

VAE in Hautes Ecoles

Data available in 2013 indicates that the number of files treated is clearly increasing:

- 294 requests in 2012 (132 in 2011)
- 191 procedures engaged (93 in 2011)
- 150 candidates supported through the process (92 in 2011)
- 116 applications effectively submitted (69 in 2011)
- 104 applications examined by a jury (52 in 2011)
- 94 registrations (50 in 2011) - meaning that 80% of the files that were submitted resulted in a registration with the HE.

In terms of profile, 60% of candidates were women, 47% were employed (only 16% job seekers), 58% had more than five years’ experience.

An important fact is that VAE is still mainly used by individuals who already hold a higher education degree (more than 60%). One assumption that can be made from such data is that VAE candidates engage in a dynamic of horizontal mobility, or ‘career change’ dynamic, rather than a vertical mobility aiming at accessing higher-level qualifications. Therefore one challenge is to reach other target groups. It is also important to improve the conditions of jobseekers who obtained admission through VAE and subsequently return to education.

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

VDC

The main objective of the legislation on VDC is to enable citizens over the age of 18 to gain recognition for the competences they have acquired through professional experience and training and through other life experiences. Official recognition of individuals’ skills is seen as beneficial in terms of their professional identity and should guarantee access to continuing education, enable the individual to manage their career path and allow them to validate their abilities within the labour market. Skill Certificates are official documents issued on behalf of the French Community, of the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission and are additionally recognised by Public Employment Services.

As a result of the negotiations conducted by the Consortium with social partners, the signing of sectoral agreements is expected to increase the market value of the Skill Certificates and provide further benefits for Certificate holders for those occupations where agreements apply (see Section 2.5.2 on social partner involvement).
In 2012, an impact study conducted by a consulting firm (Sonecom) on behalf of the Consortium aimed at providing a clearer picture of the actual benefits of VDC for Skill Certificate holders. Another part of the survey aimed at measuring the ‘value’ of certificates with companies (private and public) and the third sector.

The first strand of the survey concerned benefits to ‘candidates’ or the impact of the Skill Certificate in terms of professional pathway (self-esteem, employability, mobility, effectiveness and satisfaction of employment, opinion on the Skill Certificate). 400 candidates (who took part in testing sessions) were interviewed. Overall, perceptions were positive; 93% were satisfied with the mechanism and said they would recommend the scheme. Most importantly, after obtaining the Skill Certificate, successful candidates were more likely to go into employment or return to education, more likely to have a position corresponding to their competences, and their self-esteem had increased. The strong points of the mechanism, as reported by candidates, were the support provided, the quality of the procedure and its positive impact on labour market integration. The weak points highlighted by candidates were first of all the lack of recognition of the Skill Certificates, the level of the tests which was deemed too hard and the session organisation (waiting lists to pass certain sessions, timing of the sessions...).

Regarding employers, the survey focused on the impact of VDC in terms of visibility, image, the perceptions and attitudes towards the Consortium, the testing sessions and the Skill Certificate itself. 300 employers were interviewed. Overall the poor knowledge of the mechanism emerged as the main problem (only 12% of employers declared that they were aware of VDC mechanisms), a serious issue considering that if the scheme is not known, certificates cannot be ‘recognised’ on the labour market. However, a more positive indicator is that there is potential for development as 76% of employers said they were relatively interested or very interested in the scheme; 78% would recommend the scheme; 44% would be ready to use the mechanism for their employees, and 69% would use it for recruiting new staff. Almost half of them would like further information. Most employers believe the scheme is mostly relevant for individuals without any qualification. When concerns or reservations were expressed, they were related to the fact that the validated competences would not correspond to the current needs in the corresponding occupation.

VAE in EPS

The rationale of EPS is to facilitate and shorten the training pathway of individuals who have not been able to complete a study pathway in their initial training (EPS is often viewed as a ‘second chance’). More specifically, VAE in EPS helps to:

- Avoid the repetition of learning activities that would cover learning outcomes that are already mastered (through other training activities or professional and personal experience);
- Obtain a diploma delivered by EPS;
- Encourage social and professional mobility (vertical and horizontal).

VAE in higher education

The objective of VAE is to improve access to higher education and the number of people holding a tertiary-level diploma.

---


45 Overall the satisfaction level was rated 7.65 out of 10.

46 The lack of recognition is a very serious issue that the Consortium has taken into account in its current and future actions. Concerning the level of the tests which was deemed too hard, this is not an issue that the Consortium is planning to address, as the tests are meant to be discriminating, in terms of identifying those who master the professional competence and those who do not. The average success rate at the test is deemed satisfactory by the Consortium (see section 2.7.3).

47 The existence of this problem is confirmed by another indicator in the candidate survey: only 20% of candidates were asked whether they were holding a Certificate while being interviewed by employers for recruitment or during an interview with PES. However, when asked whether they were using or showing this Certificate, 44% of candidates reported that they do never use or show their Certificate.
There are two types of benefits for individuals: first the recognition of one’s competences is a factor increasing self-esteem. Secondly VAE is a tool for social recognition as the candidates’ competences are recognised by scientific experts in one disciplinary field.

In addition, the VAE procedure itself and the application process are a tool for reflection and self-assessment by beneficiaries. VAE does not only consist of an administrative procedure for admission to a programme; it is a mechanism enabling the development of skills, knowledge and competences for adults.

Benefits go beyond individual dimensions, as successful candidates will be able to take up more demanding jobs. Their new competences will benefit the economy as a whole. Adults having completed tertiary education pathways are more employable, and more likely to engage in vertical professional mobility.

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

VAE in universities

Citizens are informed about VAE in universities via various channels: CIUF website, university websites, a free telephone number, admission and guidance services in universities, articles in the media, and higher education fairs for prospective students.

Data from the VAE-University Project indicates that from 2008 to 2012, 373 awareness-raising activities were carried out to inform the target audience, resulting in more than 7,000 persons receiving information via these activities. More than 300 of these activities took place in Universities. Specific actions were carried out to inform university staff about the VAE projects, reaching almost 1,500 staff members. Hundreds of university staff are directly involved in the VAE project.

The VAE-University project, which is partly funded by ESF, is primarily targeting job seekers. Despite an increase in the percentage of job seekers among all VAE candidates (18% in 2012) they remain a marginal group. One problem seems to be the lack of awareness of unemployed people about VAE opportunities in higher education. In the future, further


3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

VAE in universities

Citizens are informed about VAE in universities via various channels: CIUF website, university websites, a free telephone number, admission and guidance services in universities, articles in the media, and higher education fairs for prospective students.

Data from the VAE-University Project indicates that from 2008 to 2012, 373 awareness-raising activities were carried out to inform the target audience, resulting in more than 7,000 persons receiving information via these activities. More than 300 of these activities took place in Universities. Specific actions were carried out to inform university staff about the VAE projects, reaching almost 1,500 staff members. Hundreds of university staff are directly involved in the VAE project.

The VAE-University project, which is partly funded by ESF, is primarily targeting job seekers. Despite an increase in the percentage of job seekers among all VAE candidates (18% in 2012) they remain a marginal group. One problem seems to be the lack of awareness of unemployed people about VAE opportunities in higher education. In the future, further

cooperation with the employment services (FOREM) should ensure a better streaming of potential VAE candidates towards university counsellors.

**VAE in Hautes Ecoles**

Citizens are informed about VAE in *Hautes Ecoles* via information leaflets, websites of *Hautes Ecoles*, admission services, external partners (FOREM, VDC Consortium, Actiris, Council of social advancement education, Ministry of the French Community).

One strong argument mobilised in the information disseminated by the VAE unit about VAE in *Hautes Ecoles* is the efforts made to harmonise procedures and pool resources, to ensure fairness of treatment for all candidates, wherever they have decided to apply.

### 3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

Three networks play a key role in developing information about VDC and VAE in the higher education sector. These are the Consortium of the validation of competences (CDVC) for VDC, the VAE-University Project and inter-network VAE Unit for *Hautes Ecoles* (see Section 2.5.3).

**VDC**

Support and advice is provided to candidates by a Validation Centre. The main objective is to help the candidate to assess whether s/he has good chances to pass the validation session, thanks to various self-evaluation tools for each occupation. Candidates will receive information on the validation process, the different stages, the examination methods etc. During this phase the applicant will also determine, during an interview with a member of the Validation Centre, which Certificate s/he would like to validate. Following this first phase of information and guidance, the applicant will go through a practical exam (see Section 5.1 for a description of the assessment).49

Certain VDC centres have developed ‘micro-sessions’ to prepare candidates before validation sessions. This is considered as part of efforts to decrease the failure rate and the absence rate to validation sessions, which are high and costly (see Section 2.7.3 on that issue). One of the main obstacles to further preparation and guidance provided by Validation Centres is the funding issue.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the core of Validation Centres is first and foremost, to train individuals (they are training providers), and secondly to validate competences as a result of their accreditation as a Validation Centre. It is not guidance. To ensure that candidates go through the whole validation procedure and attend the test session, stronger partnerships must be established with guidance professionals from PES who can play a key role, prior to but also after validation. Indeed the counsellor is also responsible for guidance once the Skill Certificate has been obtained, in particular regarding the recognition of this Certificate by employers. An example of such an initiative is the ‘guidelines for supporting candidates’ published in collaboration with Walloon local authorities.

The next steps will be further development of ‘pre-guidance’ and ‘post-guidance’ approaches beyond the procedures currently in place in the Validation Centres.

**VAE in Universities**

Candidates are free to decide how they want to carry out the procedure: completing an application autonomously, without any help, or with the support of a VAE counsellor. Guidance is more or less encouraged, depending on the university.

Thanks to the funding received by the VAE-University project, a dozen VAE counsellors have been hired. VAE counsellors play a key role throughout the VAE procedure, providing guidance not only to candidates but also to members of VAE juries and programme coordinators.

Data collected by the VAE platform clearly indicate the positive impact of guidance provided by VAE counsellors during the identification and documentation phase. Indeed candidates have no obligation to request the support of a VAE counsellor. They have the possibility to fill

---

in the application file (available online) and prepare their documentation on their own. However, these candidates are more likely to abandon the VAE procedure before completion and more likely to see their applications negatively assessed by the VAE jury, compared to candidates who were supported by a VAE counsellor.

**VAE in Hautes Ecoles**

The missions of the VAE counsellors (trained by the VAE unit) are to:

- Provide guidance and support to candidates (individually or collectively). This includes answering questions candidates may have, helping them to define their professional project, accompanying them throughout the procedure once the feasibility of the application has been established (e.g. identifying the competences that are relevant to the programme, formulating the experience gained in the light of the competences required, constructing ‘narratives’ around the candidate’s experience that will match the jury’s requirements), if necessary, preparing candidates for the oral interview and informing candidates about the Haute Ecole’s decision concerning their application.

- Ensure internal and external communication about VAE,

- Build a network of resources persons;

- Support the VAE juries as observer or provide additional information on the application being examined.

### 3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

As part of the collaboration activities anticipated between the four VNFIL systems following the ‘2013 Year of Competences’ initiatives, common measures concerning raising awareness about VNFIL among practitioners could be implemented.

To increase the market value of the Skill Certificate, and ensure a complete transparency of these certifications, partnerships have been developed between public training providers in the Brussels region, Actiris (PES agency) and the Consortium. Meetings and workshops were also organised with restructuring units. These activities target guidance professionals in the PES and their agencies. As a result, Actiris has included the Skill Certificates in its database used to register the certifications and qualifications held by job seekers registering with the agency.

In higher education, collaborations between VAE counsellors and public bodies for labour market integration (FOREM, ACTIRIS) resulted in better awareness of VAE among the unemployed.

### 4 Quality assurance and evaluation

#### 4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

There is no national framework for QA related to VNFIL in Belgium (Fr).

In the continuous vocational training sector, the Consortium overseeing validation is responsible for implementing the accreditation of the Validation Centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach.

National legislation does not specify any particular quality assurance mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning procedures in higher education. Since academic authorities are responsible for the organisation and implementation of the recognition of prior learning procedures, those authorities are expected to guarantee the quality of the procedures.

---


51 See CVDC Activity Report 2012 for more information.
4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

VDC

A stringent and concerted methodology in defining assessment criteria has been developed by the Consortium (See Section 2.3). These criteria are recognised by the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (Cocof).

In terms of validation standards, the Consortium is pursuing close cooperation with SFMQ to adjust their standards with those produced by the new body. In 2012 activities were dedicated to ensuring the consistency between the profiles developed by SFMQ and the competence standards developed by the Consortium. For occupations not yet covered by the Consortium, a request is sent to SFMQ so that the Consortium can develop validation standards. In addition the following quality criteria should be met in assessment procedures:

- Transparency: all candidates receive identical information about the assessment procedure.
- Fairness: all candidates benefit from an identical assessment procedure, on the basis of a single set of skills assessment indicators, no matter who is being assessed, where, when or how an assessment takes place.
- Validity: assessment procedures are stringent.

The procedures in place during the validation session to assess candidates (e.g. presence of an observer) ensure further quality assurance criteria (see Section 5 on methods).

The high stakes involved in the validation of skills have led governments to position the validation mechanism in the public service sector whilst retaining close ties with management and labour representatives on strategic, normative and operational levels. To guarantee both the quality and homogeneity of VDC, an approval mechanism for Validation Centres has been implemented. Specific approval for each profession is required to validate the skills of candidates. Candidate Centres prepare their programmes on the basis of a list of specifications issued by the Consortium. After a preliminary audit undertaken by independent verification bodies as well as an opinion from management and labour representatives, Validation Centres receive approval by governments.

4.3 Evaluation framework

There is no national evaluation framework for QA in Belgium (Fr). However further cooperation between the four VNFIL systems, as envisaged following the 2013 Year of Competences, could lead to changes in this area, with for instance the adoption of common evaluation indicators used across all education sectors.

Concerning VDC, an audit on methodology and organisation of validation sessions has been carried out by an external body (Labset, ULG).

An evaluation of VAE-University Project will take place in 2014. This evaluation will be the basis for recommendations about how to develop VAE in the future at this level. In addition, the VAE platform has already been evaluated: first in the form of self-assessment (questionnaires completed by VAE counsellors and university staff). Secondly, an international expert, member of the EUCEN network, carried out the interim evaluation of the platform. The recommendations resulting from the evaluation focused on how to develop VAE further. VAE counsellors have also conducted qualitative evaluations with former candidates, in order to improve their actions.

52 CDVD Activity report 2012
## Validation methods

### 5.1 Methods used and the validation process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Declarative methods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>VAE-U</td>
<td>VAE-U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-HE</td>
<td>VAE-HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>VDC (being tested)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio method</strong></td>
<td>VAE-U</td>
<td>VAE-U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-HE</td>
<td>VAE-HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>VDC (being tested)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-HE (if insufficient evidence provided by portfolio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simulation and evidence extracted from work</strong></td>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>VAE-HE (if insufficient evidence provided by portfolio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-EPS (if insufficient evidence provided by portfolio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tests and examinations</strong></td>
<td>VAE-U (Exceptionally, for certain university degrees such as IT science).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-HE (if insufficient evidence provided by portfolio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VAE-EPS (if insufficient evidence provided by portfolio)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Acronyms: VDC (Validation of competences by the Consortium); VAE-U (VAE in universities); VAE-HE (VAE in Hautes Ecoles); VAE-EPS (VAE in Enseignement de Promotion Sociale.)*

**VDC**

The most commonly used method is the assessment of the candidate in a professional situation. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skills in a practical fashion, in the presence of experienced professionals.

**Stages of the standard VDC procedure:**
Centre Managers appoint one examiner, one observer and one logistical manager for each test. During the test, a professional situation is reconstructed following the Validation Reference Indicators. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skills in a practical fashion in the presence of experienced professionals who form the panel. Their work is observed by the examiner on the basis of a standard assessment criteria sheet. The observer (representative of the profession) checks that the testing procedure is organised correctly and participates at the end of the test.

Directed by the Validation Centre Manager, a panel composed of the examiner and the observer deliberate on the performance of the test. Candidates are subsequently informed of the test result. Each candidate can have an interview if required and will receive, if successful, a Skill Certificate by post. Candidates can appeal against the decision taken by the panel. The specific steps to be taken in case of appeal are fully described on the Consortium website.

New Developments

Another method is allowed by the decree on VCP, which is the constitution of a portfolio by the candidate. A review is currently underway on the possible hybridation or combination of the two procedures, to meet demands concerning competences that cannot be validated by a simulation easily or in a satisfactory way (e.g. web designers); or concerning candidates who can provide sufficient evidence that make validation sessions unnecessary (e.g. workers highly specialised in technical fields with 20 years’ experience). The strategic note developed by the Consortium (2012-2014) made a commitment to pilot this type of validation (with the help of a consultant). LabSET (research centre on distance learning) has carried out a feasibility study on the introduction of the ‘dossier’ or portfolio as a complementary mode of validation. A pilot test is being carried out with the occupation of administrative employee.

In addition, research is currently being carried out in cooperation with academic experts (University of Liege) to develop the portfolio approach in VDC. It is thought that portfolio can increase the validity of assessment, for certain occupations and competences. The first pilot experiment was positive and five additional experimentations will be conducted. The scheme could then be extended, if results indicate it is a relevant approach. This pragmatic approach (combining assessment methods to better address the candidates’ profiles) is also encouraged by the fact that portfolio methods are used in VAE in the higher education and adult education sectors. The Consortium is also involved in a Leonardo Project where partners exchange experiences on this approach.

However one difficulty related to implementing the approach is the time needed to prepare the portfolio. Such an approach would be best implemented if the Consortium could establish partnerships with bodies whose main activity is to document competences (e.g. Restructuring units or Cellules de reconversion; PES; Enterprises providing social insertion schemes). Such ‘skills audits’ require specific competences, methods, approaches, which are not currently part of the competences or missions of Validation Centres. Synergy with organisations specialised in skills audits would therefore maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the approach.

Finally, the Consortium is looking at a second experimental approach: collective validation. There are limits to the current individual approach, notably the fact that the individual is isolated in his/her preparation for validation. A collective approach could be suited for companies where a group of employees would benefit from having their competences validated. Company managers could, with the support of the local and sector trade unions, be interested in promoting such validation for their company. If such a scheme were developed, the quality assurance standards developed by the Consortium would have to be applicable to such collective validation. One pilot project is currently being conducted (Company Delacre); the scheme might be further developed if results are positive. The Consortium is also aware that such approaches are currently being implemented in other European countries.

VAE in EPS

55 Appeals Commission to examine appeals lodged by candidates and Validation Centres.
Each EPS training centre has its own procedures for introducing and examining VAE applications. Each centre determines the methodology to support and guide candidates. Criteria used to assess and validate are the standards (learning outcomes) of each training unit (UF).

Candidates wishing to be admitted to a UF, can do so on the basis of competences that can be established and documented via a personal portfolio (access to UF is also possible on the basis of a Skill Certificate delivered by the Consortium, or other certificates delivered by vocational training providers). If the candidate cannot present a portfolio that provides sufficient evidence, s/he can pass a test that will assess whether s/he possesses the minimum competences necessary to access the UF.

Depending on the competences that could be documented, exemptions to certain courses within the UF can be granted.

A full UF can be granted by VAE when candidates want to follow a whole learning pathway and get either a certificate or a diploma, although candidates will have to complete an integrated examination at the end of their learning pathway.

Ultimately, the decision to grant admission, exemption or certification is taken by the Committee in charge of each UF (Conseil des études).

**VAE in Universities**

The portfolio (dossier) is elaborated by the candidate after an interview with a VAE counsellor. This portfolio is then handed in to the jury who will examine the application. Each higher education institution has developed its own portfolio, adapted to its own context. However there is common basis and structure behind all them (candidate’s CV; formulation of the motivations to engage in VAE; competences acquired etc.\textsuperscript{56}).

Although tools and methods vary from one university to another, all universities strive to follow a similar procedure comprising five main steps\textsuperscript{57}:

- Information and reception: Applicants for VAE receive information;
- Orientation and positioning: Applicants have the possibility to explain their plans in more detail, with the help of centres of information/orientation. The competent authorities determine if the application is acceptable and valid;
- Contractualisation: Universities commit themselves to analysing, assessing and deciding on the outcome of the application; the applicant commit to the process;
- Assessment: the jury evaluates and take a decision;
- Transmission of results: the jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may offer recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant.

**VAE in Hautes Ecoles**

Methods are very similar to VAE in universities however the jury only formulates an opinion - ultimately the decision is taken by the Haute Ecole.

To ensure fair treatment of VAE applications, the inter-network VAE unit has developed common VAE procedures and communication tools, for all the Hautes Ecoles. The unit has also trained VAE counsellors. As in universities, the VAE jury in Hautes Ecoles has full autonomy to decide which experience is relevant, with regard to the study programme where the candidate wishes to enrol.

The steps followed are the following:

- Candidates choose a Haute Ecole and get information via the admission service and contact the VAE counsellor
- Candidates elaborate their VAE portfolio and submit it to the jury (two submission periods per year)

\textsuperscript{56} For an example of a dossier developed by the University of Louvain, see : [http://www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/vae/documents/file.pdf](http://www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/vae/documents/file.pdf)

\textsuperscript{57} [http://www.vae-universite.be/les-etapes-de-la-vae/](http://www.vae-universite.be/les-etapes-de-la-vae/)
The jury analyses a portfolio and formulates an opinion, potentially after auditioning the candidate.

A decision is taken by the Haute Ecole: exemption, admission, or re-direction towards another pathway and communicated to the applicant via the VAE counsellor.

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

VDC

The Validation Centres are established training providers run by the consortium partners. A panel composed of the examiner and the observer assesses applicants. Examiners are trainers or teachers working within the occupation concerned by the validation with a minimum of five years’ experience in this occupation. Observers are professionals experienced in the relevant occupation.

VAE in Higher education

The Jury de valorisation is defined in articles 53 and 60 of the ‘Bologna Act’ as the body recognising and adding value to the professional and personal experience of the applicants. The jury is fully competent in its responsibilities. The jury evaluates and takes a decision on the non-formal and informal learning, subject to recognition. The jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may give some recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant. According to article 68 of the Bologna Act, the jury can constitute commissions of three members at least, for the purpose of VAE. The department of the HEI in charge of recognition of non-formal and informal recognition selects the members of the jury.

Concerning VAE counsellors, the VAE-project considers them as a ‘new occupation, at the crossroads between career guidance counsellors, admission services and education counsellors’58. VAE counsellors are recruited directly by universities and support both candidates and jury members. Currently there are about two VAE counsellors in each of the six universities in Belgium (Fr). Most of them hold a degree in social science (psychology, sociology, education science). They were generally employed, in their first job, in the guidance or admission services of a university or the employment agency (e.g. FOREM). There is no formal training specifically designed to become a VAE counsellor. However continuous training is provided to the counsellors via the VAE platform (e.g. information sessions, training workshops facilitated by VAE experts from France, training sessions in the VAE services of French universities). Since 2011 VAE counsellors have gained legitimacy in universities. They are clearly known as the reference points concerning VAE in their respective institutions. Two counsellors are now directly employed by their university (VAE counsellors were initially remunerated through the VAE-University Project). This is a positive sign indicating that their role is becoming institutionalised. Such institutionalisation should be further encouraged by the new decree on the organisation of higher education that puts a strong emphasis on the role of guidance in VAE.

VAE in Hautes Ecoles

The assessment is carried out by a jury who has full autonomy to decide which experience is relevant, with regard to the study programme where the candidate wishes to enrol.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

VDC

The training of evaluators for VDC is compulsory and strongly advised for Validation Centre managers. A methodological expert provides the training from the Consortium. The Consortium de Validation des Compétences delivers training to evaluators and staff involved in the management of validation.

58 For more information, CIUF (2013), Projet VAE-Université 2008-2013. Résultats et Perspectives, Mai 2013.
VAE in the higher education sector

Continuous training is provided to the VAE counsellors via the VAE platform (e.g. information sessions, training workshops facilitated by VAE experts from France, training sessions in the VAE services of French universities).

VAE counsellors play a crucial role in the training and support to members of the juries examining and assessing candidates’ files. In two universities VAE counsellors also prepare evaluation tools to assist the jury members and facilitate their work.

Jury members are fully autonomous and are not under the obligation to refer to VAE counsellors. Increasingly however, counsellors receive requests from jury members (for information, support, clarifications).

There is an increasing awareness about the need to improve guidance provided to VAE jury members in higher education, a key issue for future development of VAE. Indeed, VAE marks a profound change for higher education institutions with the task of identifying and measuring learning that is accomplished outside their boundaries and acceptance of other forms of learning.

VAE in Hautes Ecoles

The inter-network VAE unit is providing training to VAE counsellors. The VAE unit organizes a training module, for the staff that will fulfil the missions of VAE counsellors in Hautes Ecoles.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

VDC

Evaluators are employed by a Validation Centre, or have a temporary contract with the centre. To become an evaluator, one must:

- Be a trainer or teacher of the occupation concerned by the validation;
- Belong to one of the five public institutions members of the Validation Consortium (Bruxelles Formation, Enseignement de Promotion sociale, FOREM-formation, IFAPME, SFPME);
- OR
- Have five years’ experience in the occupation concerned by the validation, not having left the occupation for more than five years;

Observers are professionals in the occupation concerned by validation. They are appointed by the Validation Centre and must:

- Have five years’ experience in the occupation concerned by the validation; not having left the occupation for more than five years;
- Not have any professional or personal links to the candidate. If such link exists, the Validation Centre must choose another observer.

VAE

Generally, there are no specific, explicit qualification requirements for VAE counsellors or member of VAE juries.

For instance, Higher education institutions are free to decide on their own procedures for recruiting VAE counsellors or VAE jury members. There is no formal training specifically designed to become a VAE counsellor. The VAE-project considers VAE counsellors as a ‘new occupation, at the crossroads between career guidance counsellors, admission services and education counsellors’ 59.

7 References

Websites:

VDC

VAE
Valorisation des acquis de l’expérience in Enseignement de Promotion Sociale.

Other
FOREM : http://www.leforem.be.
Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française http://www.ciuf.be/.
Enseignement de promotion sociale.

7.1 Organisations Consulted
Consortium de la validation des compétences
CIUF - Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique
Fédération de l'enseignement de promotion sociale catholique