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1 Introduction

In France, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning builds upon long-standing practices in the field of identification and recognition of prior learning and professional experience. The validation system, which is based on a clear legal framework, has taken shape in the framework of continuous vocational training and labour market policies; it builds upon an individual right to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Its purpose is to give the opportunity to those who have no qualification but have a professional experience and skills to get a first level of qualification, and more generally to improve the level of qualification of all the users.

A key milestone was the adoption of legislation in 2002, followed by various decrees, which created the current procedure known as Validation of experience (Validation des acquis de l’expérience - VAE)\(^1\). VAE can lead to the award of whole or components of a qualification (certification) based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts. As mentioned above, VAE is an individual right (which is closely connected to the individual right to continuous vocational training); in order to qualify, individuals must have at least three years of experience in a certain field relevant to the field of the qualification they want to obtain.

VAE can be organised for a wide range of qualifications, not only those awarded or accredited by Ministries such as VET qualifications and higher education qualifications but also sectoral qualifications recognised by social partners such as Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP). Any qualification officially recognised by the State and the social partners and listed in the national directory of qualifications, the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (RNCP), except when it is linked to a ‘regulated profession’ (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal) can be awarded through a VAE procedure. The qualifications awarded through VAE are exactly the same and have exactly same value as those awarded through participation in formal education and training.

It should be noted that in addition to VAE, other procedures linked to the assessment of informal learning and non-formal learning exist:

- In higher education, there is a mechanism for recognition of professional and personal experience to grant access to a programme through exemption of the normal requirements; this procedure known as Validation des acquis professionnels ("VAP 85") was introduced in 1985\(^2\) and is still in place as of today;
- The skill audits or bilan de compétences (see Section 2.2) aims at the identification of skills and competences of an individual but is not considered as a validation procedure in

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\(^1\)Loi de modernisation sociale 2002-73 du 17 janvier 2002 (Journal officiel du 18 janvier 2002)
Décret 2007-1470 du 15 octobre 2007 relative à la formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie des fonctionnaires de l'État
Décret 2002-1460 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif au contrôle des organismes qui assistent des candidats à une validation des acquis de l'expérience et modifiant le titre IX du livre IX du code du travail (deuxième partie : Décrets en Conseil d'État)
References in the Education code : Articles L 335-5 et suivants, Article L 331-1, Articles L 613-3 et suivants, Articles L 641-2 and Labour Code : Article L6111-1 (VD), Article L6311-1, Article L6411-1 (VD), Article L6422-1 (VD), Article L6422-10 (VD), Article L6421-1 (VD), Article L6421-2 (VD), Article L6421-3 (VD), Article L6421-4 (VD), Article L6412-1, Article R6422-11 (V), Article R6422-12, Article R6422-13 (V)

\(^2\) Décret n° 85-906 du 23 août 1985
France (as it does not lead to the award of a qualification); other types of competence portfolios developed outside of validation procedures also exist (not described in detail in this report).

While the legal framework on VAE sets general parameters, in practice the design and implementation of specific rules and procedures are under the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications listed in the RNCP. This includes different Ministries (Ministries in charge of national education, higher education, agriculture, labour, culture, sports and youth, social affairs, health, defence), chambers of commerce, and chambers of trade. Actual validation procedures differ depending on the type of qualification targeted by the application and awarding authority. This gives rise to a wide range of practices and working cultures at the provider level, local and regional levels, in terms of methodology, cooperation with stakeholders, promotion of the use of VAE as part of HR/active labour market policies, etc.

In comparison with systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in place in other European countries, the French VAE system is relatively well developed, however efforts to broaden access, improve the transparency of the procedure, shorten its length and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications and profiles are still required. The potential of VAE for many different groups of users – with positive individual impacts in terms of self-esteem, motivation, participation in lifelong learning, employability and career development prospects – is still underused.

Currently the demand for VAE focuses on a small number of qualifications. In 2012, the 10 most popular qualifications for VAE (nine of them in the field of health and social care) accounted for 47.8% of all VAE applications assessed by juries.

During the first decade of the implementation of VAE (2002-2012), more than 250 000 individuals have successfully participated in this procedure. The number of VAE applications collected by different Ministries is around 60-65 000 applications per year\(^3\), while about 30 000 full qualifications per year are awarded. Concerning higher education qualifications alone, the number of users remains relatively modest as about 4 300 VAE applications in total were examined by juries in 2011 but success rates are high: more than 4000 validations (representing full or partial qualifications) have been delivered, more than half of these for full qualifications; this number also adds to 12 000 successful validation procedures granting access to higher education programmes (“VAP 85”).

No changes have been made to the legislative framework in recent years but according to stakeholders consulted, a reform is currently under discussion at the inter-ministerial level with a view to simplify the current provisions in the Labour and Education Codes concerning VAE. This reform will bring clarifications but is not expected to change significantly the purpose and the content of the procedure or governance systems.

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

The French validation system is well-developed and based on a legal framework.

A key milestone was the adoption of a new legislation in 2002, followed by various decrees, which created a type of validation procedure applicable across different education and training sectors\(^4\). This procedure is known as Validation of experience (Validation des

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\(^3\) Source: DARES. This only takes into account applications which went through a first eligibility check.


Décret 2007-1470 du 15 octobre 2007 relative à la formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie des fonctionnaires de l'Etat

Décret 2002-1459 du 16 décembre 2002 relatif à la prise en charge par les employeurs des actions de validation des acquis de l'expérience et portant modification du titre V du livre IX du Code du travail (deuxième partie :
acquis de l'expérience - VAE) and used to deliver a whole or components of a qualification (certification) based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts. VAE can be organised for any qualification officially recognised by the State and the social partners and listed in the national directory of qualifications, the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (RNCP), including VET qualifications and higher education qualifications. All higher education qualifications accredited by the Ministry, whether awarded by universities or other higher education institutions are considered as 'Certifications Professionnelles'; therefore they must be registered in the RNCP and opened to VAE. In addition, sectoral vocational certificates such as Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP) can also be awarded via VAE.

The qualifications awarded through VAE have exactly same value as those awarded through participation in formal education and training.

VAE is defined as an individual right.

For employees, a VAE procedure is assimilated to a training activity (employees can use their individual right to training and individual training leave in order to undertake a VAE). In practice, groups of workers can engage in a so called collective VAE, at the initiative of their employer; however their applications are always assessed on an individual basis.

Except for some measures comprised in the 2009 law on guidance and LLL of the employees (stipulating for example that the issue of VAE must be addressed by the social partners during their negotiations within the sectors or the measure concerning the financing of the participation of professionals in the juries), no substantial changes have been made to the legislative framework on VAE in recent years.

According to stakeholders consulted, a reform is currently under discussion at the inter-ministerial level with a view to simplify the current provisions in the Labour Code concerning VAE. This reform will bring clarifications but is not expected to change significantly the purpose and the content of the procedure or governance systems. Other key policy objectives at the inter-ministerial level are to foster the use of VAE among the less qualified and to improve monitoring and data collection systems, based on common indicators used at the regional level.

Other types of validation procedures also have a legal basis:

- In higher education, the Validation des acquis professionnels (VAP) or recognition of professional experience to grant access to a higher education and training programme, through exemption of the normal requirements was introduced by a decree in 1985;

- Concerning recognition/identification of informal and non-formal learning, the use of the skills audits (bilans de compétences, procedure not leading to the award of

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5 Décret n° 85-906 du 23 août 1985
6 Another type of validation procedure in place in the higher education sector - not linked to informal and informal learning - is the ‘validation of higher education studies’ - VES e.g. for studies carried abroad. Instead of evaluating the professional experience, this procedure takes into account the prior studies followed and the qualifications the person has got in order to deliver a partial or full qualification. To date, there is no data available for this type of validation.
qualifications, see below) is well-regulated by legislation (codified in the Article R6322-35 and followings of the Labour Code).

2.2 Skills audits

Skills audits (bilans de compétences) are a well-developed tool in France. This tool is used mostly for workers, but also for jobseekers. Its objective is to allow individuals to analyse their professional and personal competencies, their aptitudes and motivation, with a view to define a professional project or re-training project. A skills audit is personalised and is not related to specific qualification or standard.

According to the Labour Code (Article R6322-35 and followings):

- A skills audit can be requested by an employee or by his/her employer, but cannot in any case be imposed on any individual. It is assimilated to a training activity and can be requested as part of the individual right to training and training leave.
- The skills audit must be carried out by an external accredited provider and include a preliminary phase, an investigation phase, and a conclusion phase. The procedure must last at least 24 hours in total, including 10 hours of face-to-face interviews taking place over a period of three weeks to three months.
- The skills audit results in a synthesis document drawn up by the professional counsellor. This document is confidential and only provided to the worker who is the object of the skills audit, unless this person agrees to communicate it to another party. This document summarises the competencies and aptitudes uncovered and how these relate to the objectives of the candidate, and includes one to three proposals for career evolution as well as an action plan. Advice is given on necessary steps to reach the objectives in question.

In practice, professionals in charge of performing skills audit are often also trained to provide guidance on VAE procedures and support to candidates.

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

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

In France, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is directly linked to formal qualifications, as VAE specifically aims at the award of an official formal qualification (certification).

The National Qualifications Directory or RNCP, which was established by law in 2002, is the basis for the French National Qualification Framework (NQF). The aim of the RNCP is to ensure quality and transparency of formal qualifications in France, by establishing a publicly accessible register of qualifications formally recognised by the State and social partners. The RNCP is overseen by a national commission, the Commission Nationale de la Certification professionnelle (CNCP).

The RNCP and the VAE are interdependent: a VAE procedure can be organised for all qualifications registered in the RNCP, except when a qualification is linked to a ‘regulated profession’ (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal). Recently, the possibility to use VAE has also been introduced for qualifications in the field of accounting and management.

Credit systems

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In Higher Education, the credit system for formal learning is implemented through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). VAE follows this structure for the diplomas or degrees concerned.

In VET, each qualification is generally divided into modules. Such modules can be considered as units that can be linked to the credit system.

**Standards**

The RNCP describes the content of each qualification. The standards or *référentiels de certification* describe skills, knowledge and know-how and are defined in relation with *referentiels d’activités* (list of functions and tasks to be performed within the given occupation). For the technical and vocational qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of national education, the *référentiels* are updated on a continuous basis by bipartite commissions (*Commissions Professionnelles Consultatives*). These commissions are also in charge of the higher technician degree (*brevet de technicien supérieur* – BTS). The same type of national commissions exist for technological degrees delivered by universities (*diplôme universitaire de technologie* - DUT).

### 2.4 National institutional framework

The general institutional framework for VAE is under the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of lifelong learning (currently, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue).

Specific rules and practices for the implementation of the VAE procedures are under the responsibility of each authority awarding qualifications included in the RNCP. This includes chambers of commerce, chambers of trade, different Ministries (Ministries in charge of national education, higher education, agriculture, labour, culture, sports and youth, social affairs, health, defence). In the higher education sector, according to the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions, each institution sets its own procedures for VAE within the general framework set by the law and the specific decree on implementation of the VAE in higher education institutions. The procedure in all cases must respect the different phases of the procedure: information and guidance, portfolio and counselling, assessment and interview by a jury. The role of the Ministry of higher education is to provide general guidance and to assess the different validation systems.

Therefore, actual validation procedures differ depending on the type of qualification targeted by the application and awarding authority, but must in all cases comply with the general principles laid out in the 2002 law on VAE.

### 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

Information, promotion, and rising awareness about VAE is the joint responsibility of different stakeholders and happens at different levels (national- both inter-ministry and ministry levels, regional level, provider level, sectoral level and company level).

Concerning State diplomas (i.e. those awarded by Ministries), VAE standards and procedures are designed nationally, while the organisation of the procedure and assessment and the provision of counselling and guidance is delegated to the regional services depending from the Ministry (e.g. for the Ministry of Labour, regional directorates DIRECCTE).

Concerning State vocational and technological degrees - which include secondary vocational qualifications delivered by the Ministry of National Education (CAP, BEP, Bac pro), some vocational higher education qualifications (BTS, BTS, DSAA, DCG, DSCG) and some qualifications delivered jointly by the ministries in charge of national education and social affairs (DDES, DEETS, DCESF and DEME) – the following responsibilities apply.
- The Ministry of National Education is responsible for setting up general standards, as well as overall quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms.
- The organisation of VAE is carried out at the level of the Académie (administrative division of the State education system). Within each Académie, a service called Dispositif académique de validation des acquis (DAVA) provides information and guidance to candidates about the qualifications available and the process and individual support. The eligibility check and organisation of the assessment (jury sessions) is carried out by the service in charge of examinations and competitions (DEC) at the level of the Académie, or in some cases by the DAVA.

Concerning qualifications awarded by higher education institutions, or any public or private institutions with one single establishment in France, all stages are implemented at the provider level. For example, each university is in charge of setting up and implementing their own validation procedures. Nevertheless, the procedure must be in line with the rules laid out by the 2002 decree on implementation of the VAE by the HE institutions and therefore only the details of implementation differ. For instance, differences can be seen in the information phase (individual or collective information), in the type of counselling proposed to the individual, in the number of juries organised per year. Each institution also has to plan quality assurance and evaluation processes.

### 2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

**Education and training providers:**

The formal education and training sector plays a major role in the development of VAE given that this procedure can lead to the award of formal qualifications.

Individual upper secondary schools are not directly involved in organising VAE procedures for vocational/technical qualifications (managed by the DAVA and not at the provider level) but VET teachers and trainers are represented in VAE juries.

Higher education institutions are responsible for putting in place their own procedures, covering information and guidance services, collection of applications, administrative procedures, and organisation of jury sessions. The level of development of VAE across higher education institutions is heterogenous. Overall, those higher education institutions with a strong tradition of involvement in continuous training provision are generally the most proactive in developing and promoting the use of VAE. The level of involvement and acceptance of VAE in the university sector is generally increasing, but some cultural, organisational and financial barriers remain. For example, a strong hindering factor is the insufficient level of interest for VAE among university professors and their involvement in related procedures (e.g. as members of VAE juries), which is partly due to the fact that this role can be time-consuming and is not always being well recognised in terms of career development. On the other hand, some university professors acknowledge that VAE fulfils a social purpose and also brings added value in their own work, as the process of evaluating learning outcomes acquired in other contexts brings new insights into the relevance of existing qualifications.

**Private sector actors (including social partners)**

Chambers of commerce or social partners are directly responsible for implementing VAE procedures related to the type of qualifications they award. As such, they take charge of the entire process, from the provision of information to candidates to the organisation of jury sessions, certification, and providing quality assurance.

Private sector actors are not directly involved in the VAE procedure if the targeted qualification is a State diploma, but the legislation foresees that at least 25 % of the jury members are professionals, which may include representatives of the private sector.

Private sector actors also contribute to awareness raising and promotion of VAE, regardless of the type of qualification targeted. At the national inter-sectoral level, social partners can
contribute to shape the general policy framework on VAE, via the adoption of inter-sectoral collective agreements.

Sectoral bipartite organisations in charge of vocational training and the OPCA (bipartite training funds), as well as individual employers, play an essential role in promoting the use of VAE for workers, including via the development of so-called collective VAE (groups of workers undertaking individual VAE procedures).

Collective VAE projects can be put in place for various employees of the same company or for employees from different companies performing similar occupations in a given sector (this is organised with the support of the OPCA or sectoral bipartite organisations).

VAE can be used by employers as a useful tool as part of their human resources policies, with a view to:

- Raise qualification levels among staff, contribute to the professional development of employees while limiting training costs
- Facilitate the occupational mobility of workers and managing needs of specific groups of employees, assess training and recruitment needs
- Improve social dialogue, stimulate interaction between employees and between employees and management

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

An inter-ministerial committee for the development of VAE (Comité interministériel pour le développement de la VAE) is in place. It includes representatives of all Ministries involved and has met in 2013 to discuss future reforms and policy developments. The general information portal on VAE (www.vae.gouv.fr) is under the responsibility of the ministry in charge of employment with the help of the inter-ministerial committee.

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

VAE benefits from public funding at different levels. As its implementation is largely decentralised, it gives rise to a wide range of practices, processes and working cultures at the provider level, local and regional levels, including concerning the cooperation with stakeholders, use of VAE as part of HR policies, active labour market policies, etc.

Examples of innovative developments and approaches in the field of VAE have not yet been systematically mapped in France. A few examples of on-going national level policy developments to improve the take-up and/or quality of current VAE procedures are described below.

- The use of VAE is being promoted as part of the flagship initiative launched in 2012 by the government to support (low-skilled) young people facing difficulties to access the labour market, the Subsidised jobs programme (Emplois d’Avenir)\(^8\). Participants in this nation-wide scheme (co-funded by the State) undertake different types of training activities during their work contract; in addition to formal training, this experience offers a broad range of opportunities for informal and non-formal learning. Participants are supported individually by a counsellor who monitors their individual development. Counsellors should advise young people on how to use VAE at the end of their contract to get their learning outcomes formally recognised and improve their employment prospects. Although the government’s target is to enrol 150 000 young people as part of the scheme by 2014, no target has been defined concerning the number of VAE applications following participation in the scheme.

- The Ministry of National Education (currently the main VAE provider in France) is seeking to improve the coordination between the services in charge of implementing VAE in the different Academies (DAVA) and fostering the exchange of good practices. Some of the priorities that have been identified, based on local experimentations, are described below.

\(^8\) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/emplois-d-avenir,2189/
– The improvement of guidance/feedback offered to VAE candidates whose application is considered eligible, with a view to provide tailored advice at an early stage and help those candidates that are likely to be awarded a partial validation to plan their training plan in advance. Currently, partial validation is too often perceived by the candidate as a failure and very few of these candidates will continue their training/validation pathway in order to obtain a full qualification.

– The development of online platforms to store applicants’ portfolios and make them easily accessible to the members of VAE juries.

– The grouping of applications from different regions for some qualifications for which there is little demand (i.e. the minimum threshold for organising a jury session is not reached) and the use of video-conferencing to organise interviews between the juries and candidates.

– The training and professional development of members of VAE juries (validation practitioners).

At the higher education level, similar innovative approaches can also be identified (for example in relation with the use of online application and documentation tools, use of video-conference and remote support ; some universities can provide a whole on line procedure).

– The network of the VAE services at the university level (www.fcu.fr) which is linked to the conference of directors of university services for continuous training, contributes to the exchange information on innovative practices in the field of VAE. Recently, the network has elaborated a guide on how to implement VAE for PhD qualifications, which provides a methodology in line with both general provisions on VAE as well and standards applicable to PhD qualifications.

– The network is particularly efficient at dealing with the companies when they need to qualify their employees by using the VAE : the grouping of applications in one university which is charged to examine the applications and dispatch them afterwards to the other universities, according to the needs of the applicants and the degree they want to get, makes VAE easier for the companies.

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

In France, VAE is funded by public and private sources; funding streams are very complex due to the variety of stakeholders involved.

Public funding is part of the overall budget from lifelong learning including State funding – within each Ministry concerned and regional funding – regional authorities can allocate funding with a view to support the development of VAE. Regional authorities are responsible for the Information and Guidance centres and finance them. The public employment services Pole Emploi also contribute to the funding of VAE.

Information and guidance centres can also receive funding from the European Social Fund.

Concerning the volume of public funding, no consolidated data is available. For instance, within the Ministry of Education, there is no specific budget line allocated to VAE. Within each Académie, functioning costs of the services in charge of VAE (DAVA) are integrated within the general budget. This funding is allocated internally and may therefore differ across Académies. Similarly, universities receive a global budget from the State which does not include a specific budget line for VAE.

Private funding sources include:

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9 In addition, a part of the DAVA revenues are generated by guidance counselling activities offered to candidates during the second phase of the application.
bipartite bodies - funds for individual training leave, *Fonds de Gestion des Congés Individuels de Formation* (FONGECIF) or *Organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés* (OPCA), which are sectoral bodies managed by social partners and collecting taxes from employers and employees in order to finance and develop training,

- additional contributions from employers,
- candidates.

### 2.7.2 Distribution of costs

No consolidated data is available on the real average costs and the distribution of costs linked to VAE (costs related to the design of the standards, the VAE procedure itself and the provision of information and guidance to candidates, the counselling, the set-up of VAE juries, etc.). Most of the cost is related to the counselling proposed to the applicant during the second phase of the procedure.

Only a part of these costs is covered by the candidate (and therefore, the procedure could have net costs for the VAE providers\(^\text{10}\)). A non-official website on VAE provides some estimates of the fees charged by different types of institutions and training providers.\(^\text{11}\)

The costs charged to candidates vary depending on the targeted qualification/ awarding authority (generally no more than EUR 1 000) and the status of applicants. Administrative/registration fees may apply in some cases. In the higher education sector, fees for VAE are set by the management board within each institution.

For State vocational/technical qualifications, there are no administrative costs for registration, but on average the cost per participant of counselling offered by DAVA during the second phase of the validation procedure is about EUR 800\(^\text{12}\).

Importantly, VAE candidates can apply for different types of financial support depending on their status (employed, unemployed), their age, etc.\(^\text{13}\). According to an annual survey of VAE procedures managed by the Ministry of Education, only 5 % of the candidates concerned did not benefitting from any form of financial support in 2011\(^\text{14}\).

So to sum up, individuals can have their VAE financed by their company or by a bipartite body when they are employees, by Pôle Emploi or the Region when they are unemployed.

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\(^{10}\) This tends to be the case in higher education, according to the interviewee consulted.

\(^{11}\) [http://www.vae­guide­pratique.fr/vae­tarifs.htm](http://www.vae­guide­pratique.fr/vae­tarifs.htm) (consulted on 20 October 2013). For qualifications delivered by Ministries, fees are generally below EUR 1 000. Concerning higher education qualifications, fees charged by universities and specialised schools vary more significantly, between EUR 600 and 2 000, depending on the institution and type of diploma. A common practice is to charge different fees depending on the status of the candidate (employed/unemployed); again, some possibilities to receive financial support are available on a case by case basis. Private sector organisations such as Chambres de Commerce et d'Industrie and Chambres des Métiers et de l'Artisanat charge in average around EUR 750 and EUR 1000 respectively to VAE candidates (covering both administrative fees and support); again with some possibilities of financial support.


\(^{13}\) [http://www.vae.gouv.fr/VOUS_ETES_UN_PARTICULIER/QUELLES_SONT_LES_POSSIBILITES_P/645.htm](http://www.vae.gouv.fr/VOUS_ETES_UN_PARTICULIER/QUELLES_SONT_LES_POSSIBILITES_P/645.htm)

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Data on flows of VAE beneficiaries is only available for those qualifications awarded by Ministries, including higher education qualifications (i.e. excluding qualifications awarded by chambers of commerce and trade).

In the first years following the introduction of the new legislation on VAE in 2002, the take-up of validation in France increased significantly, according to data collected from different Ministries. However, over in recent years, the number of VAE candidates considered eligible has been stabilising at around 65 000 per year (64 000 in 2012) after reaching a peak in 2009.

A bit less than half of the VAE candidates considered eligible eventually received a full qualification: since 2007, about 30 000 qualifications per year were delivered by VAE (28 700 in 2002). Concerning the number of partial validations per year, no consolidated data from all Ministries is available.

Table 2.1 Evolution of the number of candidates considered eligible, candidates going through the full process and successful candidates from 2007 to 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of candidates considered eligible</th>
<th>Number of candidates going through the full process</th>
<th>Number of diplomas delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>63,543</td>
<td>48,709</td>
<td>28,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>47,000</td>
<td>26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>29,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DARES. Scope: Qualifications delivered through VAE by all Ministries, expect Ministry of Youth and sports for the number of candidates considered eligible and going through the full process in 2012.

Data collected from different Ministries is also available on the profile of VAE applicants. As shown in the table below, most VAE applicants are adult workers, females and target secondary level VET qualifications (Level V, corresponding to ISCED level 3c).

Table 2.2 Profile of VAE applicants in 2012 across different Ministries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of applicants</th>
<th>% of all applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed – active</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level V (lowest) – ISCED 3c</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IV – ISCED 3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III – ISCED 5</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>% of all applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level II – ISCED 6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level I (highest) – ISCED 6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DARES. Scope: all Ministries involved in VAE except Higher education.

Vocational and technical qualifications (ISCED 3c to 5)

Among different ministries involved in VAE, the largest VAE provider in France is the Ministry of National Education, which is charge of VAE procedures for State vocational and technical qualifications, both at the secondary and tertiary level.

In 2011, concerning State vocational and technical qualifications:
- 31 910 applications were considered eligible,
- 22 170 portfolios (livret 2 – second phase of the application) were submitted,
- 20 950 applications were evaluated by a jury,
- 13 560 full diplomas were awarded,
- 87 % of applications were related to qualifications for services occupations, especially in occupation the care sector and administrative occupations.

Overall, the demand was largely concentrated on a small number of qualifications in sectors facing important recruitment needs.

### Table 2.3 Three vocational and technical qualifications most commonly targeted by VAE candidates in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the qualification</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Candidates assessed</th>
<th>% of all candidates assessed</th>
<th>Full qualification awarded</th>
<th>% of all qualifications delivered via VAE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAP Petite enfance - Childcare</td>
<td>ISCED 3c</td>
<td>3 596</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>2 598</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplôme d’État Éducateur spécialisé - Specialist educator,</td>
<td>ISCED 5</td>
<td>2 308</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>1 216</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplôme d’État Moniteur éducateur - Educator/youth worker</td>
<td>ISCED 3</td>
<td>1 079</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scope - applications managed by DAVA - Ministry of national education. Source: DEPP (Ministry of national education)

In 2012, the three qualifications most commonly requested by VAE applicants were all related to the care sector and at the ISCED 3c level:
- The diploma for nurse assistant or Diplôme d’État d’aide soignant (DEAS) with 6 050 applications assessed (12.4% of the total)
- The diploma for carer or Diplôme d’État d’auxiliaire de vie sociale (DEAVS), with 4 506 applications assessed (9.3% of the total)
- The childcare diploma CAP petite enfance with 3 133 applications assessed (6.4% of the total)

All together, these three qualifications represented 28.1% of all applications assessed by VAE juries in 2012.

In the healthcare and the childcare sector, jobs are traditionally held by low-qualified female workers, who might particularly benefit from undergoing a validation procedure.

Higher education qualifications (ISCED 5-6)

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15 Source: DARES (2014) La VAE en 2012 dans les ministères certificateurs
Concerning higher education qualifications awarded by universities, and other higher education institutions (\textit{instituts nationaux polytechniques, universités technologiques, Conservatoire national des arts et métiers})\textsuperscript{16}, in 2011\textsuperscript{17}:

- 4 032 applications were examined by juries in 83 higher education institutions,
- 2 397 full qualifications were awarded,
- 1 622 partial validations were awarded.

Most VAE candidates targeted higher education qualifications in the field of economics, management, and administration; the most popular types of qualifications are master degrees and vocational bachelor degrees.

In the higher education sector, the vast majority of VAE candidates are in employment (85\%) and belong to the 30-49 age group (77.1\%). A small majority are male (52\%) and 45\% are managers.

At the same time, more than 15 000 applications for validation of prior learning in order to grant access to higher education or exemptions not leading to the award of full qualification (VAP) were administered by higher education institutions in 2011, and about 12 000 of these procedures were successful.

\textbf{2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals}

There is limited scientific evidence available on the net benefits to individuals of undertaking a VAE procedure at the national level, although some studies may have been carried out at the regional, local level as well case studies. No comprehensive overview on the literature has been carried out so far.

The grey literature (including online guidance material on VAE) suggests that there is a broad range of positive impacts for individuals engaging in VAE, in terms of self-esteem and personal development, self-efficacy, motivation to learn and participation in further training, employability, career development prospects and well-being in the workplace.

In addition, it should be noted that many individuals engage in VAE because they need to acquire a specific type of qualification to work in their occupation of choice (e.g. in childcare). For these individuals, VAE offers a relevant alternative to participation in a formal training course.

\textbf{3 Information, advice and guidance}

\textbf{3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment}

Although there are no recent studies on the general level of awareness on VAE opportunities, one can estimate that that it is increasing as the current scheme has been in place since 2002\textsuperscript{18}. In addition, the validation procedure to get access to in the higher education sector (VAP) is relatively well known as it has been in place since 1985.

\textsuperscript{16} These are: DUT-DEUST-DNTS, Bachelor (Licence, Licence professionnelle), Maîtrise, Engineer diploma, Master, PhD.


\textsuperscript{18} An official stock-taking report on VAE published in 2008 reported that according to a survey, the general public is relatively well informed about VAE, however, the less qualified are also the less aware about VAE opportunities. See BESSON Eric. \textit{Valoriser l'acquis de l'expérience : une évaluation du dispositif de VAE}. Secrétariat d'État à la prospective, à l'évaluation des politiques publiques et au développement de l'économie numérique ; \url{http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/084000590/0000.pdf}
Awareness-raising and recruitment is the joint responsibility of different stakeholders.

Since 2002, a network of regional offices to provide information about VAE, called Points d'Information Conseil (PIC), has been in place. Such structures act as a focal point at the regional level to provide basic information about the process and refer applicants to the relevant awarding body.

A general information website (www.vae.gouv.fr) provides information for the general public - including employers - on the use of the VAE, access to reference documents and to a list of the regional PIC. This website will be revamped in 2014, with a view to provide better information services for potential candidates, employers and validation practitioners. The website will also include practical information fiches.

An official website on VAE in the field of health and social care is also in place: http://vae.asp-public.fr.

Other types of stakeholders/agencies can also provide general information to candidates and can refer them to the right contact points:

- public Employment Services, including Mission locales (for young people);
- other guidance providers (not part of PIC network);
- regional services depending from the Ministry of Education in charge in VAE (DAVA) - DAVA are primarily meant to support candidates who are interested in acquiring a qualification delivered by the Ministry of National Education, but can provide initial guidance to all candidates regardless of the qualification targeted;
- different stakeholders involved in the field of guidance/continuous training/skills audit - including local offices of the Association for the vocational training of adults (AFPA), sectoral training funds, and the networks of education and training institutions in charge of adult training (GRETA) etc.;
- social partners.

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

Every individual has a right to receive guidance on the VAE process. As mentioned above, early guidance is provided mostly by the regional information points (PIC), as well as a range of different stakeholders.

Counselling to VAE candidates, called in French “accompagnement”, is provided by the structure/awarding body responsible for the organisation of the procedure; this can be either at the provider level (e.g. universities) or at the regional level.

For example, concerning vocational and technical qualifications (delivered by the Ministry of national education), guidance and counselling is provided by a service called DAVA in each Académie. During the first phase of the application (eligibility check), advisors working at the DAVA provide initial information and guidance on how to submit an application to candidates. This is entirely free of charge. As part of the second part of the application, DAVA can also provide intensive counselling upon request of the candidate (not free of charge), to help them prepare their portfolio. Counselling can be provided individually or collectively, depending on the needs of the candidates and the working practices of each DAVA. In practice the network of GRETA (local networks of education and training institutions involved in the provision of training courses for adults) are also involved in the provision of support to candidates.

In the field of health and social care qualifications, guidance on VAE and services to candidates are provided by a structure called ASP (Agence de Services et Paiement) on behalf of different Ministries.

In the higher education sector (universities), support to VAE candidates is provided by the specific service in charge of VAE and/or continuous training. Counselling is generally provided by a team of two professionals, including a general guidance practitioner and a professor responsible for the type of qualification targeted.
Private providers can also provide counselling and support on how to prepare their application and their portfolio to candidates.

Though counselling is not mandatory, it is a very important element of the validation process increasing significantly the chances of success of the candidate.

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

Guidance practitioners are well informed about VAE as its use has been continuously encouraged for some time and the current system has been in place for more than 10 years. At the regional and local level, a number of specific initiatives are also in place to enhance the level of awareness of VAE among guidance practitioners. For example, the region of Ile-de-France via its VAE information service (Pôle Régional Information Conseil en VAE) organises regular information sessions on VAE for all counsellors/advisors/practitioners working in the field of vocational guidance, labour market services and social inclusion. The target group includes professionals from the Public Employment Service (Pôle Emploi) as well as other stakeholders such as APEC (national association for the promotion of employment of managers), missions locales (local structures offering vocational guidance and placement services for young people) and other employment and training stakeholders.19

It should be noted that the provision of guidance on VAE is integrated within lifelong guidance in France. Typically, professionals in charge of providing advice on VAE can also offer general occupational/vocational guidance and advice on lifelong learning opportunities. For example, some regional PIC are Information and counseling centres (Centres d’information et d’orientation - CIO), whose core mission is to provide guidance to pupils in initial education and training.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The 2002 legislation on VAE and decree sets some general criteria on the procedure, including on the functioning and composition of VAE juries.

Concerning the provision of guidance to VAE applicants, a ‘quality charter’ was developed by the State services in 200820 in order to outline a set of key principles for the provision of support (after the first part of the application – i.e. for those applications considered eligible).

The main objective of the charter is to guarantee that all State services offer a consistent level of quality and in particular in relation with the following aspects:

- offering suitable conditions for the provision of support,
- shortening as much as possible the length of the procedure,
- providing required documentation to candidates,
- guaranteeing the quality of guidance,
- listening to candidates’ needs.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

VAE quality assurance systems/procedures (regarding the organisation of the procedure and the characteristics of validation practitioners) are under the responsibility of each body awarding qualifications (at the Ministry/national level or at the provider level).

19 http://www.infovae-idf.com/jcms/c_5580/les-professionnels-de-l-aio
20 http://www.vae.gouv.fr/_pdf/CHARTE_ACOMPAGNEMENT_VAE_GROUPE.PDF
4.3 Evaluation framework

At the national level, the monitoring of the implementation of VAE is ensured by the inter-ministerial committee on VAE.

The collection of data from different Ministries on flows of VAE beneficiaries is carried out by the research department of the Ministry of Labour (Direction de l’animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques, DARES).

Within the Ministry of National Education, the Directorate for Evaluation, Prospective and Performance (DEPP) carries out annual surveys on the activities of the DAVA, in relation to State technological and vocational qualifications (secondary and tertiary level) and on VAE procedures carried out by higher education institutions.

An official public report taking stock of the implementation of VAE at the national level since the introduction of the procedure was published in 2008\textsuperscript{21}, followed by another report prepared by a working group published in the same year\textsuperscript{22}; no general evaluation or stock-taking report has been published since.

Each body awarding qualifications is expected to develop their own evaluation of the implementation of VAE, review the process and procedures used for VAE on a continuous basis, and make the necessary improvements. For example, the implementation of VAE procedures at the Ministry of National Education has been examined by the Inspectorate General of the Administration of National Education and Research (IGAENR). The most recent report issued by the IGAENR on VAE (2011) refers to the functioning of validation juries\textsuperscript{23}. This report concluded that there is a need to foster the exchange of good practice concerning the work of VAE juries, for instance by setting up a common database of good practice, tools, and reference materials.

The General Inspectorate of Cultural Affairs (IGAC) published a report in 2013 on the implementation of VAE in higher education institutions depending on the Ministry of Culture\textsuperscript{24}. The reports highlights a number of challenges linked to the application of the legislation, the provision of guidance to candidates whose application is considered eligible, and the clarification of assessment practices used by juries. It includes a number of recommendations, for instance on the development of information and promotion mechanisms as well as monitoring mechanisms linked to VAE within the Ministry.

5 Validation methods

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

The main approach used as part of VAE in France is the portfolio method completed with interviews and debates with a jury. The methods used may vary depending on the provider and the type of qualification targeted (each awarding authority is in charge of defining the methods used).

Identification/documentation phase


\textsuperscript{24} IGAC (2013), La mise en oeuvre de la VAE par les établissements d'enseignement supérieur relevant du ministère de la culture et de la communication; \textit{http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/134000217/index.shtml}
The VAE application follows a two-step procedure for all qualifications (except those delivered by the ministry in charge of employment).

- For the registration of applicants in the VAE process, a common format for the collection of information has been developed, which is known as Livret 1. This is used for a first eligibility check.

- The second part of the application is the preparation and submission by the candidate of a portfolio identifying and documenting the learning outcomes to be validated (called Livret 2). The exact structure and content of this document can vary in content according to the awarding body; in all cases, it contains a detailed written description of the applicant's knowledge and skills acquired through experience as well as evidence of past professional achievements.

As part of the procedure used at the ministry in charge of employment, the candidate must present a document called dossier de synthèse professionnelle (DSPP) presenting its professional experience.

- **Assessment/certification phase**

The content and relevance of the portfolio is assessed by the members of an ad-hoc validation jury. The jury meets in the presence of the candidate; this typically includes a presentation by the candidate about his/her experience, an interview with the candidate and debate with jury members. The jury can then decide to award a full or partial validation to the candidate or not to award anything.

Other methods can be used as part of the assessment/certification phase (related to the type of learning outcomes to be assessed) such as observation of real or simulated working activities.

As part of the procedure used at the ministry in charge of employment, the assessment includes a simulation of work environment (called épreuve de synthèse) in front of a jury, who is also evaluating the dossier submitted by the candidate. The validation can be total or partial (one or several certificates of professional competences can be awarded).

Tests and examinations are not common practice.

### 6 Validation practitioners

#### 6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Validation practitioners include administrative staff, staff in charge of guidance and support and members of VAE juries.

Generally, administrative staff (but in some cases, teachers or trainers) are in charge of the receipt of the application and performing an administrative check on Livret 1.

A jury carries out the actual validation and evaluation of the content of the portfolio (Livret 2). The profile of VAE jury members is heterogeneous. According to the legislation, at least 25% of the jury members must be qualified professionals (half of them employers and half of them employees). The rest of jury members are teachers or trainers. Jury members are paid.

Concerning VAE procedures at the Ministry of National Education, a report published in 2011 by the IGAE, a report highlighting that in practice, it is difficult to ensure a balance between employers and employees representing the profession.

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25 DARES (2014) La VAE en 2012 dans les ministères certificateurs

26 DARES (2014) La VAE en 2012 dans les ministères certificateurs

27 Rapport - n° 2011-125 Inspection générale de l’administration de l’Éducation nationale et de la Recherche, Décembre 2011 - Le fonctionnement des jurys de VAE

In higher education institutions, the jury must be composed of a majority of professors who are very familiar with the qualification standards and professionals in the area; a balance between female and male members has to be respected.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Each awarding body and regional structures for VAE are in charge of providing training to VAE jury members, as well as guidance practitioners. As these arrangements may differ, and there are currently no consistent arrangements across France concerning the provision of training support to validation practitioners across different levels.

Training typically takes the form of one to three days of workshops and practice exchanges on the learning outcomes to be assessed.

Within the Ministry of National Education, the training of VAE jury members is currently considered as a priority for further development. A challenge reported by a recent report of the inspectorate general IGAENR (2011) on the functioning of validation juries is the fact that jury members too often lack experience in similar contexts (e.g. as tutors, mentors or jury members) and therefore are not familiar with the methodology and procedure used, and would benefit from common tools.

In the higher education sector, many higher education institutions have developed their own internal training courses and material for validation practitioners. In addition, the conference of directors of university services for continuous training (Conférence des Directeurs de Service Universitaire de Formation Continue) organises training courses for VAE guidance practitioners, members of VAE juries and staff responsible for VAE. These sessions are opened to participants from all across France. For example, a regular one day training course is organised for VAE jury members on an annual basis. This training course introduces the main principles about VAE and methodologies to support jury members as part of the assessment of applications (e.g. use of different tools and criteria). The focus of the training is practical and case studies are presented.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

Qualification requirements for VAE jury members depend on the subject field and vary for each targeted qualification. There are no explicit requirements set in the national legislation, as criteria should be applied on a case-by-case basis: jury members must have relevant experience as professionals or teachers.

7 References

Key recent publications


28 Rapport - n° 2011-125 Inspection générale de l’administration de l’Éducation nationale et de la Recherche, Décembre 2011 - Le fonctionnement des jurys de VAE


IGAENR (2011). *Le fonctionnement des jurys de VAE.*

IGAC (2013). *La mise en œuvre de la VAE par les établissements d'enseignement supérieur relevant du ministère de la culture et de la communication.*

**Key websites**

Portail VAE du Comité interministériel pour le développement de la VAE.

La validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE) – site internet du Ministere de l’education nationale.


### 7.1 Stakeholders consulted

- Ministry of National Education
- Ministry of Higher Education