

## VNFIL COUNTRY FICHE: FRANCE

### General description of the system



National terminology: “VAE – *Validation des Acquis d’Expérience*”

The VAE process is long (up to 12 months) and necessitates guidance by a specialist. The process follows the classical format (identification – documentation – assessment – certification) and the outcome of VAE is always a formal qualification – there is no distinction between certificate / diploma gained through formal education and a certification gained through VAE. Partial validation of specific learning outcomes / training units is possible – in that case the candidate has 3 years to complete his skills and knowledge and validate the missing competences required by the targeted qualification. Validation is however not used as an entry for training, but mainly for the labour market. The acceptance by employers of the certification gained through VAE is good, as it is the same diploma as from formal education. From the methodological point of view, a combination of summative (validation of a complete certification) and formative approach is used (mainly through building a personal portfolio).

### Process and vocabulary

#### Identification (*Information et conseil*)

Helping the candidate in their decision process about the type of certification to target and the receivability of their candidature. The role of the counsellor is to evaluate the length and the depth of the candidate’s experience and help him/her to make a decision to engage in the RVC. This phase is in most cases assured by the counsellors at the information points. The candidate sends the preliminary dossier to the certification organisation that then decides about its validity and whether the candidate meets the required conditions, the certification organisation sends him/her the dossier.

#### Documentation (*Accompagnement*)

This phase consists of the development of a portfolio (dossier) that links the candidate’s experience with a specific qualification standard. Bilan de competences can be used in this phase. Emphasis is put on verbalisation of working experience, but observation or simulation can sometimes be used to complete the portfolio. The length of the portfolio can vary based on the level of targeted certification, but usually is around 70-100 pages.

#### Assessment (*Jury*)

Jury is always used: Interview with a panel composed by teachers and professionals from the given field. This inter-view touches mostly on points of the candidate’s dossier that need to be clarified, but rarely touches upon theoretical knowledge. Sometimes the interview can be supplemented by a work simulation.

#### Certification (*Certification*)

The jury takes the decision on the deliberation of the certification that is then awarded by the certifying body – the same that delivers formal diploma (ministry of education or other stakeholders).

A certification can be obtained as a whole or only a part of the qualification can be obtained. In the latter case the jury is obliged to propose ways for candidate to obtain the rest of the qualification (through further experience or training). In this way the jury doesn’t only assess the knowledge and skills of candidates, but also gives value to the experience of the candidates and help them develop further.

### Usage of VNFIL

#### Target group

In France almost two thirds of the 18,000 different certifications that exist are accessible through VNFIL (called “Validation des acquis de l’expérience”, or VAE). There is therefore no specific target group for validation, but the general idea is that a person doing the same work has a right to the same diploma – the validation is considered an alternative pathway to formal qualification and an individual right of every citizen. Despite this, only 2% of certifications are delivered through VAE. Around 13 000 diplomas are delivered through VNFIL every year, of which around 24% in lower secondary (ISCED 3C), 24 in upper secondary and 52% in tertiary education.

### Most common targeted diplomas

Despite the wide range of diplomas accessible by the VAE, 20 most targeted diplomas represented 70% of all the validations in 2012. Most targeted branches are in social, health and other services sector: childcare, cook (ISCED 3C), commercial or administrative baccalaureate (ISCED 3B), Optician, Hotelier, technician in industry, electro technician (ISCED 5B) and specialized qualifications such as accounting and special education.

### Quality assurance

QA is done mainly through national legislation: The 2002 Social Modernisation Act that introduced the current system defines the general process and rules for the RVC. There is, however, no quality assurance framework with precise quality standards and no formalised quality control processes.

The first level contact (information) is freely accessible and free of charge for all citizens, afterwards the candidates have the choice to engage in accompaniment or prepare their dossier on their own. The assistance in the documentation phase can be carried out either by the certification bodies or by other organisations (private or public) – every certification body can sign an agreement and delegate the accompaniment to a specific organisation or network. There is no accreditation procedure for the accompaniment organisations. There is no official national standard, but certification organisations can define criteria for external providers of accompaniment. There are several regional quality charts for accompaniment, but they are on a voluntary basis and contain general ethical and methodological principles.

The most sensible point of the process is the phase of evaluation by a jury that takes place in accredited centres. These centres have a lot of autonomy in the organisation of the RVC procedure and considerable differences exist namely in the work of the juries, which some experts call “a black box”. It is difficult to assure a perfectly objective assessment of a candidate’s knowledge and skills acquired through different experiences and compare them to a standardised qualification standard. Also, the majority of the assessors come from formal education and have a certain bias towards formal evaluation procedures and are rarely trained for VAE assessment.

The main challenges of the VAE:

- variable quality of information, counselling and accompaniment,
- the VAE procedure is often very long (1 year in average),
- the VAE procedure relies heavily on the writing skills and self-analysis skills and requires assistance of specialized counsellors – sometimes makes it inaccessible to low-skilled,
- difficulties of finding qualified jury members without conflict of interest, mostly in sectors with high number of SMEs,
- high drop-out rate during the process (in 2007, half of the people who initiated the first level contact with the VAE information points didn’t continue in this process) and
- continuing reluctance and resistance of the formal education sector.

Role of Peer-review: Peer review is rarely used in France, and usually in cases of international cooperation and development (e.g. OECD policy assessment, nuclear security, employment services peer review). The culture of peer review is missing and most of the quality assurance systems are based on quality standards, audit procedures and certification.

Peer review in VNFIL was used in the regional network of CIBC Bourgogne Sud in 2015. The visit was done by pairs from

the neighbour region. The visit was very stimulating for the CIBC Bourgogne Sud, because it revealed strengths and weaknesses from the outsider point of view.

### Status of implementation of the CEDEFOP guidelines on VNFIL (2015)

#### 1. Availability of information, guidance and counselling:

The information and guidance is readily available through public-funded PRC Centres often with dense territorial presence. With the 2015 reform individual counselling for the elaboration of the portfolio (*dossier*) can be funded from tripartite lifelong learning funds. Moreover, a unique career guidance public service was introduced in 2015 (Conceil en évolution professionnelle) was introduced, that is also used for directing potential candidates towards VAE.

#### 2. Stakeholders coordination:

The main lines of the VNFIL system are drawn on the national level through the legislation, that clearly defines the roles of different stakeholders. Every organization delivering a formal professional qualification must be able to deliver it also through validation process. Regions are responsible for the financing and the coordination of information and counselling points (PRC VAE).

#### 3. Links to national qualification framework

All diplomas are referenced to the national qualification framework with a clearly defined level, that is equivalent to the formal certification.

#### 4. Standards and learning outcomes

All qualification standards registered in the national register of certifications (RNCP) contain a repository of professional activities, that serve as a base for the VAE dossier. Qualification standards are elaborated and updated by committees where all the stakeholders are represented.

#### 5. Quality assurance

Quality assurance is done on national level through legislation, that defines the basic rules of the VNFIL system. Some regions have regional quality standards for the work of information and counselling points.

#### 6. Professional competences of practitioners:

The professionalization of counsellors is also the responsibility of regional networks of information and counselling points. In some regions regular meetings and training activities are held, in others, however, this aspect is neglected. Counsellors usually come from multidisciplinary background, often with a longtime experience in the *bilan de compétences*. Counsellors responsible for the documentation often come from the targeted field of activity. Little attention is paid to the training of the members of the jury.