

COUNTRY REPORT FRANCE

ANNEX TO WP1.2

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AUTHORS:

Abdeslam MAMOUNE

Virginie RIBAUD

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A) DEFINITION OF VALIDATION

Validation can be defined as the confirmation by a competent authority that the results and learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and / or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal context were assessed according to predefined criteria and meet the requirements of a standard (or reference) validation. The validation results in the allocation of all or part of a degree. Thus, ECTS are assigned for life to the candidate.

Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner.

Non-formal learning, for its part, is integrated in planned activities that are not always explicitly designated as learning activities (in terms of objectives, time or resources), but contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional on the part of the individual. (CEDEFOP, 2009).

The validation of prior experience in the French education system

Within the French education system, several approaches for validating formal, non-formal and informal experience have emerged since 1985. Today, the most widespread is the Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE), a procedure that also exists in various English-speaking countries under several different names, including "accreditation of prior experiential learning", "validation of NIL" (Non-formal and Informal Learning) and "validation of prior experience". For the purposes of this report, we shall use the latter.

In France, the VAE is an individual right enshrined in the Social Modernization Law of 2002, the Labour Code and the Code of Education. It is a procedure for obtaining all or part of a recognized qualification (university degree, professional diploma or professional qualification certificate) via the formal recognition and accreditation of skills acquired through prior experience and learning, notably work experience. The French Labour Code (Article L900-1) defines the VAE as the right of any person who has been working for at least three years to validate the experience acquired with a view to obtaining a degree, professional diploma or certificate among those registered in the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (RNCP, the national directory of professional certification). The French Code of Education states that validation of prior experience produces the same effects as the testing or proof control of knowledge and aptitudes.

All publics are thus concerned by the VAE procedure: salaried workers, regardless of their status (permanent or fixed-term contracts, temporary workers, etc.); the self-employed (members of the liberal professions, farmers, artisans, retailers and merchants, freelance workers, etc.); public officials (incumbents or not); job seekers (receiving benefits or not); volunteers with experience working for an association or trade union; and any person, with or without recognized qualifications, wishing to obtain, complete or adapt such qualifications with the aim of returning to work. The VAE procedure applies to all of the degrees, professional diplomas and qualification certificates registered in the RNCP, on condition that the rules for obtaining said qualifications do not prohibit the implementation of this procedure (notably for health, safety, or national security reasons).

The prior experience and/or learning that can give rise to validation include all professional skills acquired during employment, self-employment or volunteer work, continuous or not for a cumulative total period of at least three years, and related to the content of the qualification or degree concerned.

Periods of initial or continuing education, internships and vocational training undertaken for the preparation of a degree or diploma are not included in the duration of the experience taken into account. The candidate's knowledge

and skills, and their adequacy with respect to those required by the framework of the degree, diploma or certificate, are assessed by a validation committee composed of teachers and professionals. The committee may also take into account studies pursued and completed in a foreign country.

The VAE procedure in French universities

The VAE procedure is offered in all French universities in such a way as to meet all candidate requests. The whole procedure, from the first contact with the university to the interview before the validation committee, usually takes between three and twelve months.

It involves six main stages, briefly described below.

Stage 1: This is the **information** stage for those interested in validating their prior experience. The universities have set up information networks to help candidates identify the degree that is the most closely related to their experience and in line with their professional project.

Stage 2: A specific office within the university, also called a “coaching centre”, is responsible for **assisting the candidates in formulating their application** and in researching the most suitable degree. Common motivations expressed by the candidates include achieving a personal goal, ensuring job security, acquiring new skills to offset the competition from recent graduates, participating in the development of skills within the company, and preparing for professional mobility.

Stage 3: This stage involves examining the **“admissibility”** of the application. It is carried out by the experts of the degree concerned and the department responsible for validation. It consists in analysing the professional and personal background of the candidate in terms of career development, education, evolution in personal activities, and informal and non-formal experience, all in relation to the requirements of the degree concerned. This stage ends with the decision whether or not to allow the candidate to continue with his/her VAE procedure.

Stage 4: If the answer is positive, the candidate can start working on drawing up his/her **application portfolio**. This document is essentially divided into two parts:

- the administrative part, which includes the identity of the candidate, his/her education and qualifications already acquired or prepared, employment contracts, various certificates, etc.;
- the “experience” part, which contains the description and analysis of the experience that the candidate is basing his/her application on.

Under French law, the university provides a coaching service to assist the candidate during this stage. A VAE advisor, often directly in contact with an expert from the degree course concerned, works with the candidate to help clarify, formalize and generalize his/her formal, informal or non-formal learning and experience. They work together on the meaning of each activity, seeking consistency in the description, and reflect on how best to reformulate the expression of the candidate’s prior experience. Under no circumstances must the candidate be placed in an examination (academic) situation. Rather, it is a case of giving him/her the opportunity of putting forward and explaining all relevant prior experience.

Stage 5: The University then convenes a **validation committee** and holds an interview with the candidate. This committee is most often specific to each candidate, and is composed of a majority of faculty members. It must also include business or industry professionals from the field concerned by the degree, and ensure, as much as possible, gender balance in its composition. The committee interviews the candidate on the basis of his/her application portfolio, which they have received and examined in advance. In no way is this interview a test to check the candidate's knowledge. The committee must form its personal conviction at this time.

Stage 6: Deliberation and decision by the committee, based on the application portfolio and the interview. The committee must ensure that the candidate has the same skills, aptitudes and knowledge as a graduate of the degree concerned, and is capable of implementing them, including in a development dynamic. The committee can then decide to either:

- Grant the full degree.
- Award only part of the degree. In this case, the committee provides the candidate with recommendations concerning the knowledge and skills yet to be acquired in order to complete the degree, and possibly specific methods of acquisition and validation, which may include:
 - the acquisition of complementary experience with his/her current employer (for example, by a change of position within the company), or with a future employer;
 - taking some additional modules within a formal educational or training setting;
 - undertaking a written assignment based on documentary research or research of another nature.

The committee has an obligation to be innovative and ensure that its recommendations are feasible.

B) FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS AND REGULATIONS

The French higher education system and VAE procedures

The procedures for validating formal, non-formal and informal experience are laid down in the following legislation:

- Decree no. 85-906 of 23 August 1985.
- Article 133 of the Social Modernization Law of 17 January 2002.
- Decree no. 2002-590 of 26 April 2002: VAE in higher education.
- Decree no. 2002-615 of 26 April 2002: VAE and professional certification.
- Decree no. 2002-529 of 16 April 2002: Validation des Études Supérieures (VES, validation of graduate studies).

This legislation allows for obtaining access to training and/or the awarding of all or part of a degree or diploma thanks to the validation of prior experience and/or learning.

Three historical stages make up the validation of formal, non-formal and informal experience in the French higher education system.

The first stage was introduced with the Decree of 1985, which defines the terms of the Validation des Acquis Personnels et Professionnels (VAPP, validation of personal and professional experience). This decree is specific to the French higher education system and determines the conditions under which prior studies, professional and personal

experience can be validated for access to different levels of tertiary education. It states that validation may be awarded for any studies followed by the candidate in a public or private educational institution or structure, whatever the conditions, duration and method of approval, as well as for professional experience gained during employment, when self-employed, on work placement or internship, or for all knowledge and skills acquired outside of any educational system. This Decree is still used and complements the existing text on the validation of prior experience (VAE).

The second stems from the Law of 20 July 1992 and introduced the possibility of obtaining part of a national degree through the validation of the skills acquired in the exercise of professional activities.

The aim of these first two procedures is to shorten the time spent in education or training for anyone with experience related to the particular degree or diploma they wish to obtain.

Finally, the third stage stems from the Social Modernization Law of 17 January 2002, which opened up the possibility of granting any type of degree or certification based only on the prior experience of the candidate. This is the law that led to the creation of the Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE) procedure. A specific decree was issued for higher education degrees, repealing the provisions of the Law of 1992.

The main provisions of the Law of 2002 and the Decree concerning higher education can be summarized as follows:

- Is concerned, anyone who has at least three years of professional and/or extra-professional experience related to the degree, diploma or certificate they wish to obtain.
- All professional diplomas and certificates registered in the RNCP (www.cncp.gouv.fr) are available under this procedure.
- Can result in validation, all experience relevant to the exercise, continuous or not and for a cumulative period of at least three years, of salaried, self-employed or volunteer activities. This experience must justify all or part of the knowledge and skills required for obtaining the degree, diploma or certificate concerned.
- The candidate must submit a portfolio detailing the knowledge, skills and abilities he/she has acquired through this experience. The portfolio includes documents attesting to this experience and the duration of the various activities during which the candidate acquired it, as well as, where appropriate, any diplomas or certificates corresponding to training received and degrees obtained previously.
- The validation committee is appointed by the Chancellor of the University. It comprises a majority of faculty members as well as professionals working in a field other than teaching and who are competent to assess the nature of the experience (notably work experience) for which the validation is requested. A balanced representation of women and men is sought in the composition of the committee.
- The committee reviews the candidate's portfolio and meets with him/her to discuss it. It then determines the knowledge and skills that it deems can be validated, and can decide to grant the full degree.

The Law of 2002 also provides the possibility of validating a candidate's academic experience, with validation being awarded for all third-level studies followed by the candidate in a public- or private-sector institution or training organization, in France or abroad, whatever the conditions and duration of said studies. This is known as the Validation des Études Supérieures (VES, validation of graduate studies).

For French universities, all qualifications are concerned by the VAE procedure, from the Diplôme d'Accès aux Études Universitaires (DAEU), a diploma granting secondary education "Baccalauréat" equivalence and access to university studies, right up to Ph.D. level (Figure 1). This law is sometimes presented as something of a "revolution" and it does indeed represent a new way of gaining access to qualifications, notably degrees awarded by universities. Prior experience is now considered to be fully equivalent to an academic background in initial or continuing education (formal education).

The French legislative framework also provides for the possibility of funding for the university to support and coach the VAE candidates. Several different sources of funding exist, including regional councils, businesses, OPACIF (Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agréés du CIF, authorised joint collection bodies for "individual training leave", a French professional training system for employees), or the individuals themselves.

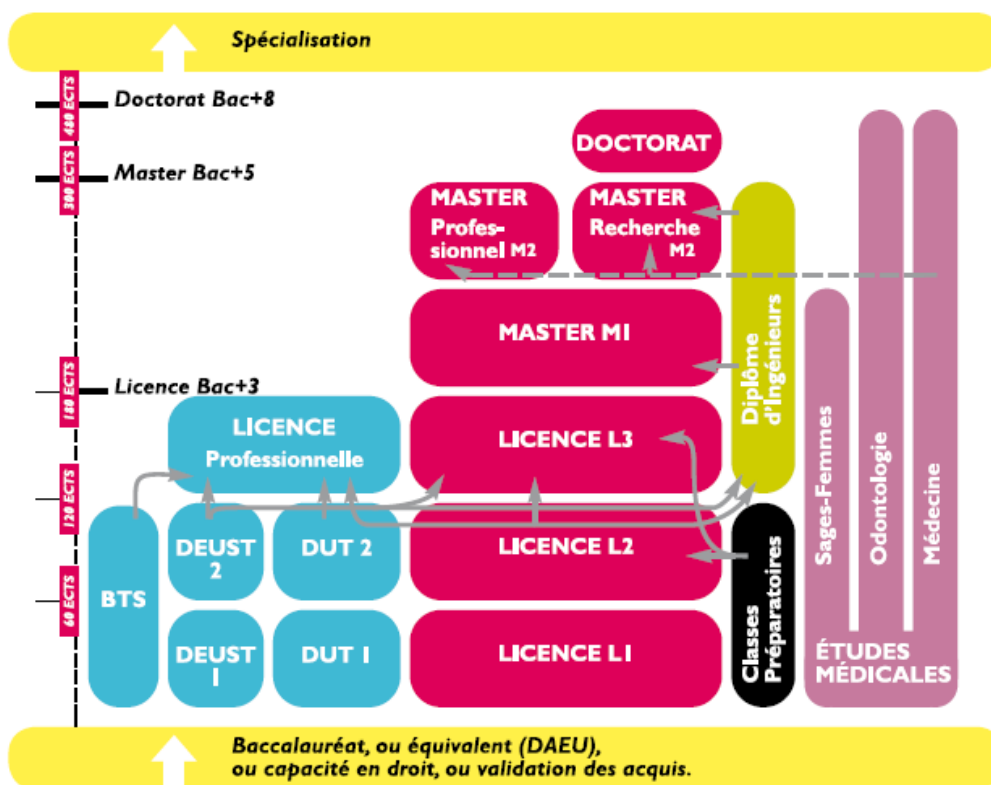


Figure 1: Diagram of studies within French universities

Understanding the terms used

Abilities (of the learner): A set of certified performances, often expressed as knowledge and know-how (AFNOR, the French Standards Agency).

Aptitudes / abilities: A reservoir of skills that can be potentially mobilized, representing an opportunity for success and implementation of skills in the performance of an activity.

Areas of skills and competence: All of the broad areas, themes, subjects and disciplines under which the skills can be grouped (by sector of activity and by discipline).

Competence: The capacity to take action and/or solve professional problems satisfactorily within a particular context by mobilizing various abilities in an integrated manner (Carré and Caspar, 2011).

- Competence is a sense of initiative mobilized within a professional situation.

- It can be observed in action (use of a measurable and observable action verb, within a professional context).
- According to AFNOR, it is the proven ability to implement knowledge, know-how and behaviours in a professional situation.

Educational framework: An inventory of observable actions and performances detailing a set of abilities (training framework) related to the corresponding profession or job reference frameworks (AFNOR). There are different types of reference frameworks for jobs and professions, skills, and training.

Educational objective: What the candidate hopes to achieve via an academic course or training, the content of the course/training, and the learning process. The educational objective must define a level of performance to be reached (and that will be assessed).

Experience: All of the knowledge and know-how that a person skilfully demonstrates within the framework of a professional, social or training activity. The experience required to follow a course constitutes the prerequisites (AFNOR).

Knowledge: General knowledge constituting one of the resources the person can draw on and with which he/she can demonstrate competence. Knowledge of this nature is acquired through formal education (high school, university, Grandes écoles, etc.) and during initial and continuing training (vocational training, professional institutes, etc.) (Le Boterf, 2011).

Learning outcomes: all knowledge, skills and / or competences an individual has acquired and / or is able to demonstrate at the end of a learning process (CEDEFOP, 2009).

Missions: The "sense" or "meaning" of the candidate's employment, what his/her professional experience involves. Missions correspond to the level of responsibility entrusted to an individual with a view to achieving specific objectives. In general, the means, limits, deadlines and methods of control are specified.

Qualification: a special skill or type of experience or knowledge that makes someone suitable to do a particular job or activity. It's a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to a given standard (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2008).

Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (RNCP): Created by the Social Modernization Law of 17 January 2002, this national directory of professional certification aims to make available all information pertaining to degrees, professional diplomas, and certificates of qualification inscribed on the lists established by the national joint commissions for the professional sectors. It provides access to the descriptions of qualifications by level and by sector of activity, and allows for obtaining information on the job reference framework or the skills acquired, the procedures for accessing these qualifications, etc. (www.cncp.gouv.fr).

Tasks: The different operations that must be undertaken in order to complete each mission correctly. A mission can be divided into several tasks. They express with a greater level of precision what the job holder must actually be able to do.

C) EXISTING PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

The role of the French continuing education university network

The French continuing education university network has existed since 1981 and became a formal association in 2004. All French institutions of higher education are members of this network. It is primarily a tool for the exchange and

sharing of experiences among its members. It is increasingly also a political actor contributing to the development of a policy of lifelong learning that is coherent at national level.

Since 1992, the network has implemented a policy of promoting the validation of prior experience. A working group has been working with business representatives on the application portfolio, staff training, and the inclusion of this validation activity as a new competence.

Since 2000, a professionalization plan for the actors involved in the validation procedure within universities has been designed and implemented with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF).

Three priority groups were targeted: the university policy managers, the committee members, and personnel from the VAE Departments (mostly belonging to the Departments of Continuing Education).

An extensive training program was jointly developed to ensure the consistency of the responses from all of the universities, based on the experience of the most advanced centres, and promoting the transfer of experience and dissemination throughout the network.

This development process mobilized 20 universities, required 152 days of preparation work and a team of 30 trainers. To date, it has trained 760 people working in 82 universities. A true validation network now exists at national level, supplemented by regional networks that have contributed to building partnerships with other public institutions. By developing a common vision of the validation process within each university, the procedure is now implemented and undertaken in a consistent and coherent way.

Today, the work continues through a permanent working group within the association, which brings together more than 75 universities several times a year. This group organizes seminars on the sharing of practices and training for new staff. It allows for offering a network answer at national level to requests from companies or organizations. In 2008, it published a book entitled "Validation des Acquis de l'expérience - Retour d'expériences à l'université" (Validation of Prior Experience - University Feedback) relating the network's experience.

University-industry partnerships: the group VAE

Agreements have been signed by the universities with more private bodies than public bodies, the number of VAE procedures undertaken being greater in the private sphere. Partnerships allow businesses or organizations seeking to provide their employees with a degree from among the subjects available to mobilize the resources, know-how and expertise developed by the universities (coaching and support, offer, degrees, etc.). Requests for partnership agreements for what are known as "group VAEs" (concerning several employees from the same company) are likely to vary from one year to the next.

The VAE procedure and Ph.D. degrees

The research doctorate or Ph.D. falls within the framework of the LMD system (Licence, Master, Doctorat, or Bachelor, Master, Doctorate) that resulted from the reform of the higher education system with a view to creating a European Higher Education Area supported by the European Union. The Ph.D. is a national degree, the initial education regulations of which are laid down by a ministerial decree.

Of all the degrees granted by universities and other institutions of higher education, the Ph.D. is the most iconic because it provides the highest link between education and research.

In the VAE procedure for obtaining a Ph.D., both legislations (validation of prior experience in higher education and doctoral studies) are respected.

Since 2005, French universities have begun to award Ph.D. degrees following a VAE procedure, the application of which, for the obtaining of all or part of the Ph.D., nevertheless remains uneven across France. That is why the VAE Group of the Conférence des Directeurs de Service Universitaire de Formation Continue (CDSUFC, the conference of directors of university continuing education departments) took the initiative to draw up a national vade-mecum to establish the general framework of the implementation of the VAE procedure applied to the specific case of Ph.D. degrees. This vade-mecum is the result of a working group based on the work and discussions conducted by universities that have already successfully experimented with this measure, in collaboration with scientific committees and faculty members in their institutions. The central legal point is the method of constitution of the validation committees.

Fairness in the evaluation of candidates obtaining their Ph.D. through formal education and of those acquiring it via the VAE procedure is at the heart of the concerns of VAE committee members. During the interview sessions on the “research experience portfolio” within the framework of the VAE, the committee members assess the professional careers and skills of the candidates, and evaluate their mastery of the research topic, as well as their ability to set up a scientific research strategy, implement it and use the results. A degree obtained via a VAE procedure has the same value as a degree acquired through formal education or training. This holds true for the Ph.D., the most emblematic degree higher education has to offer (Appendix 1: Ph.D. VAE logic diagram).

Desire to create a Quality Label

The French system has defined the following quality criteria. These criteria focus on the accompanying in validation process:

- provide adequate reception conditions and ensure the transparency of the procedure,
- guarantee the confidentiality of the process,
- deliver a quality service and offer wait times and durations consistent with the needs and constraints of the public,
- allocate the necessary resources,
- professionalise actors,
- develop cooperation and sharing of information between institutions,
- ensure equal treatment of applicants.

Today, the education departments responsible for organizing and implementing the VAE procedure want to become more involved in a quality approach. Their reflection is based on two major factors:

- the use of a common language of quality;
- the ability to display, for our partners, our Quality approach in a visible and clear way (notably via the establishment of a charter, label or certification guaranteeing the quality of our services).

In July 2011, the continuing education departments of the French universities created a “Quality VAE” national working group with a view to achieving FCU labelling (Formation Continue Universitaire, University Continuing Education) for the VAE procedure. This label is coherent with the commitment of the new law on vocational guidance and training, which requires us to ensure the quality of the services offered to students, as well as with the assessments by AERES, the Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education, which consider “quality and certification” to be an important focus, directly associated with the five-year contracts of academic institutions.

D) ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

All French universities meet the requirements of the Social Modernization Law of 2002 and are more or less committed to implementing the VAE procedure.

Differentiated practices depending on the universities (DEPP, May 2014)

In 2012, the vast majority of the universities used the VAE procedure to award degrees to adults. On average, 47 portfolios were examined by the universities (compared with 48 in 2011). Disparities between the universities remain significant: in six of them fewer than ten portfolios were examined, whereas seven other universities examined more than 100 portfolios. The number of applications concerned is nevertheless still too low for us to be able to highlight the policies specific to the universities.

Key figures for the VAE procedure in the French higher education system

Since the introduction of the VAE procedure in 2002, and out of all of the validations awarded by the universities, the number of full degrees granted has continued to grow (Figure 2): from 17% the first year, it rose to 60% in 2011 and remained stable in 2012 (59%). Within universities and the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM, National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts), 4,016 people benefited in 2012 from the validation of their prior experience via the VAE procedure, obtaining all or part of their degree or other higher education qualification (Figure 2). This number is stable compared with 2011.

Bachelor's and Master's degrees receive the highest number of applications. In 2012, the former represented 46% of the degrees awarded in whole or in part via the VAE procedure (compared with 45% in 2011). Applications for Master's degrees, always highly sought-after, remained stable, with 43% of the beneficiaries of the VAE procedure receiving all or part of their degree. Among the major academic fields, applications primarily concerned Economics, Management, and Economic and Social Administration degrees (nearly 36%), followed by Basic and Applied Sciences (26%).

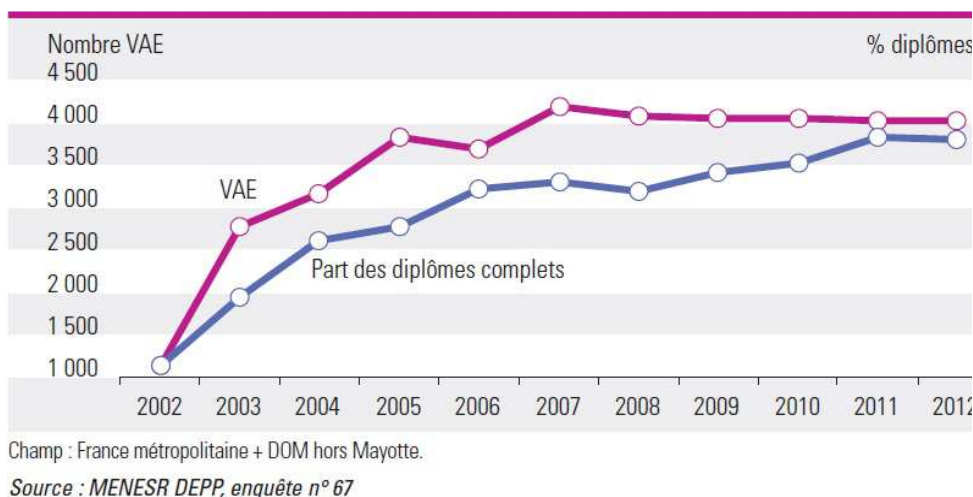


Figure 2: Evolution of the VAE procedure from 2002 to 2012 as a percentage of full degrees

The VAE at the University of Western Brittany (IDEAL “État de l’Art” National Report)

The University of Western Brittany is a multidisciplinary university. Each year, it welcomes nearly 20,000 students in 21 faculties and schools across six geographical sites in the region. It boasts six Teaching and Research Units (Unités de Formation et de Recherche, UFR) – Science and Technology, Medicine, Dentistry, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law, Economics and Management, Sport and Physical Education – as well as seven institutes. In addition, the university comprises an engineering school and an engineering degree, as well as a midwifery school. Finally, it has 38 research laboratories.

In total, the UBO offers 131 speciality Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, 41 professional Bachelor’s degrees, 16 two-year University Technology Diplomas (Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie, DUT), two engineering courses and five doctoral schools (a French educational structure similar to a graduate school but restricted to Ph.D. level).

At the University of Western Brittany, there are at least five members in each VAE committee, in accordance with the provisions adopted by the Board of Governors of the University. The committee members must imperatively include experts chosen by the university from the professional sphere, university teachers, and the VAE advisor/coach.

The president of the VAE committee must be a faculty member. While the committee is not composed entirely of teachers, there must be a majority of teachers among the committee members.

Candidates are systematically required to present their portfolios before the committee during an interview. In the event of the partial validation of the degree concerned, the committee issues recommendations for obtaining the rest of the degree, either through additional training or a specific assessment. The VAE committee awards a certain number of ECTS-credits corresponding to the level of validation granted. In the event of financing by a third party, the VAE procedure at the UBO is subject to a flat rate, currently set at €1,500. By signing the VAE contract, the candidate undertakes to research the different financing possibilities available. In the event that the VAE is not financed by a third party, the candidate is required to pay a fee of €300 in addition to the registration fee for the course (from €160 to €611 depending on the degree concerned).

The candidate may be coached through the procedure if he/she so desires.

The tools used by the university in the implementation of the VAE procedure include a skills reference framework, a validation of prior experience portfolio with methodological guide, and a curriculum vitae. The minimum duration of a VAE procedure is usually three months. There is no maximum duration laid down in legislation.

At the University of Western Brittany, the Bureau REVA (Reprise d’Études et Validation des Acquis), an office within the Department of Continuing Education, is responsible for managing adults returning to education and the validation of prior experience. Seven people work in this office. They are responsible for managing enrolments on continuing education courses offered by the university (more than 1,500 adults enrolled on national degree courses), coaching adults returning to education, and managing the three procedures for validating prior learning and experience (130 VAPP, 120 VAE, and 126 VES).

Regarding the quality process within the university, a flowchart has been implemented for the various stages of the VAE procedure: from the information stage (group meeting), through reception, feasibility, admissibility, support and coaching, the interview with the committee, following up on the committee’s recommendations, until the obtaining of the degree.

E) RESUME

The recognition of prior learning and experience by universities marks a profound change of mindset, probably not yet fully recognized, but the outcomes of which are nevertheless already visible. Among these, we can notably mention the relative acceptance of the Bologna Process by the university community, with its spillover effects. The professionalization of university courses, and the approach based on the results of training or on acquired skills derive their legitimacy from the recognition of the multiplicity of places of learning. This allows universities to break free from the isolation in which many would like to keep them. They are nonetheless a little shaken by this opening up to new publics in search of recognition and social advancement, but who also judge and assess the quality of the solution provided, as well as to stakeholders who have often built their own representations based on stereotypes that are still difficult to overcome. The title of the work "VAE, l'expérience des professionnels à l'université" (VAE, the Experience of Professionals in the University) plays on this dialectic, reflecting both the effect and the cause. Universities have been able to develop new professional competence and status, benefiting from the theoretical contributions of their research while welcoming seasoned professionals and recognizing them as having their rightful place within their structures.

Implementation of the VAE procedure

The organization of the three cycles of higher education, consistent with the recommendations of the intergovernmental agreement constituted by the Bologna Process, is a serious advantage for the development of the VAE procedure. A system for funding continuing education that includes the concept of individual projects, as well as low educational costs, are equally important assets.

One of the points to be monitored concerns the organization of the degree courses in terms of schedules and accessibility, often not fully compatible with the personal and professional obligations of adults.

Strengths and limitations of the VAE procedure in our universities

The French regulatory framework is clear and detailed in the Social Modernization Law of 2002 and the Decree specific to higher education. Individuals have a right to validate all prior learning and experience – formal, non-formal and informal – in order to access training or a degree issued by or on behalf of the State. Universities have the possibility of granting a full degree via the validation of prior experience, the coaching and support provided within the framework of this procedure are recognized and financed, and the RNCP datasheets describe the qualifications and make them available via the VAE procedure (for French qualifications).

Nevertheless, the quality of the implementation of the procedure is not uniform across the different universities, with a wide variety of practices being observed. Other factors complicate the choice and positioning of potential candidates, notably the poor visibility of the courses on offer due to the very large number of accessible degrees and other qualifications. The number of candidates in higher education is low, with an observed stagnation in the total number of VAE procedures undertaken since 2006. Applications are highly concentrated on second-level technological and vocational education for some qualifications. Finally, only one fifth of the applications examined concern job seekers.

Representations of the VAE procedure

In general, the VAE procedure is intended to be an essential practice and an opportunity for universities. It is part of their teaching mission and their services to the community, and also represents a tool for social justice. A degree or qualification obtained via the full validation of prior experience has the same symbolic value as a degree obtained through studying on the course. It can, however, be perceived as endangering the foundations of the university system.

The VAE committee

The meeting of the validation committee to interview the candidate is absolutely essential. The presence of a professional member on the VAE committee is required for the efficiency of the process, as much as the presence of teachers is a necessary condition for the legitimacy of the committee. The issue of training for all members before serving on a VAE committee must be considered, as must the question of whether or not VAE committees are fairer than educational committees.

The tools

The portfolio, the skills reference framework, personal assignments and the interview before the committee are necessary tools for the VAE procedure, but is the portfolio alone sufficient to judge the experience acquired by a candidate? Some believe that an in-situ assessment of skills or an exam would represent complementary tools.

The role of the coach

Today, the coaching and support of candidates is optional. It should become mandatory, with a coach who participates in the committee in an advisory capacity. It is in the interest of the coach to work hand-in-hand with all the other university departments. The support and coaching offered should also continue after the candidate has been interviewed by the VAE committee.

Source: IDEAL "État de l'Art" National Report

Why VAE becomes so important?

Because the benefits are significant at three levels (seminar RPL, 2012):

For the society it's:

- After deduction, using the following statements, more social cohesion
- The responsibility of training shared between the society and the individual
- The general rise of qualification to respond to tomorrow challenges
- A valorisation of certain undervalued jobs (social sector)
- Less unemployment and problems linked to it

For the individual it's:

- A better self professional awareness
- A means to take his destiny and further training in his hands
- More self-esteem
- A recognition by the others
- An evolution in the company (better position)

- The opportunity to move to another company and get more qualified and better paid job
- A reduction of the training time
- An incentive for more training

For the company it's:

- A response to meet the new needs for qualified workers
- A more efficient management of the human resources and competences
- Workers more involved in the company
- A better image that can attract new employees (in sectors where offer is bigger than demand)
- A reduction of the costs of training

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ACRONYMS

AERES: Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education

AFNOR: French Standards Agency

CDSUFC: Conference of Directors of University Continuing Education Departments

CNAM: National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts

DAEU: Diploma Granting Access to University

DUT: University Technology Diploma

ECTS: European Credits Transfer System

ESF: European Social Fund

FCU: University Continuing Education

LMD: Bachelor, Master, Ph.D.

OPACIF: Authorised Joint Collection Bodies for Individual Training Leave

REVA: Returning to Study and Validation of NIL

RNCP: National Directory of Professional Certification

UFR: Teaching and Research Units

VAE: Validation of Prior Experience or Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning

VAPP: Validation of Personal and Professional Experience

VES: Validation of Graduate Studies