The Validation of Experience Skills in France

Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Employment
GDEPT - General Delegation for Employment and Professional Training

The validation of experience skills (VAE)\(^1\) emerges as an innovative system in the politics of continuing education. It is an individual right that engenders social promotion and that can offer solutions to businesses confronted with the growing need for skilled workers. Designed for persons who do not have advanced degrees but who have acquired professional work experience, the VAE system, sustained by a vast institutional organisation, has, since its inception, drawn much interest. After recalling the context in which the VAE system was established (1), the principle mechanisms of the system, namely the certification of competencies (2), are described. Finally, elements of evaluation five years after the inception of the system are presented (3).

1. A Context Specific to France

In France, the dominant model for building and identifying competencies presents three major characteristics:

- Diplomas for initial training awarded by the State heavily shape the image of an individual’s competencies, an image that follows them throughout the rest of their career.
- The system of continuing education struggles to offer individuals a true “second chance” to allow them to achieve work qualification.
- Individuals and businesses struggle to identify competencies acquired during the course of professional work experience which, in turn, penalizes mobility in the work market.

1.1 A Structural deficit in Training and Recognition of Qualification

30% of the working population does not have a professional diploma even though it has acquired competencies through practical experience. What is more, less than one worker out of two obtains training throughout his or her lifetime. In a highly-competitive work market, this situation strongly leads to the risk of long-term unemployment in case of employment loss or temporary inactivity (parental leave, etc.).

Obtaining a diploma is a decisive individual characteristic during one’s entry into the work market and beyond, throughout one’s professional career. Lack of a diploma often implies an “irreversible” devaluation in the work market. Persons with little qualifications are even more exposed to this risk than other workers, as starting a long course of training means “going back to school,” often associated with a situation of failure: a process that failed once has little chances of knowing a favourable end a second time.

At the same time, the French system of continuing education of workers known to “work for the better educated”\(^2\) privileges fragmented and short actions (20 hours yearly on average) that do

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\(^{1}\) In the following text, we will use the French acronym VAE (Validation des acquis de l'expérience) rather than VES.

not allow an accompaniment of workers towards recognition in the form of a title or a qualifying diploma. Only 1.5% of continuing education expenses go towards meeting this objective.

A historical attachment to an initial diploma on the part of numerous French companies can be added to these elements. The whole contributes largely to making the disparities stemming from initial training determine one’s later professional life namely by penalizing mobility and can aliment the sentiment that work does not pay.

1.2 The Progressive Opening to Experience

The conscious raising of limits of an all too divided and rigid a system without offering an alternative by facilitating the access of adults to qualifying courses progressively imposed itself during the 1980s. Acquired experience thus became one of the conditions for access to certifications.

In 1985, in order to favour a return to training, a decree authorized adults to validate their personal and professional experience to register in a continuing university education program for which they did not have the required perquisites.

The following step, a law in 1992, rests on the validation of professional skill (VPS). The integration of experience in this case is greater because the law authorizes the obtaining of a part of a diploma on the sole basis of acquired professional experience.

1.3 Creation of an Individual Right for the Validation of Professional Skill

In 2002, the law on the VAE is in line with a context of high unemployment that reinforces the expectations of individuals as far as the securisation of professional courses is concerned. To recognise that experience produces competencies, particularly for those that have little initial skill, and who are thus the most exposed to the risk of unemployment, responds to the desire to find a corrector of the functioning of training systems, that is to say both initial training that does not lead to a diploma and continuing education that is unable to serve as an instrument of promotion in the course of a career.

The VAE provides workers with the benefits associated with diplomas, namely those who have a weak level of initial training: readability of competencies by employers, transferability of skills, potential recognition in terms of salary or positioning in the company.

From the point of view of the politics of employment, this measure facilitates a worker’s return to employment, in particular the most vulnerable in the work market, contributes to the securisation of courses and favours mobility throughout life.

The “Social Modernisation” law of 17 January 2002 created a new right for the validation of experience skills. It allows any person engaged in professional life to acquire, without training, from as little as three years of professional paid, unpaid or volunteer experience to all or part of a diploma, title with professional aim or certificate of qualification. Here forth, professional experience opens the right to obtaining a complete certification.

This right is fully in line with the commitments made by France in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy in the capacity of the construction of the common European market to the 2010 horizon.
It relies on the recommendations regarding life-long training, transparency of qualifications and mobility. One of the objectives of Member Nations of the European Union is to “promote the development of human capital as well as education and life-long training.” The ESF brings its contribution to both the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Employment.

With the VAE, the “formative” value of work is reaffirmed. Experience is recognised as a source of professional competencies. Training programs, if they remain the privileged form of access to certifications, have lost their monopoly.

**Box 1**

**The Regulatory System**

**In as much as access modalities are concerned**, article L.900-1 of the Work Code affirms that “Any person engaged in professional life has the right to validate the skills associated with their experience, namely professional experience, in the aim of acquiring a diploma, title with professional aim or certificate of qualification figuring on a list established by the national joint commission of employment of a professional branch, registered in the national repertory of professional certifications set in article L 335-6 of the Education Code.”

The article L.900-2 stipulates that the actions of VAE enter into the domain of measures relative to professional training. In this framework, the rules for financing, registering of service organisms and control apply. The legislature also provided for a leave of absence in view of participating in validation examinations organised by certificate authorities in the case of the accompaniment of preparation for this validation. A decree fixed the duration of the VAE leave at 24 hours (accompanyment and validation) as well as the modalities of financing (cost and remuneration). Similarly, it was specified that the refusal to participate in a VAE cannot constitute a legal motive for firing or serve as a basis for fault, the volunteer nature of the worker’s participation is, on the other hand, necessary. The modalities of compensation of jury members mentioned in the Work Code were extended to VAE juries (authorization of leave, maintenance of payment). The modalities for certain workers such as those who work under a fixed-term contract were also anticipated.

**In as much as the validation process for VAE is concerned**, codification is specified in the Code of Education. In the terms of the article L 335-5 of the Code of Education, the validation of experience constitutes a way to acquire a certification along the same lines of scholastic and university channels, apprenticeship and continuing professional education. It produces the same effects as the other modes of examination of skills, aptitudes and competencies.

According to this article, diplomas or titles with professional aim as well as professional qualification certificates registered in the national repertory of professional certifications can be obtained, in whole, or in part, by the VAE. The legislature fixed the nature of the experience taken into consideration (unpaid, paid or volunteer work experience, in relation to the aimed certification) as well as the duration of the activity (3 years). The measures taken in relation to juries require the presence of professionals affected by the certification and set out their competence (attribution of the totality of the certification or limitation in time of a complementary examination in the case of a partial validation).
2. The VAE: Implementation and Functioning of the System

2.1 Coordinated Action of the Ministry of Employment in Favour of the VAE

The Ministry of the Economy, of Finances and Employment wanted to organise its intervention by encouraging the emergence of more organised applications than spontaneous individual applications. The pursued collective logic gives way to targeted actions on populations presenting common characteristics (professional sector, level or statute in the domain of employment, etc.).

The ministerial action is articulated around three levels:

- At the National Level, the GDEPT animates the inter-ministerial VAE development committee. This committee concludes partnership charters with groups of companies active on the national level that provide a homogenous service to all regions from the basis of the definition of targeted objectives (number of beneficiaries, qualification of the population in question, chosen certifications) and recommendations in terms of project engineering (duration of courses, mobilized financing, mutualisation of means).

- At the Regional Level, the services of the Ministry of Employment construct action development plans for the VAE according to territorial employment policies namely in favour of sectors under tension, less qualified labour sectors and by targeting populations with the help of regional employment public service and the economic actors in question.

- At the Local Level, these action plans are declined through the elaboration of conditions of contract and registration of services for the implementation of operations (reinforced support of populations, mobilization of territorial actors…).

All of these actions rely on inter-ministerial cooperation carried through public service employment. There were thus some 200 “collective actions” organised in 2006, concerning nearly 6,000 beneficiaries, job seekers and workers.

The VAE is used as a supplementary tool that adds to and articulates with the other actions that it leads: in support of companies (methodological and financial help to develop the provisional management of employment, companies or sectors in restructuring) or in favour of specific populations (seniors, workers in sectors of economic insertion or services to persons …). The action is centred on the populations of the first level of qualification, job seekers or workers, weakened in the market by the absence of recognition of their competencies.

With an Inter-Ministerial Dimension

In order to reinforce and accelerate the increase in charge of the system created in 2002, the Government created in 2006 an inter-ministerial committee to favour the VAE approach and its development. This committee brings together the ministries interested by the VAE, a total of 8 certifying ministries, in order to coordinate their action. It quickly implemented an action plan axed around identified objectives:
facilitate the spread of information to the general public by the launching of a web site: www.vae.gouv.fr;

- favour the transparency of services through the elaboration of a public accompaniment charter;

- encourage the mutualisation of means and procedures through the elaboration of common tools;

- collect results from the basis of a common statistical framework;

- formalise an offer of inter-ministerial service through the country to coordinate the demand for collective VAE actions by companies (search for certifications in connection with corporate activities, mutualisation of juries…).

The VAE renovates the traditional modes of access to certification. This necessitates an important and coordinated collective effort. The means for the transmission of information to the general public, financing of validation actions and coordination of all of the actors involved must be implemented. France is strongly interested in the various intervention axes.

This desire for coordination between ministries is completely new. The VAE thus contributes to narrowing the gap between institutions accustomed to treating these questions through their own training apparatus. This attitude of cooperation goes in the right direction namely to address the question of the regulation of the creation of state-issued certifications that are entirely too segmented.

This new service has meant a significant professionalisation effort on the part of all of the actors concerned, both public and private.

2.2 Clarify and Renovate Certification: A Crucial Prerequisite

2.2.1 Making the Offer of Certifications More Clear

The National Repertory of Professional Certifications (NRPC), an information tool for the public regarding the offer of certifications, was created by the law in 2002. It carries out a double function: identify the field of eligible certifications and facilitate the search for an adapted certification for the populations that seek out a VAE.

Available on line since mid-2003, the NRPC is the reference tool for certification offers, destined for the public but also professionals of information and certification consulting. The number of times the site was consulted (600,000 consultations during the course of the year 2006) attests to the public’s interest in this tool. Today, over 4,000 descriptions of certifications outside of higher education were registered of which 60% are state-issued. This corpus is nonetheless far from being exhaustive namely in the case of certifications stemming from higher education. The certifications created by Universities are indeed very numerous (Box 2).
Box 2

Diplomas, Titles or Professional Certifications: A Complex Reality

The “cartography” of professional certifications highlights a great diversity of offers.

State-Issued Diplomas or Titles

Issued by the various certifying ministries, the majority of the diplomas are elaborated in association with social partners in the framework of consultative professional commissions (CPC). CPC function alongside ministries and are organised by large activity sectors.

- 613 diplomas issued by the Ministry of National Education (to which some 15,000 titles issued by higher education can be added, of which 1,500 professional bachelors degrees can be added). These diplomas have the vocation of being prepared either through a scholastic route or by apprenticeship, the VAE or by continuing education. This includes:
  - 198 vocational training qualifications, 35 certificates of technical education and 37 complementary level V mentions;
  - 73 Professional baccalauréats;
  - 59 specialised professional technical qualifications (that are only acquired though the channel of apprenticeship or continuing education) and 20 complementary level IV mentions, 109 advanced vocational diplomas;
  - 40 level III art career diplomas.
- 291 professional titles issued by the Ministry of Employment, elaborated by the Adult Education and Training Organisation and prepared by this organism or by aggregated centres;
- 130 titles or diplomas issued by the Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- 196 titles or diplomas issued by the Ministry of Agriculture;
- 14 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and 3 by the Ministry of Health.

The Other Titles with Professional Aim

They are issued by public establishments, chambers of commerce, private organisms or associations. Nearly 1,400 titles are listed in the National Repertory of Professional Certifications.

The Certifications of Professional Qualification

Created in 1983 and defined in the framework of national joint employment commissions, the certifications of professional qualification favour the description of qualifications in terms of know-how and skills whereas diplomas, namely those issued by the National Education, are equally guided by the needs of the educative system.

- 452 certifications of professional qualification were counted in 2005, of which 19 can be found in the National Repertory.

Several conditions must be met in order to legitimise a particular certification: define an “employment frame of reference,” demonstrate the effectiveness of the insertion of beneficiaries, guarantee the specificity of the certification in relation to an existing offer.

Over 15,000 certifications are found in the National Repertory of which 12,000 university degrees. All certifications listed in the National Repertory of Professional Certifications are created under the joint aegis of the State and union and managements. The Repertory is managed by the National Commission for Professional Certification where both the State and union and management

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3 State-issued certifications are created by commissions where union and management are members. They are listed in the National Repertory. The other certifications that are sought after are listed there, after judgment by the National Commission for Professional Certification.
are in session. The certifications listed in the National Repertory should be accessible through the VAE. In addition, the multiplicity of access channels is the norm, without specialisation in one or another channel. Thus, all certifications prepared by initial training or by continuing education are accessible by the VAE.

Nearly 15,000 certifications are listed in the National Repertory of which 12,000 are university diplomas.

2.2.2 The VAE Requires an Innovative Approach to Certification

After the creation of this new access channel, it was necessary to adapt the method to the construction of titles and diplomas as well as the modes of evaluation of candidates. How to analyze this experience whose validation is being sought?

This method relies on a change in posture in relation to the elements that need to be evaluated: get through acquired skills stemming from a training program composed of various disciplines to highlight the corresponding professional skills associated in the practice of employment (or in a specific job) targeted by certification. To do so, the activities that compose the specific targeted job and the “competencies, aptitudes and skills” that they require in order to determine the skills that candidates should have during an evaluation.

These elements must be listed in two documents: the job and certification of reference. Expected learning skills are the same for each candidate who presents him or herself after a training course on the basis of experience. Some diplomas (from National Education, from Agriculture…) due to the fact that they have a double finality of initial and continuing education, require general knowledge (in French, languages, history, etc.), alongside evaluations of a more professional nature.

The writing up of targeted job skills is particularly important. This frame of reference must specify the contents of jobs made accessible by a referenced certification. This requirement is innovative for organisms that are used to translating their job offer in terms of a pedagogical program. It signals the legislature’s desire to break the certification/training bond to replace it with a certification/employment articulation.

Another necessary evolution: the construction by modules of each certification, each module corresponding to a coherent unit of evaluation in the light of expected professional skills. This technique makes the partial issuing, if necessary, of a title or a diploma possible. This modular construction of certifications will facilitate the implementation of the European Credit for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) procedure in France.

2.3 Access Courses and VAE Candidate Evaluation Modes

The course of VAE includes several types of services (consulting, accompaniment, jury, possible complementary training). These actions were assimilated into training actions and their financing comes from the same circuits.

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4 Besides diplomas, infrequent, reserved for general training, all of the other state-issued diplomas, including those of higher education should be accessible by the VAE.
The principle stages of the process are as follows:

1. The candidate’s application is evaluated by the authority that issues the title. The authority verifies that the candidate meets the access conditions: an experience of a duration of three years minimum in connection with the targeted certification (with an obligatory declaration of honour). This is the stage of the applicant’s admissibility.

2. A support, prior to validation aims to help the candidate prepare his or her presentation before the jury or to prepare the preparation of the dossier that will be submitted to the jury. This is the accompaniment stage.

3. The evaluation of the candidate is carried out by a jury composed of a minimum of a quarter of professionals. The jury is determined on the basis of the candidate’s dossier or professional situation, as well as an individual interview.

2.3.1 A Regional Network of VAE Information and Consulting For Candidates

One of the success elements of the system is the public’s access to information. The Ministry of Employment implemented a regional level information network from as early as 2002. The territorial network is composed of a regional network head and public informational centres throughout the country: informational advice centres. Since 2005, the regional authorities have the responsibility for this network. The strong mobilization of regional actors allowed nearly 800 sites to be operational at the end of 2004 in 23 regions. In 2006, they welcomed nearly 90,000 persons, 66% of which benefited from a consulting interview and three quarters of which were oriented towards a validation project.

The network consulting service consisted in providing adapted information to interested persons in terms of their professional goals in order to allow them to exercise their right with a maximum chance of success. This service helps to target the applications addressed to certifiers.

2.3.2 Dossier and Interview

A written explanation of the candidate’s experience is a central element of the jury’s assessment and decision, including for the Ministry of Employment that privileges work placement of the candidate through the evaluation. The dossier must evoke the candidate’s professional background. To establish the dossier, the candidate can benefit from the help of an aid either associated or un-associated with the authority that issues the title.

The candidate’s interview with the jury helps to add additional information to his or her application and places into perspective the elements described in the dossier. The interview can be decisive for the result, namely for candidates evaluated on the sole basis of their dossier.

The relationship between a personal experience and the contents associated with the certification always provides to be a difficult exercise that necessarily calls for a dose of subjectivity. The formalization of the “confrontation” between the jury and the candidate can only be limited. The indirect role of actors participating alongside the jury, those who decide if the dossier is admissible and those who accompany the candidate during the dossier evaluation process.
The jury can award a complete or partial certification. In the case of a partial certification, the candidate has five years to obtain the complete certification.

2.4 The Financing of Services

2.4.1 Public Financing

The ministries have implemented many means to organise the validation:

- The National Education Ministry, with support from the European Social Fund in the framework of the 2000-2006 programme, contributes 19 million euros total, representing 45% of the costs associated with the programs.

- The Ministry of Employment, with support from the European Social Fund increased the budget allocated to the Association for Professional Training of Adults in order to adapt the engineering of its titles to VAE requirements and develop its validation offer. New credits were allocated to finance VAE actions carried out in centres outside of the Association for Professional Training of Adults as well as those raising from targeted actions for weakened populations.

- The Ministry of Social Affairs, in response to the flood of received VAE applications, the administrative management of operations of validations are delegated to an exterior service provider on the basis of ad hoc financing.

2.4.2 VAE Financing from the Point of View of Workers

For workers, these various stages are chargeable to the title of obligatory training expenditures. The incurred expenses can be paid for by the employer in the framework of the company’s training plan. Workers have the right to have a leave, of three days total, for the accompaniment and the interview with the jury.

This system encouraged financers and pre-scribers to re-evaluate the financial sums typically dedicated to training. This process of re-examination was progressive and is not yet complete. From their side, union and management have noted their desire to develop this new modality of access to certifications in the national inter-professional agreement, devoted to professional training in general that they signed in December of 2003.

2.4.3 VAE Financing from the Point of View of Employers

For employers, the VAE appears to be an interesting modality for the adaptation of training backgrounds to meet the specific needs of workers and also as a factor that optimizes training efforts. They raise, however, one fundamental criticism regarding the system that holds on to certifications of accessible fields defined by the law and that are limited to sole certifications listed in the National Repertory of Professional Certifications after having received the approbation of the National Commission for Professional Certification. It is for them an exorbitant requirement that calls into question their capacity to define the contents of their own sectarian certifications (Certifications of Professional Qualification).
The blocking of this question is real and is a major difficulty in the process established by the law, in as much as the branches multiply the creation of the Certifications of Professional Qualification (Box 2).

2.4.4 VAE Financing for Job Seekers

Union and management anticipate the undertaking of the responsibility of VAE services for job seekers indemnified by the unemployment insurance scheme, managed by the National Inter-professional Union for Employment in Industry and Commerce under certain circumstances and namely that the certification sought after be listed in the Repertory. Union and management’s desire is to favour the VAE backgrounds that correspond to existing needs in the labour pool. In addition, union and management have agreed to finance the pursuit of the certification approach during one year in the case of return to work, partial validation, with the reservation that the VAE approach began during the first six months of unemployment.

Regional councils frequently take responsibility for VAE financing in the form of VAE checks as they do for the professional training of job seekers.

3. Evaluation Elements of the System

3.1 Quantitative Assessment

3.1.1 The VAE Attracts Many Workers. All, However, Do Not Submit a Dossier

The VAE immediately sparked great interest on the part of the public. Over 300,000 information requests were carried out and 110,000 people benefited from a consulting interview by the Regional Network of Informational Advice Centres. Less numerous, actual deposits of dossiers to public certifiers have been quickly rising.

Since the inception of the law, over 71,000 titles and diplomas have been issued by the three principle certifying ministries (National Education, Social Affairs and Employment) were obtained by the VAE.
Table 1. The Data by Certifying Ministry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admissible Dossiers</th>
<th>National Education (VTQ to AVD)</th>
<th>National Education (universities +NCAC)</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Social Affairs</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Youth and Sports</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>15 782</td>
<td>2 780</td>
<td>1 029</td>
<td>3 895</td>
<td>23 486</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>24 203</td>
<td>3 165</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>5 200</td>
<td>31 778</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>27 093</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>25 663</td>
<td>3 763</td>
<td>60 947</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>26 053</td>
<td>16 235</td>
<td>3 855</td>
<td>51 016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93 131</td>
<td>5 945</td>
<td>2 787</td>
<td>41 898</td>
<td>167 227</td>
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<table>
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<th>Presented Dossiers</th>
<th>National Education (VTQ to AVD)</th>
<th>National Education (universities +NCAC)</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Social Affairs</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Youth and Sports</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>14 374</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>14 509</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19 136</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>4 400</td>
<td>1 535</td>
<td>25 334</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>20 571</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>9 219</td>
<td>30 141</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>22 367</td>
<td>10 400</td>
<td>8 700</td>
<td>41 467</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76 448</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>19 619</td>
<td>1 535</td>
<td>111 451</td>
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<th>Diplomas or Certificates Issued</th>
<th>National Education (VTQ to AVD)</th>
<th>National Education (universities +NCAC)</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Social Affairs</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Youth and Sports</th>
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<td>76</td>
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<td>4 224</td>
<td>3 202</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>5 161</td>
<td>4 613</td>
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<td>916</td>
<td>71 670</td>
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</table>

Sources: the Ministries of National Education, Agriculture, Social Affairs, Youth and Sports. Processing DARES.

After five years of continuous growth, the application level is currently slowing down (see Graphic). The natural flow of applications seems to be reached, at least for the Ministry of Education, one of the first organised. The ministry of Education remains the first to validate with 60% of issued diplomas, even if its predominance is reduced with time (outside of higher education). The other ministerial certifiers have currently a more restricted VAE activity nonetheless in rapid progression (Social Affairs). In addition, the minor rank of higher education can be explained in part by the maintaining of the procedure created in 1985 in Universities themselves.

5 The data available does not concern public certifiers and is not homogenous. No system of data centralization is asked of private certifiers. Efforts to homogenize these information systems are underway. To this can be added the difficulty of sticking to potential deadlines to obtain the final certification (must be completed in five years).
The assessment of these five years demonstrates a strong concentration of applications in the area of particular professional titles in echo of specific strategies of certain sectors. At the ministry of National Education, a flood of individual applications to receive an advanced vocational diploma in secretary work (Baccalaureate followed by an additional 2 years of study) has been noted that corresponds to a promotional search for secretaries having acquired their skills on the job. A contrario, the strong development of the VAE in the sanitary and social sector and namely in person-based services results in a collective approach on the part of employers and their organisations and public authorities. In this sector, the VAE appears as a useful response to the development of professionalisation needs (namely nursing auxiliaries and assistant helpers).

Certain limits to the system have been identified. The average time it takes to respond to a dossier is 9 months. There has to be a sufficient number of dossiers to organise a jury in a determined place. The reactivity of individual applications for validation is one of the challenges that VAE organisers face. The obligation to use professionals whose available is not always open sometimes adds to the difficulty associate with the organisation of juries. The complexity of the dossier can be dissuasive. In 2005, over 30% of the candidates for a diploma issued by the National Education abandoned the procedure half way through the application process.

Lastly, this procedure that relies on the presentation of a written dossier keeps a scholarly character and can be discouraging to those that have been marked by failure in school.6

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3.1.2 Profiles of VAE Candidates

Two certification candidates out of two for the Ministries of National Education, Employment or Agriculture currently had a job and nearly one third were job seekers (Table n. 2). The proportion of job seekers among VAE candidates is three times superior to their weight in the working population, proof that the system is perceived by many of them as a chance to improve their position in the work market. Employed candidates most often aim for a diploma issued by the National Education whereas job seekers seek out or are oriented towards these titles in 2005, which is coherent with its priority access policy for certification for these populations. This part tends to go down rather regularly in parallel with the number of candidates: job seekers only represent 60% of the candidates for professional titles of the Ministry of Employment in 2006.

3.2 Qualitative Elements

3.2.1 Is the VAE a true ‘second chance’?

The complexity of information to master to commit to a VAE from the choice of certification up to the method of financing and required deadlines create obstacles to overcome in the case of populations in difficulty. To avoid letting the process become too selective for these populations, the Minister of Employment implemented a local coordination for its own certifications and an engineering to reduce its duration, limit the numbers of marginalized populations that abandon the process and follow candidates up to the issuing of a complete certification.

Qualitative studies carried out over 5 years on the development of candidates demonstrate that the VAE is often the first step for those who have not completed a degree program that move on to consider initiating training in the hopes of professional progression. The issuance of a first diploma can release certain candidates from what is pulling them back from completing the training. We can evoke a cumulative effect associated with the VAE that develops an appetite for the training of successful candidates. Nonetheless, these phenomena must be observed with caution. They largely depend on the modalities of recognition organised by companies and workers from which the persons come. The recognition can be of symbolic nature if it leads to a graduation ceremony but also of statutory or wage value.

3.2.2 Is the VAE a Securisation Tool for Career Development?

The effects of VAE on individual trajectories of marginalised publics, remains largely under-evaluated today. It remains that the VAE approach updates diverse professional trajectories: often rich, sometimes atypical if not chaotic with activities carried out in France or abroad. For the professionals of information and consulting, the VAE poses questions concerning the construction of competencies throughout one’s professional career. The assessment carried out by information structures demonstrates that the VAE concerns different publics from those that are ‘in difficulty’ who are usually come to employment service centres. These ‘new populations’ are workers looking to anticipate possible mobilities, young adults seeking a recognition in wage form and a

7 The statute in the work market of candidates is not available for the Minister in charge of social affairs and health.
social marker of qualification and persons who seek to get settled on their dime for whom a diploma is necessary.