

Good practice in validation of learning outcomes

France

Qualification "Hairdressing"



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. France. Qualification "Hairdressing"

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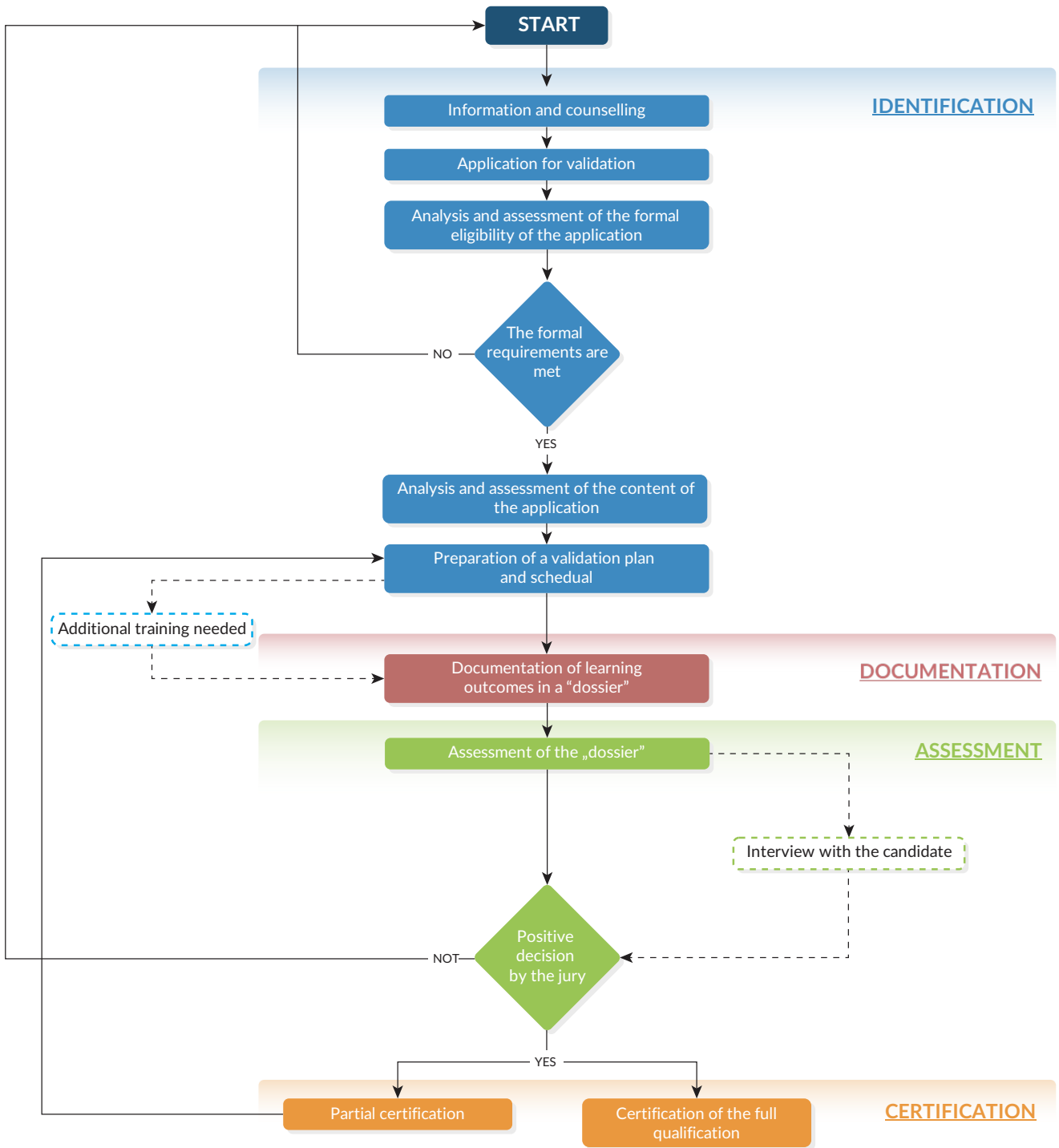
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Table 1. Stages of the VAE process in France. 15



1. Country, institution name

- France
- Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Directorate-General for School Education, Department of Lifelong Professional Education for Adults

2. Institution website

<http://www.education.gouv.fr>

3. Qualifications

Hairdressing (in French: Brevet Professionnel Coiffure)

- Fourth level of the French National Qualifications Framework [*Cadre National de Certification Français*]
- Fourth level of the European Qualifications Framework

4. Short description of the validation process

In France, the validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal education or informal learning is performed in the same way for all qualifications. Excerpts of the good practice relating to those aspects of validation that differ due to the character of the qualification are highlighted in purple.

Validation consists of four stages:

- **identification** of the candidate's experiences, which includes an assessment of the formal and content-related aspects of the validation application
- **documentation** of the candidate's experiences (preparation of a validation dossier)
- **assessment** of the candidate's experiences (the validation dossier is assessed and, if needed, the jury interviews the candidate)
- **certification** ending with the awarding of part of the qualification (partial validation) or a complete qualification

5. Detailed description of the validation process

5.1. Identification of learning outcomes [1]

Information and counselling

The French system provides counselling and information in a similar way for all qualifications.

The candidate can obtain support even before submitting the application for initiating validation. It is provided until the jury meets to decide on the result of the validation process. In the case of partial validation, the support may last longer – until completion of an additional assessment that will enable the candidate to attain the complete qualification for which validation is being undertaken.

Counselling and information are adapted to the needs of a given person after, among others, analysing his/her application for initiating validation. This usually includes such activities as:

- informing the candidate about the exact course of validation
- assisting the candidate in presenting his/her competences
- identifying competence gaps
- determining whether the candidate's application is justified before its submission

- determining whether additional training is needed to optimise the path leading to the attainment of the qualification
- preparing the application
- searching for a source of financing for the validation counselling service
- preparing the validation dossier, including preparing the candidate for the interview with the jury
- specifying further steps in the case of partial validation

Counselling and information services can be provided by vocational counsellors, psychologists and advisors specialising in skills audit and vocational guidance as well as validation counsellors trained in the field of the qualifications included in the National Register of Vocational Certification (Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles – RNCP [2]).

The validation counsellor who reviewed the application of the candidate acts as an agent between the candidate and other persons participating in the validation process: teachers, trainers, counsellors, financing institutions and employers.

Assessment of Whether the Candidate Meets the Conditions For Validation

A candidate who wishes to attain a qualification through validation should first prepare an application for VAE [3] (accreditation of prior and informal learning). In this document, candidates include general information about themselves (concerning, among others, their present professional situation and level of completed education) and initially describe the professional experience acquired at work, in courses or through voluntary service. The format of the application, called *Livret 1* (Booklet 1), is the same for all qualifications. The candidate can submit only one application of this type within a given calendar year.

The candidate can obtain support in preparing the application from a validation counsellor, who analyses the document and assesses:

- compliance of the statements contained in the application with the requirements concerning the amount of professional experience required for a given qualification (“formal eligibility”) [4]
- relationship between the professional experience declared by the candidate and the learning outcomes required for the given qualification (“content-related eligibility”)

If the application meets these formal requirements, i.e. is eligible, content-related assessment takes place.

The purpose of the content-related analysis of the application is to adapt the strategy of attaining the qualification to the individual needs of the candidate, including:

- determining the scope of assistance needed by the candidate during validation, including financial support from public funds
- deciding whether the candidate should apply at once for confirmation of the complete qualification or whether confirmation of successive sets of learning outcomes [5]
- indicating whether professional training is needed to fill the gaps in the learning outcomes of the candidate
- developing recommendations concerning the course of validation and specifying the initial work schedule, taking into account the periods in which the jury convenes (February/March and October/November)

In working with the candidate on the content-related analysis of the application and developing a plan of attaining the qualification, the counsellor can consult additional experts, conduct a workplace observation of the candidate, and consider with the employer whether it would be possible to increase the scope of the candidate’s work responsibilities so that he/she would gain additional experience, thereby improving the chances of demonstrating possession of the required learning outcomes for the qualification.

Hairdressing qualification

The Hairdressing qualification takes learning outcomes pertaining to management into account, which are

particularly difficult for a candidate to acquire and demonstrate at the workplace because this depends on the employer's decisions on such issues. Therefore, an important task of the validation counsellor is to specify whether the candidate performs or performed in other situations (for example, as part of voluntary service or activity in trade unions) tasks connected with management, which can be documented in the dossier in the next stages of validation. If the candidate has no such evidence, the validation counsellor should specify the training needed by the candidate to fill these gaps.

The result of the content-related and formal analysis of the application is presented to the candidate in no more than two months from its submission. The decision about taking part in validation is communicated in written form and a negative decision must be justified. In practice, notification of admission to validation is made in most cases within 10 days from the submission of the application and negative decisions are very rare.

The formal and content-related analysis of the candidate's application does not affect the final decision of the jury about awarding the qualification and it also does not commit the candidate to anything.

As already mentioned, the counsellor also analyses the candidate's application to prepare a validation plan and schedule. However, if this plan is not feasible (for example, the level of the qualification was chosen improperly or the candidate is not sufficiently involved in the process), the validation counsellor can modify the plan with the consent of the candidate.

5.2. Documentation of Learning Outcomes

After the candidate's learning outcomes are identified, they are documented in a dossier, which is assessed by a jury at the stage of assessing the learning outcomes.

The dossier of the candidate mainly consists of evidence of actually possessing the learning outcomes in the form of pictures, recordings or documents, such as letters of recommendation, certificates and diplomas that the candidate organises and describes in detail based on the form *Livret 2* (Booklet 2). The previously prepared application for initiating VAE is also part of the dossier.

The candidate is responsible for how the evidence confirming his/her learning outcomes is described and presented and it is recommended that the candidate obtain support from the validation counsellor in preparing this material. The counsellor helps the candidate specify which tasks performed at work best match the requirements specified for the qualification and how they should be described so that the dossier is positively assessed by the jury.

The evidence confirming the learning outcomes should be referenced to the professional tasks listed in the description of the qualification.

Hairdressing qualification

If the candidate applies to attain the complete Hairdressing qualification, he/she must describe in the dossier at least four professional tasks of the eight listed in the qualification's description, for example: "Ladies haircut", "Hair colouring", "Hair permanent, straightening" and "Product marketing".

When describing how the individual professional tasks were performed, the candidate should primarily focus on answering the following questions:

- How do I do it?
- Why do I do it in just this way?
- Could I do it differently? Why? What would be the result?

The description of how the professional tasks are performed should be detailed and if possible take the different job positions and workplaces of the candidate into account. The presentation of the entire professional experience helps the candidate demonstrate that he/she is able to adapt the way tasks are

performed to the situation at work, for example, in relation to his/her scope of responsibility or the size of the team he/she works in.

Hairdressing qualification

In the case of the Hairdressing qualification, the candidate should be able to justify the way that tasks are performed in terms of such aspects of the work as, for example, retaining clients or using resources (for example, why specific product brands are used to achieve a specific result).

5.3. Assessment of the learning outcomes

The jury specifies the rules of assessment for a given qualification. Its members include:

- teachers
- representatives of the occupation constituting at least 1/3 of the total number of committee members, with parity between employees and employers

Hairdressing qualification

The jury of the Hairdressing qualification is composed of hairdressing teachers and representatives of the hairdressing business – employers and employees.

Each member of the jury independently analyses the candidate's dossier and records all of the learning outcomes that they believe have been sufficiently evidenced. Members of the jury should approach a given candidacy holistically – because the objective is not to assess each learning outcome required for a given qualification but to assess learning outcomes that are of key importance for this qualification. Insufficient competences confirmed in one area may be made up by perfect technical skills in another. If the validation path of the candidate took training into account, its effects are also considered.

The results of the analysis performed by individual members of the jury are compared and the final list of learning outcomes that may be confirmed for the given candidate is specified. This list is later compared to the description of the qualification. On this basis, the jury decides whether or not to award the qualification. If the decision is positive, the jury also decides whether it is possible to confirm a part of the qualification or the complete qualification.

The jury issues a written decision and its justification in the form of a report of the meeting, which may include recommendations for the candidate's future professional planning. The report is sent to the candidate within 15 days of the date of the jury's meeting. This decision is final.

If the jury has doubts about the assessed dossier, they may invite the candidate to an interview, which lasts no more than 40 minutes. Such an interview is neither an oral exam nor a test of theoretical knowledge. It is intended to obtain additional information to help the jury make a final decision. The interview can take place at a face-to-face meeting or remotely (by telephone or video conference), and must meet the conditions specified in relevant regulations.

5.4. Certification

On the basis of a positive decision by the jury, the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research issues the candidate a certificate confirming the attainment of the qualification. There is no difference between this certificate and the ones issued as the result of formal education.

[1] In France the term "competences" is used – understood as the ability to combine knowledge, skills and a proper attitude to perform a given task. In the Integrated Qualifications System, this term means, in the most general understanding of this word, a broadly understood ability to take specific actions and perform tasks using learning outcomes and one's own experience. This is why the term

“competences” in the IQS cannot be equated with learning outcomes, which are specified as the knowledge, skills and social competences acquired during the learning process (Sławiński, 2016).

[2] The French *certifications* correspond to “qualifications” in the Polish system.

[3] VAE (*Validation des acquis de l'Expérience*) – the French system of the validation of competences acquired outside formal education, also called the “accreditation of prior and informal learning”.

[4] In 2016, one of the conditions of initiating VAE was changed by decreasing the required amount of professional experience from at least 3 years to 1 year.

[5] The term “sets of learning outcomes” is used in the Integrated Qualifications System. In the French system, the term “competence blocks” is used.

6. Validation methods

6.1. Identification and Documentation of Learning Outcomes

The methods of information and counselling are adapted in France not to the type of qualifications but to the individual needs of the candidates. This can take place in two ways:

1. as part of individual meetings during which the counsellor interviews only one candidate,
2. as part of group meetings of five to six candidates with the counsellor.

Moreover, support for the candidate can take place through direct meetings (three-hour meetings) or remote work.

The application for validation and the dossier are prepared according to available templates – *Livret 1* and *Livret 2*.

When analysing the application for validation or – if available – the candidate's skills audit [6], the validation counsellor can use the National Register of Vocational Certification to match the professional experience of the candidate to existing qualifications.

6.2. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The members of the jury analyse the dossier using matrices to specify the key competences for the qualification. Then they compare a given candidate's learning outcomes that may be confirmed to the learning outcomes in the qualification's description.

If the jury needs additional information about the candidate, its members interview him/her and this interview may last 40 minutes. This interview is not considered a part of any exam or test.

6.3. The Case of Partial Validation – the Stage after the Jury's Meeting

The validation counsellor meets with the candidate to explain the decision of the jury to award only a part of the qualification, which is based on the information obtained as part of the content-related analysis of the validation application and the report of the jury's meeting. During the meeting, the validation counsellor and the candidate jointly determine the best way to attain the complete qualification.

[6] a tool for identifying professional competences and “soft” skills. The skills audit has been used at companies since the 1980s. It is used to help employers formulate a training plan in their workplace or adapt the competences of employees to a new company structure.

7. Validation results

The result of validation, irrespective of the type of qualification, may be:

- attainment of a complete qualification,
- attainment of a part of the qualification,
- lack of certification, if the result of validation is negative.

There are no provisions for appealing a jury's decision.

The report of the jury's meeting, which is the basis for awarding a part of the qualification or the complete qualification, may contain recommendations for the candidate concerning his/her further education and professional development.

8. Human resources

In France, all employees of the formal education system and employees of institutions performing VAE, both civil servants and persons employed on the basis of civil law contracts, must complete at least three years of study in areas such as pedagogy, education and training [*ingénierie de formation*], human resources management.

Validation is performed by:

- a validation counsellor – an expert specialising in the analysis of professional experiences. He/she knows the various ways of attaining qualifications listed in the National Register of Vocational Certification, their descriptions as well as possible sources and methods of obtaining financial support.
- jury members (assessors) – jury members are trained to assess dossiers using matrices specifying the key competences of a given qualification. They are experts in the standards of the professional qualifications in their sectors. Members of the jury are often teachers, employees and employers participating in the work of advisory committees, the role of which is to develop, modernise and revoke diplomas.

9. Organizational and material conditions

9.1. Conditions of the Premises

Due to the methods used in VAE (preparation of the dossier and its analysis by the jury), the institution performing validation does not have to ensure special conditions of the premises or adapt them to meet the specific character of the qualification. The premises must be suitable for conducting individual and group counselling meetings and jury meetings.

9.2. Technical Conditions

As in the case of the premises, the validation methods used for VAE do not require specialised equipment enabling the professional tasks of a given qualification to be demonstrated. The institution responsible for validation should, however, ensure the technical equipment needed by the jury to conduct a remote interview with a candidate. The interview takes place in the institution subordinate to the Ministry of Education, close to where the candidate lives. a remote interview can be held by phone or using video conference equipment, in the presence of a supervisor, who verifies the candidate's identity. In case of technical difficulties, the interview can be repeated.

The validation dossier is stored and made available to jury members at the institutions where they meet. Members of the jury are able to review the dossier on site, when the institutions are open. The documentation may not be sent by post because of the costs.

9.3. Timeframe of Validation

The validation process is time-consuming because of its many stages and the involvement of many entities, i.e. validation counsellors, jury members, the companies and institutions financing validation counselling to help in preparing dossiers.

No more than two months can be taken to assess the application.

The decision about the possibility of financing validation counselling to help with the preparation of dossiers is made by a committee. The time intervals between the meetings of this committee are long, which is why it may take two or three months after submitting an application for candidates to obtain a decision on this matter.

Because resources need to be optimised, jury meetings are convened when at least three candidates are being validated. As a result, the time from submitting the dossier to the jury's meeting may extend to even nine months.

The candidate is informed about the result of validation within 15 days from the date of the jury's meeting.

10. Quality assurance

A network of continuing vocational education institutions, which can also be awarding bodies in the case of VAE and which operate as part of formal education, became involved in quality assurance very early. There are two networks of institutions:

- GRETA – a group of education institutions of the Ministry of Education that combine staff, technical and material resources to maintain their position in a competitive market;
- DAVA – 30 regional academies validating learning outcomes for higher education [7]

The GRETA network has an internal quality trademark “Greta+”, which complies with the quality standards of AFNOR BP X50-762 and ISO 9001), whereas DAVA validation centres have their own quality trademark “VAE +”, compliant with the quality AFNOR BP X50-752 standard.

The Ministry of Education decided to adopt a joint quality trademark that would cover the entire scope of services offered by the continuing vocational education network: information, counselling, training and certification. The new quality trademark, known as EDUFORM, is based on the 2016 version of the AFNOR BP X50-762 quality standard. EDUFORM includes the following services:

1. registering, informing, supporting, training, and tracking candidates
2. preparing skills audits, assessing learning outcomes, assisting with professional orientation, supporting the creation of projects in the fields of development and social and professional integration and counselling oriented towards employment
3. determining whether a dossier is ready to be submitted for validation, supporting candidates' own work and organising the jury's work
4. preparing and conducting exams, competitions and validation.

The Regulation of 30 June 2015 on the quality of continuing vocational education, adopted by virtue of the Act of 5 March 2014, strengthens the quality assurance activities of the services provided in this area.

The National Council for Employment, Education and Professional Orientation (CNEFOP), an organisation combining an equal number of representatives of employees and employers, is obliged to establish a public list of certificates and quality trademarks that comply with the six quality criteria set forth in the Regulation.

The EDUFORM quality trademark has been on this list since 7 June 2016, which also includes most of the formal education institutions, centres of skills audit and professional orientation, as well as GRETA and DAVA institutions. It may also be used by entities from outside this system, for example, by training companies or

companies providing validation counselling services, which prepare and support candidates in attaining qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education.

[7] In France, an academy is an administrative unit of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research. Since 1 January 2016, each academy has been part of academic region (whose borders correspond to the administrative regions). The role of the academy is to adapt the educational policy specified by the government, including the Ministry, to the needs of the region, and it conducts activities in cooperation with local and regional authorities. Each academy is managed by a vice-chancellor, selected from among the university professors in the region.

11. Financing

Tasks connected with information and counselling, the personalised analyses of candidates' applications, as well as organising the validation process and providing counselling after the jury announces its results are regarded as public services and no payment is charged.

Only the counselling service to assist in preparing the dossier has to be paid by the candidate. These services are provided by public and private awarding bodies and private companies specialising in this work. The average cost of such a service is 1250 € per candidate.

Numerous mechanisms of financing validation exist at the national level – funds may come from the pool designated for financing lifelong learning. The state's expenditures for providing VAE are mainly intended to finance awarding bodies and to support candidates (counselling, preparation of dossiers, etc.). In 2013 and 2014, the French Ministry of Labour designated 6.8 million Euro for this.

The expenses of a given validation candidate – depending on his/her status in the labour market and the type of qualification – can be covered by:

- central authorities
- regional authorities
- funds intended to finance the education of employees (*fonds de gestion des congés individuels de formation, FONGECIF*)
- institutions responsible for collecting funds from employers for employee training and education and the assessment of the quality of training offered to employees (*organisme paritaire collecteur agréé, OPCA*);
- the candidates themselves.

In 2011, only 5% of persons entering validation did not obtain any financial support.

12. Context of good practice

12.1. Validation of Learning Outcomes Acquired through Practical Experience (VAE)

In 1992, the act on "the validation of professional competences" (*validation des acquis professionnels, VAP*) was introduced. It states, among others, that the performance of work contributes to increasing knowledge and skills, which should be recognised to the same degree as qualifications attained through education programmes.

The Act on social modernisation of 2002 introduced the validation of learning outcomes acquired through prior and informal learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience, VAE*), which made it possible to take into account not only professional experience, but also the experience acquired as part of voluntary service or activity in trade unions. Thus, all learning outcomes are taken into account in VAE – those acquired as part of formal and non-formal education and those acquired through informal learning.

All professionally active persons have access to VAE. The French labour code contains provisions stating that

each person has the right to increase their professional competences, whereas the education code states that VAE is the fourth equivalent path leading to attaining a professional qualification (in addition to learning at school, alternative education and continuing vocational education).

12.2. Approximate Data

Within 10 years, a total of 230 000 occupational qualifications were awarded through VAE. 57% of them were qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education, 14% were from the welfare services and health sector and 11% were qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Labour.

12.3. Certificates Issued in 2015

In 2015, 19 300 dossiers were assessed and 89% completed validations ended with qualifications being awarded, of which 68% were complete qualifications and 21% – part of the qualifications. The 68% of complete qualifications include 11 680 certificates obtained through VAE, which is only 2.5% of all certificates granted in 2015.

Table 2. Structure of certificates awarded in 2015 by the Ministry of Education according to the level of the qualification, age, sex and status of the candidates.

Name of certificate	Share of awarded diplomas
BTS – certificate of technician (two-year post-secondary cycle) –European Qualifications Framework level 5	33%
Bac Pro (Bac professional – the so-called vocational secondary school leaving exam) – European Qualifications Framework level 4	18%
CAP – certificate of occupational qualifications (level of qualified worker) – European Qualifications Framework level 3	21%
Social and demographic features	Percentage of applications for validation
Age 30–49	74%
Sex – female	70%
Unemployed	25%

Table 3. Number of certificates issued for the Hairdressing qualification

Certificates issued through formal education	2 976
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Certificates issued through VAE, including:	816
complete certification	42.8%
part of the certification	47.2%
lack of certification (negative result of validation)	10%

12.4. Description of the standard VAE process, its objectives and involved entities

Table 1. Stages of the VAE process in France

Stage	Objectives	Involved Entities	Source of
Identification of learning outcomes			
Information and counselling	Provision of initial information about validation conducted by awarding bodies [a] Provision of information about support services, the institutions providing them and possible ways of financing Referral to one or several awarding bodies	Public services for information and professional counselling Awarding bodies Labour offices	Public fund
Assessment of the fulfilment of the conditions for entering validation	Assessment of the application's compliance with the formal requirement of the number of years of experience required for a given qualification Review of the relationship between the candidate's experiences and the description of the qualification he/she wishes to attain	Awarding bodies	Public fund
Documentation of learning outcomes			

<p>Preparation of the dossier</p>	<p>Preparation of a written description of how the professional tasks included in the description of the qualification were performed together with evidence of possessing the learning outcomes</p> <p>Support of a validation counsellor in preparing the dossier is recommended</p>	<p>Awarding bodies</p> <p>Private service providers (in the field of education, training and skills audit)</p>	<p>From 900 to 1000</p> <p>In most cases, the costs are covered by taxes paid by the candidates and the authorities</p>
<p>Assessment of learning outcomes</p>			
<p>Assessment</p>	<p>Conclusion: positive or negative decision and in the case of a positive decision – deciding whether the conditions have been fulfilled for the complete qualification or part of the qualification[b]</p>	<p>Awarding bodies</p> <p>The composition of the jury is specified in the rules for each qualification</p>	<p>Public funding</p>
<p>Stage after awarding part of the qualification</p>	<p>Determining with the candidate the best strategy for attaining the complete qualification</p>	<p>Awarding bodies</p> <p>Public services for vocational information and counselling</p>	<p>Public funding</p>
<p>Implementation of the next stage of the path leading to the attainment of the qualification</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Through training: specification of expected results and duration 2. Through VAE: specification of the expected scope of the additional dossier 3. Through a combination of both the paths 	<p>Education institutions and entities providing services supporting candidates in VAE</p> <p>Awarding bodies</p>	<p>Payable services are financed by the State, the regions, the departments, the municipalities and the public offices and agencies</p>

[a] In France these are: certain ministries, trade organisations, chambers of industry and commerce, as well as education institutions that award the given qualification.

[b] When only part of the learning outcomes required for a given qualification have been confirmed.