



Files on School Education

2010

# National Education and Vocational Education in France

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nationale





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Education and life-long learning are a priority for the member-states of the European Union. The European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 declared that Europe must equip itself with « the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world ».

With this European objective in mind, France has made changes to its system of vocational education and qualification.

Hence, the national vocational diplomas, divided into five levels, validate skills and knowledge that can be gained through three routes:

**Initial vocational education:** it follows on from general education and prepares young people for qualified employment as anything from a blue collar worker to an engineer.

**Continuous vocational training:** this is aimed at all categories of active adults, employees, job seekers, civil servants, freelance workers, entrepreneurs. It allows them to build on or gain a recognised standard of qualification.

**The *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE)** or Accreditation of Life Experience: this allows vocational qualifications to be gained through the recognition of skills and learning obtained through paid or unpaid work.

These different routes make it possible to meet the needs of different people seeking qualifications, whatever their age, educational standard or experience. They make real life-long learning a possibility.

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Initial Vocational Education

Continuous Vocational Education

The *validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)*  
(Accreditation of Life Experience)

# The Stakeholders of Lifelong Learning

The State, regional government and professional bodies have shared responsibility for vocational education in France.

## THE STATE

The ministries responsible for initial and continuous vocational education are mainly those responsible for school education, higher education and employment.

For its part, **the Ministry for National Education is responsible for initial vocational education at secondary level**. In this context the law has assigned it several duties:

- it draws up frameworks for vocational diplomas in consultation with professional bodies,
- it sets exam rules,
- it awards diplomas,
- it offers a range of courses to pupils and on-the-job apprentices,
- it recruits, trains and pays teachers,
- it monitors the quality of training,
- it is accountable for the results and the resources used.

The National Education Ministry is also involved in the field of continuous training for adults through state schools that can team together and pool their resources to provide a wide range of training options for adults.

## REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

The twenty-six French regions are regional authorities that are run by elected officials. Their remit is to plan and ensure the coherence of vocational training. Within this remit, they set out their policies according to their economic and social priorities, in consultation with the State and social partners.

As such they draw up the regional plan for developing vocational training which sets out, in the medium term, in their geographical area, a coherent programme for developing courses of study for young people and adults.

They also fund certain schemes for these groups according to their priorities.

They are responsible for the construction, upkeep and facilities of upper secondary schools (*lycées*) as well as the funding of school transport.

## PROFESSIONAL BODIES

They are systematically involved with the implementation of vocational training. As such,

- they contribute to drawing up diplomas,
- they are represented on examination panels,
- they host young people into the workplace and train them,
- they are involved with the funding of initial technological and vocational education through the payment of a tax called « *taxe d'apprentissage* ».

Professional bodies are also involved in the system of continuous professional training. This system is based on the duty of businesses and industries to participate in the funding of continuous professional training for employees and on the right of such employees to be trained in working hours.

Further, social partners, unions that are representative of employees and employers are involved in setting objectives and priorities for the continuous professional training of employees.

# The National Education Ministry's Vocational Diplomas

In France, vocational diplomas are a national standard. They are categorised by level, from level V (first level of qualification) to level I, corresponding to the highest qualifications

French classification	Education level	Equivalent International Classification CITE (2)	European Qualifications Framework level
Level V	short secondary level vocational qualification such, as the <i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle - CAP</i>	3 c	3
Level IV	<i>baccalauréat professionnel</i> (vocational baccalaureate) type diploma	3	4
Level III	a bac+2 (baccalaureate plus 2 years of higher education) type diploma such as the <i>brevet de technicien supérieur (BTS)</i> (higher vocational training certificate) or the <i>diplôme universitaire de technologie (DUT)</i> (1) (undergraduate diploma in technology).	5 b	5
Level II	bachelor type diploma such as the <i>licence professionnelle</i> vocational degree (1)	6	6
Level I	a masters type diploma (such as the <i>ingénieur</i> diploma) and doctorate (1).	6	7 et 8

(1) These diplomas are awarded by the Ministry for Higher Education and Research

(2) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) created by UNESCO, original name given.

Diplomas awarded by the Ministry of National Education are between levels V and IV of the French classification system. They are recorded in the National Register of Vocational Certification (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*). These diplomas cover nearly 450 specialisms related to different trades or fields of activity.

They are drawn up and regularly reviewed in consultation with professional bodies in the framework of national bodies called « Consultative professional committees », (*commissions professionnelles consultatives*).

They all require the acquisition of professional and general skills and knowledge.

## MAIN DIPLOMAS

### The *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle (CAP)*, Vocational Training Certificate

The *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* or Vocational Training Certificate is the oldest vocational diploma, created in 1911.

It certifies an initial level of qualification, it awards its holder with a skilled worker or employee qualification.

Aimed at the acquisition of practical knowledge, it allows immediate entry into the work place.

The **CAP** covers over 200 specialisms for artisanal trades, production and services. A part of initial vocational education, it is taken over two years after the last year of *collège* (lower secondary).

The ultimate aim is entry into the workplace. But it also makes it possible to obtain the **Baccalauréat professionnel** (Vocational baccalaureate) after a period of further study.

### **The *Baccalauréat professionnel* (Vocational Baccalaureate)**

It certifies the aptitude of the holder to exercise a highly qualified professional activity.

The **Baccalauréat professionnel** (Vocational baccalaureate) offers 70 specialisms in very diverse sectors (commerce, services, catering, maintenance, secretariat, accounting, construction, agriculture...) as well as very specialised sectors (watch making, jewellers, fashion...).

In initial vocational training, this diploma is taken over three years after the last class of *collège* (lower secondary) or over two years after the **Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle** (Vocational training certificate).

The ultimate aim of the **Baccalauréat professionnel** (Vocational baccalaureate) is entry into the workplace. But, like any French baccalaureate in France, it gives the right to access higher education.

# The Different Access Routes to National Vocational Diplomas

## INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

### Education Routes after *collège* (Lower Secondary)

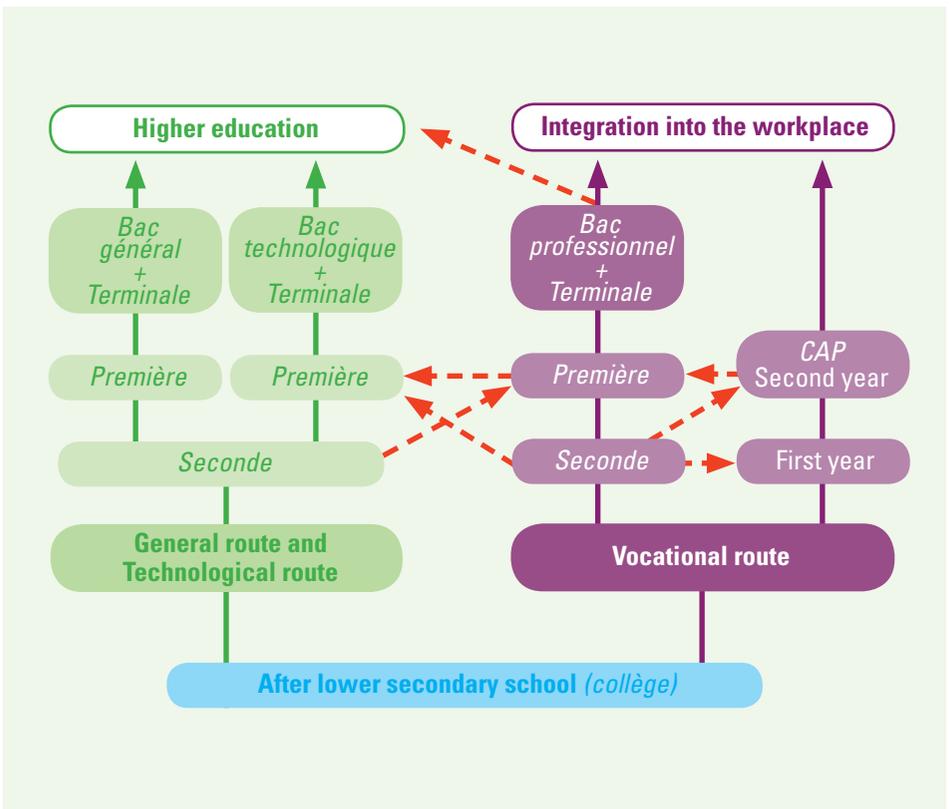
In France, school is compulsory from the age of six to sixteen.

From the age of six to eleven, young people attend *l'école élémentaire* (elementary school). Subsequently, they attend *collège* (lower secondary) for four years of schooling.

At the end of *collège* (lower secondary) pupils can choose between two different options:

- The general route or the technological route: pupils work towards a *baccalauréat général* (general baccalaureate) or a *baccalauréat technologique* (technological baccalaureate) in a *lycée* (upper secondary school). This route is aimed at the continuation of study in higher education.
- The vocational route: over two years pupils work towards a *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (Vocational Training Certificate) which allows entry into the work place or further study towards a *Baccalauréat professionnel* (vocational baccalaureate), or a *Baccalauréat professionnel* over three years which also allows entry into the workplace or further study.

Young people can work towards these diplomas either in a *lycée professionnel* (vocational upper secondary) or as an on-the-job apprentice.



(2008-2009) **37 %** of *collège* (lower secondary) pupils take the vocational route.

**700 000** of vocational pupils and **300 000** on-the-job apprentices (under the Ministry of National Education's remit and at secondary level)

**1 700** *lycées professionnels* (vocational upper secondaries) (state and private schools under contract with the State)

**1500** *centres de formation d'apprentis* (apprenticeship training centres)

**Further study:**

**37 %** young holders of the *baccalauréat professionnel* (vocational baccalaureate) go on to higher education, mainly to obtain a *brevet de technicien supérieur -BTS* (advanced vocational certificate over two years). This diploma certifies the aptitude to exercise a professional activity of intermediary level.

Source: *Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance* (Assessment, Forward-Planning and Performance Directorate) of the Ministry of National Education.

## The Syllabus at the *lycée professionnel* (Vocational Upper Secondary)

Courses at the *lycée professionnel* (vocational upper secondary) include general academic subjects, theoretical and practical subjects, project activities, periods of on the job training:

- Academic subjects include literature, history-geography, mathematics, physical science, one or two modern language(s), applied art, physical education and a class in « health, safety and environment »;
- theoretical and practical vocational courses, allowing the skills and knowledges that are specific to each *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (Vocational training certificate) and *Baccalauréat professionnel* (Vocational baccalaureate) to be acquired;
- project activities use practical work related to general or vocational courses to develop team skills, the organisation and management of time, creativity;
- periods of training in the workplace are compulsory and taken into account in the awarding of the diploma. Their length varies according to the purpose of the diploma and according to the specialism (from 12 to 22 weeks).

For the *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (Vocational training certificate), training is 2 300 hours over two years including 420 to 560 hours dedicated to work-based training (12 to 16 weeks).

For the *Baccalauréat professionnel* (vocational baccalaureate) training is 3 400 to 3 500 hours over two years including 770 hours in work-based training (22 weeks).

A tailored support scheme has existed since the beginning of the 2009 academic year for pupils throughout the three years leading to the *Baccalauréat professionnel* (Vocational baccalaureate).

This support is provided by teachers and aimed at pupils who are in need of one-to-one help, would like to work on their career plans for example to go into higher education or to change career path.

## Training Through on-the-Job Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships combine on the job training with an employer and courses at the *Centre de formation d'apprentis* (Apprenticeship Training Centre) in work time. The apprentice has a specific employment contract and receives a salary including when he or she is at the training centre. He or she must be aged between 16 and 25.

Apprentices spend between 60 and 75 % of their time in the work place. They are placed under the supervision of an apprenticeship supervisor (a tutor) who transmits knowledge and know-how and assigns tasks.

The number of training hours in the Apprenticeship Training Centre is at least 800 hours for apprentices working towards the *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (Vocational training certificate) over two years and at least 1 850 hours for those working towards the *Baccalauréat professionnel* (Vocational baccalaureate) over three years. Courses are structured by the CFAs. Two thirds of training is dedicated to general academic and technological courses. The remaining third is dedicated to practical learning.

The pedagogy of the on-off the job training of apprenticeships is characterised by the priority given to training in the workplace: trainers draw on pupils' experiences of business.

## International Strategy and Mobility

In order to open upper secondary pupils and apprentices up to Europe and the world, a large range of activities are possible: training abroad, exchanges, trips, work experience, connections with foreign companies.

These activities can be with various partners, be part of a European scheme, a bilateral scheme, or a specific project.

Indeed, the Ministry of National Education has created a specific scheme to encourage French secondary schools to have a European and international outlook: *les sections européennes* (European classes). In *lycées professionnels* (vocational upper secondary schools), aside from an emphasis on languages, it encourages work experience and periods of training in a company abroad. The Europass Mobility certifies the European aspect of the training.

Further, the teaching of vocational disciplines in a foreign language is favoured.

## The *lycées des métiers* (Trade Schools)

The *lycée des métiers* label is awarded to schools that offer training and diplomas built around a coherent group of trades (for example, a school for auto mobile trades).

Hence, the *lycées des métiers* allow improved visibility of courses and support further study. They constitute a path of excellence which can lead to a vocational bachelors degree and favour bridges between different courses and between *lycées professionnels* (vocational upper secondaries), apprenticeships and continuous training.

The *lycées des métiers* develop close relationships with the world of work, local government and higher education.

## CONTINUOUS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Employees and job seekers can work towards vocational diplomas as part of continuous vocational training.

Organisations that can provide training for them include *les groupements d'établissements (Greta) de l'Éducation nationale* (groupings of national education establishments). The Gretas are formed by state schools, *collèges* (lower secondary), *lycées* (upper secondary schools), *lycées technologiques* (technological upper secondary schools) and *lycées professionnels* (vocational secondary schools):

- which group together depending on their geographical proximity;
- that pool their skills;
- that make up one of the largest networks of adult education providers.

Present in all regions, 211 *Gretas* including 6 500 sites train some 450 000 adults every year. These can be employees, civil servants, job seekers, young people, older people...

*Gretas* can:

- offer general courses, language courses, refresher courses, trade courses...;
- help individuals to work towards vocational diplomas (*Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle, Baccalauréat professionnel, Brevet de technicien supérieur*);
- adjust the length and content of courses according to the needs and objectives of individuals: the employee or the job seeker can build his or her own course and spread it over time;
- offer services such as the skills audits, support for *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (accreditation of life experience) or careers advice.

**Continuous training organisations, whether they are state-funded or private,** are all part of a competitive market.

The *groupements d'établissements publics locaux d'enseignement (Greta)* of the National Education Ministry and the organisations attached to the Higher Education, Employment, Agriculture and Health Ministries etc. are part of the public sector.

The chambers of commerce and industry, the chambers of trade and the chambers of agriculture are all large service-providers of the semi-public sector.

Private training companies, charities and freelance consultants are part of the private sector.

## THE VALIDATION DES ACQUIS DE L'EXPÉRIENCE (VAE) (ACCREDITATION OF LIFE EXPERIENCE)

A recognition of prior vocational learning scheme was put in place in France as early as 1992.

In 2002, this scheme was built on and turned into the *Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)* or Accreditation of life experience. Like traditional initial training, apprenticeships and continuous training, the *VAE* gives access to diplomas.

The *VAE* scheme makes it possible to gain all or part of a vocational diploma through the recognition of skills and knowledge obtained through professional experience.

This experience must be of at least three years and related to the diploma sought. It can come from salaried employment, non-salaried employment (shop keeper, shop keeper's assistant, freelance work, farming, artisanal work...) and/or volunteer work (union, charity).

Diplomas and certifications that are recorded in the *Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles* (National Register of Vocational Certification) are accessible through *VAE*.

Any individual, whatever their age, nationality, status or standard of education, can work towards a *VAE* and can, among other things, benefit from support. It is an individual right.

The recognition of prior learning procedure is based on an application and possibly interview by a panel for the relevant diploma, who will then decide whether to award all or part of the chosen diploma.

Hence, those who were not able to follow the academic approach to working towards a diploma can access official certification of their achievements which holds real currency in the labour market.

### KEY-FIGURES

In 2008, **22 000** candidates seeking to be awarded a national vocational education diploma or a technological education diploma through *VAE* had their applications examined by a panel.

**14 000** candidates were awarded a full diploma, that is **64 %**.

**34 %** were admitted to a *BTS*, **22 %** to a *CAP* and **18 %** to a *baccalauréat professionnel*.

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titre du document

Vocational Education

éditeur

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website

[www.eduscol.education.fr/dossiers](http://www.eduscol.education.fr/dossiers)

date of parution

July 2010

conception/réalisation

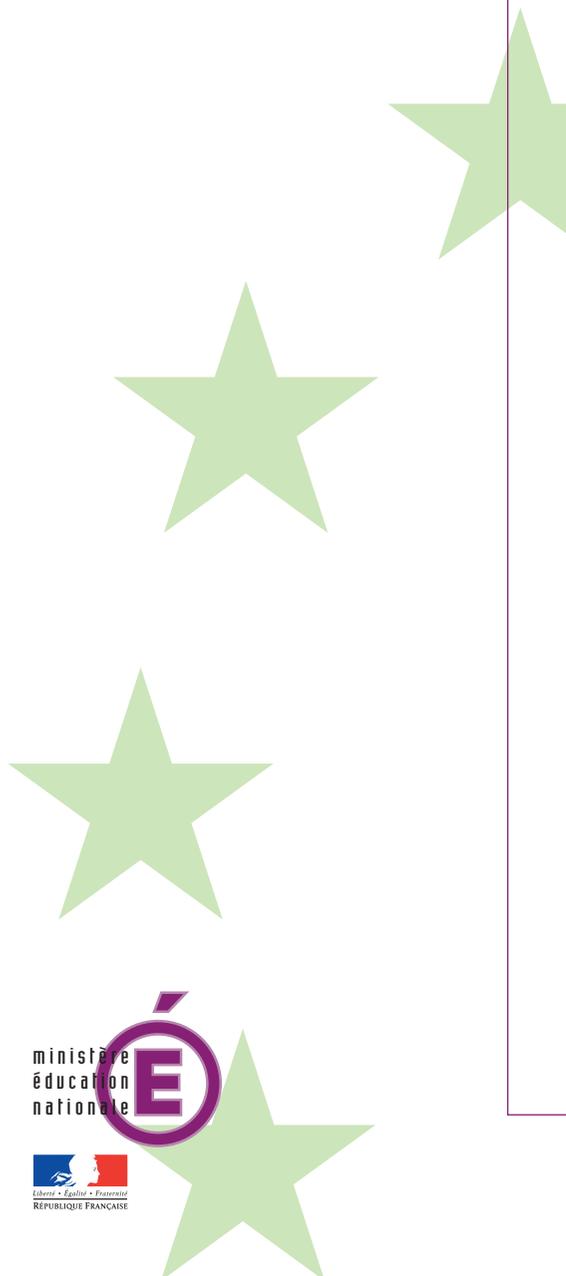
Press Communications Office

photographie

Claude Delhaye

printing

Printing Office of MEN - 1 500 exemplaires



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