***EU-CERT:  
European Certificates and Accreditation for European Projects***

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E-Square

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**Adult education: certificates and accreditation systems in France**

In France, vocational diplomas are a national standard. They are categorized by level, from level V (first level of qualification) to level I, corresponding to the highest qualifications. They can be obtained in one of three ways:

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

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

Table

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Since 1971, adult training has been a right recognized by French law. Its objective is to develop the professional integration or reintegration of adults, to maintain them in employment, to encourage the development of their skills, to enable workers to adapt to changing techniques and working conditions, to promote their social advancement through access to the various levels of culture and professional qualification and their contribution to cultural, economic and social development.

**The national register of vocational qualifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles* or RNCP)**

Since 2002, all vocational qualifications recognized by the State and the social partners, at national level, have been registered in the national register of vocational qualifications. As a single reference source, the RNCP is a centralized repository of competences providing individuals and companies with up-to-date data on vocational qualifications. It includes public and private qualifications, based on initial and continuing vocational training, provided that they are vocational in nature. This means that the RNCP does not include general qualifications such as the national brevet qualification, general qualifications (baccalaureates or doctorates).

Three main categories of vocational qualifications are listed in the register:

* **vocational qualifications** (certifications and diplomas) awarded on behalf of the State by ministries on behalf of the State, developed by ministries with the support of vocational advisory committees (CNCP). These qualifications are legally registered in the RNCP;
* **sector-specific certificates of professional qualification** (*certificats de qualification professionnelle* or CQP), developed by and under the responsibility of the social partners. These qualifications are not automatically registered in the national register of vocational qualifications. The professional body concerned must make a request (by filing an application form), which is subject to CNCP approval;
* **other vocational qualifications**, described as ‘qualifications voluntarily registered with the RNCP’, produced by training organizations, professional bodies and ministers without CNCP backing. It should be noted that private training organizations have no obligation to register their professional qualifications in the RNCP, provided that they do not use terms in the description such as ‘*licence’*, ‘*master’* or ‘*diplôme d’ État’*.

**Main diplomas**

1. **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 workplace. The CAP covers over 200 specializations 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* after a period of further study.

1. **Baccalauréat professionnel** (Vocational Baccalaureate)

It certifies the aptitude of the holder to exercise a highly qualified professional activity. The *Baccalauréat professionnel* offers 70 specializations in very diverse sectors (commerce, services, catering, maintenance, secretariat, accounting, construction, agriculture...) as well as very particular sectors (watch making, jewelry, fashion...). In initial vocational training, this diploma is taken over three years after the last class of *collège* or over two years after the CAP. The ultimate aim is entry into the workplace. But, like any French baccalaureate in France, it gives the right to access higher education.

1. **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*. 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 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 labor market.

**Key Providers**

Adult and continuing education in its two-fold French differentiation into lifelong learning (*la formation tout au long de la vie*) and further and continuing education (*formation professionnelle continue*) is delivered in a wide range of institutional arrangements. The responsibility is shared by all the economic and social partners involved (each of which can act independently). In this respect, the state does not have the same predominant position as it has in initial training.

The best opportunities for adult education are provided by the private non-profit sector, which operates with public resources. However, government and public authorities also offer a wide range of possibilities for adults. Reasons for taking up such education is extremely diversified including, training for a new job in case of unemployment, lifelong learning, social promotion, or illiteracy. This is the reason why government, regions, and private associations work to provide a wide range of courses and opportunities for adult people.

The main non-formal learning providers are the ***Universités Populaires*** (Folk Universities), which are coordinated by the French Association of Folk Universities. Furthermore, innumerable federated organizations and association directly contribute to the implementation of non-formal adult education in France, commonly known as "*éducation populaire*". A decisive role is also played by many local non-federated organizations, which provide literacy, adult training courses, and social and education activities. On the other hand, vocational institutions are mostly public or organized by public powers, through the GRETA mechanism, or the VAE system. Moreover, some schools can be recognized as ***Lycées des Métiers***, special high schools providing (generally evening) courses for adults and the ***Écoles de la Deuxième Chance*** - E2C (Second Chance Schools).

As far as learners are concerned, continuing training can be undertaken by all adults over 18 years of age; admission procedures depend on the status of each learner: employees, jobseekers or people with special needs. According to Eurostat (Labor force survey data), the participation rate of 25-64 year olds in continuing education in France in 2019 was 19.5%.

**Quality and Evaluation**

The main bodies responsible for the evaluation of continuing education in France are

* The **Ministry of National Education**, through the design and award of the EDUFORM quality label to public or private vocational training structures (Greta, GIP FCIP, CFA, etc.)
* The **General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research** (IGÉSR), through the performance of missions to evaluate in-service teacher training schemes

In France, the evaluation of continuing education is based mainly on external evaluation procedures. A significant example is the award of the EDUFORM label. This label aims to guarantee the quality of the services offered and implemented within the national education vocational training network throughout the country. It is also open to all vocational training providers, whether public or private, which prepare for national education vocational diplomas.

This is a quality label for vocational training from the Ministry of National Education and Youth. It is issued for three years by the Minister of National Education and Youth, after a national labelling audit and the opinion of the national labelling commission. Obtaining the label automatically leads to the award of the QUALIOPI quality certification.

*France Compétences* is the only body responsible for the quality and governance of vocational training and apprenticeship. It evaluates the actions carried out by skills operators, the evolution of costs and the quality of training. All training organizations, including apprenticeship training centers, have to be quality certified, as long as the training they offer is financed by public funds and mutual funds. The objective is to strengthen and enhance the quality of the training offered; clarify the offer of ‘quality’ certification for training providers and bring more flexibility in the individual approaches of workers to training.

Another element that guarantees quality is the methodology for developing certification processes. For example, each ministry that develops standards for professional diplomas in consultation with professional circles, defines examination regulations, awards diplomas, offers various types of training in its institutions, recruits, trains and pays teachers, monitors the quality of training and reports on the results and resources used. The need for the training organization to be accredited or recognized by the awarding authority responsible for the diplomas or titles prepared was analyzed as an important element of quality.

**Resources**

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