

PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

FRANCE COUNTRY REPORT



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Abstract

France has a very well established system of continuing vocational training and education (CVET). However, it is considered as a very complex system with many actors involved. Social partners play an important role in regulatory, political and financial aspects of lifelong learning programmes. Their nationwide inter-professional agreements are the basis for the introduction of reforms and are generally reflected in legislative and regulatory documents. The social partners are responsible for the management and financing of employee training. In the past years many reforms were implemented that have not yet been evaluated due to their short operation time. Recently, a new process of reforms has started.

- **Anticipation and identification of skills needs:** The sectoral and professional observatories in which the social partners are involved have a good knowledge of their sector. More cooperation and harmonisation between the 136 observatories is desirable, as it would facilitate the collection of relevant information and the development of an economical and educational strategy for the regions and other actors in CVET. The companies are requested to create a human resource development strategy by making a training plan on company level and using the appraisal interview every two years.
- **Mobilising resources:** Collective bargaining plays a very important role, agreements on national level often are the basis for laws. The resources for CVET are rated as adequate. The social partners define the amount of contributions to the training funds (*OPCAs*). SMEs can profit from the principle of mutualisation. All individuals have a personal training account. Social partners are not satisfied with the proposed reduction of their competences in the training funds.
- **Information, support and guidance:** The social partners offer information and guidance for their members. However, there is need for improvement. The Counselling in career development (*Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) provided by the public employment service and other institutions is rated as a good instrument (but not yet evaluated). However, it is not being used enough yet. The actual reforms aim at improving this.
- **Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency:** The CVET system is seen as very complex and non-transparent. With a very high number of actors the system is at risk to be inefficient. Until recently, there was no unified system of quality assurance framework. *DataDock*, a new instrument online since 2018, provides information on the quality of training providers for CVET financiers nowadays.
- **Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications:** There are a lot of diplomas and they play a crucial role in the labour market. With the Experience Validation (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*), France has a high developed system of recognition of prior learning, but it is not used very often. Social partners see the necessity of a reduction of complexity and of a change in mind set (both for employers and employees) as people are currently not aware that a person can obtain a certificate / diploma without formal learning.
- **Provision of learning:** More than 90,000 providers offer training measures. There is a mismatch between supply and demand of training measures, because training measures are not well linked to the labour market needs. Provision of further training only plays a minor role in social partners' activities.

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1 Introduction

The social partners play a crucial role in the French system of continuing vocational training and education (CVET). CVET is seen as a national obligation in which the state, the regions and the social partners are involved. Each of them can act independently, but in many policy fields the “*quadripartisme*” plays an important role. CVET is rated as essential to ameliorate competitiveness and productivity of enterprises as well as to ensure employees’ employability and to reduce unemployment. In recent years a lot of reforms have taken place. Under the actual government further reforms of the labour market and the educational system are ongoing. On 5 March 2018 the minister of labour published her far-reaching reform proposals which in some fields want to reduce social partners’ competencies.

2 Facts and figures on employee training

The following chapter deals with participation in employee training in France from the individual and the company perspective and also puts a focus on factors that may prevent both sides from taking part in further training. For the sake of inter-country comparability we rely on data from the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) from 2005, 2010 and 2015 as well as from the Adult Education Survey (AES) from 2011 (because French data for 2007 are not available).

2.1 Participation in employee training

The Adult Education Survey (AES) informs about adult learning. Learning activities are divided into formal education, non-formal education and informal education. Formal education and training is defined as education provided by the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous ‘ladder’ of full-time education. Non-formal education and training is defined as any organised and sustained learning activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions (courses, work-shops or seminars, guided-on-the-job training – such as planned periods of education, instruction or training directly at the workplace, organised by the employer with the aid of an instructor – and lessons). Informal learning is defined as intentional learning which is less organised and less structured than the previous types. The participation rate in education and training covers participation in both formal and non-formal education and training. Employer-sponsored learning activities are defined as all activities paid at least partially by the employer and/or done during paid working hours.

The employed persons’ participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training in France lies about the EU average (49 percent in France / 41 percent in EU in 2011). As in other European countries, non-employer-sponsored training only plays a subordinate role in France, the major share is employer-sponsored. Men are slightly more likely to participate than women whereas on the EU average it is the other way round. Younger people are much more likely to participate than the elderly (56 percent / 37 percent), a pattern that can also be observed for other European countries with the gap being less pronounced on the EU average (42 percent / 36 percent). Educational attainment level and participation in education and training are positively correlated. Almost two thirds of the higher educated employees (ISCED 5-6) participate, whereas the share is less than one third for people with low educational attainment levels (ISCED 0-2). This again is in accordance with the EU average.

Table 2-1: Employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training

In percent, persons from 25 to 64 years

	2011		
	All	Employer-sponsored	Non employer-sponsored
All	49.1	46.7	2.4
Men	50.1	48	2.1
Women	48	45.3	2.7
Age groups			
25-34	55.5	51.9	3.6
55-64	36.7	34.2	2.5 ^u
Educational attainment level ¹⁾			
ED 0-2	29.1	27.6	1.5 ^u
ED 3-4	46.8	44.7	2.1
ED 5-6	64.3	61	3.3

Source: AES 2011; special evaluation of Eurostat, data for 2007 for France are not available

1) ISCED97

u low reliability

The Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) informs about enterprise activities. CVET is divided into courses and other forms of learning. CVET courses are usually separated from the active workplace (learning takes place in locations specially assigned for learning, like a class room or training centre). They show a high degree of organisation (time, space and content) by a trainer or a training institution. Other forms of CVET are typically connected to the active work and the active workplace, but they can also include participation (instruction) in conferences, trade fairs, etc. for the purpose of learning. The following types of other forms of CVET are identified: planned training through guided-on-the-job training; through job rotation, exchanges, secondments or study visits; through participation (instruction received) in conferences, work-shops, trade fairs and lectures; through participation in learning or quality circles; and through self-directed learning/e-learning.

French companies' participation rates in continuing vocational training are above EU average for 2005, 2010 and 2015. In this period the participation rate experienced a slight increase from 74 percent in 2005 up to 79 percent in 2015 while the overall European rate rose from 60 percent up to 73 percent. The increase was driven by small enterprises whereas the participation rate of medium and big enterprises was the same in 2005 and 2015, though at very high level (98 percent / 100 percent). Small enterprises are still much less likely to participate in continuing vocational training (75 percent), a pattern that can also be observed for other European countries. Regardless of a company's size class, courses are much more important to French companies than are other forms of learning (75 percent / 48 per-

cent in 2015). On EU average companies participate comparably in courses and in other forms of learning (61 percent / 60 percent in 2015).

Table 2-2: Companies' participation rate

In percent

	2005			2010			2015		
	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning
Average	74	71	44	76	71	45	79	75	48
Small	69	66	40	72	67	42	75	71	46
Medium	98	95	65	95	93	57	98	95	56
Big	100	99	74	98	98	65	100	100	68

Source: CVTS 2005, 2010, 2015

2.2 Motives and barriers for employee training

When asked for the main obstacles to participation in (more) training, nearly 80 percent of the individuals stated no need for (further) education and training. Conflict with work schedule / training organised at inconvenient time and lack of employer's support or public services support rank second and third with about 15 percent each. No need for (further) education and training is also the most common barrier on the EU average, even though it's named far less often on average than it is in France (50 percent). Nine out of ten non-training companies state that they did not offer employee training because the existing skills and competences of the persons employed corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise. Other important barriers for employee training are a lack of time and recruitment of people with the skills needed (73 percent / 63 percent). These are also the main barriers on EU average (82 / 55 percent) whereby no time seems to be a much more important barrier in France than in other European countries.

Table 2-3: Main barriers for employee training

In percent

Individuals	2011	Companies (non-training)	2015
No need for (further) education and training	79	The existing skills and competences of the persons employed corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise	89
Conflict with work schedule or training organised at inconvenient time	16	No time	73
Lack of employer's support or public services support	14	People recruited with the skills needed	63

Source: AES, 2011; CVTS, 2015; multiple answers possible

3 Legal framework and institutional setting

In France, the CVET system is characterised by the “*quadripartisme*”: the French state, the regions and both social partners (Ministère du Travail, 2018). Social partners play an important role in regulatory, political and financial aspects of lifelong learning programmes. Their nationwide inter-professional agreements (*Accord National Interprofessionnel – ANI*) are the basis for the introduction of reforms and are generally reflected in legislative and regulatory documents. This close connection between collective bargaining and the law is one of the specific features of the French CVET system (CEDEFOP, 2016).

The regions have a general remit in terms of CVET. They are responsible for defining and implementing vocational training policy based on local economic and social priorities. Each region has a committee on education and professional orientation (*Comité Régional de l’Emploi de la Formation et l’Orientation Professionnelles - CREFOP*) which consists of regional authorities, the State representative at the local level, the local education authority, and employers’ and employees’ organisations (Eurydice, 2015).

3.1 Embedment of CVET in general education system

In France, CVET is clearly distinct from initial training in the way that it is organised. CVET is seen as a “national obligation”, in which many economic and social stakeholders are involved – the French state, regions, companies and social partners – each one being capable of acting independently. The State does not have the same pre-eminent role as it has in terms of initial training, which is a “public service” (Eurydice, 2015).

Main types of provision are (Eurydice, 2015):

- Provisions to raise achievement in basic skills (key competences, literacy skills) financed by the State.
- Provisions to achieve a recognised qualification during adulthood
 - In France, all professional qualifications of the National Registry of Professional Certifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles – RNCP*) that are mainly obtained through initial training can also be obtained with CVET and/or validation of experience. However, some *Diplômes Universitaires* are only available to adult education. These diplomas are not subject to ministry validation. They are specific to each university and are specifically meant to respond to training needs that are not filled with national diplomas.
 - *Les Titres Professionnels*: These diplomas, recognised by the State, employers and professional branches, can be obtained through training courses or by validating experience and non-formal learning. The diplomas range from ISCED 3 to 6 (ISCED 2011). The *Titres Professionnels*, which foster career evolution or fasten reemployment, attest their holders that they master skills, aptitudes and knowledge required to have a professional qualified activity. The certificate is obtained after a training course (or validation of experience), provided by a public training institution (AFPA, etc.) or a recognised private training institution.
 - The certificates of professional qualification (*Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle - CQP*): These qualifications are developed by the social partners in the professional branches. The *CQP* makes it possible to recognize the know-how corresponding to the trades of the companies of a branch or a sector. *CQPs* are created and delivered by a professional branch, usually within the *Commission Paritaire Nationale pour l’Emploi (CPNE)*.
- Provisions targeting the transition in the labour market financed by the labour administration (*Pôle Emploi*).

3.2 Regulatory level of CVET

Adult training falls under the Ministry for Work, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue for its regulatory framework and depends on a specific ministry department: the Directorate General of Employment and Vocational Training (*DGEFP*). The Ministry sets the CVET policy, secures career paths and employment access, proposes legal evolutions, fosters the dialogue between social partners and finances marginally some training-providing institutions as well as the training of specific publics.

Main laws on CVET (Eurydice, 2015; Centre Inffo, 2015):

- The French CVET system was introduced with the Delors law from 1971, which is based on an inter-professional agreement from 1970 in which the social partners agreed on CVET.
- In 1990 the national evaluation council (*Conseil national d'évaluation*) was implemented to ensure quality.
- In 2002 the validation of professional experience (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience – VAE*) was implemented.
- In 2004 the principles of life-long training were stated and an individual training right was created (*Droit Individuel a la Formation – DIF*), based on an inter-professional agreement.
- Since 1982/1984 regional councils have been introduced to define and organise apprenticeship and vocational training policies. Since 2004 the regions have the entire responsibility in this issue.
- In 2009 a law on public guidance service (*Service Public d'Orientation – SPO*) was passed. This public service guarantees free access to full and objective information on careers, training, qualifications, opportunities and levels of remuneration for all citizens. It also facilitates access to counselling and supports services in respect of guidance, in particular via dematerialised tools. In 2014 the counselling in career development (*Conseil en Evolution Professionnelle – CEP*), a new guidance instrument, was introduced.
- 2015: The personal training account (*Compte Personnel de Formation – CPF*) was implemented

Best practice: Personal Training Account (*Compte Personnel de Formation*)

The personal training account (PTA) was created by an inter-professional agreement in 2015. The account «hosts» training hours the employees acquire during their professional life as well as the training programmes the employees may apply to. The account is automatically updated at the end of each civil year, increasing the stock proportionally to the accomplished working time with a maximum of 24 hours (48 hours for low qualified persons) per year and a ceiling of 150 (400) hours in total. These hours may be financed by a training fund (*OPCA*) the labour administration, the region or the state, the employer or the account holders themselves. Only certain training programmes or services can be funded which lead to certain certificates named by the social partners (*Liste Nationale Interprofessionnelle et listes de branches*) (Centre Inffo, 2015). The employee can decide how and when to use this account, but has to apply for the money at the *OPCA*s. For training measures outside the working time the employer's approval is not necessary. If the training takes place during the working time, the employer must agree. The salary is maintained and paid by the *OPCA*.

Recent reforms:

At the end of 2017 the minister of labour requested the social partners to develop a reform of the CVET system. In February 2018 the social partners presented an inter-professional agreement. Their main proposals are (ANI, 2018):

- The credit of the personal training account increases from 24 to 35 hours a year and the account's limit from 150 to 400 hours (for the low qualified the hours shall increase from 48 and 400 to 55 and 550 hours).
- The former lists of certifications whose attendance is funded is abandoned and nearly all training measure are eligible to the personal training account.
- The *Conseil en évolution professionnel* gets its own funding to improve its work.
- The former *Congé individuel de formation* is transferred to the personal training account.
- Both sectoral and professional observatories are strengthened.
- The role of the bipartite *Comité paritaire interprofessionnel national pour l'emploi et la formation professionnelle (Copanef)* which is responsible for the definition of social partners' policy in education and employment is strengthened.

However, the minister of labour, Muriel Pénicaud, was not satisfied with this inter-professional agreement. Her main proposals declared on 5 March 2018 differ from the social partners' ideas inter alia in the following points (Ministère du Travail, 2018):

- The personal training account is ameliorated, simplified and extended. It will be the one and only instrument which all people can use more autonomously without obligatory intermediaries such as *OPCAs* or other institutions. The account's unit will change from hours to Euros; with an individual maximum of 500 Euros per year (low qualified persons 800 Euros) and a ceiling of 5,000 (8,000) Euros. All relevant information will be available online and the measure can be booked with one click.
- A new quadripartite agency *France Compétence* is installed and replaces former bipartite institutions (*Copanef*, *Cnefop* and *FPSPP*). *France Compétence* will be concerned with the quality assurance and price regulation.
- The *OPCAs* will be reorganised. The collect of the obligatory contribution will be done by *URSSAF* (social security benefits office) and no longer by the *OPCAs*. The number of *OPCAs* will be reduced and they will focus on counselling and guidance as well as on financing apprenticeship.

3.3 Public financing/funds and tax incentives

Adult education and training is financed by the state, the regions and the companies. In particular, the state finances training of those facing most difficulties (disabled, prisoners, foreigners and illiterates), while the regions are mainly responsible for financing the training of the unemployed, and companies fund the training of their employees via *OPCAs* (sectoral training funds, see box below).

Best practice: *OPCA*

Social partners help to fund and implement the CVET policy by managing the training fund called *Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agréés – OPCAs* (approved joint collecting bodies). There are 20 *OPCAs* (18 sector specific *OPCAs* and 2 nationwide *OPCAs*) which do not follow an industrial classification (PEF, 2018a). They collect the compulsory contributions paid by companies for employees' vocational and further training. Agreements on sectoral level determine the obligatory contribution to the *OPCA*, which in some sectors are higher than the legally fixed contribution which depends on the company size: Companies with less than 11 employees pay 0.55 percent of their wage bill to the *OPCA*, for companies with 11 or more employees the share is 1 percent. SMEs can profit from the *OPCA* system because they can make use of more financial resources than contributed (*principe de mutualisation*). The financial resources of the *OPCAs* are dedicated to the funding of different forms of training: com-

panies' training plans, professionalisation, individual training leave, the personal training account and the joint fund for professional career security (Centre Inffo, 2015). The *OPCA*s permit the financing of training measures which are judged as necessary to fulfil skills needs on enterprise and individual level. During a training measure the salary is maintained and paid by the *OPCA*. In addition to collecting money, the *OPCA*s are responsible for information and guidance of both enterprises and employees.

3.4 Regulations on training leave

The individual work-leave for training (*congé individuel de formation*) enables employees to take a one-year leave for a full-time training programme (or two years part-time within a limit of 1,200 hours). A certain threshold of remuneration is maintained during the training period which can be used for reconversions. According to the reform proposal, the individual work-leave for training will be integrated in the personal training account (ANI, 2018; Ministère du Travail, 2018).

3.5 Training providers

CVET has formed an open market in which numerous service providers operate - profit-making private providers, non-profit private providers (associations, cooperatives, foundations etc.) as well as public providers and providers in the broader public sector (*GRETA*, *Association nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes (AFPA)*¹, chambers, higher education institutions etc.). Today more than 90,000 training providers exist (Malhère, 2018). Continuing training in France is a competitive market where all providers are subject to the same rules, including public service providers such as *GRETA*.

4 The role of the social partners

In the following chapters, mainly information and assessments of the interview partners are resumed.

4.1 Anticipation and identification of skills needs

The anticipation and identification of skills needs takes place on different levels. On enterprise level the employer is requested to develop a training plan in which the skills needs of the enterprise are elaborated. The employer is responsible for this plan after consulting the employee representatives. Companies with more than 300 employees are obligated to do a human resource planning (*Gestion prévisionnelle des emplois et des compétences – GPEC*). The social partners are engaged in the process of human resource planning by negotiation.

¹ *AFPA – Agence nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes* is a public provider of adult vocational training leading to qualifications, supervised by the French Department for Work, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue. It receives public grants. *AFPA* programmes are open to jobseekers and employees alike.

A lot of enterprises do not make a training plan or *GPEC* because they do not see the necessity of further training. The social partners appreciate the idea of co-construction of employers and employees. From the trade unions point of view they are not enough involved in co-construction but only in consultation. Employers claim that a coordination of enterprises' skills needs and the employers training wishes would lead to a win-win-situation. The training plan's focus lies on recent skills needs whereas individuals often want to develop their professional life in a longer run so that coordination is difficult.

On sectoral and regional level there are observatories (*observatoires prospectifs des métiers et des qualifications – OPMQ*), which aim to help enterprises to define their education policy and to help employees to elaborate their professional projects (see box).

Challenge: Cooperation and harmonisation between the observatories

In France there are 339 *branches professionnelles* (PEF, 2018b) which do not follow an industrial classification. One or more professional branches or groups of branches decide by collective agreements to set up an observatory to assist companies in defining their training policies and employees in developing their professional projects. At the moment there are 136 observatories, in which the social partners are involved (PEF, 2018c). The social partners agree that the observatories have a good knowledge on skills needs in their respective sectors, however, things work better in some sectors than in others. The main barriers for improvements are seen in a lack of money and political willingness. Some criticism is mentioned concerning the coordination and harmonisation between the observatories of different sectors as well as between the observatories and other studies. Social partners want the results to be more "lisible" (lucid). The regions use all the information from the branches to develop an economic and educational strategy.

The social partners agreed in their recent inter-professional agreement to improve the observatories.

At national level social partners work together in the National Joint Employment Committees (*Commission Paritaire Nationale pour l'Emploi – CPNE*) which are inter alia occupied with the development of qualifications.

4.2 Mobilising resources

Collective agreements play a very important role on both sectoral and national level. The trade unions want CVET to play a more important role in sectoral agreements, but often other issues are more important. Agreements on sectoral level determine the obligatory contribution to the *OPCA*. Needs of SMEs are not always considered in this agreements. Financial resources from the *OPCAs* are only available for the current year and cannot be accumulated for a longer period. In addition, CVET is more expensive for SMEs because they do not profit from economies of scale.

The *OPCAs* are rated by social partners as (too) complex and too bureaucratic. Especially for SMEs this system is very time demanding. The whole system of financing is seen as non-transparent and not efficient, because there are too many funds and actors. These issues are also addressed by the recent reform proposals made by the Ministry of Education. However, the social partners have some doubts regarding the reform proposals of the government:

- With the *URSAFF* collecting the money, the obligatory contribution could be seen as a tax rather than an investment in education and training (MEDEF, 2018). The trade unions are afraid that there will be less resources for CVET especially for small *OPCA*s.
- The personal training account's unit changing from time to money must not lead to a weakening of employees' rights (CFDT, 2018) and each employee should know which training he or she can buy with this money (CPME, 2018).
- CVET is a co-construction between employer and employee. With the increased right of the individuals to decide themselves on their training the principle of co-construction is in danger (MEDEF, 2018).

The financial resources are rated as adequate by all social partners, but the distribution of the money could be improved. More resources are needed for low qualified employees. To increase their participation rate, they must be convinced that training is worth the effort. The trade unions want a better funding of reconversions. The personal training account is seen as too complicated, too.

4.3 Information, support and guidance

The social partners inform and guide their members directly and indirectly via the *OPCA*. However, the social partners agree that information and guidance could be improved. All persons have the right to use the counselling in career development (*Conseil en évolution professionnelle – CEP*) for guidance and counselling (see box).

Best practice: Counselling in career development (*Conseil en évolution professionnelle*)

The counselling in career development is a free service of information, counsel and guidance at individual level concerning further vocational training and education. It is operated by the *OPACIFS* (part of the *OPCA* which is responsible for the *Congé Individuelle de Formation*), the *Pôle Emploi* and other institutions (Ministère du travail, 2018).

In their recent inter-professional agreement the social partners stipulated measures to ameliorate the *CEP*: the guidance should be more professional and of higher quality, more evaluation should be done, the access to guidance should be easier and the employees should get more support in their education planning.

On enterprise level information and guidance can take place in the mandatory biannual appraisal interview on the individual development (*l'entretien professionnel*). Representatives of employer associations as well as of trade unions state that the principle of co-construction is not always lived and should be increased. In this process of co-construction the employer and the employee construct the individual training programme which respects the enterprise's needs as well as the employee's needs. The appraisal interview is rated as a helpful instrument by the trade unions, but it is not yet possible to evaluate this instrument which was only implemented in 2014. It seems that it is much easier for big enterprises to use this instrument than it is for SMEs. The social partners are involved in the process but it is very time-consuming.

On regional level, a public service was created to give individuals support in orientation. In the *Service Public Régional d'Orientation (SPRO)*. This service is operated by *OPACIF*, *Pôle Emploi*, the *APEC*, the

Missions Locales, the *CAP Emploi*, the *Centres d'Information et d'Orientation*, the *Services Universitaires d'Information et d'Orientation*, and the *organismes consulaires*.

4.4 Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency

Concerning non-formal education and training, the social partners claim that the quality of providers and training measures is mainly assured via the market, and that quality assurance needs to be better anchored institutionally. The quality of the training is a strong will of the French state and the social partners. Following the ANI of 2013 the training funders must verify the quality of the actions they finance. However, this is an area of progress. With the recent inter-professional agreement of 22 February 2018 and the propositions of the government (*France Compétence*) quality will be better assured.

The National Commission for Professional Certification (*Commission nationale de la certification professionnelle – CNCP*) can certificate training measures. The quality of formal training measures which end with a diploma is assured through the National Registry of Professional Certifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles – RNCP*). In this registry all diplomas are listed and the *CNCP* ensures that the diplomas are state of the art. Recently the *CNCP* has developed the *Diplôme en bloque*, which comprises the identification of modules, so that the diploma can be adapted to changing needs on the labour market more easily. Short and non-formal measures that do not correspond to a certain profession (e.g. language skills) can be certificated by the *CNCP* using *Inventaire*. The social partners are satisfied with their involvement.

The trade unions state that the transparency of the training market has become better due to the reforms. In 2014, the social partners developed criteria for quality assurance of training providers and training offers (*CNEFOP, CONAPEF*). The recent inter-professional agreement has reinforced the importance of quality: The social partners try to look at the overall education quality in the system and no longer only at the providers' quality (evaluation of instruments, better identification of skill needs, improvement of trainers' competences and pedagogical methods). Since the beginning of 2018 *DataDock* is available online. *DataDock* is a database which allows the financiers of CVET to verify that training providers fulfil the quality criteria defined by law.

Challenge: CVET system is non-transparent

Social partners rate either the whole CVET system in France as too complicated and non-transparent or parts of it like the training market (with a high number of providers and certificates), the distribution of the financial resources or the regulation of the personal training account. They claim that there are too many actors and instances in the CVET system which fosters opacity and the risk of inefficiency. The experts often speak of *lisibilité* (lucidity) which should be increased for the benefit of individuals and employers. Perhaps the default in lucidity is one reason why some good instruments like the personal training account and the counselling in career development are not used more intensively.

4.5 Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications

The Experience Validation (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience – VAE*) for recognising non-formal and informal competences was introduced in 2002. With the *VAE* France has a good system of recognition relative to other countries (see box).

Best practice: Experience Validation (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience)

The *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* states that “every individual that is already in its active work life has the right to 'validate' his experience, especially the professional experience, in order to acquire a diploma, a title with a professional goal or a qualification certificate that is registered in the National Registry of Professional Certifications” (Eurydice, 2015). The methods of evaluation by the jury are the examination of the dossier presenting the candidate's experience, an interview with the jury and where applicable, a real or reconstructed work situation that can also be supplemented by an interview. The VAE general institutional framework is under responsibility of the Department in charge of lifelong learning (currently the Department of Work, Employment, Professional Training and Social Dialogue), but the implementation framework depends on the parent ministry of the awarded diploma (Department of Agriculture, Department of National Education, Higher Education and Research, etc.). The process of recognition can be funded by the personal training account.

The process of validating non-formal and informal learning through experience is then recent in France. As a whole almost 130 000 diplomas were awarded since the implementation of the VAE. However, this process is still marginal in terms of awarded diplomas per year, when compared to other process of graduation (and particularly initial training): in 2012, only 2 percent of the awarded diplomas were obtained through VAE.

The social partners are satisfied with their involvement in the conception of the VAE system. In principle, they rate the VAE as a good instrument of high quality, but criticise that it is not well known and not used enough. The social partners named different reasons for this:

- The system is too complex.
- It seems that there is no broad acceptance that people can get a diploma without formal learning. A change in employers' and employees' mind set is necessary.
- Employers say that they are more flexible in recognising non-formal and informal competences than trade unions. Employers would appreciate a wider recognition of competences.

4.6 Provision of learning

The social partners only play a minor role in the provision of further training, because they only offer training for their members in some issues (i.e. the trade unions offer training for special unionist issues, *Nexem* offers training for managers of its sector). Trade unions are members in the board of some training providers. The *CPME* offers training via its sectoral organisations.

The chambers of skilled crafts and trades play an important role as they offer information, guidance and training measures to their members a (see box).

Best practice: Chambers of skilled crafts and trades

Each chamber of skilled crafts and trades (*Chambres de Métiers et de l'Artisanat – CMA*) offers an information point or a decision support centre. The network of *CMAs* also offers individualised training courses within the so-called Regional Universities of Skilled Crafts (*URMA*). Each person who wishes to work in a craft trade finds support in being trained to a job according to his or her personal background. A portal (www.e-urma.fr) provides information about the whole training offer of the *URMA* by sector, profession or level in each administrative region.

Training in crafts is provided by apprentice training centres (*CFA*) of the network of chambers. The network of chambers prepares for diplomas of the National Ministry of Education but also for the certifications / titles of the skilled craft sector.

The network offers 65 certifications which are built in cooperation with professional organisations to cover the relevant competences and skills for the production as well as the management of craft companies. The certifications are registered in the national directory of professional certifications (*RNCP*) and accessible through initial vocational training, apprenticeship, further training and validation of prior learning experience (*VAE*). *CMAs* accompany the validation of prior learning experience of employees in the craft sector allowing the recognition and the validation of their know-how. All certifications can be acquired gradually over a period of 10 years, allowing learners to reconcile professional and personal life and skills development. These courses are accessible via distant learning processes in order to grant more flexibility and reduce the presence of employees in training centres and not to hinder the day-to-day production of the company.

Furthermore, the individual right / personal training account is a reality for craft companies because it offers real opportunities for the development of the company's skills as part of its training effort. *CMA* are the interlocutor for advice taking into account the constraints and the reality of companies in the implementation of this right.

The social partners disagree concerning the efficiency of the training market. The *CPME* opines that the supply answers the demand relative efficiently, whereas other employers' associations and the trade unions stated that the training does not always correspond to the needs and that skills needs and measures should be better connected. Reasons for this mismatch may be that the certificates / qualifications are not developed fast enough and that enterprises sometimes do not know their future skills needs. The social partners' role in determining the enterprises' needs can be strengthened to solve this problem.

5 Conclusion

In general, it seems that the French CVET system offers a good infrastructure for employee training. However, the system is rated as non-transparent and too complicated and does not lead to an outstanding participation rate in CVET which an outsider may expect regarding the importance of this issue in recent reforms and the offered opportunities for individuals (personal training account, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) and enterprises (*OPCA*). One expert stated that the CVET system in France is a complex system but that it is difficult to reduce this complexity.

The social partners are very engaged in the CVET system and its reforms. In the recent years, a lot of reforms have been carried out which are not yet evaluated.

All social partners are satisfied with the bipartite dialogue on both sectoral and national level. In some cases there are conflicts but if the social partners want to succeed, they find compromises in their inter-professional agreement. In general, social partnership works well in CVET and the social partners' role should be strengthened.

The bipartite dialogue on enterprise level is seen a bit more critically by the trade unions who would prefer co-construction but find themselves more in the role of consultants; the social partners should be more involved in the training plans at enterprise level.

Concerning the tripartite / quadripartite dialogue the social partners are in general satisfied with their institutional involvement and find it positive that they have the possibility to negotiate and determine a nationwide inter-professional agreement before the legislation process. But with the new government the social partners' role tends to change from negotiation towards counselling. The social partners are not satisfied with the recent propositions of the government to reduce their competences in CVET.

Harmonisation and cooperation between the different actors in the CVET system could be extended to improve efficiency.

Explanatory note

A reform is currently underway in France. During the finalisation of this report the bill is presented on April 27, 2018 to the Cabinet and a new law is planned for the end of summer 2018. The implications of the new law on employee training in France could not be taken into account in this report. As regards social partnership the role of social partners is set to change. The training of employees, now managed by the social partners in the framework of joint management, would be at the end of the reform managed by a new national agency "*France competences*" in the framework of a quadripartite governance. In addition, the social partners would be empowered in the apprenticeship (now led by the Regional Councils), for the identification of skills needs and for professional certifications.

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