The 133th article of law no. 2002-73 of January 17th, 2002 [1] that introduced the Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience (VAE - Experience Validation) process, states that “every individual that is already in its active work life has the right to “validate” his (her) 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 Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles [2] (RNCP - National Registry of Professional Certifications)”. 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, Agri-food and Forest, Department of National Education, Higher Education and Research, etc.).

The process of validating non-formal and informal learning through experience is then recent in France, but its usage is now well established. As soon as 2006, the number of individuals that went through the validation process [3] stabilized around 20 000 per year after a quick raise during the first years. The number of passing total validations also stabilized since 2006 (around 13 000 per year). As a whole, since the implementation of the VAE, almost 130 000 diplomas were awarded. However, this process is still marginal in terms of awarded diplomas per year, when compared to other process of graduation (and particularly initial training): during 2012, only 2% of the awarded diplomas were obtained through VAE.

Every individual, whatever the status, may ask to go through a VAE process as soon as (s)he has 3 years of professional experience in a relevant field for the targeted certification. Access to qualification applies to every certification with a professional aim (secondary education or higher education diplomas, titles, certificates), may they be awarded and recognized by the State, professional branches or private institutions. These certifications are listed in the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles [2].

However, another procedure to validate professional experience, non-formal and informal learning exists. The “Validation des Acquis Professionnels 85” (VAP 85 - Professional Experience Validation 85), referring to the implementation year (1985), also allows to validate the same type of learning. Yet, it isn’t awarded with a diploma, but with an admission in a higher education training for candidates that otherwise wouldn’t have the requirements. It thus indirectly gives access to a qualification (higher education training only).
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