



COUNTRY STUDY

FRANCE

Country Monitoring Report

France is performing at average level with regards to education and has done some major efforts during the last years. However, a few challenges remain and the French government still needs to find a solution to reduce educational inequalities. Additionally, professional training needs to be more generalized, as people are trained with very specific skills that only respond to a specific need on the market. VET's and apprenticeship are underdeveloped and links between the education system and the labour market are still insufficient. One of the failure of the "alternance" system is that there are no sufficient means to prepare and accompany apprentices during their time within the companies

Recommendations

- Generalize skills and competences taught during professional training in order to adapt to the flexibility of needs of the labour market
- Remove barriers to youth guarantee and facilitate access for this particularly vulnerable target group
- Develop VET and apprenticeships as well as create links between the education system and the labour market
- Fight educational inequalities by ensuring that every child has access to quality education and by taking measures to prevent early school leaving
- Concerning the validation of experience, efforts to broaden access, improve the transparency of the procedure, shorten its length and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications and profiles are still required. >>>





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1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

As regards adult education, the law on lifelong learning (LLL) and vocational training enters into

force in 2015. Its main objectives are to improve LLL guidance and access to (higher) quality training especially for those who need it most and to reduce skill losses throughout life. It reforms the following aspects: 1) financing arrangements by simplifying the funding system for training and specific measures for apprenticeships; 2) governance through the transfer of competence for LLL to regional level including by setting up a regional public guidance service); and 3) the main measures for training¹. However, according to our French members, some problems should be pointed out:

- There is a difficulty to articulate the transfer of the competence to regional level with the competences which remain to the State, due to, among other the institutional rigidity between both levels.
- The facts that the competence is partly transferred to Regions will lead to inequalities between the different territories, as not all regions have the same capacity to take over the competence.
- The territorial reform (new territorial organisation of the republic (NOTre) Act) which is currently being carried out also stands in the way of the good implementation of the law, as it results for the moment in a blockage and counteraction of measures taken, until the new regions are operational.

Generally speaking, one of the major issues of professional training is that people are trained with very specific technical skills that respond to a specific need of the market, with short-term priorities to be responded to. But as soon as the needs change, these people's training become obsolete and they lack the transversal and social competences which would enable them to adapt to the flexibility of the needs, which is a lasting reality on the job market.

¹ European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – France*.

2. Vocational Education and Training

Participation of upper- secondary students in vocational education and training remains below the EU average (44.2%¹⁰ compared with 50.4% in 2012). The number and proportion of young, low-qualified individuals entering apprenticeships has decreased despite various measures.

As regard initial vocational education and training (VET), the main measures of the 2013 reform of the compulsory education system include:

1. Developing stronger links between education and economy, notably through setting-up the national 'Economy-Education' Council in June 2013 and "Campuses of professions and qualifications"¹⁵ and by making early career guidance of pupils compulsory
2. Bridging VET and higher education: in selective non-university higher education institutions, quotas are now reserved for graduates from upper secondary VET
3. Modernizing the initial VET curricula and 4) focused initiatives at initial VET level to combat early school leaving.

However, VET's and apprenticeship are underdeveloped and links between the education system and the labour market are still insufficient. Around 27 % of students in vocational education and training are involved in work-based learning, but the number of new apprenticeships fell by 8.1 % in 2013 and by 12 % in the first half of 2014, at odds with the government's target of 500 000 apprentices by 2017². One of the failure of the "alternance" system is that there are no sufficient means to prepare and accompany apprentices during their time within the companies. It is a recurrent problem of the upper-secondary students in vocational education and

² European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – France*.

training, as vulnerable youngsters may drop from the training because of this lack of preparation and accompaniment.

In France, the added value of apprenticeship for entering the labour market is greater at lower levels of qualification. Consequently, the number of apprentices whose highest qualification is the baccalauréat or an equivalent diploma and whose transition from school to work is more problematic, fell by 13 % between 2005 and 2013.

Various measures have been taken across the different levels of compulsory and higher education to develop guidance systems, to support the development of entrepreneurial skillsets and to improve links between education and economic actors. Measures include a new national 'Education-Economy Council', still in its infancy, while the implementation of 'campuses of profession and qualifications' has progressed. The Campuses of professions and qualifications are an interesting initiative; however as always with centers of excellence, they have the default to weaken the structures that are not part of it.

The law on vocational training includes specific measures, entering into force in 2015, to promote apprenticeship, such as introducing open-ended apprenticeship contracts and providing more secure funding for apprenticeships for those with fewer qualifications.

3. Validation of NFIL

In France, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning builds upon long-standing practices in the field of identification and recognition of prior learning and professional experience. The validation system, which is based on a clear legal framework, has taken shape in the framework of continuous vocational training and labour market policies; it builds upon an individual right to validation of non-formal and informal learning.



A key milestone was the adoption of legislation in 2002, followed by various decrees, which created the current procedure known as Validation of experience (Validation des acquis de l'expérience - VAE). VAE can lead to the award of whole or components of a qualification (certification) based on the knowledge and skills acquired through prior experience and learning in a variety of contexts. As mentioned above, VAE is an individual right (which is closely connected to the individual right to continuous vocational training); in order to qualify, individuals must have at least three years of experience in a certain field relevant to the field of the qualification they want to obtain.

The French VAE system is relatively well developed compared to other European countries, however efforts to broaden access, improve the transparency of the procedure, shorten its length and encourage its use across a wider range of qualifications and profiles are still required. The potential of VAE for many different groups of users – with positive individual impacts in terms of self-esteem, motivation, participation in lifelong learning, employability and career development prospects– is still underused.

³According to our French members, these difficulties may be explained by the following factors:

- Some of the universities in charge of VAE in France still have difficulties to comprehend their participation to continuous professional training. Strong territorial inequalities can be identified depending on the universities and how strong their expertise is on continuous education.
- Another problem is related to the difficulty for the right to go back in training to be fully exercised by people, as all sectors are hermetic to each other and it is difficult for someone to move from one to another if they wish to change career.
- The new personal training account created by

³ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report France.*

the 2014 law, is not sufficient in terms of number of hours for a person to both carry out VAE and follow the complementary training necessary to get the targeted qualification.

- The administration processes are too long and complex for a certain group of people who face writing difficulties and some certifications require a written explication of their competences during the presentation to the jury. During the different steps of the VAE procedure, not enough guidance is provided.
- Beneficiaries have difficulties to find their way around in the French landscape of certifications. Most of the beneficiaries have a low level of qualification and a chaotic professional pathway, leading to different modules of certifications, which reinforces the difficulties.
- Waiting times between the different steps of the VAE procedure are too long, which is due to a difficulty to mobilize the jury members who receive very low financial compensations (the lower the level of qualification, the lower the financial compensations).

Better counseling and career guidance as well as more support during professional evolution is necessary in France. In this context, supporting and accompanying learners, apprentices etc. along the way is a major aspect of the work to be done in France to guarantee access to lifelong learning to everyone.

4. Early-school Leaving

The French early school-leaving rate declined significantly in 2013 and is now below the EU average (9.7 % compared with 12 % in 2013).

New measures have been taken to develop a more comprehensive and efficient early school leaving policy, which remain to be implemented. As a follow-up to a 2014 evaluation report on the measures against early school leaving implemented in recent years, the national authorities adopted an action plan to fight early school leaving entering into force



in 2015, supported by an annual budget of EUR 50 Million and focused on three areas: the mobilization of all actors, increased prevention, and acquisition of qualifications for early school leavers. The implementation of the plan should be accelerated according to a recent declaration of the national authorities. Key measures foreseen in the reform of compulsory education to raise the early childhood education and care participation rate of 2-3 years old to 30% by 2017 support specifically the most disadvantaged group and contribute also to prevent early school leaving.

The plan to fight school dropping is built in relation with Regional council schemes and school (which depends from the State). One of the crucial moments of the school dropping strategy is to avoid school dropping at the end of secondary school. At that point, "weaker" pupils only have few options and are oriented by default. In that sense, the reform of Collège, to be implemented in 2016 will be crucial as it intends to make this period of education easier⁴.

In France, the link between social origins and educational performances is very strong. Only 22% of children coming from families with low social level access to high studies (26% in OECD countries). Children from families of immigrant are very over-represented among children with less educational performances.

An important reason of school drop is the gap between cultural capital of families (diploma of parents, educational practices in adequacy with school, educational ambition for children,...) and the educational culture of the institution. This gap is more important in families from popular classes and foreign families and generates a process of selection.

5. NEETs

The percentage of young people not in employment, education or training remains high (NEETs), as they

⁴ European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – France*.

represent around 1.9 million and 12% of the 15-29 years old. In France, 85% of the NEETs attended the gymnasium, whereas only 42% attended secondary school. Launched in October 2013 and managed by the Misons locales, the aim of the Experimental Youth Guarantee was to support 10 000 young people in 2014. The experimentation was a success and the youth guarantee has been developed from 10 territories in 2013 to 73 at the end of 2015. The extension of the territories has been accompanied with the aim to gradually extend the support to NEET's to 50 000 in 2015 and 100 000 in 2017. Our French members are critical of this number and stress that this is not enough. They underline that 1.9 million NEET's are currently not part of society and that every fourth beneficiary in homeless structures is aged 18-25.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee remains challenging in terms of outreach, information and coordination strategies. A major issue of the implementation of the youth guarantee in France is the lack of coordination between all the actors involved, namely National Employment agencies, Missions locales, regional Councils and the Ministry of Education. The real challenge will actually be the operational implementation of the measure coordinated by one common platform. Additionally, the poor quality of offers for such young people is regrettable. Another point is the communication on the European Youth Guarantee, as it could be strengthened to ensure dissemination of adequate information to all parties concerned. Efforts to improve outreach are under way with the creation of an interministerial working group to connect existing databases. The coordination process is being reviewed and the role of Pôle emploi should be strengthened.

However, there are other barriers to the youth guarantee in France. First of all, the generalization of a collective approach needs to be prevented. The Youth Guarantee has to be adapted to local realities and suit the local context. Moreover, the administrative burden is very high and the documentation and justifications



required to access the guarantee can be an obstacle for this fragile target group.

6. Citizenship education

In France, citizenship education is a separate subject taught throughout primary as well as lower and upper secondary education. In total, over 12 years are dedicated to citizenship education, starting at the age of six.

Proposals have been made by the Ministry of Education (which were part of the structured dialogue proposal), to increase the participation of pupils and students in democratic life of their schools/universities⁵.

7. Council recommendations

The Council did not issue any recommendations on education and lifelong learning for 2015. Looking back at 2014, the Council recommendations have targeted in particular the educational inequality in France, which is amongst the highest in the OECD countries. A sixth of young people in France leave education and training without a qualification and apprenticeships schemes should be promoted to reach in particular the least qualified young people.

The French government is required to pursue the modernisation of vocational education and training, implement the reform of compulsory education, and take further actions to reduce educational inequalities in particular by strengthening measures on early school leaving. Moreover, it should ensure that active labour market policies effectively support the most vulnerable groups and that the transition from school to work is improved.

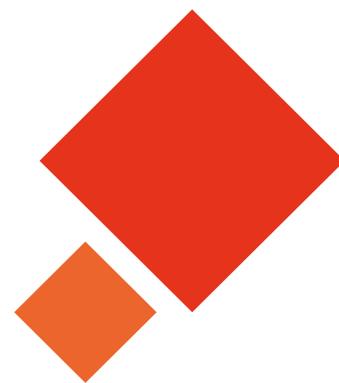
⁵ European Council (2014). *Council Recommendation of 8 July 2014 on the 2014 National Reform Programme of France and delivering a Council opinion on the 2014 Convergence Programme of France*. European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of France and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of France*.





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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).



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