

Validation of prior experience in the French Higher education system

Prof. Mossadek Talby

Deputy Vice-President in charge of doctoral education

@Aix-Marseille University

EUA-CDE Steering Committee member

Validation of Prior Experience (VPE)

A way to partially or completely earn a degree or certification on the basis of life and work experience.

In France the practice of VPE dates back to 1934:

→ Procedure set to give opportunity to technicians to earn credit for experience in engineering work toward obtaining a qualification as « Ingénieur Diplômé par l'Etat » (a State-certified Engineer).

- ❖ In 2002 the « **Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)** » program was created to give possibility for a candidate to obtain academic credits toward certification on the basis of life and work experience.

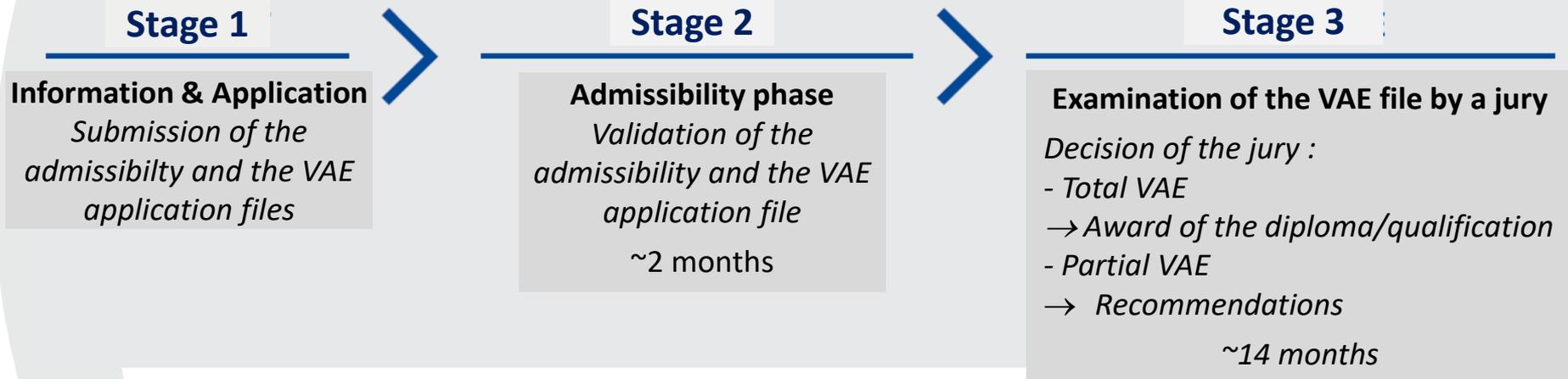
According to a decree published in 2002, any national diploma in France can be obtained either through **initial training**, **lifelong training** or by the **VAE**.

VAE introduces:

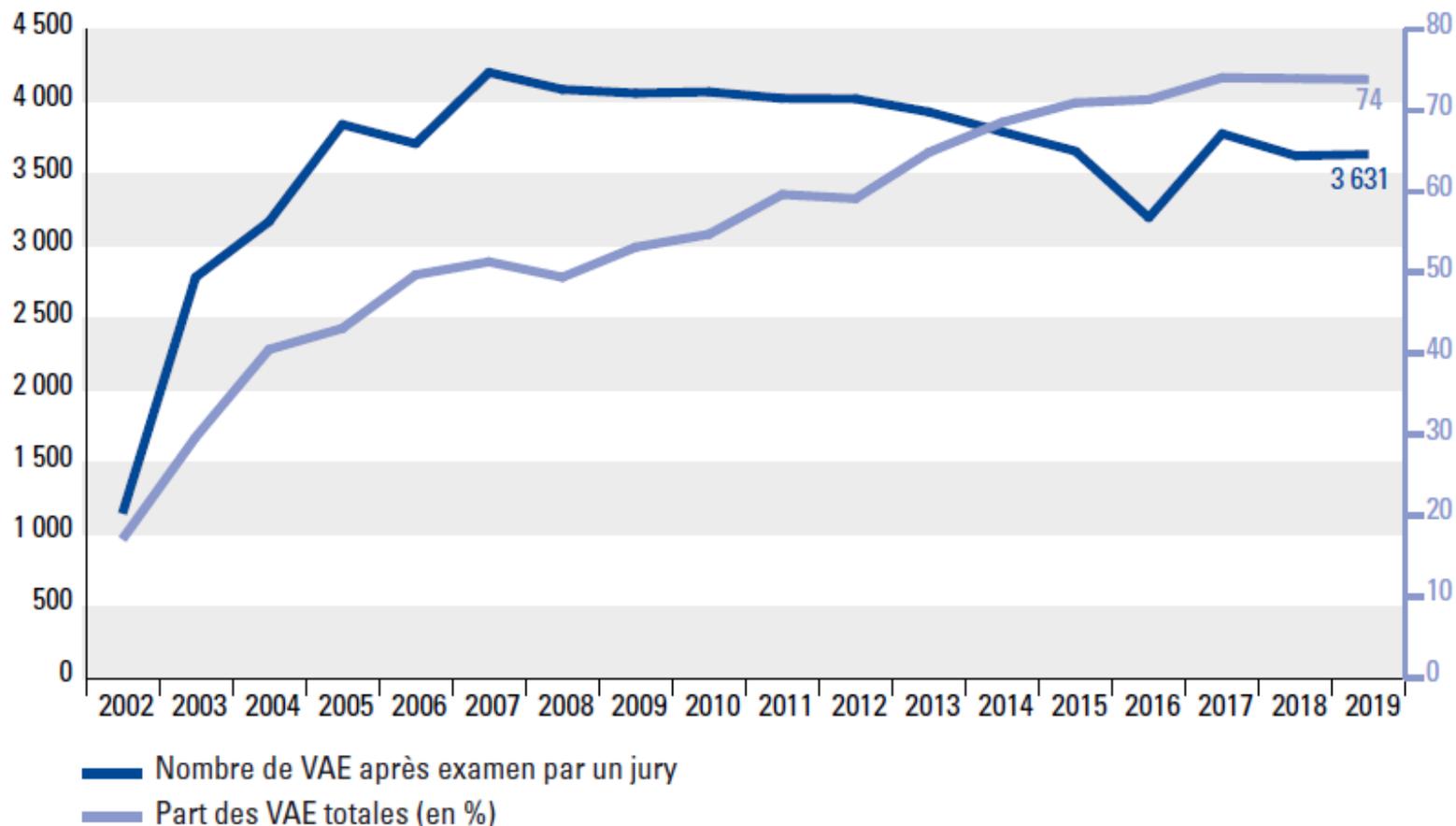
- a relationship between work experience and certification.
- Explicite acknowledgement that work experience was a form of learning that should be considered for accreditation.

VAE in Higher education institutions

Outline of the VAE process



Evolution of VAE applications in HEI



On average, 44 applications are examined every year by the universities.

What are the motivations for a VAE ?

- ♣ People are fully aware that VAE can enhance their employability:
 - It gives them the possibility to gain through certification access to a job, keep a job or even change a job.
- ♣ VAE has become an important tool for making a candidate's employment future more secure.
- ♣ It helps to identify skills acquired through work and life experience and draws recognition to their value:
 - Obtaining a degree or certification via the VAE process can be a source of motivation for the candidate and a source of recognition by professionals.
 - Pursuing a VAE procedure, the individual can mount a broader and flexible strategy to enhance his/her professional career.

Breakdown (in %) of applications to VAE after examination by a jury in 2019

	DUT-DEUST-DNTS	Licence professionnelle	Licence	Master et Doctorat	Diplôme d'ingénieur	Autres diplômes	Total
Diplôme visé							
Dossiers de recevabilité ayant reçu un avis favorable	4,1	45,8	8,6	38,7	1,6	1,3	100,0
Diplôme obtenu							
Ensemble des validations après examen par un jury	2,8	41,8	8,4	38,7	3,2	5,1	100,0
Validations totales							
Part dans les diplômes obtenus	3,2	45,9	8,3	37,5	1,9	3,2	100,0
<i>Poids des VAE totales</i>	85	82	74	72	44	47	74
Validations partielles							
Part dans les diplômes obtenus	1,6	29,8	8,8	42,1	7,1	10,7	100,0
<i>Poids des VAE partielles</i>	15	18	26	28	56	53	26

Champ : France métropolitaine + DOM hors Mayotte, toutes les universités + Cnam

Source : MESRI-SIES, enquête VAE auprès des établissements

- The majority of VAE candidates obtain a diploma at a level just above the one they already hold.
- Law-economy-management and science-technology-health are the two disciplinary fields most concerned by VAE.
- In 2019, more than 75% of the eligible candidates for VAE are between 30 and 49 years old (40% are between 40-49 years old) and 16% are 50 years old or more.

Characteristics of VAE beneficiaries after examination by a jury in 2019

	Validations totales		Validations partielles		Ensemble des validations après examen par un jury	
	Ensemble	dont femmes	Ensemble	dont femmes	Ensemble	dont femmes
		50,6		51,5		50,8
Diplôme obtenu						
DUT-DEUST- DNTS	3,4	47,7	1,6	53,3	2,9	48,5
Licence professionnelle	47,8	48,3	29,6	50,4	43,0	48,7
Licence	8,7	56,1	8,7	68,3	8,7	59,4
Master et doctorat	34,8	53,1	42,4	57,5	36,8	54,4
Diplôme d'ingénieur	2,0	11,8	7,0	13,6	3,3	12,8
Autres diplômes et titres inscrits au RNCP	3,3	55,2	10,6	43,0	5,3	48,7
Statut d'emploi						
Actifs occupés	91,3	51,6	87,4	51,5	90,3	51,6
Actifs à la recherche d'un emploi	8,2	59,2	11,5	59,6	9,0	59,3
Inactifs	0,5	23,1	1,1	30,0	0,6	26,1
Catégorie socioprofessionnelle pour les actifs occupés						
Ouvriers	0,2	0,0	0,2	0,0	0,2	0,0
Employés	33,1	57,4	29,3	60,5	32,3	58,0
Professions intermédiaires	23,8	50,9	27,6	47,5	24,6	50,1
Cadres	39,0	46,3	38,5	54,0	38,9	47,9
Actifs non salariés	3,8	49,4	4,4	50,0	3,9	49,5

Lecture : 47,8 % des bénéficiaires obtiennent une licence professionnelle en VAE totale, parmi lesquels 48,3 % sont des femmes (51,7 % sont des hommes).

Champ : France métropolitaine + DOM hors Mayotte, toutes les universités + Cnam

Source : MESRI-SIES, enquête VAE auprès des établissements

Awarding of the doctoral degree through VAE

A process in 3 stages:

1. **Admissibility** (~2 months)
 - 1.a **Administrative admissibility**
 - 1.b **Scientific admissibility**
2. **Preparation of the VAE file for the defence** (≥ 1 year)
3. **Defence**

Administrative and scientific admissibility

Admissibility file: Application document for the VAE, a report on research activities and scientific or technical productions, specifying the developments carried out and the obtained results, a list of all publications, a copy of the most important documents produced.

1.a Administrative admissibility

- ✓ Compliance of the application with the legal framework examined by the department in charge of the VAE

After validation a counselor in charge of monitoring the process is appointed

1.b Scientific admissibility

- ✓ admissibility file reviewed by the board (or ad-hoc committee) of the Doctoral School whose theme is the closest to the candidate's profile.

In case of agreement, the DS board proposes a researcher qualified referent in the scientific field targeted by the applicant, who will advise the candidate in the writing of the scientific part (dissertation) of the VAE file.

His/her role is similar to that of the thesis supervisor.

Preparation of the VAE file for the defence

Carried out by the candidate under the supervision of the appointed qualified researcher

The candidate must prepare a dissertation to be presented for the defence.

The dissertation document consists of 2 parts:

- Reflective review of the progression of the professional and personal career as a researcher through the evolution of the career, the analysis of activities and the identification of skills,
- Description and analysis of the work and methods of one or more previous research projects: argumentation on scientific results according to explicit methodological criteria, ..., national and international publications in peer-reviewed journals,..., communications, scientific, technical and study reports, patents and innovations...).

The mastery of the research topic and the ability to develop a scientific research strategy, to implement it and to exploit its results must be demonstrated.

Defence

Composition of the defence committee

- ✓ Must comply with both the provisions for the composition of a VAE jury and the regulations on the composition of the defence committee for the doctoral degree,
- ✓ The defence committee is appointed by the head of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) after receiving the opinion of the Doctoral School director, on the proposal of the supervisor.

Prior to the defence, the candidate's dissertation document is assessed by at least two external, independent and qualified rapporteurs appointed by the head of the HEI on the proposal of the doctoral school director, after receiving the opinion of the supervisor.

In the case of work involving persons from the socio-economic world, a third rapporteur, recognised for his or her competence in the field, may be appointed as third rapporteur.

The rapporteurs give their opinion on the candidate's work in written reports.

Defence (cont'd)

The defence is authorised by the head of the HEI on the basis of the rapporteurs written reports and after the opinion the Doctoral School director.

The rapporteurs' reports are communicated to the defence committee members and to the candidate before the defence.

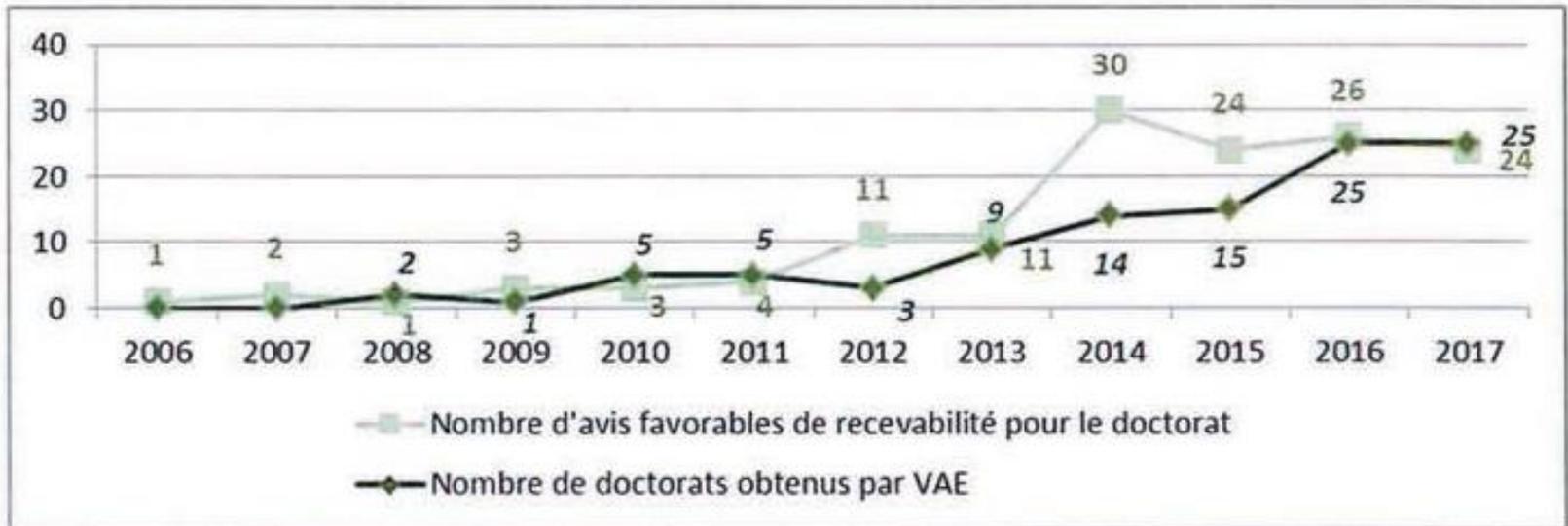
The procedure for the defence is that of a "conventional" doctorate:

- Oral presentation by the candidate,
- Discussion & questions/answers session,
- Deliberation.

The committee's deliberation can take three forms:

- Total validation: the candidate is awarded the doctoral degree,
- Partial validation: the committee determines the knowledge and skills that it declares to have been acquired and, if necessary, the nature of the knowledge and skills that need to be further assessed,
- Refusal of validation.

Evolution of the doctoral degree through VAE between 2006 and 2017



Source: Specific data gathering by the DEPP (Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance) in 2018 from the higher education institutions' lifelong education departments.

23 French HEI awarded 104 doctoral degrees through VAE from 2008 to 2017.

- 92 doctoral degrees/104 were awarded in science and technology, and in health and life sciences.
- 12 doctoral degrees/104 were awarded in humanities at large.

This represents a tiny fraction (~ 0.0007) of the total number of doctoral degrees awarded by HEI in France during the same period.

Examples of doctoral degrees awarded through VAE

Doctorate in Signal processing (University of Rennes)

The candidate applied for a doctoral degree through VAE on the basis of over twenty years' experience as a researcher at Thomson company, with numerous patents and publications to his credit. He holds an engineering degree in optics.

After 11 months of support provided by a pair of VAE advisor and a disciplinary referent, a university professor, designated by the doctoral school director, the defence committee of six members awarded the candidate the doctoral degree in signal processing in December 2011 after a session of approximately two hours.

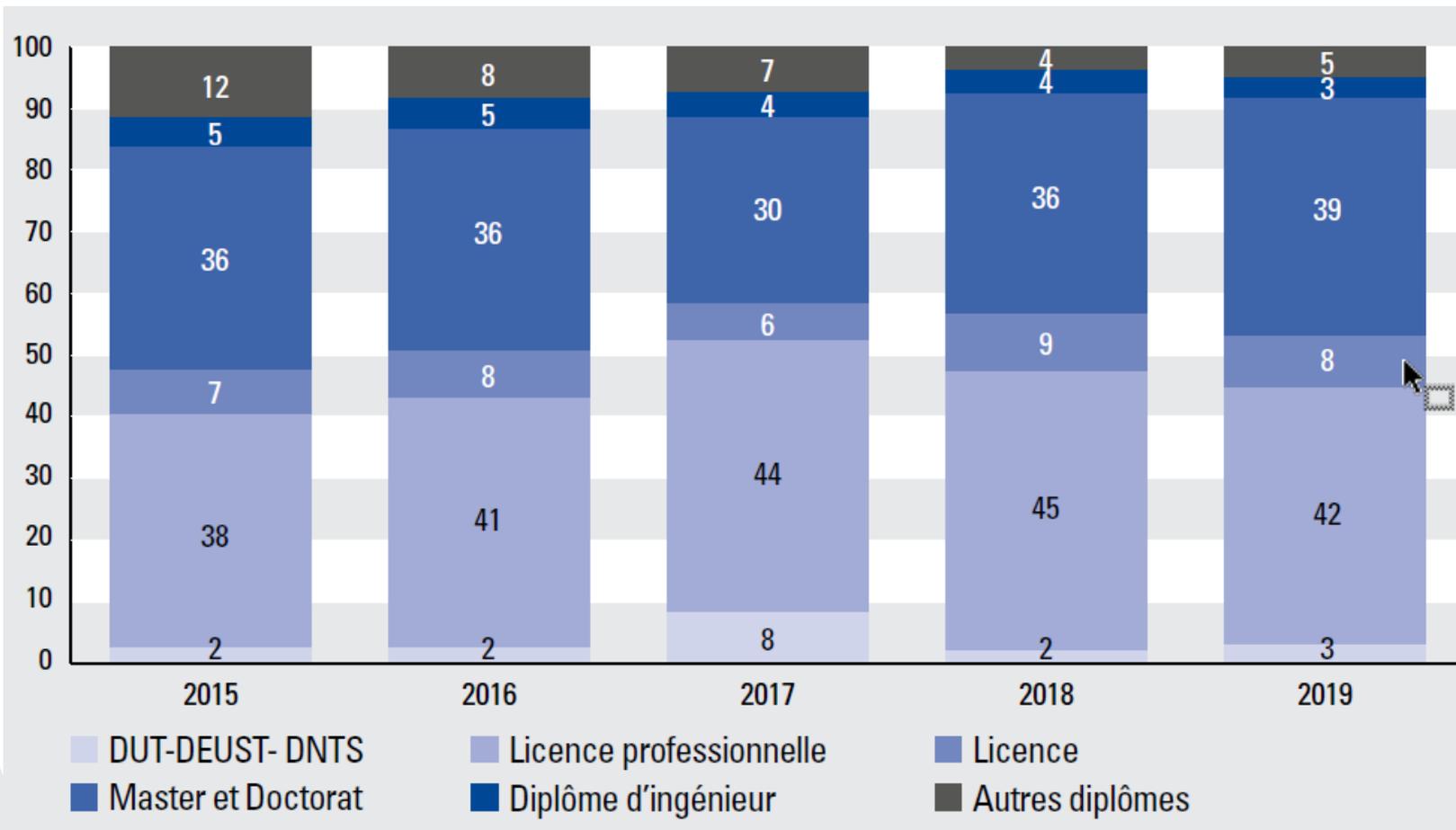
Doctorate in French Literature (University of Sorbonne nouvelle)

The candidate, who holds a Bachelor and a secondary-school teaching diploma in French literature has been teaching in a secondary school for 12 years. It is in view of the quality of the personal research work developed over several years on a well-known 19th century author with the aim of publishing his biography that the VAE process was validated.

The candidate was supervised by a qualified researcher, designated by the doctoral school director, for a period of 8 months. At the beginning of the process, the candidate signed a contract with a known French publishing house (Fayard). At the end of a four-hour session, the five-member of the defence committee awarded him the doctorate in French literature.

Backup slides

Evolution of the breakdown (in %) of degrees awarded by VAE between 2015 and 2019



Partial validation

Possible requirements in the case of partial validation:

- Completion of the dissertation document: in case of amendments and/or complements requested by the committee, a deadline is set to the candidate for submitting a new version of the document. This deadline may not exceed one year,
- Additional training through research,
- Other requirements.

The Committee may decide to ask for a new defence or, in the case of minor corrections, to appoint a qualified researcher as responsible for monitoring the prescription. At the end of the prescription, the jury assesses its validity and decides whether to grant full qualification or to refuse it.