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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: MEETING FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS

- **30th anniversary of the vocational baccalaureate**, an advanced qualification leading to employment or higher education
- **Nearly a third** of secondary-school pupils opt to study for a vocational school-leaving diploma
- **Vocational education is accessible** any time during a lifetime

Why vocational education matters

This school year marks the 30th anniversary of the *baccalauréat professionnel*, the vocational baccalaureate, and Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, Minister for National Education, Higher Education and Research, has chosen the occasion to celebrate the *lycées professionnels*, the high schools that specialise in vocational education.

These vocational schools held an open house on 29 and 30 January 2016, for parents, pupils and students, businesses and teachers from *collèges* (lower secondary schools), whose pupils will form their new intakes. The minister has also announced an exhibition in Paris in May to present the achievements and skills of vocational students in the industrial and service sectors.

“I think it is important to stress how essential the vocational career path is for France, how it contributes to its achievements, its diversity and success; and why we can all be proud of it together”, said the minister.

“Vocational education is essential because today, like 30 years ago, it meets the specific economic and social needs of our country. Vocational education enables us to equip France with the trades it needs – jobs for workers, technicians and executives.”

Six ambassadors were appointed by the French government to promote vocational education throughout the year, and many participated in the events on 29 January. The six ambassadors are the film director Lucas Belvaux, the internationally renowned photographer Reza, the member of Parliament Colette Langlade, non-profit founder Claudine Schellino, world judo champion Céline Lebrun and the creator of the vocational baccalaureate, Daniel Bloch.

The vocational education and training (VET) system

France’s vocational education and training (VET) system is part of the European framework that dates back to the European Council in Lisbon in 2000, which declared Europe must equip itself with “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world*”. Member states set common objectives on education and lifelong learning, renewed under the Europe 2020 Strategy in 2010.

France’s system consists of initial education, for young people within the educational system; continuing training, for adult employees and jobseekers; and a scheme that allows adults to gain vocational qualifications through knowledge and skills acquired through work experience.

Responsibility is shared by the state, elected regional authorities and professional bodies (companies and other workplaces).

- The **state** is principally represented for initial VET by the Ministry of National Education, which awards diplomas drawn up in consultation with professional bodies, offers pupils and apprentices a wide range of courses, and recruits and pays the teachers. In addition, the Ministry of Employment is responsible for regulating continuing vocational training and negotiations with the ‘social partners’, the unions representing employees and employers.
- **Regions** define initial and continuing VET programs consistent with their medium-term regional plans depending on their economic and social priorities, in collaboration with the state and social partners. They are responsible for the construction, upkeep and equipping of the *lycées*. While it is the regions that wholly determine apprenticeship programs, the definition of continued professional training is a shared responsibility.
- **Professional bodies** take part in preparing vocational diplomas and sit on exam panels; provide students with workplace training and experience; contribute to funding of initial and continuing VET through the apprenticeship tax; and help define the aims and priorities of continuing VET of employees.

Delivering vocational education depends on strong partnerships between the Ministry of National Education and professional and economic bodies, as well as workplace specialist teachers, advisers and consultants, who keep the system functioning. There are about 50 national agreements with large industrial groups, businesses and associations, covering such issues as the provision of educational tools, information for the young about jobs, organisation of work placements for teachers, development of entrepreneurialism among the young and continuing education.

Moreover vocational advisory committees are involved in the determination of vocational qualifications. These committees, composed of employers, employees, state representatives and practitioners, are consulted on the creation, revision or suppression of diplomas in vocational and technological education from level V (CAP-BEP) to level III (BTS). These committees are alternately chaired by an employers' or an employees' representative.

The qualifications

After leaving *collège* (lower secondary school) at about age 15, pupils can choose between general/technology studies and vocational education, which offers several pathways leading to different diplomas. The two initial VET qualifications most commonly awarded by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) are:

- ***Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*** (Certificate of Professional Aptitude, or CAP). This is a first-level diploma that qualifies the holder for a job in some 200 sectors. Pupils study and work for it over two years after leaving *collège*. Those who pass may continue to study for the second option - *Baccalauréat professionnel*.
- The more advanced ***Baccalauréat professionnel*** (vocational baccalaureate), is available in about 90 subjects, covering a wide range of sectors – including retail, services, catering, maintenance, secretarial work, accountancy, building trades, agriculture and some highly specialised trades. Students study for three years after *collège*, or two years after a CAP, and while the main aim is to enter employment, it entitles the holder to higher education.

Students can study for these diplomas either based at a *lycée professionnel* or as part of an apprenticeship. In both cases, general studies – history-geography, maths, physics, languages, arts, PE and sport, among other subjects – play an important part, as well as VET theory and practice.

Apprenticeships are based in apprentice training centres (*centres de formation d'apprentis*), which combine training by employers and by teachers during working hours. Apprentices, who are aged between 16 and 25, have employment contracts and are paid salaries when they are in the workplace, which accounts for between 60% and 75% of their time.

Continuing VET allows employees and jobseekers to study for national vocational diplomas. One of the biggest adult training providers are the Greta, *groupements d'établissements de l'éducation nationale*, networks of state schools throughout France, which have 6,500 sites and train about 500,000 adults a year. Other state providers include institutions that come under other government departments such as higher education, employment, agriculture and health; chambers of commerce, trades or agriculture. There are also private sector providers.

The *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE – accreditation of prior learning experience) scheme allows adults to transfer their skills and knowledge acquired through professional and other experience to obtain a vocational diploma.

School-business partnerships

Beyond the general and technical education delivered in schools and educational institutions, the school system, in cooperation with local business, offers many opportunities for the professional integration of young people: new and newly updated types of diplomas, internships, orientation courses and so on.

Since the passing of a law on 8 July 2013, the objectives of the partnership with the business and professional world has changed: the implementation of a “Future” program (*parcours Avenir*) aims to allow students to understand the professional world, become aware of the diversity of available professions and training programs, develop their sense of commitment and initiative, and prepare their educational and vocational plans.

Furthermore partnerships are conceived of as a comprehensive guidance program in a larger sense (lifelong guidance rather than strictly in school).

A recent example of an initiative to strengthen the school-business relationship is the creation of 31 specialised campuses. Begun in 2013, these campuses bring together schools (vocational schools and training centres), higher educational institutions, research laboratories, businesses and local authorities all specialized in the same professional sector. The benefits of these prestigious campuses are manifold: students are more likely to be recruited after graduation with this experience on their resume. In addition, students are likely to seek a higher level of education than what was originally imagined, thanks to exposure to the variety of possibilities.

Internships centres were created and put in place in 2015 with the aim of ensuring not only equal access to on-the-job training but also the quality of these internships. These centres provide a national network, as all schools are associated with an internship centre. These centres oversee the academic coordination of programs and are each managed by a facilitator whose missions are mainly:

- to provide a single contact for both professionals and teachers;
- to create a pool of companies with which to establish a dynamic, ongoing partnership,
- to help schools associated with the individual centres, particularly in resolving difficult situations,
- to institute collaborative working practices, and pool resources and transferable practices.

Entrepreneurship

At the same time, France is leading an ambitious educational initiative to encourage entrepreneurship. The French conception of entrepreneurship education covers a wide area, depending upon the level of the educational system.

At the school level, the goal is for students to acquire knowledge and skills that contribute to expression, cooperation and creativity at a young age. Beginning in lower secondary school, students can participate in the “Future” program (*parcours Avenir*), launched in September 2015, which helps them gradually build up genuine competence in the area of entrepreneurship and innovation, in cooperation with local businesses.

Apprenticeships and other initiatives are also available in partnership with businesses or non-profit groups, which might include educational programs with small enterprises or business owners speaking in classrooms.

At the level of higher education, the ministry launched the Action Plan for Student Entrepreneurship (*Plan d'action en faveur de l'entrepreneuriat étudiant*) in 2013. This plan of unprecedented scale is focused on four principal initiatives:

- The integration of entrepreneurship and innovation training modules, which will be recognised by the European Credits Transfer System, into the curriculum
- The launch, in March 2014, of 29 student centres for innovation and entrepreneurship (*Pôles Etudiants Pour l'Innovation, le Transfer et l'Entrepreneuriat*)
- The creation of a “student-entrepreneur” status for students or recent graduates who wish to start a business
- The creation of a student entrepreneurship award (*Tremplin Entrepreneuriat Etudiant*) as part of a national competition funded by the education ministry

ABOUT VET

Key figures

31% of secondary-school pupils study for a vocational school diploma

670,300 students attend the 1,600 *lycées professionnels*; and there are 320,000 apprentices under the education ministry scheme, in 1,000 *centres de formation d'apprentis* (apprentice training centres)

42% of those who attain the *baccalauréat professionnel* go on to pursue higher education, with 39% obtaining a *brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS) over two years

ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Key figures

110,000 students were reached by the ministry's Action Plan for Student Entrepreneurship in 2014-2015

89,500 students received diplomas in entrepreneurship and innovation during this period

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche at +33 (0)1 55 55 30 10 or spresse@education.gouv.fr