



EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in FRANCE

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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in France. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in France as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at eaea-info@eaea.org.



Overview

Lifelong learning and adult education are currently managed by public and private institutions in France. The biggest provider is the **Ministry of National Education** (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale), whereas other departments give a smaller contribution (e.g. In rural places, until 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture gave subventions to NGOs and associations within a budget line called "animation rurale" [1]; also the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Development include a small contribution in their budget for the implementation of specific actions in the socio-cultural field.

However, the **process of decentralization** empowered regional governments and provided some **powers to local authorities**, which are now charged with adult education issues and professional training. During the last few years several reforms about adult education were enacted, with the introduction of the "**validation of competences via the experience**" system (validation des acquis de l'expérience - VAE) and a series of acts concerning the general theme of social modernisation, from 2002.

On the other hand, private actors also contribute in the adult education field by organising courses and other kinds of activities with the support of the government. According to the data provided by the Ministry of National Education, **private associations and organisations** such as tgis represented around 80% of educational activity.

Politics and Law

Two departments are particularly concerned with lifelong learning. **The Ministry of Economy, Industry and Employment** manages **lifelong learning policies** to improve the opportunities for employment. It is not strictly involved in financing adult education projects and institutions, but it contributes to helping specific target groups, like migrants or prisoners, with the specific aim to encourage and abate them to find employment. **The Ministry of National Education** concretely **organises and promotes lifelong learning**, which is realised through the so-called GRETAs, specific centres designed to promote vocational training courses.

Regions have the power to promote policies concerning adult education, according to local priorities. After the process of decentralisation Regions have a general competence in **vocational training** of young and adult people and they enact the "regional plan for the development of vocational training" (plan régional de développement des formations professionnelles). The statute concerning



lifelong learning and vocational training, published in November 2009, gave Regions the power to organise every single regional development plan.

On the other hand, enterprises also have a special duty towards adult education and vocational training; for example a **small proportion of the worker's wage should be dedicated to lifelong learning** (at least 1,6%). In 2009 the reform of education introduced some innovations; firstly the right to information and professional orientation for everyone, and also the use of funds to improve the rights of employees.

The education of each employee grows through three different strategies.

The first is the **education plan** (plan de formation) of the enterprise, which is a sort of **on-the job training**, which is paid and organised by every single company, and provides the necessary education to employees.

The second type of education is known as the **individual right to education** (droit individuel à la formation - DIF), which gives employees 20 hours per year for educational purposes. Since this amount of hours can be accumulated during 6 year periods, the employee can eventually take up to 120 hours for education.

Finally, two different special permissions exist: **individual permission for education** (congé individuel de formation - CIF), which allows employees to choose and attend a course; and also 'congé de bilan de compétences', a special permission through which each employee can **self-evaluate their professional and academic skills and define a personal plan of education** [2].

The reform of the French vocational training system started with the creation of the "validation des acquis de l'expérience" - VAE, within the **social modernization act** in 2002 [3]. This statute only came into force in 2004 thanks to an agreement between all the social partners. The act concerning lifelong vocational training and social dialogue (2004 - formation professionnelle tout au long de la vie et le dialogue social) dramatically changed the education system, originally organized on the basis of a statute approved in 1971. The principal aim of this reform was to make **employees aware of the education they need**, without any interference by the employer. The VAE system in fact consists of **obtaining a school degree through the validation of professional experiences**. According to the procedure, the candidate should fill in a form, which is evaluated by a jury. This jury will decide whether to validate the professional experiences of the candidate, giving them the respective diploma (usually a certificate of professional aptitude - CAP, certificate d'aptitude professionnelle) [4]. This system is not very easy to understand and the number of applications are very low because of the **lack of information and the complexity of the system**.



An important role is also played by the **National Agency against Illiteracy** (L'Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illettrisme - ANLCI), established in 2000. The role of ANLCI is to promote initiatives which aim to prevent and fight the illiteracy. In 2001 the regional plans against illiteracy were introduced, whereby in 2003 a national framework of reference for the equal access to basic literacy was created.

Structure overview

The best opportunities for adult education are provided by the private **non profit sector, which operates with public resources**. However, government and public authorities also offer a wide range of possibilities for adults. Reasons for taking up such education is extremely diversified including, training for a new job in case of unemployment, lifelong learning, social promotion, or illiteracy. This is the reason why government, regions and private associations work to provide a wide range of courses and opportunities for adult people.

The main **non-formal learning** providers are the **Folk Universities** (Universités Populaires), which are coordinated by the French Association of Folk Universities (Association des Universités Populaires de France). Furthermore, innumerable **federated organizations and association** directly contribute to the implementation of non-formal adult education in France, commonly known as "**education populaire**".

A decisive role is also played by many **local non-federated organisations**, which provide literacy, adult training courses, and social and education activities.

On the other hand, vocational institutions are mostly public or organised by public powers, through the **GRETA mechanism**, or the **VAE system**. Moreover, some schools can be recognised as "Lycées des Métiers", special high schools providing (generally evening) courses for adults and the Ecoles de la Deuxième Chance - E2C (Second Chance Schools).



Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

'Non-Formal' Learning

Universités Populaires play an essential role in providing non-formal education. The first **folk universities** were born during the late 19th century, however the sharpest growth of **Universités Populaires** was after the end of the Second World War, during the economic boom. It was only from the beginning of the 1980s that an active coordination between these institutions was established.

The main purpose of **Universités Populaires** is to **promote social inclusion**, providing free courses and to increase **citizens' self-awareness**. They were mostly located close to cities, due to the higher demand and the higher concentration of population, but now they are almost homogeneously distributed. The diversity of French **Universités Populaires** is linked to several aspects, as firstly different **local contexts** produce diverse effects on their organisations. Furthermore, they promote different activities from simple **courses for leisure**, to **vocational** training courses, although both are usually provided [5].

The umbrella association which coordinates the French Folk Universities is the **Association des Universités Populaires de France (AUPF)**.

As far as federated-organisations are concerned, it is not easy to give an exhaustive overview of the French situation, because of the **high number of associations** involved in this field. However, some examples can be outlined in order to give a general overview.

Firstly, the **Confédération des Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture de France (CMJCF)** aims to develop a system to **promote the education of volunteers and professionals**. Furthermore, in 2002 and 2007 it established a series of partnerships with the University of Paris 12 to promote lifelong learning. **Ligue de l'Enseignement** also operates in the field of lifelong learning and represents the biggest French **coordination of associations**. Other organisations also exist, like **La Fédération des Centres Sociaux et socioculturels de France**, and **Fédération des Foyer Ruraux, les Francas**, but they are only a very small part of associations actively engaged in non formal education, providing different kind of courses, like cinema, theatre, or literature. They also target more specific issues such as BAFA courses - Brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur de centre de vacances et de loisirs. Associations and universities must be supported by the Ministry of Youth to provide these types of courses).



Another example of a non-formal learning provider is the **Cours Municipaux d'Adultes (Local Courses for Adults)**, organised and managed by the **local government in Paris**. This institution provides different types of courses, concerning various subjects: **language** courses for French speakers and foreign people; foreign languages; **IT literacy** skills; and also **vocational training** courses for technicians and **craftsmen**. Courses are not completely free as students are supposed to pay a small tuition fee in order to attend. According to the availability of the local structure, courses are organised during the day or in the evening [6]. Other municipalities try to organise this kind of non formal education for adults, and sometimes they directly organise the course, where as in other cases the organisation is delegated to by other associations.

Second Chance Schools (Ecoles de 2eme Chance - **E2C**) are specifically for those **without any education**, mostly aged between 18 and 25 (but often courses are provided for the over 25). The typical duration of each course can vary from 9 months to one year, with the purpose to develop **basic literacy and numeracy skills, IT skills and foreign languages**.

E2Cs work in direct contact with enterprises and **internships** are often offered to increase the opportunities to be in contact with future employers. At the end of each course a **certificate of attendance** (certificat de compétences), signed by both the director of the school and an employer, is given to students in order to demonstrate their progress [7].

A particular role is played by the **INFFO Centre**, an association managed by the **Ministry of Economic Affairs**, whose aim is to promote and spread information about education and **opportunities for jobseekers**, for instance concerning vocational training or apprenticeship. Its main aim is to promote education, to provide general information and to educate.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

France has long been developing a complex **network of non-profit organisations**, most of which are directly or indirectly involved in adult education, lifelong learning, or non formal and informal education. As stated above, it is not possible to make a fully exhaustive list of those, but instead here are some examples to give an overview of who they are and how they work.

The Fédération Nationale des Associations d'Accueil et de Réinsertion Sociale is actively engaged in the promotion of **social inclusion of disadvantaged people**. It is an **umbrella organisation** gathering many French associations which organise workshops, vocational training, etc. Their main aim is to promote social work as an instrument to **fight social exclusion**.



Also, the **Agence pour la Creation d'Entreprises** is somewhat involved in education as its main purpose is the promotion of young **entrepreneurship** through diverse strategies.

Furthermore, **Association pour l'Insertion Sociale et Professionnelle des Personnes Handicapées** promotes the inclusion of **disabled people** at both a social and a professional level. This association carries out different activities, but the most related to adult education concerns services for education and vocational training courses.

Another organisation involved in adult education in France is the Association Nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes (**AFPA - National Association for Vocational Training of Adults**). AFPA plays a number of different roles, however as far as the education of adults is strictly concerned, it provides the assistance required to undertake vocational training. Moreover, it provides other kinds of support, for example, helping organisations and enterprises during recruiting processes; supporting people when facing transition and **requalification**; and finally it provides specific education for engineers. However, AFPA's also has a particular status, because it has a mandate from the French State to **develop the government's policies** (this is what is called in France "association gestionnaire") [8].

Since many organisations are involved in adult education, the Ministry of National Education created a website (www.associations.gouv.fr) to increase connections between them and find information about the way how associations work. Yet, it is also true that the main reference for many associations is the Ministry of Youth or the Ministry of Social Affairs and not the Ministry of Education.

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

The most important vocational institutions are **managed by the government**. They are known as **GRETA**. Each GRETA is a **group of public institutions** (colleges, technical schools, etc.) which organise the development of adult education. The majority of resources and personnel comes from the groups themselves, so that it can be better adapted to local needs.

GRETA's

One of the biggest activities carried out by **GRETA's** is the preparation to **CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude professionnelle)** and **BTS (Brevet de Technicien Supérieur) diplomas**. However, they also provide other kinds of courses, like basic literacy and numeracy skills, foreign languages, technology and communication skills. In general, GRETA's aim is to work with every kind of education to develop useful **skills in private and public life**. The most requested courses concern professions like secretarial, administrative, etc. Since



these courses are extremely popular, they are usually provided by every single GRETA. On the other hand, more specific courses (generally those related to more qualified positions) are provided only by some groups. Every GRETA **adapts its supply to the area** where it operates.

The duration of each course depends on the purpose and characteristics of the learner. Some courses take place in the workplace, during the day or the evening, hosted by GRETA's structures or by enterprises' own structure. Sometimes courses are provided alternately with periods of work [9].

As far as the administrative organisation of GRETA's is concerned, each group has a "conseil inter établissements" (CIE), which is a sort of **management board**, whose aim is to define education projects, to give suggestions and support to businesses, and to coordinate the action of teachers and professors. At a higher level the Ministry of National Education manages the GRETA funds, which are assigned to each group.

In a GRETA the aim is that everyone (employed or unemployed) can benefit from education. Teachers, who work in the public sector, know and use adult education techniques with a special focus on **labour market**. The pedagogic support involves the creation of specific measures suitable for every single student [10].

The Lycées des Métiers

The Lycées des Métiers are specific **centres of preparation** for CAP. They were created in 2001 and their target groups are not only adults, but all people wishing to work towards a certificat d'aptitude professionnelle. so they are open to the general public, both young and adult, students, interns, employees, etc. Schools who want to be classified as Lycée des Métiers need to satisfy some parameters; a wide supply of technological and professional courses, specific orientation to CAP preparation; validation des acquis de l'expérience service; partnership with local enterprises; a European dimension; and accommodation service [11].

CNAM (Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers)

The CNAM (Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers) is a public institution with a scientific, cultural and professional aim. It is basically dedicated to **lifelong learning** and it is coordinated and **managed at a governmental level**. Its mission consists of three points: **vocational training** for adults, technological research and innovation, an promotion of science and technology. Education at CNAM is divided into four main areas: economics and management, work and society, sciences and industrial techniques, and IT and communication. Different



ways to obtain an education at CNAM exist, including daily courses, evening courses, traineeships and e-learning [12].

Vocational training and agricultural promotion centres (Centres de formation professionnelle et de promotion agricole) are other institutions concerning adult education. They are managed by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Universities

French universities are gradually **increasing their role in adult education**. They provide different types of courses for adults and every single institute is free to provide courses specifically aimed towards adults or to continue a focus on young people. Most of these courses are financed for students and applicants by professional training funds within companies and the public structures framework.

e-learning

The biggest public institution dedicated to e-learning is the **National Centre for E-learning** (Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance - CNED), which is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education. CNED offers different kinds of courses, including **primary education, University preparation and vocational training** courses. It also establishes partnerships with high schools, who provide the certificate at the end of the course.

The main product offered by CNED concerns accounting and management, but there is also a growing interest in organising courses in the secretarial field, foreign languages, and information and communication [13].



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