# Key concepts and debates in the French VET system and labour market

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The purpose of this overview is to elaborate upon the seven analytical dimensions suggested and, if possible, to propose a tentative articulation between them to guide our thinking at this stage in the research project. But before exploring the various levels and categories of the common grid, it is necessary to emphasize the difference between English and French languages regarding a key word, qualification.

French usage of the word *qualification* typifies the 'labour market' facet of the relationship between training and employment. Indeed, in certain respects, it overlaps with the English term 'skill' but it also carries a connotation of something that has been 'negotiated'. In the employment field, its use derives most probably from legal usage, where an act (eg a criminal act) is *qualifié en droit* or admitted as being legally valid. Durkheim (1911) uses the term in this way when referring to judges' powers in *The division of labour in society*. The [etymological reference-work – TN] *Trésor de la langue française* indicates that it first appeared in employment usage around the time of the Popular Front in connection with collective agreements concluded at that time [the Popular Front was the alliance of left-wing parties that governed France between 1936 and 1938 – TN]; in a 1947 entry, Villemer specifies that "*professional qualifications* are the capacities recognised in a worker by virtue of his empirical or methodological training"). The concept was then widely used in industrial sociology (Naville; Friedman) where it referred to a 'social relationship' rather than to an objective and inherently measurable quality.

The concept then re-emerged in the 1970s in a work entitled *La qualification du travail, de quoi parle-t-on?* [*What are employment skills?* – TN] (CGP, 1978), when the discussion centred on a dual usage of the term. The first referred to the *qualification* of a particular job in the sense of its position in a hierarchy of jobs or of the skills level it required) and, hence, its position in a 'grille de classifications' negotiated at company or sector level. The second referred to the *qualification* of the individual worker [his or her '*qualifications*' in the broadest sense – TN], that is, a personal attribute resulting from the complex interplay of that individual's level of training, vocational experience and post. These individual '*qualifications*' also provided the worker's individual status within the job and pay hierarchy and were sometimes transferable: someone who was 'unqualified' in the English usage ( without a *formation* in the French sense) could still be a skilled worker and could move from job to job on the strength of the skills he had rather than on the strength of formal 'qualifications'. By contrast, a white-collar worker with a given level of training but carrying out a relatively low-level job could be considered as 'deskilled' (*déqualifié*). The relative nature of skills as an expression of a social or employment relationship has also figured prominently in the way jobs have evolved: through disputes and in bargaining, jobs formerly categorised as unskilled *(non qualifies*) became skilled jobs (*emplois qualifiés*) as, too, did

those who did those jobs. The reduction in the number of unskilled jobs as a proportion of all jobs can be attributed at least in part to this process.
Most of the researchers and of the social actors will agree on the fact that the qualification (of a work place and/or of an individual) is not a substantive definition (which could be precisely measured through indicators) but a relative one, which is partly the expression of the conflict or tension between labour and capital.

## 1. Educational dimension

Initial vocational training, that is, the training of young people studying for an award either within an educational framework or as part of an apprenticeship, cross-cuts with a number of concepts.

The first of these is education, which, in French history, has been strongly characterised by the Enlightenment and has aimed to prepare individuals to be human beings, citizens and producers. Of course, the emphasis placed on each of these three dimensions varies with the nature of the education (general or vocational), but all three are represented. A study of the history of 'vocational education of young people' demonstrates a gradual process of integration within the educational system (and within the French Ministry of Education), as this activity was gradually transferred from other Ministries (the Ministries of Industry, Labour and Commerce) and from employers, who gradually gave up their *écoles d'entreprise* or in-company training facilities . In organisational terms, this took the form of the Ministry of Education taking responsibility for both 'general' [primary, secondary and tertiary] education and for vocational education with the exception of sectors such as agriculture and health. Within the Ministry, the same department (the schools department) traditionally oversaw both general secondary education and vocational secondary education. Where a [junior] minister within the Ministry was responsible for vocational education, his or her authority was limited to initial training within the general education system. This meant that initial *vocational* training (the term used in vocational education) was integrated into the educational system of which, indeed, it was a branch. The case of 'continuing' vocational training was quite different, as that related only to young people or, indeed, adults who had left formal education and fell within the remit of the Ministry of Labour, albeit with some demarcation disputes. At times when there was a Secretary of State or minister for vocational training (*formation professionelle*), s/he was seconded to the Ministry of Labour and took responsibility only for those aspects of training that lay outwith the initial education system.

Crossing these words with the various fields of scientific disciplines, one can found the same differences. Implicitly, a sociologist or an economist of education will work on the "general education", from primary schools to university. Researches in the field of "formation professionnelle" will be separated. Moreover, "formation" will be mainly used for "continuing training", or adult education and training. An "encyclopédie de la formation" to be published next year will cover only the field of adult education and training and not the initial "formation professionnelle" of the young.

But the common use of "formation" and "formation professionnelle" is expanding. It expresses the growth of the employment and labour market perspective within the "système éducatif", as well as the growth of the vocational tracks [Méhaut, 2006] : as an example, the master degree is divided in two kinds of masters : the master "professionnel" (which is not only for professionals in the English meaning, but to designate all the masters preparing to

an entry on the labour market) the master "research" preparing to Phd studies.

Most of the initial vocational education and training at the upper secondary level (and partly at the tertiary level, 2 years after the baccalauréat) is delivered trough full times studies in what is called "lycée professionnel". Studies will combines classroom courses and more practical period in workshops. They will also include periods within firms ("stage en entreprise"). The apprenticeship track is existing (and expanding) but remains low developped. You will prepare and pass also a public diploma (sometimes in the same field as full time study, the two tracks co-existing and competing). The main differences are on the one hand that the apprentice is under a labour contract and on the other hand that he will alternate working period within a firm and courses within a "centre de formation d'apprentis". More recently, apprenticeship is also expanding within universities : a university student, for example preparing a bachelor or a master could be under an apprenticeship contract.

Vocational education retains the triple focus (human being, citizen and producer) but with a relatively 'holistic' concept of awards (diplôme) and of certification. Courses always (albeit sometimes under pressure) include some 'general' education, including such topics as language, history or civic education, with the aim of maintaining a balance between these three aims while at the same time allowing for shifts in emphasis at some future point. This holistic concept is also, as we have seen, an attempt to prepare students for life in the broadest sense; rather than preparing them for the immediate demands of the labour market at a given point, the aim is to anticipate how employment will evolve and to give individuals a knowledge-base that will enable them to benefit from mobility (Bouix, 1997, Kirsch, 2005). This takes the form, for example, of designing frames of reference based on cutting-edge, innovative practice rather than on the demands typically made by companies; this, too, can lead to tensions with companies. Thus there is a difference within any given vocational field between what the French call a *diplôme* (a more academic qualification awarded by schools, typically to young people) and what they call a *titre*, awarded by AFPA [France's main adult vocational training organisation – TN]), or a *CQP* [certificate of vocational skills - TN], both of which are more geared to the immediate requirements of the labour market.

## 2. Qualification and Certification

In part, it is this 'holistic' outlook, aiming to train people for life, that gives rise to additional considerations:

- The jobs or occupations to which these awards refer are broad targets, covering a number of related jobs or occupations, both to give holders employment prospects and to ensure that courses attract sufficient numbers. They are often also defined in terms of development, to give holders the opportunity to move both horizontally (to other jobs or sectors) and vertically (to move upwards within a job). Here, too, there is sometimes tension between groups of employers, who want a narrow definition (of qualifications to which they can immediately attach a labour market 'value', and those taking a broader view of education.
- In contrast with the British system, 'competences' are designed to be inter-related, and any award forms a whole; while it is possible to gain the award in discrete units, within France's national qualification register, it is impossible to disaggregate these units.

- There exists an ambiguity in what the *diplôme* signifies on the labour market (Tanguy, 1986). If an individual holds a *diplôme*, does this mean that s/he has an immediate productive capacity or merely future potential? Or, to put it more empirically, does the *diplôme* guarantee aptitude for a job (the 'finished product' of the training system) or is that aptitude still virtual, needing to be achieved by the company? Company views, and practice, vary widely on this point, ranging from repeated complaints about poorly-adapted workers (particularly common in small organisations) to acceptance or even endorsement of broader training and an acknowledgement that even those with awards will require induction (usually large organisations with their own internal labour markets). These tensions undoubtedly account for some of the difficulties young people have in accessing employment in France.

What are the differences between what are known in French as *diplômes*, *titres* and *certificats*? As indicated above, a *diplôme* is a national award, academic or vocational, made by the Ministry of Education, although students may also study for a *diplôme* in a private establishment. A *titre* may be awarded either by the Ministry or by a semi-public authority and does not have the dual [that is, academic and vocational] value of a *diplôme*: a *titre* awarded by the Ministry of Labour's main training organisation may be of the same educational level as a vocational *diplôme* awarded by the Ministry of Education but does not entitle the holder to go on to university. A *certificat*, finally, is a term commonly used to designate other kinds of qualifications (that is, not *diplômes* or *titres*) that are usually awarded by private bodies, mainly those in further or in-service training. In the past, a special committee existed to decide on the value of such a qualification and, in particular, its 'vertical' value, that is, its status within a given sector. It was a challenge for the training suppliers to obtain such a decision, which was used as a kind of quality certification (even if it was not) and was often presented in such an ambiguous way that students might have been fooled into thinking they were studying for a *diplôme*. The new *répertoire national des certifications*, or 'national qualification register', introduces a new procedure.

Since the mid-1980s, employers' organisations (and unions) have been promoting a new kind of certificate, the *CQP* (*Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle* or 'vocational skills certificate'). *CQPs* may be gained by adults wishing to improve their skills or to move from one occupation to another but also by young people just starting out on their careers. In some sectors, this policy is clearly a backlash against the *diplôme* and the French education system with the aim of establishing their own qualification system. In other sectors, however, the aim of the policy is much more to complement the formal system and to 'fine-tune' skills to specific jobs. And although the word *qualification* is used, this is because, in most cases, a *CQP* will give an employee a particular grading within a collective agreement, because the 'values' are negotiated between employers and unions (Charraud, Personnaz, Veneau, 1996).

In France, as in many countries, the idea of a national qualification register has gradually emerged, with the dual aims of bringing coherence to the wide range of awards now in existence (and avoiding duplication where possible) and of guaranteeing a measure of transparency for both individuals and companies. Attempts to achieve this were very fragmented in the past but have now been entrusted to a body, the 'national certification commission' (*Commission nationale de la certification*) which is devising the national qualification register. The gradual emergence in French of the term 'certification' represents a shift in what Vinokur (1995) has called the 'economy' of the *diplôme*. In the 1970s and

1980s, a *diplôme* was, essentially, designed by pedagogues and established a close link between training courses and routes, but since then, things have changed and certification has gradually become dissociated from knowledge acquisition, a principle that was recently formalised with the introduction of APEL, or accreditation of prior experiential (vocational) learning. Any *titre*, *diplôme* or *certificat* now has to offer its own plan for learning (for example, through formal training or experiential learning) before it can be included in the national register. To some extent, certification has introduced a down-stream (that is, results-based) orientation of training schemes rather than an up-stream (that is, syllabus-based) one. However, this does not mean that all training is now wholly commercial; it is provided at different levels by different bodies, such as employers and unions, various authorities and expert providers; in terms of *diplômes*, *titres* and *CQPs*, this provides regulation of the range of what is on offer and of the training and awarding bodies. In contrast with Britain, by the way, training and awarding bodies are not separate, although boards are made up of professionals (employers and employees) as well as trainers.

## 3. (and 4) Knowledge, skills and competences

*a) Definitions*

French terminology tends often to distinguish between three basic categories, as follows:

- Knowledge (*savoir*) that is normally based on a body of scientific and/or technological knowledge, usually coded and shaped by a particular (scientific and/or technical) discipline that can be acquired by teaching or by self-directed learning. Such a definition is, however, partly rejected by those in the occupational learning field, who stress the importance of knowledge-in-action (or of concepts-in-action), that is, on the individual's ability to represent a situation or a problem in his or her occupational field in conceptual terms. This representation, they argue, is knowledge-based but enables the individual to determine his or her action.
- Expertise or skills (*savoir-faire*) based on the implementation in a concrete situation of both knowledge and experience (such as the blue-collar worker's manual dexterity, the skilled worker's ability to deal with breakdowns or malfunctions,). These 'empirical' skills may be acquired both through learning and through practice.
- *Savoir-etre* that relates more to inter-personal relationships than to technical matters and that may also relate to communication (for example with peers or clients), to problem-solving skills within a team, or to autonomy within the context of a hierarchy.

It is this range of skills that defines a level of professionalism and that will be unpacked below with relation to the *diplôme* in a competences register. These competences are, in such a case, a practical expression of an individual's ability to apply the three categories listed above in a practical, work-related situation.

A distinction – as well as a parallel – also has to be made between this notion of competences, which is inherent in the certification system, and the notion that has been developing over a number of years in the human resource management (HRM) field. The French discussion on competences differs considerably from the British debate, where 'competence' is generally synonymous with performance. Nor do such categorisations feature in the European Qualifications Framework. But while the word 'competence' is not

new, and derives at least partly from the education system and from pedagogical research, over the last few years companies have been vigorously debating competence-based management. This was presented as a shift from and/or a break with the previous model based on collective agreements and 'qualifications' in the French sense. Competence-based management is a new trend in HRM that puts emphasis on the concrete competences in use at the workplace and on personal development (and obsolescence) of competences and allows more individualised management both at the workplace and for individual's career paths. In this view, competences are firm-specific and attached to individual posts and to work organisation. However, use of the categories outlined above means that they are usually explained in terms of technical competences (*savoir*), operational competences (*savoir-faire*) and behavioural competences (*savoir-être*). At its simplest, the debate is around this third category and the extent to which behavioural competences can be defined and measured objectively without shifting into subjective assessments of personality (a cashier's smile, for example) (Méhaut, 2004).

Regardless of the outcome of this debate, three main changes in French society must be emphasised in any attempt to link competence-based management to the accreditation of prior experiential learning or to reform of the further training system:

- A shift away from the classic conception of the learning process. In the past, learning was equated with school-based learning, with the workplace regarded as destroying knowledge rather than developing it, with the 'course' as the standard unit, and calibrating the qualification level was linked to the number of hours a particular course represented (this applied also to further training (Gehin, Méhaut, 1993)). Competence-based management, the accreditation of prior experiential learning and the new factor, *alternance* [combining academic learning with practical experience – TN] within the school system are good indicators of a shift in this view. Workplace and work experience are now regarded as producing competences, and while this does not change the fundamental situation, in which individuals and employers will seek the highest level of *diplôme* within the initial education system, it does suggest scope for changes in the future.
- A shift away from collective rules (such as length of service or rules based on organisational structure, such as job allocation or availability) towards more personal rules, such as personal rights and duties linked with individual experience or an individual's career trajectory. This shift does not necessarily mean that collective rules become less important but that the relationship between collective rules and more procedural, individual positions is being reshaped.
- A shift away from a conception of the labour market as 'stable' to a view of lifelong mobility (highly controversial).

*b) Building qualifications: concepts, evolving methodologies and evolving rules*

Most of the nationally-recognised qualifications are prepared by a special committee on which unions, employers and training providers and award bodies are represented. All such qualifications will automatically be included in the national qualification register or *répertoire national*. Since the early 1990s, methodology has undergone a change (Bouix, 1997, Robichon, 2002, Möbus, Verdier, 1997).

The first stage is usually debate and an attempt to define the occupation(s) concerned, job content and labour market outlook. This stage is often based on preliminary studies done by

experts (including Cereq [the French centre for research into skills and qualifications – TN]). Part of the debate will often be between a narrow definition of an occupation or a broader one based on common trends and shared competences between occupations.

Then two reference frameworks are devised, one based on work content and job analysis (the activity framework, or *référentiel d'activité*) and the other using this framework to produce a grid of competences that is then used to evaluate individual students (the competence or certification framework, or *référentiel de competence/référentiel de « certification »*). In most cases, three groups of competences are defined:

- knowledge (the ability to understand technology);
- skills or expertise (the ability to perform a task in a specific environment);
- *savoir etre (behaviour, attitudes…)* such as the ability to communicate, analyse and report and so on.

In principle, these steps are independent of the course content or curriculum, which is defined at a later stage; in fact, as teachers and specialists are also involved, it is often to some extent a compromise. The new procedure for accrediting prior experiential learning has strengthened these two stages: all qualifications listed in the national register must be open to validation through prior experiential learning and so a competence grid is required for them all, enabling learning to be evaluated independently of how the competences were acquired.

The next step will be to build the *référentiel de formation* ( curriculum), which is done by teachers and inspectors without the involvement of unions and employers; this lays down guidelines for the number of hours, disciplines and content of courses.

With some differences in practice, the register is used by the Ministry of Labour (to govern the *titres* accredited by the AFPA) and the Ministry of Education, which awards basic vocational qualifications such as the CAP [a vocational qualification awarded at age 16 – TN] or the BTS [a more advanced vocational qualification – TN]. Some similarities emerge from a comparison with the way students work towards a CQP. However, most vocational qualifications within tertiary education (vocational degrees or master's qualifications) are still mostly academic in content and design, not necessarily occupation-specific and usually more organised around the academic disciplines.

This process often raises two key questions. The first is about the transversal structure of an award, that is, its applicability across industries: should it, for example, be designed for one occupation in one industry or could it relate to many similar occupations in a number of industries? A good example of transversality is the award called the *baccalauréat productique*, a school-leaving qualification that prepares the student to be a machine tool operator anywhere in the mechanical engineering industry or other industries using machine tools. Indeed, the structure of such awards reflects the fact that employment is divided both horizontally ('families' of occupations) and vertically (in a job hierarchy). The structure may also be seen as both national and sector-based: awards are national rather than regional and the regionalisation of vocational training does not give local government any authority in this respect, while vertical hierarchies are often similar in a number of sectors but sector-based in that 'families' of awards and the organisation of CPCs [consultative vocational committees – TN] correspond fairly closely to the organisation of sectors covered by the same CPC.

The second question concerns the lifetime perspective of a qualification and whether it prepares an individual in the short term for a particular job or also prepares the individual future developments, including possible career development and/or sideways moves into a new occupation (Fourcade, Ourliac, Ourteau, 1992). The broader perspective is advocated by the Ministry of Education (and by teachers) for young people, a position which is also explained by the dual value of the *diplôme*. The narrower perspective, by contrast, tends to be the one endorsed by employers' organisations, and it will form the basis for AFPA *titres* and for most *CQPs*.

## 5. (and 6.) Quality/use and exchange of labour : the value of a diploma

The interplay between training level and qualifications 'qualifications' (in the British sense of the word) illustrated below clearly demonstrates the ambiguity of the French view of the relationship between training and employment. This stems in turn from the meritocratic operation of the French education system, the dual value of a *diplôme* and the characteristics of labour markets.

*a) The myth of French republican meritocracy*

France's education system is based, in fact, on a dual myth that has fed into the development of a hierarchy of both qualifications and fields of study (Duru-Bellat, 2005, Verdier, 2001). The first of these is based on the argument that the education system is able to function as a sort of distillation tube to filter students according to their academic ability and thereby to counteract inequality of access to knowledge. This republican ideal does not, however, withstand scrutiny of the distribution of students from differing social classes between 'general' and vocational streams. It is also the case that 'elite' schools are increasingly closed to those students who do not already form part of the social elite and that the massification of education, including higher education, has more to do with demography than with democracy: the social class of parents remains an accurate predictor of the hierarchical value of the qualifications their children will attain. The second myth is that the allocation of school places is the result of the hierarchy both within employment and in society.

*b) The dual value of the diplôme*

The French system differs from other systems, which distinguish between a 'qualification register' geared to the labour market and an educational 'qualification register'. France has just one register which is deemed to endorse an individual's value in both educational and labour market terms. This dual value perpetuates tensions concerning syllabuses, awarding arrangements and bodies involved (Méhaut, 1997). In 'general' education, the main value of an award is its value within the education system: courses and awards are primarily designed to ensure that the distillation tube works and that students can be selected and given progressive access to education up to higher education level. One of the consequences of this is, however, that some of the awards given have relatively little value on the labour market because they are basically seen as a means for students to pursue their general education (for example, the general strand of the school-leaving examination, the *baccalauréat*, or the DEUG [broadly equivalent to the British DipHE - TN]). In vocational education, by contrast, the labour market value of an award is its main value. However, to remain true to the ideals

of republican education and to parity of esteem for all awards, guarantees have to be in place for students to progress within the education system as a whole and in particular to be able to move between general education and vocational training where appropriate. A good example is the 'vocational *baccalauréat*' created in 1985: it was designated a *baccalauréat* to make it more attractive to students, who attach low value to vocational education, but also because it is the *baccalauréat* that opens to door to higher education, whether academic or vocational (Campinos Dubernet, 1995). This dual value of the qualification ('internal', that is within the educational system, and 'external', that is, on the labour market) creates marked tensions between the two functions. If the occupation at which a qualification is aimed is defined too narrowly, or the curriculum is too strongly vocational, the holder will not be able to progress within the education system. Conversely, a vocational qualification used to gain access to higher education can lose part of its vocational content and, hence, of its value on the labour market. An example is the BEP [a vocational college qualification – TN], originally created to broaden and slightly increase the level of the CAP; this is now the entry qualification for those wishing to gain a vocational *baccalauréat* [within the general education system – TN] but has lost part of its vocational value. This dual value is also a strong argument for the teachers to support 'general' elements (such as language studies or history), in the vocational education syllabus. It further explains why some students, despite being very good in vocational skills terms, will fail because they perform more poorly in terms of 'general' education.

*c) Ranges of qualifications and ranges of social and employment status*

The main way of organising qualifications is vertically, in both general education and vocational education, as well as in some parts of the further education and training system. The reason is that most of the formal VET system was devised later than the general education system. There is also a problem with 'parity of esteem'. Qualifications are also, however, organised according to occupation (a horizontal division of labour). In the past, occupations were narrowly defined, but the trend is increasingly to widen definitions and to reduce the number of qualifications. This trend is strong at secondary level, less so at tertiary level, where the number of vocational qualifications is growing steadily.

A number of points may be made about the relationship between the way qualifications are structured and organised and the labour market. First of all, there is mutual reinforcement between qualifications and job (vertical) hierarchy, that is, *de facto* a strong relationship between the structure of qualification by level and employment and social structures (Bourdieu, Boltanski, 1975).

The grid below was produced in the late 1960s to support research into future manpower needs. It was mainly based on the need for the school system to produce enough qualifications at various levels to meet the needs of the production system.

| ***Level*** | ***Qualification*** | ***Theoretical skill level and job position (private)*** | ***Skills (public sector)*** | ***Occupational and socio-professional category [as categorised by French national statistical service]*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level VI (and Va) | Compulsory education and a post-compulsory qualification outwith a vocational context | Unskilled | D (C in the new grid) | Unskilled |
| Level V | CAP or BEP (2 or 3 years' vocational education) | Skilled blue- or white-collar | C | Skilled |
| Level IV | Baccalauréat plus 2 years vocational education | Foreman, technician | B | Skilled |
| Level III | As above plus 2 years' tertiary education | Ditto | B | Supervisory |
| Level I-II | At least three years' tertiary education | Qualified professionals and management (*cadres*) | A | Management and higher professions (*cadres*) |

This was clearly based on the pyramid model of both the school system and of the major manufacturing organisations. A few clarifications may be helpful here.

- The *cadre* category is specific to Franc because middle and higher management are not covered by same rules as other categories, for example with regard to social security or, more recently, the regulation of their working time [*cadres* were given rules from the legislation on a 35-hour week – TN]. An individual may be a *cadre* without having managerial responsibility.

- There is no strict relationship between qualification level and skill structure: a level VI or Va employee could be regarded as a skilled worker in collective agreement terms and increasingly, level IV employees are being classified as skilled workers rather than as 'technicians' (Eckert, 1999). In just a few collective agreements (for example those for the chemical industry and for banking), qualification level determines pay and skills levels (Jobert, Tallard, 1995)l. As more and more students enter the labour market with a level IV qualification or above, where they then find it difficult to gain employment due to a shortage of appropriate vacancies, there is a debate about 'dequalification'' that is to some extent comparable with the British debate about over-qualification but that relates more to economic and social status than to job content. The public sector grid also provides a good example. Category D has now disappeared and the first category is C, to which entry may be with a level VI qualification. Categories C and B are normally

subject to minimum qualification and/or occupational requirements, but as a result of the competition for jobs, jobs in these categories are increasingly taken by young people with higher qualifications.

- As the grid was designed for industry and blue-collar workers (in French, *ouvriers)*, it is increasingly difficult to apply it to white-collar workers (in French, *employés*). It is due to the increasing diversity of career paths along with the emergence of new forms .of services activities and of organisations.

- The new structure of the qualifications system (that is, growing numbers of students within tertiary education) is producing a number of problems. Those in the lowest levels (level VI and Va) find it increasingly difficult to gain employment and decreasing numbers of students obtain a *cadre* position. There is also decreasing social and inter-generational upward mobility in terms both of qualifications and of job status, despite the growing proportion of jobs designated as being of *cadre* status. It is also, however, the case that industrial hierarchies are increasingly blurred because of measures to achieve 'lean' structures and of the crisis and/or reshaping of the internal labour markets (Germe, 2001).

## 7. Governance dimensions

Regarding the gouvernance, we must separate various dimensions. And here, we shall speak only of the full time initial vocational training.

As said before (see point 3), and as in Germany, the building process of a vocational qualification (a public diploma) remains highly centralised (for the upper secondary level). It is state led (Ministry of education or others) with the involvement of employer's and employee's representative (usually employers organisations and unions at the sectoral level, sometimes individual employer or human resource director or training officer from one big firm). But, unlike Germany, the final decision is always in the hand of the state (social partners have a kind of consultative voice).

The funding of the system is mainly public. The state is paying directly the teachers (civil servants) and a part of the other costs. But the regional authorities (Conseil Régional, elected body) are more and more involved in the funding of the buildings and equipments. A part of the funds could also come from the apprenticeship levy, a compulsory levy (percent of the wage bill) for all the firms. Most of the funds from this levy are devoted to the apprenticeship track and to the "Centres de formation d'apprentis". But lycées and universities could also benefit from it.

Then, the opening or closing process of a section, the number of places for the students will depend of a complex interplay (not possible to develop here, see Bel, Méhaut, Mériaux 2003 and Méhaut, 2004) between the state (no possibility to open a section which do not prepare a public diploma, dependence from the public funds), the regional authority (which is legally in charge of the coordination of all the training supply in the region) with the advice (sometimes) of the regional employers organisations and unions.

## Conclusion

As Vinokur (1995) suggests, there is a decline in the relatively high expectations

individuals have traditionally had of a *diplôme* in terms of its collective recognition and the more or less long-term correlation between a qualification and a job within internal labour markets. The growing mismatch between certification of the result, the process of production and diversification of the way in which occupational knowledge is created could be said to be producing a new system for governing and producing/distributing qualifications. For example, there is evidence of a rigid divide between bodies that certify occupational knowledge and those that produce it, which might in the longer term produce a 'certification market' (in this case, a market in the award of qualifications to individuals) dominated by private awarding bodies. It might also produce greater collective oversight of certification by the professions involved. Another aspect is the growth in external monitoring of quality, often based on industry-type standards (for example, ISO standards) so that employers and other organisations can trust both the certification process and the knowledge-acquisition process.

To that extent, the nature of any national or European framework for certification cannot be neutral with regard either to education and training structures or to the labour market. This goes some way to explaining various criticisms, which often differ substantially from country to country. In France, a hierarchical approach has been taken to qualification level as a result of the historical arrangements for access to internal markets and the way French society is stratified. A common level-based grid would sit comfortably alongside such an approach provided that the grid was not perceived to distort relative status within the labour market. However, ambiguities concerning the content of that categorisation (such as awards or individual characteristics) and those involved could produce a clash between social forces and training providers on the one hand and 'independent' authorities and quality control bodies on the other, which would pose a significant challenge to what Vinokur calls the 'university' model of regulation. Hence a model is defended that remains pregnant with possibilities, including with regard to the make-up and operating conditions of the national certification body and to the conflicts within it.

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