

**REFINE –First Year / experimentation year at the national level  
Summary of the French-Belgian group**

*Partners involved*

- **The University of West Brittany (L'université de Bretagne Occidentale) in Brest** and more specifically the REVA office linked to the further training and permanent education department which is working on the establishment of consistency between procedures for the validation of experience. The REVA office is involved in two missions :
  - Welcoming, informing and monitoring adults who are resuming their university studies
  - Establishing systems to validate experience
- **The national association for the professional training of adults (AFPA - Association Nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes)**, the leading professional training organisation offering qualifications for unemployed and employed adults in France and Europe. This association deals with all questions concerning professional guidance, professional training, the validation of professional skills and human resources consulting.
- **The French Red Cross**, an association governed by the law of 1901 represented by the European and international authorities (international federation and liaison office of the national Red Cross societies in the EU) which is involved in preventing and alleviating all human suffering: it participates by means of continuous action in all protection efforts and health and social campaigns in an educational, preventive and curative context.
- **The Catholic University of Leuven** within the framework of its campaign conducted in partnership with the Movement of Christian Workers for the recognition of the experience of non-qualified individuals with a view to obtaining a complete or partial certificate.
- **The university centre for economic and social cooperation (CUCES - Centre Universitaire de Coopération Economique et sociale)**, an inter-university further training department involving the universities of Henri Poincaré and Nancy2., which is involved in the development of training for adults resuming their university studies and more specifically in welcoming and supporting these individuals (VAE<sup>1</sup> system)
- **Les Francas**, a non-political, non-religious movement which promotes popular education. Its aim is to promote informal education, offer advice, support and training for young people, children and individuals involved in young people's leisure activities.
- **The SUDES of the USTL** (university department of economic and social development of the science and technology university of Lille - Service Universitaire de Développement

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<sup>1</sup> Validation of experience

Economique et Social de l'université de Sciences et Technologies de Lille). This department is in charge of leading and coordinating the further training activities of Lille1 university and in particular the validation system for professional skills.

### *Associate partner*

- **Interéchanges**, a non profit-making organisation which is mainly involved in welcoming and seconding young volunteers within the framework of the "European Voluntary Service" campaign of the European Union's youth programme.

### *General context*

In spite of the diversity of the French and Belgian partners involved in the REFINE project, the involvement of each individual in this project corresponds to a shared twofold aspiration:

- To integrate the European tools identified within the framework of the joint TRANSFINE campaign as elements of cohesion between formal, non-formal and informal education in an overall approach to the evaluation, recognition and validation of experience.
- To organise exchanges in order to develop a national and European area for the national tools used by each participant.

**The universities involved and the AFPA** have already successfully integrated the French legal system for the validation of experience and are keen to improve the procedures which they have already developed and give them a European dimension through the REFINE project.

**The French Red Cross and the Fédération des Francas** would like on the one hand to promote voluntary experience and associative commitment alongside formal education and, on the other, to become familiar with the positive approaches of their partners towards the establishment of a procedure to support the VAE within their associative movements with significant backing from voluntary participation.

Through its involvement in the REFINE project, the French Red Cross is keen to apprehend and obtain tools which contribute to the development of its policy to welcome, integrate and guide volunteers for the requirements of its network.

### The tools tested in 2004

The EuroCV and the language portfolio are the two European tools which have been chosen by the majority of partners in order to make comparisons based on results. In addition, some have appealed to the ECTS (Catholic University of Leuven) and other specific solutions such as the VAE supporting guide issued by the University of West Brittany and the booklet on voluntary commitments published by les Francas.

Due to the relatively short period available for the presentation of the initial experiment results, the partners have not been able to establish a detailed analysis of the use of the REFINE tools. It was unanimously concluded that the usefulness of these tools in an area as complex as the recognition and validation of experience could not be justified in only a few months. Long-term considerations will have to be taken into account in order to reach useful conclusions. A few general remarks and amendment proposals have nevertheless been made which may be examined in more detail and refined at a later stage.

➤ **The EuroCV** has been tested on a wide range of people thanks to the diversity of the partners' approach: job seekers, future volunteers within the framework of the European Voluntary Service, volunteers in the associative sector and VAE candidates. In spite of the diverse expectations of each individual as regards the usefulness of this system, the experiment inspired a number of general remarks:

- The EuroCV is an original document which, thanks to the introduction of the "skills" section in its layout, offers the candidate the possibility to highlight skills other than professional and formal ones and to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, know-how and behaviour rather than a chronology of experiences.
- This document is rather inflexible and cannot be adapted to all types of people without support and to all situations (for example, it seems to be incompatible with the employment market in France at present)
- Within the framework of the validation of experience, the EuroCV could be used as a basic document for the establishment of an accompanying file to guide the candidate in his project presentation.

The initial experiment results raise questions as to the legitimacy of the EuroCV. Is it a sophisticated system allowing for the auto-evaluation of skills and knowledge or an effective decrypting tool for the recognition and validation of an individual's skills and competences for a VAE jury or an employer?

➤ **The language portfolio** has been tested in two specific contexts: on professionals within the framework of the validation of skills with a view to obtaining a higher education certificate and on trainees on professional courses.

Proficiency in foreign languages is an essential skill which is often evaluated during employment interviews for an increasingly wide range of socio-professional categories. In order to obtain a third level certificate such as a master's degree from a university, it is necessary to have knowledge of at least one foreign language.

The system used to evaluate a VAE candidate's linguistic knowledge and skills must be easy to handle for the user and clear for an employer who is not specialised in foreign languages but is interested in the candidate's exploitable know-how.

Given these assertions, what is the role of the language portfolio in the context of the VAE system?

To what extent can it be integrated in the VAE application file?

The language portfolio does not as yet appear to be supported unanimously by the people who have tested it. The informal format focusing on the valuation of language learning during initial training does not appear to be adapted to adults involved in professional activities. In view of the exhaustiveness and purely descriptive nature of the portfolio, it is not likely in its current form to become an effective evaluation tool for the skills and knowledge of a VAE candidate and it is even less adapted to the employment market.

- **The VAE supporting guides** issued by the AFPA and the University of West Brittany have been compared in order to identify similarities and differences so that they can be presented to other European partners and, if necessary, compared with their own methods at the intermediary meeting or during the course of 2005. Although the organisations, resources, certificates and educational methods vary (professional scenarios for the AFPA during evaluation / support for the establishment of the UBO file), the aim of the VAE support is the same for both structures, namely to offer information, support and guidance. In addition, they both consider experience to be a core element in the system. In France, the VAE consultant's profession develops on the basis of a search for identity, references and tools. The exchanges established between structures which stem from different sectors of activity are particularly interesting. We hope that the Kaunas meeting will enable us to discover and become more aware of different European practices.
  
- **The booklet on voluntary commitments** is a tool developed by les Francas with the aim of establishing a procedure to welcome and support its volunteers with a view to enhancing their associative experience within the movement in order to promote social, personal and professional recognition. The booklet on voluntary commitments, developed during the course of 2004, will not be tested until 2005. The French Red Cross will join forces with les Francas to test this tool focusing on the recognition of experience outside traditional academic and professional contexts so that it can be put forward, after consultation with our European partners in the tertiary and youth sectors, as a tool to supplement the Europass Kit.