Département Europe et International

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF FOREIGN DOCTORATE/PHDS

SUPPORT GUIDE

June 2023

CONTENTS

1. EVALUATION OF A DOCTORATE/PHD FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES

1.1. DEFINITION: EVALUATION VS ACCREDITATION

For a university doctorate/PhD, evaluation involves characterising and analysing the doctorate/PhD in line with a set of external standards in order to determine whether or not it has achieved its objectives since it was established or last evaluated. Evaluation is a process involving two closely linked stages:

1. Self-evaluation performed by the applicant institution. At its request, it may receive guidance from Hcéres.
2. External evaluation performed by Hcéres; this is based on the collegial work of a panel of experts appointed in accordance with the characteristics of the evaluated entity.

Accreditation is different from evaluation. It entails a recognised body officially recognising the validity of a doctorate, generally following an on-site visit. As with evaluation, accreditation is based on standards which define extremely precise requirements for anticipated objectives and actions performed, referred to as accreditation criteria. The accreditation commission examines whether the actions of the entity comply with the criteria. Depending on the extent to which the actual conditions observed at a given time differ from the criteria requirements, the accrediting body issues an opinion and decides whether or not to accredit the doctorate/PhD.

Accreditation is optional and is only carried out at the request of the evaluated entity.

> *The accreditation decision issued by Hcéres concerning a program, a doctorate or an institution corresponds to the attribution of a quality label to the evaluated entities. The Hcéres accreditation process is independent from the accreditation process carried out by the French State and therefore does not entail recognition in France of the institution's degrees.*

1.2. SUMMARY OF EVALUATION/ACCREDITATION

A methodology, standards for evaluation and accreditation criteria in line with the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and based on Hcéres procedures for evaluating doctorate/PhDs and institutions and best practices gathered from a number of European agencies have therefore been produced and used by Hcéres for evaluating and accrediting doctorate/PhDs at foreign universities.

The procedure consists of five phases.

Prior to the procedure, contact will be made with the national agency in the country concerned, where such an agency exists, in order to keep it informed of what Hcéres is doing.

1. **A preparatory on-site visit from an Hcéres project team. This provides an opportunity for the members of the exploratory mission to inform the doctorate/PhD if they are not yet ready for the accreditation process.**
2. **A self-evaluation phase prior to evaluation.**
3. **An external evaluation phase performed by a panel of experts with an on-site visit and publication of an evaluation report.**
4. **Proposal of an opinion on accreditation by the panel of experts.**
5. **The accreditation phase only occurs at the request of the institution once the evaluation phase has been completed and the final evaluation report for the institution or doctorate/PhD has been published.**

EVALUATION/ACCREDITATION PROCESS
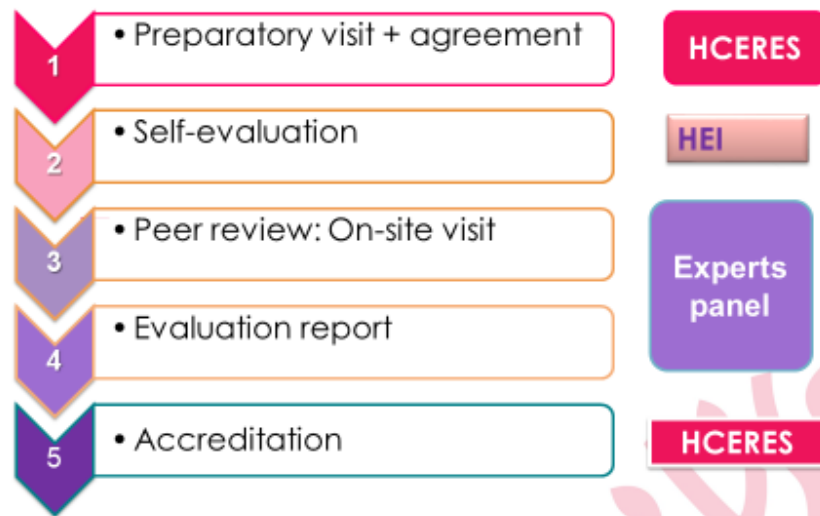
A Hcéres project team will be available to advise the evaluated entity throughout the procedure. It is responsible for ensuring that the process goes smoothly and that external evaluation ethical principles are complied with. It will also support the panel of experts in its work and answer any questions that could be raised.

1.3. EXPECTATIONS OF THE DOCTORATE/PHD

Education and research are the two main missions of higher education institutions. Their policy in these areas must enable each graduate to find a job at a level corresponding to his/her qualification – whether in a national or international environment. The doctorate should allow for integration into the job market in all fields of activity, in or outside research, in the public as well as the private sector.

Hcéres has defined four areas to be taken into account by the institution and the panel of experts, which are shared by both the evaluation standards and the accreditation criteria.

Doctoral policy

The Hcéres expects the team responsible for the doctorate, first of all, to be able to define, explain and justify the positioning of the doctorate in the scientific orientations and thematic priorities of its institution and its appropriateness to the institution's training and research strategy. The doctorate is part of the continuity of a 2nd cycle doctorate/PhD and is positioned in a local, national or international training offer. It cannot ignore its scientific and socio-economic environment, whose needs it takes into account to define and publicise its opportunities and its purpose. The doctorate also benefits from academic and socio-economic partnerships and, in particular, agreements with foreign higher education institutions offer mobility prospects to the doctoral students.

Training, hosting and supervision arrangements for doctoral students

Doctoral students benefit from common, high-quality and transparent recruitment conditions. The conditions of supervision allow for the proper conduct of research work within a predictable and reasonable timeframe. Doctoral students benefit from adequate material and financial conditions. Doctoral training is set up to develop and enhance the skills of doctoral students, and it encourages

their outgoing mobility. The rules and criteria for defending a doctorate guarantee its quality and are defined and made known to all stakeholders.

Attractiveness, performance and relevance of the doctorate

The doctoral doctorate/PhD must be able to monitor its attractiveness to its different audiences by analysing the evolution of applications and enrolments of different types of audience. It puts in place measures to encourage the success of its various audiences and to ensure that the defence is completed within the required timeframe. It analyses the quality of the professional integration of its doctors in relation to its objectives and the job market on the basis of surveys to monitor professional integration and cohorts. These data are made public.

Management and continuous improvement of the doctorate/PhD

The quality of the doctorate also depends on its management and monitoring of the objectives set. To this end, it has its own human, material and financial resources or those shared within a larger structure. These dedicated resources enable it to have reliable information on the typology and evolution of enrolments, the future of graduate students and the attractiveness of the doctorate. A quality policy is defined and shared, based in particular on a process of internal and external evaluation, as part of a continuous improvement process. A regular evaluation of doctoral training by students and the periodic meeting of a consultation body, including students and representatives of the socio-economic world, are notably organised.

2. DETAILED PROCEDURE FOR THE EVALUATION OF A DOCTORATE/PHD FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES

2.1. SELF-EVALUATION

The self-evaluation is part of the internal quality assurance system of the institutions. It provides the evaluated entity with an opportunity to carry out a critical and sincere consideration of its activities with the help of external criteria.

For each doctorate/PhD, the self-evaluation called for here must be directed by the bodies responsible for managing the doctorate/PhD based on a file completed by the teaching team. This will prove to be a useful exercise for measuring strengths and weaknesses and recommending improvements to the doctorate/PhD. Finally, it will also help with the management of the institution's overall range of training doctorate/PhDs.

Ultimately, this will enable the institution and the teaching team to benefit from the self-evaluation. It should be considered as a learning process for the benefit of the entire community.

The practical aspects of the self-evaluation depend on the institution itself and are completely flexible (period of self-evaluation, composition of working groups, methods of presenting results, etc.) The self-evaluation is a process that should include as many of the relevant people or bodies as possible (management, teachers, non-teaching staff, students, external partners, etc.) The file must be prepared jointly by the partners involved in the doctorate/PhD.

The main goals of the self-evaluation are as follows:
1 – Perform a self-critical review of the services provided by the doctorate/PhD, including a SWOT analysis;
2 – Provide a solid basis for external evaluation;
3 – Initiate a quality improvement process by creating innovation dynamics.

The self-evaluation file is the basis for the evaluation process. It must compile all the information required for the external evaluation carried out by independent experts. It will provide the evidence to prove the quality of the doctorate/PhD.

The self-evaluation report will be around 30 pages long (excluding appendices).

The file must contain 4 sections and include evidence and supporting documents in attachment (see Appendix No.1):

1. A document from the institution requesting the evaluation or accreditation specifying the institution's general training strategy and the reasons for requesting the evaluation. It may also specify particular areas which the institution wishes the experts to examine.

2. A detailed characterisation sheet of the doctorate/PhD providing specific details about it and its environment (see Appendix No. 2).

3. A self-evaluation report:

    a. written based on the standards provided by Hcéres,

    b. and including a description of the self-evaluation approach.

The self-evaluation report must be prepared based on the outline provided by the standards framework. However, these guidelines are a minimum requirement which the evaluated entity can expand on to include further specifics and inform the experts in its desk-based work to prepare the

visit. It is therefore recommended that the evaluated entity highlight any important additional points that are not included in the criteria covered by the standards.

4. A SWOT analysis: strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (see Appendix No. 3).

The file template provided in the Appendix corresponds to Hcéres quality standards and criteria and those of the main European agencies. However, besides the fundamental criteria shared by Hcéres and the main European evaluation agencies, the evaluated entities may request additional evaluation criteria strictly for the purpose of consistency with national legal requirements if the evaluation request for accreditation purposes is required by a foreign agency for a qualification awarded on its territory.

If several evaluation and/or accreditation agencies are involved, they must prepare shared evaluation standards.

2.2. EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Hcéres external quality assurance is based on the principle of peer review conducted in a collegial and transparent manner. Hcéres will create a panel of 4 to 5 experts, including one student. They are appointed based on the characteristics of the evaluated entity. The panel of experts will be selected in line with the ESGs. They shall therefore be chosen carefully, have the required aptitudes and skills, and have been appropriately trained or briefed.

The composition of the panel of experts must also comply with specific national expert profile requirements. The names of the experts shall be submitted to the institution for opinion in order to avoid any conflicts of interest.

If the evaluation request requires that two or more agencies work together, the experts must obviously be approved by all the agencies. However, one of the agencies shall be the "coordinating agency".

Before carrying out their on-site visit, the experts must first work off the self-evaluation file submitted. However, they may request additional documents when necessary. The institution shall respond to such requests as soon as possible using the most appropriate methods.

2.3. ON-SITE VISIT

The on-site visit must be carried out in line with Hcéres recommendations. The institution shall cover the costs of the panel of experts and the Hcéres team based on predefined arrangements. A qualified representative appointed by the institution shall be present to facilitate the whole visit.

The on-site visit by the panel of experts shall take place over two to three days. It should be limited to a single location, where the evaluation procedure can be carried out most easily. The evaluating agency and the evaluated entity will jointly select the location. Hcéres and the institution will decide on the details of the on-site visit together long enough in advance to allow both parties to properly organise themselves.

The on-site visit will include face-to-face interviews with the people responsible for the design of the doctorate/PhD, along with representative panels of students, teaching staff, and administrative and technical staff of the various sites where the doctorate/PhD is delivered, and of the main partners (professionals, scientists, etc.) collaborating with the doctorate/PhD or that employ PhD holders. However, videoconference interviews may be conducted when they cannot be present due to distance.

It is important that the various stakeholders of the evaluated entity be heard individually, without the presence of their supervising body. The Hcéres project team will examine the draft agenda for the on-site visit with this in mind and may ask the evaluated entity to make changes accordingly.

There will be no official post-evaluation meeting with the management of the doctorate/PhD after the visit. However, a final meeting between the experts and management of the doctorate/PhD will provide an opportunity to ask any remaining questions, request further details and thank the participants. The evaluated entity may also provide any final information. During the meeting the deadlines for the report writing phase will be reiterated.

2.4. EVALUATION REPORT

Following the on-site visit, the chair of the panel of experts will submit a summary evaluation report that will close with the strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for the evaluated entity.

This provisional report will be sent to the evaluated entity for comment, thereby beginning the response phase. The chair of the panel of experts, together with the experts and project team will examine the comments from the institution (only factual errors will be taken into account) in order to produce the final evaluation report.

This final report will be considered the official document of reference and be published on the Hcéres website at the end of the process.

2.5. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

If the institution decides to begin an accreditation procedure following the evaluation phase, the chair of the panel of experts will issue a non-prescriptive opinion on the accreditation that will be submitted to the ad hoc commission.

The accreditation decision will be made by the Hcéres President after advice from the international accreditation commission. This permanent commission is made up of at least 5 members: 3 members of the Hcéres board, including one student, and 2 qualified specialists. The Commission's permanent rapporteur is the director of the Europe and International Department.

The commission meets on average three to four times a year, and publishes its decisions on the Hcéres website.

The commission studies the two documents produced by the panel of experts:

1.   the final evaluation report,
2.   The opinion on accreditation proposed.

After deliberation, the Hcéres President makes his decision which will be communicated to the entity.

There are three types of accreditation decision:

1.   a five-year unreserved accreditation decision;

2.   an accreditation decision for three years, extendable under two conditions:

   –   the prescriptive recommendations identified in the evaluation report must be taken into account;
   –   submission of a follow-up dossier or mandatory follow-up visit at the end of the second year of operation to check that the prescriptive recommendations have been implemented. At the end of this procedure, the Accreditation Commission will give a reasoned decision on whether to extend accreditation for a period of two years.
3.   an accreditation refusal.

There is an appeals procedure for accreditation decisions made by Hcéres.
The final evaluation report and final accreditation decision are published by Hcéres.

APPENDIX 1: SELF-EVALUATION FILE FOR ACCREDITATION OF A DOCTORATE/PHD

The evaluated entity is requested to prepare its self-evaluation file in line with the recommendations below.

The file prepared by the institution should include the following 5 elements:

1. An **official document** from the institution (Rector or Dean) requesting the evaluation or accreditation specifying the reasons for requesting the evaluation. It may also specify particular points of interest which the institution wishes the experts to focus on.

2. A detailed **characterisation sheet** (ID sheet) of the doctorate/PhD (see Appendix No. 2).

3. A **self-evaluation report** (SER):

The SER itself should not exceed **30 pages**. It must be prepared following the External Evaluation Framework provided by Hcéres (4 fields broken down in standards). It will open on a **description of the self-evaluation approach of the doctorate/PhD**.

However, these guidelines are a minimum requirement which the evaluated entity can expand on to include further specifics: It is therefore recommended that the evaluated entity highlights important additional points that are not included in the criteria covered by the standards.

4. A **SWOT analysis** identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the doctorate/PhD (see Appendix No. 3)

5. The file must include a certain number of pieces of evidence, as listed below. They serve to demonstrate the compliance with the standards and support the self-evaluation: as such, they should be cited in the SER to make them easier to look up. When quantitative data are requested, they must be provided **over the last 4 years** to show the development of the doctorate/PhD.

EVIDENCE REQUESTED BY THE HCÉRES

OVERALL PRESENTATION

- A short narrative overview of the unit in charge of the doctorate/PhD (either College, School, research center): historical background, opening year, needs of the job market, main characteristics, campuses, evolution and trend.
- A context note about the Higher Education situation in the country (challenges, economic and social/cultural background, role of the HE Ministry, compulsory evaluation/accreditation, competition between public/private universities…) and the position of the university (benchmark) in such a context.
- Organisational chart, specifying the functional links between central governance, administration, research and training entities.

FIELD 1: THE DOCTORAL POLICY

1. Mapping of similar or competing doctorate/PhDs in the local or national context
2. List of the university research labs supporting the doctorate/PhD: implemented activities and achieved results
3. List of national or international research labs supporting the doctorate/PhD: implemented activities and achieved results
4. National business, cultural or industrial partners actively involved in partnerships with the doctorate/PhD: implemented activities and achieved results.

FIELD 2: TRAINING, HOSTING AND SUPERVISION ARRANGEMENTS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

1. Doctoral Student handbook, including the regulations for recruitment, supervision and thesis defence
2. Detailed doctorate/PhD structure (for each semester with number of hours and teaching modalities: lectures, tutorials, practical work …)
3. If available, the targeted skills framework of the doctorate/PhD
4. 2 syllabuses of courses included in the doctorate/PhD
5. Digital resources available for the students (pedagogical platform, internet access…), and library resources.
6. Internships: duration, position in the doctorate/PhD, mandatory or not? A table may be delivered specifying the titles of the internships and the student reports.
7. International academic partnerships allowing students mobility and/or the continuation of further studies abroad: implemented activities and achieved results.
8. Student mobility table over the last 4 years, specifying the countries.

FIELD 3: THE ATTRACTIVENESS, PERFORMANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE DOCTORATE/PHD

1. Attractiveness indicators:
   - Number of applications, number of students enrolled (for each year).
   - Statistics on students over the last 4 years, breakdown according to :
     o Female/male students
     o Students with grants or funding
     o In and out students (from the area or foreign students)
   - Initial/apprenticeship/long-life learning

2. Performance indicators:
   - Student success rate at the end of each year, over the last 4 years, for male/female students.

3. Relevance indicators
   - Number of graduated students, continuing studies at superior level
   - Number of graduated students integrated on the job market (table of occupied positions).
   - Number of graduated students still not employed

Please specify the modalities and the timing of the survey (eg. 12 or 18 months after the graduation) and the number of people who answered.

FIELD 4: MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE DOCTORATE/PHD

1. Organisational chart of the program
2. Management and advisory boards and councils of the doctorate/PhD: members, missions, frequency of meeting. Please provide the records of decisions over the last 2 years.
3. Digital resources for the management and the follow-up of the doctorate/PhD, as well as for the external/internal communication
4. Classrooms and technical equipment
5. Examination methods and processes
6. Supervision ratio (student/teacher ratio)
7. Quality assurance policy: staff, processes and documents.
8. Ethics policy

The expert panel will also consider any other document that the institution considers useful for the evaluation.

APPENDIX 2: CHARACTERISATION SHEET FOR THE DOCTORATE/PHD

The information requested in this form will be presented in a synthetic way (< 4-5 pages)

INSTITUTION REQUESTING EVALUATION

- Name of the Institution :
- Component, faculty or department concerned:
- Year of creation :
- Legal status :
- Organizational chart (to be attached)
- Place(s) where the institution is located:
    o City(ies):
    o Campuses:

DOCTORATE/PHD SUBJECT TO EVALUATION

- Precise name :
- Year of creation and context:
- Places where the doctorate/PhD is taught:

PERSON IN CHARGE OF THE DOCTORATE/PHD

- Surname, first name:
- Position held:
- Field:
- E-mail:

RESULTS OF PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS/ACCREDITATIONS

- On a national level:
- On an international level:

Key figure over the last 4 years

HUMAN RESOURCES: NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION BY STAFF STATUS AND CATEGORY

1. Professors and researchers:

    - Status and service charge: professors, associate professors/assistants/invited professors/ civil servants/contract staff/ part-time workers
    - Diploma(s)
    - Gender
    - Nationality

2. Administrative and technical staff: full/part-time, civil servant/contract staff.

DOCTORAL STUDENT NUMBERS AND TYPE OVER THE LAST 4 YEARS

- Number of students enrolled by year of study
- Number of graduates at the end of the course
- Boys/girls
- Foreigners and students from outside the region

Example of presentation (add blocks of lines for thesis over more than 3 years).

		2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
1st year	Male				
	Female				
	Nationals				
	Foreigners				
	Total				
2nd year	Male				
	Female				
	Nationals				
	Foreigners				
	Total				
	Male				
	Female				
	Nationals				
	Foreigners				
3rd year	Total				
Graduates	Male				
	Female				
	Nationals				
	Foreigners				
	Total				

Important note: only doctorate/PhDs with at least 2 complete cohorts of graduates, and of which at least one of them has been the subject of a follow-up (professional integration / further studies) can be evaluated by the Hcéres.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED AT EVALUATED ENTITY OR FACULTY LEVEL

- Process and management description
- Key Performance Indicators

Any other information deemed useful by the Institution.

APPENDIX 3 : SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

APPENDIX 4 : EXPERT PANEL EVALUATION REPORT TEMPLATE

1 - DOCTORATE/PHD IDENTITY SHEET

This descriptive paragraph should not contain any critical assessment information. It should summarise the essential information about the doctorate/PhD.

- Name of the Institution :
- Component, faculty or department concerned:
- Year of creation :
- Legal status :
- Organizational chart (to be attached)
- Place(s) where the institution is located:
    - City(ies):
    - Campuses:

- Precise name of Doctorate/PhD subject to evaluation:
- Level and duration of studies:
- Year of creation and context:
- Places where the doctorate/PhD is taught:
- Person in charge of the doctorate/PhD
    - Surname, first name:
    - Position held:
    - Field:

- Results of previous accreditations and quality system in place
- Material and human resources made available to the doctorate/PhD
- Student numbers and type over the last 4 years

2 – THE EVALUATION CONDUCT

A. Composition of the panel of experts

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

Hcéres was represented by ---, Science Advisor, and by ---, Head of project.

B. Description of the on-site visit

- Date of the visit:
- Summary of the proceedings:
- Organisation of the visit:
- Cooperation of doctorate/PhD and institution to be accredited:
- People met:
- Any problems:

3 - PRESENTATION OF THE DOCTORATE/PHD

A. Overall presentation
± 20 lines

This descriptive paragraph should not contain any critical assessment information. It should present a summary of:

- The Institution/College/Center delivering the doctorate/PhD
- The doctorate/PhD offered (explanation of the title, presentation of intended outcomes, etc.) and its specific features
- The context and structure of the doctorate/PhD (organisation into subspecialisms and/or pathways, target audience, etc.)
- Its position in the local, regional and national university landscape
- Its main objectives.

B. *Presentation of the doctorate/PhD's self-evaluation approach and internal quality assurance process*
± 10 lines

4 - EVALUATION REPORT

4.1. Detailed report

The evaluation report should include elements from the evaluation standards – areas, standards and criteria – based on the following outline:

- The doctoral policy
- Training, hosting and supervision arrangements for doctoral students
- Attractiveness, performance and relevance of the doctorate/PhD
- Doctorate/PhD management and continuous improvement

To achieve a more in-depth analysis, indicators provided by the institution may be cited and commented on.

4.2. Conclusion : Overall assessment (± 40 lines)

Based on the information which the experts provide, this paragraph should include a critical (not just factual) analysis of the quality of the doctorate/PhD along with key positive and negative characteristics.
Provide a general summary of the analysis of the doctorate/PhD's file, the on-site visit and the resulting assessment

4.3. Strengths

List in descending order of importance the main strengths of the academic discipline identified in the analysis.

4.4. Weaknesses

List in descending order of importance the main weaknesses of the academic discipline identified in the analysis. These strengths and weaknesses must be stated coherently and explicitly and be drawn from the overall assessment. The number is left up to the discretion of the chair.

4.5. Recommendations for the institution

This part of the report must be completed. It must be written in the conditional and suggest improvements for the doctorate/PhD. In most cases, recommendations should be provided for weaknesses.

APPENDIX 5: EXPERT PANEL ACCREDITATION PROPOSAL TEMPLATE

Hcéres has built its evaluation process based on a set of objectives that higher education doctorate/PhDs must pursue to ensure recognised quality within France and Europe. These objectives break down into four areas which are shared by both the evaluation standards and the accreditation criteria.

The panel of experts simply issues an opinion regarding accreditation of the doctorate/PhD. It is the accreditation commission that makes the official decision based on the final doctorate/PhD evaluation report. The accreditation decision is made collegially, and reasons are presented

The grid below is designed for internal use of the panel only and remains an intermediate work tool. Therefore it is not communicated to the institution.

Each criterion is assessed using a four-level compliance range:

D	**Unsatisfactory**	The doctorate/PhD does not satisfy the required accreditation criterion and presents serious weaknesses.
C	**Acceptable**	The doctorate/PhD satisfies the required accreditation criterion and presents an acceptable level of quality.
B	**Good**	The doctorate/PhD satisfies the required accreditation criterion and presents a high level of quality.
A	**Very good**	The doctorate/PhD fully satisfies the required accreditation criterion, has implemented exemplary practices and presents a very high level of quality.

Where the panel of experts considers it appropriate, it may modulate the level of compliance to provide greater precision (e.g. A+ to indicate a particularly exceptional level, or C+ to distinguish a satisfactory level from a just acceptable level).

ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur