

*Find out more about
HCERES on our website*

www.hceres.fr

Activity Report 2014 in brief

Since the promulgation of French Act no. 2013-660 dated 22 July 2013 on higher education and research, AERES has continued to provide the public service of evaluation, pending publication of the Decree pertaining to the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), which was issued on 16 November 2014.

The report therefore covers the activity of AERES, which carried out evaluations covering Group E (2013-2014) and initiated and then prepared the evaluations for Group A and subsequently Group B. It specifies the evaluation methods and changes to them, and reports both on compliance with evaluation ethics and on European and international activities.

Adaptation of evaluation processes for Groups E and A: Implementation of the Law and anticipation of regulatory provisions

In 2014, evaluations were carried out for Group E and the evaluation files for Group A (2014-2015) were initiated with the relevant institutions. The evaluation files incorporated the reforms set out in the Act dated 22 July 2013 with respect to the accreditation of institutions to deliver training programmes and territorial coordination policies.

In anticipation of the Decree pertaining to HCERES, which was due to be issued in the first quarter of 2014, various changes were made to the evaluation process for Group E. It was decided, firstly, to start having the evaluation reports signed by the Chair of the expert committee and, secondly, to remove the scoring system for the evaluation of research units and training programmes, to be replaced by a brief textual assessment for each criterion.

Key figures for the 2013-2014 evaluation campaign (Group E)

The evaluation campaign focused on institutions in Eastern Paris, Southern Paris, Cergy, the South of France, Lille and the North of France and the French Overseas Territories and Departments:

- 64 institutions, including 18 universities, 7 so-called “*grands établissements*” and 4 research bodies (CEA, CNES, IFPEN and INED);
- 586 research units;
- 285 bachelor’s degrees, 424 vocational degrees, 342 master’s degrees (a total of 1020 specialities);
- 19 masters-level degrees overseen by the French Ministry for Culture and Communication, 8 master’s degrees in institutions authorised to issue graduate engineering qualifications (CTI/AERES partnership);
- 45 doctoral schools.

Changes over time in the ethical framework for evaluation

AERES has, from its very inception, sought to ensure the quality and transparency of its evaluation activities and procedures.

Firstly, in 2009 the Board developed and approved a quality policy statement and quality assurance standards, taking into account the European Standards and Guidelines. This approach was referred to as a strength in the external evaluation of AERES: “(it) has developed quality standards enabling it both to regulate its internal operations and its external activities”.

In addition, AERES worked to ensure that its evaluation process is based on clear guidelines that are published on the website:

- Evaluation Charter (revised in December 2012);
- Status of the expert and scientific delegate (June 2009);
- Declaration of Interests (2012) completed by permanent staff, scientific delegates and experts, as provided by the Agency’s founding decree.

Finally, a complaints management system was put in place in 2009. This procedure was revised in July 2012 to take into account recommendations from EQAR and ENQA to include an appeals procedure. The external review of AERES had stated: “in view of the impact of its judgements, the AERES should look into the prospect of setting up a proper appeal procedure or bestowing decision-making powers on the Disputes Committee”.

It was therefore decided that the new complaints committee should have consultative powers and that the President, in the final appeal decision, should be obliged to comply with the committee opinion. The composition of this committee, the internal rules, and details of the complaints system are available on the website.

As at 31 December 2014, a total of 70 complaints had been filed since the establishment of AERES, of which 49 refer to evaluation quality, including 31 related to scoring. The number of complaints represents a very low proportion of the number of evaluations carried out (0.7%). This figure is just under 2% for evaluations of research units alone.

AERES has thus developed a quality assurance system and ethical guidelines, which are essential to the operation of an agency providing quality assurance services for higher education and research. HCERES will inherit this framework when it is established.

European and international activities of AERES

In 2014, AERES bolstered its activities by taking part in European and international discussions and by evaluating foreign institutions and programmes. An important place was also given to sharing experience and cooperating with foreign agencies responsible for the evaluation of higher education institutions and research in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas.

Participation in European and international discussions

Evaluation of the internationalisation of higher education and research

Along with 13 other agencies, AERES took part in the European CEQUINT project (Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation). The purpose of this project is to define a common methodology in order to issue a certificate for the internationalisation of programmes and institutions. The University of Reims was the pilot institution in which this methodology was used. After the evaluation by a committee of national and international experts coordinated by AERES, a certificate of internationalisation was issued. There is now a period of dissemination of programme results prior to the introduction of the CEQUINT accreditation across Europe for those institutions that wish to apply for it.

Role of quality assurance agencies in Europe and around the world

AERES continued to play an active role in European and international networks of quality assurance agencies, especially ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). Along with the CTI, OAQ (Swiss agency) and AEQES (Belgian agency), it founded a French-speaking network of quality assurance agencies that was presented at the Qualité G3 conference in Brussels in October 2014.

Revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

Following the ministerial conference in Bucharest in May 2012, “Mapping the implementation and application of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” with the 47 ministers of the European Higher Education Area, work started to revise the ESGs. AERES has made contributions and taken responsibility for translating the ESGs into French.

Evaluation of foreign institutions

After winning an international call for tenders issued by the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) to evaluate the National Science, Technology and Innovation Plan (NSTIP) in 2013, AERES was again selected in 2014 to issue recommendations for the 2015-2020 phase of the plan (Maarifah 2), as a follow-up to its evaluation. AERES was also selected in 2014 by ARAMCO (Aramco Overseas Company) to evaluate the state of post-secondary education and the outlook for employability in Saudi Arabia by 2040.

Following the 2013 evaluation of the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction at the request of the Armenian Ministry of Higher Education, AERES was asked to evaluate the State University of Engineering of Armenia.

Evaluation of cross-border training programmes

Under the *Erasmus Mundus* programme, several European agencies (AERES, ANECA, QAA and GAC) proposed a project, coordinated with ENQA, to define common criteria for evaluating cross-border training programmes. The QACHE project (Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education) was selected by the European Commission and will run for two years, led by ENQA. It will review cross-border evaluation activities and define and share evaluation methodologies. As part of this project, AERES wrote a Country Report on French training programmes delivered in other countries, and on joint degree and double degree programmes issued by French institutions in cooperation with foreign institutions. The results of this report were presented by AERES at the QACHE European Expert Forum in London on 5 and 6 November 2014, which compared the situations in different participating countries

AERES was also approached by the Chinese agency CEAIE with a view to performing joint evaluations of French courses in China in 2015. Since this involves engineering courses, AERES is intending to work closely with the CTI for this mission.

Preparing for the transition from AERES to HCERES and the incorporation of a new organisation, the Observatory of Science and Technologies

Preparing for the transition to HCERES

Given that AERES was to come to an end, the French interministerial archives department was commissioned to perform an audit on information and records management. Indeed, as well as verifying the AERES archives and deciding whether to transfer or dispose of them, the aim was to use this opportunity to lay the foundations for clear and efficient information management, and, more broadly, to develop a long-term records management policy.

As soon as the Act dated 22 July 2013 had been published, AERES started to prepare for the transition to HCERES. It was important to identify the consequences of the change on administrative issues, the information system and corporate identity, however without designing a new graphic identity, which will be the responsibility of the future President of HCERES. Thus, within a week of the Decree being published, a number of important tasks had been completed. All staff email addresses had been switched to the new format (firstname.surname@hceres.fr), and all applications for internal and external use had been rebranded HCERES. The new website was up and running, with the AERES site remaining in service as an archive. All foreign partners and service providers had also been informed. The financial cost of these operations is estimated to be €80,000.

Incorporation of the Observatory of Science and Technologies into HCERES

In its preparatory work before issuing the Decree, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research decided that the Observatory of Science and Technologies, a public interest grouping due to be wound up as of 31 December 2014, should be incorporated into HCERES. A working group was instituted from January 2014, under the aegis of the General Directorate for Research and Innovation, comprising representatives of the Ministry, the OST and AERES, in order to prepare for the forthcoming incorporation of OST activities and staff. The Decree pertaining to HCERES specified that OST should become a department of HCERES. This preparatory work focused on staff transfer (30 people affected) and the reorganisation of team locations in order to receive the OST team from mid-January 2015 in the former AERES premises.

Early-stage discussions were initiated as to the future coordination between the two activities, evaluation on the one hand, and bibliometrics with a view to strategic analysis, on the other.

Outlook for 2015

2014 was supposed to be a year of transition with the change from AERES to HCERES, but in the end, almost the entire year's activities were carried out as AERES. This long and uncomfortable transition period did not however stop the AERES teams from continuing their evaluation activities in close cooperation with the bodies evaluated, in a changing landscape which required AERES to adapt to some very different situations.

AERES had acquired increasing visibility and reputation on the European and international stage and on the Internet, and significant efforts were made to ensure the transition to HCERES could take place as quickly as possible, as soon as the Decree was published, preserving the benefits of visibility and reputation as best as possible and seeking to limit the difficulties for bodies evaluated as far as possible.

As in 2013, two questions remain open, which are important for future evaluation activities and the international perception of the quality of higher education in France:

- firstly, the question of financial compensation for higher education and research institutions for making academic and research staff available part-time to AERES, and now to HCERES;
- secondly, European recognition of HCERES as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and its listing on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Work carried out in advance to implement the evaluation-related provisions introduced in the 2013 Act on higher education and research should help HCERES ensure the continuity of this public service of evaluation, as soon as it is established.

HCERES in brief

HCERES is an independent administrative authority that was established by the French Act dated 22 July 2013 on higher education and research. Its organisational structure and operating methods are governed by the Decree dated 14 November 2014. Its missions are as follows:

- evaluating higher education institutions and groupings, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency, or, where applicable, overseeing the quality of evaluations carried out by other bodies;
- evaluating research units on request from the overseeing institution, in the absence of validation of evaluation procedures or in the absence of a decision by the overseeing institution to use another evaluation body, or, where applicable to have research unit evaluation procedures validated by other bodies;
- evaluating the programmes and degrees offered by higher education institutions or, where applicable, validating evaluation procedures developed by other bodies;
- ensuring that all missions defined by law and the specific status of higher education and research personnel is taken into account in their evaluations;
- ensuring that activities relating to the dissemination of scientific, technical and industrial culture are properly taken into account in the career progression of higher education and research personnel;
- conducting *a posteriori* evaluation of investment programmes and private bodies receiving public funding intended for research or higher education.

The High Council may take part in evaluating foreign or international research and higher education organisations. The evaluation reports are available on the HCERES website (www.hceres.fr).

HCERES key figures:

- 190 administrative and scientific staff;
- a pool of around 10,000 French and foreign experts, with regular recruitment and training, of which 3,500 are called upon each year;
- €15.3 million budget.