

# HCERES

High Council for the Evaluation of Research  
and Higher Education

Self-evaluation report - 2016  
French High Council for Evaluation of  
Research and Higher Education (HCERES)

Adopted by the Board of HCERES on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2016

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The external review of the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) comes at a time of major changes in higher education and research in France and as it officially replaces the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), two years after HCERES was instituted by the Act of 22 July 2013.

In the light of this situation, the self-evaluation process is an important step that will play a defining role in the organisation and future of the institution. In October 2015, after two years of transition, the new Board and President of HCERES were appointed. The results of the internal and external review will therefore form the basis for developing the HCERES strategic priorities for 2016-2020.

This process is also intended to provide a collective opportunity to discuss achievements and areas to be improved, and is critical for the continued recognition of HCERES in Europe and on the international stage. Traditionally, AERES, and now HCERES, have been regularly approached by foreign institutions and agencies to provide expertise or conduct evaluations. The recognition of HCERES in Europe adds significant legitimacy to this steadily increasing activity.

It is with these interests and the prospect of a second evaluation in mind that HCERES has set out to use this self-evaluation report to lay out the changes made since 2010 and assess to what extent it has integrated the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (Sections 8 to 14) after presenting the framework for activities, its operation and internal and external quality system (Sections 2 to 7).

## 2. THE FRENCH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN FRANCE

### 1. Changes in the French higher education and research system

The higher education and research system has undergone major changes over the last thirty years. Three trends stand out: the increased autonomy of institutions, the growing development of contractual relationships with the State and of evaluation, and the territorial grouping of higher education and research institutions.

#### ► The increased autonomy of institutions

In 1968, universities gradually became academically, scientifically and financially independent public institutions. Five major missions were established: initial and continuing education, scientific and technical research, exploitation of research findings, university cooperation, and more recently, career guidance and preparation for employment. This process of independence accelerated with the French Act of August 2007 on university freedoms and responsibilities (LRU Act). In particular, the Act gave universities the responsibility of managing their own payroll and human resources, previously overseen by the ministry at the national level. It was gradually implemented and has applied to all universities since 2013.

#### ► The growing development of a policy of contract and evaluation

In addition to giving institutions greater autonomy, the French ministry of higher education began contractualising its relations with universities and research bodies in 1984. Initially applied to research, this process was gradually extended to all the missions of institutions with the aim of fostering strategic dialogue between the State and institutions. In 2007 the LRU Act increased the central and mandatory role of multi-year contracts in the management of higher education policy. Initially established as a four-year contract, it was increased to five years in 2010, operating in five groups, each made up of a group of approximately 60 public and private institutions. In 2012 (Group C), contracts incorporated the notion of “sites” in order to support territorial groupings of higher education and research institutions. Within this framework, a national evaluation system was gradually organised which grew out of the independence of institutions and contractualisation.

#### ► Territorial groupings of higher education and research institutions

With growing international competition came the idea of territorial coordination. In 2006, Higher Education and Research Clusters (PRES) were established to give universities, *Grandes Écoles* and research bodies the ability to coordinate and pool their activities and resources. In 2013, the Act pertaining to higher education and research instituted groupings of higher education and research institutions within the same “site” in order to help coordinate the range of study programmes and research strategies, improve student life and pool resources for greater national and international visibility. Twenty-five university and scientific groupings were created: 20 Communities of Universities and Institutions (COMUE), and 5 associations<sup>1</sup>. When the COMUE status was created and signed by each member institution, it identified the competencies<sup>2</sup> transferred to it by each of the members.

Along with these organisational changes, the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research implemented various programmes to support institutions in promoting their national and international attractiveness and reputations. These included the *Plan Licence* to help students successfully complete their programmes, and the

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<sup>1</sup> French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research (MENESR) press file: “*La rentrée étudiante 2015: des résultats, des défis*” (Back to school 2015: results and challenges).

<sup>2</sup> A competency is the recognised capability of an institution or organisation to manage, make decisions or implement a statutory mission mandated by the government (budget, training or research strategy, staff management, property management, etc.).

“*Campus*” plan, launched to create campuses of excellence. As part of its economic stimulus strategy, the State also launched a vast investment in the future programme (PIA) to support research and development forces, including those in higher education and research institutions.

## 2. French higher education system

Higher education in France is mainly public. The private sector accounts for 18% of students<sup>3</sup>, most of them being enrolled in business and management schools, engineering programmes or programmes in art and communication.

Higher education encompasses all post-baccalaureate (post-secondary) programmes, mainly provided by 75 universities, accounting for 62% of students. Other institutions include the *Grandes Écoles* (comprising engineering schools, business schools, *écoles normales supérieures* and veterinary schools) and specialised schools, which include fine arts and architecture schools, paramedical training schools, etc. Other two-year programmes are also offered (preparatory classes for *Grandes Écoles* (CPGE), skilled technician programmes (STS) and university institutes of technology (IUT)). These types of institutions are generally overseen by the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research or so-called “technical” ministries, such as the ministries of agriculture, industry, culture, health, etc.

At the start of the 2014 academic year, 2,470,700 students were enrolled in higher education in metropolitan France and in the overseas departments and territories.

Secondary school<sup>4</sup> graduates are entitled to attend post-baccalaureate/post-secondary university programmes. Access to other programmes is based on a selection process (entrance or qualifying exam, application), particularly for *Grandes Écoles*, preparatory classes for *Grandes Écoles* (CPGE), skilled technician programmes (STS) and university institutes of technology (IUT).

In 2002<sup>5</sup>, France implemented the Bologna process by organising its programmes into three degree levels, which award ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. The Bachelor’s-Master’s-Doctorate system (LMD) is based on the number of semesters students have completed at university level, with corresponding ECTS credits, broken down into skills which are set out in the diploma supplement.

The French State is responsible for issuing national diplomas and is responsible for “awarding university degrees and equivalent qualifications”. French degrees can be awarded by institutions of diverse legal statuses if their range of programmes has obtained prior approval by the State (every five years). Some institutions issue their own qualifications. Following the Act of 22 July 2013, the State changed the way it assessed programmes by instituting procedures for accrediting institutions rather than a formal approval of each programmes. “The French Act of 22 January 2014 establishing the procedures for accrediting higher education institutions authorises accredited institutions to issue national qualifications for which the list of academic disciplines are provided in the Appendix of the Decree.” This change was specifically intended by the State<sup>6</sup> and “consists of an integrated approach to the academic strategy of institutions and their ability to implement it. Accreditation places the quality assurance approach at the heart of this change.”

With this renewed framework, the State simplified the range of programmes offered for greater readability. There are now 45 academic disciplines for bachelor’s degrees, 173 academic disciplines for vocational bachelor’s degrees, and 252 academic disciplines for Master’s degrees. Institutions are free to organise the programmes for each of these academic disciplines.

The French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research is also working with Ministries that supervise higher education institutions or regulated professions to integrate their programmes and related degrees into the

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<sup>3</sup> The State of Higher Education and Research in France, June 2015, MENESR - 2013 data.

<sup>4</sup> The baccalaureate is a diploma awarded at the end of the final year of secondary school in France. It is considered as the starting point for higher education.

<sup>5</sup> Decree no. 2002-482 of 8 April 2002 applying the establishment of the European Higher Education Area to the French higher education system, decrees and orders of April 2002 pertaining to university degrees and national diplomas.

<sup>6</sup> 2015 Report on national higher education and research policies.



framework of the European Higher Education Area. This work is aimed at ensuring that programmes comply with the European system and that these degrees provide bachelor's or master's qualifications.

It should be noted that there are no automatic equivalencies between foreign degrees and French degrees. Each institution determines its own admissions criteria based on the prior academic backgrounds of students, the requirements of the programme in question and European principles. The CIEP's<sup>7</sup> ENIC-NARIC France centre has therefore adopted a comparative approach for processing applications to have foreign qualifications recognised, evaluating them in relation to the French system. Applicants are then issued a statement of comparability. The statement in itself does not constitute an equivalency, but is sometimes requested by higher education institutions, which then decide on the qualification equivalency.

► First degree level

The bachelor's degree is awarded after 6 semesters of study and gives 180 ECTS credits (three years of study). It is organised into different pathways and lets students progressively choose their speciality. The beginning portion of the programme covers multiple disciplines, with courses becoming gradually more specialised. During the programme, various tools are implemented to help students successfully complete their degree (tutors, small group work, distance learning, etc.).

After completing four semesters, students have the possibility of switching to a vocational bachelor's degree (which validates 60 ECTS credits and corresponds to a total of 180 credits). This is designed for students to integrate the job market immediately after graduation. Other programmes are also included in the scope of this first level of study, such as two-year technological programmes provided by IUTs (which are attached to universities). General medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and midwifery programmes are incorporated in universities and base admissions on an entrance exam at the end of the first year. Secondary schools also provide first level programmes, such as two-year higher technical certificates (BTS) or preparatory classes for *Grandes Écoles*, which give 120 credits.

► Second degree level

The master's degree is organised into 4 semesters of study (i.e. 120 ECTS credits), and can be pursued after the bachelor's degree level. The programme includes theoretical, methodological and applied learning, at least one internship, an introduction to research, and a dissertation or other individual research projects. The national master's degree is only awarded once students have fulfilled a second-language requirement (at least one foreign modern language) and completed courses for it during their programme. It is characterised by an initiation to research and the goal of integrating graduates into the job market, while providing the opportunity to access the highest level of university study, the doctorate degree.

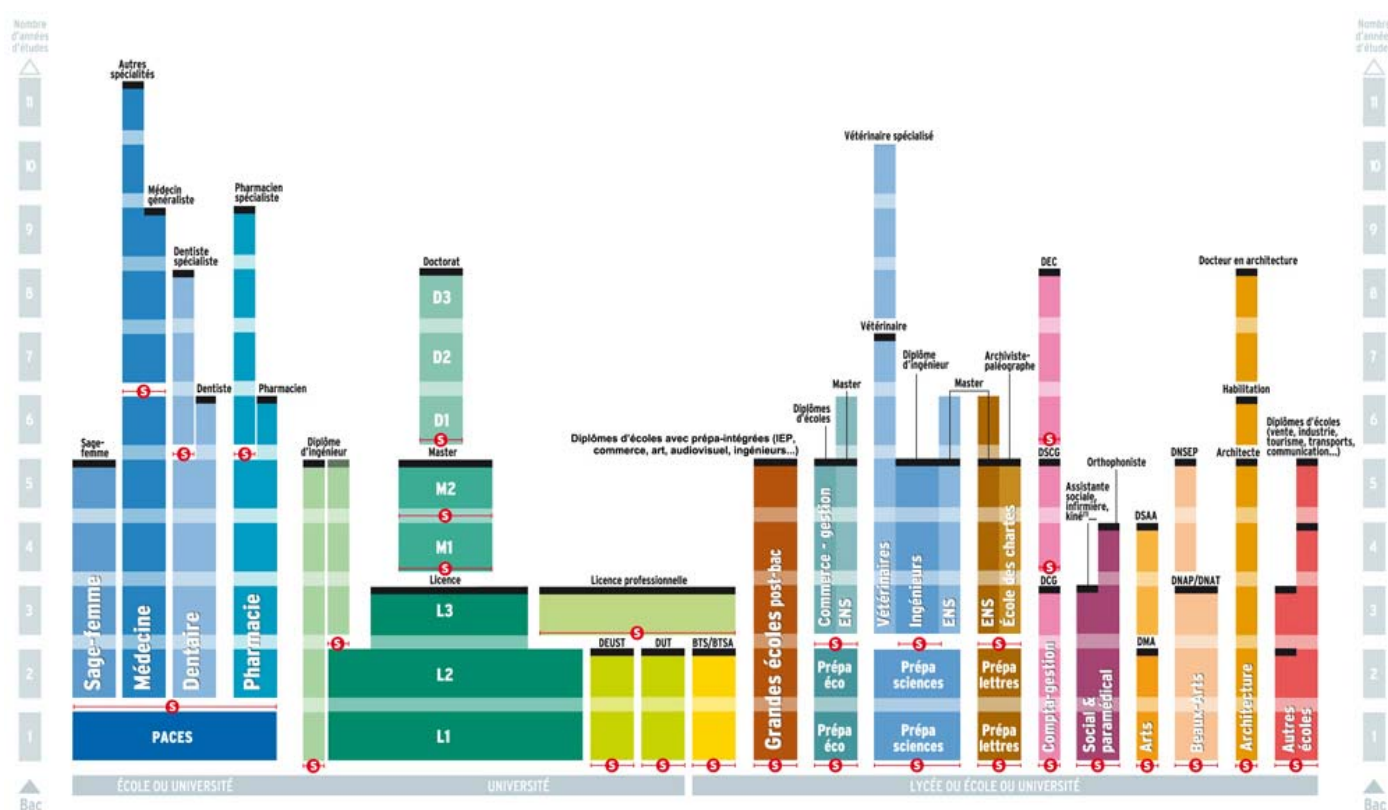
► Third degree level

The doctorate degree enables students to obtain the doctoral level after completing and defending a thesis. This programme is provided by doctoral schools attached to higher education institutions. Theses may be jointly supervised by French or foreign institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> International centre for education research

Figure 1: Organisational structure of academic programmes in French higher education



■ Diplôme ou *Diplôme d'État*  
 -S- Accès sélectif (concours à épreuves, sélection sur dossier)  
 Il existe des passerelles entre ces différents filières.

DNAT : diplôme national d'arts et techniques  
 DNSEP : diplôme national supérieur d'expression plastique  
 DSAA : diplôme supérieur d'arts appliqués  
 DSCG : diplôme supérieur de comptabilité et de gestion  
 DUT : diplôme universitaire de technologie  
 ENS : École normale supérieure  
 IEP : institut d'études politiques

BTS(A) : brevet de technicien supérieur (agricole)  
 D : doctorat  
 DCG : diplôme de comptabilité et de gestion  
 DEC : diplôme d'expert-comptable  
 DEUST : diplôme d'études universitaires scientifiques et techniques  
 DMA : diplôme des métiers d'art  
 DNAP : diplôme national d'arts plastiques

L : licence  
 M : master  
 PACES : première année commune aux études de santé  
 (1) Attention, certaines écoles paramédicales recrutent après la première année d'études de santé (PACES)



### 3. External quality assurance in French higher education

► Development of the evaluation culture in France

In France, the public policy evaluation culture stems from a desire to rationalise budget choices in the 1960s. In this approach, particular attention was paid to the cost-efficiency ratio of public actions through prior estimates. However, it was not until the late 1980s that the State began using evaluation as a tool for modernisation.

A 1990 Decree<sup>8</sup> defined evaluation as follows: “the goal of evaluating a given public policy is to determine whether the judicial, administrative and financial means implemented produce the expected effects and objectives of the policy.” Evaluation has gradually become a decision-making tool for public authorities. Initially implemented as a type of review or inspection, each major ministry established inspection bodies called “inspection bodies” to make decisions on the compliance of an activity with legislation or good accounting practices.

<sup>8</sup> Decree no. 90-82 of 22 January 1990 pertaining to the evaluation of public policies

To support the autonomy of universities, the French State created an independent administrative authority in 1984, the French National Committee for Evaluation (CNE), responsible for the institutional evaluation of higher education institutions. This enabled the evaluations to be conducted without the State becoming systematically and directly involved with institutions. Evaluation therefore became a tool for producing knowledge, analyses and recommendations in an effort to rationalise decision-making.

The evaluation of research units was organised by either the research body producing certification for its own units and those in partnership with a university, or a department of the French Ministry of Research for units only connected to universities. As for study programmes, the State accredited qualifications based on an application assessment performed by the French Ministry of Higher Education, with the exception of programmes awarding engineering degrees<sup>9</sup>.

In 2006, after re-assessing its role and methods for evaluating public policies, the State created the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), while maintaining its traditional inspection methods (inspectorates and the French Court of Auditors).

► French higher education evaluation bodies

In France, 2 institutions and 2 commissions, with differing fields and scope, are responsible for external quality assurance for higher education study programmes and institutions: HCERES, the CTI (French Engineering Accreditation Body), the CEFDG (French evaluation commission for management programmes and degrees) and the CCN-IUT (French national advisory commission for university institutes of technology) for IUTs.

	CTI	HCERES
Type of quality assurance	- Evaluation	- Evaluation
Scope	- Engineering programmes	- Bachelor's or equivalent programmes, master's or equivalent programmes, - Doctoral schools - Higher education and research institutions - Research units - Research bodies

HCERES reviews and evaluations are not prescriptive and do not lead to an official decision. They are designed to help evaluated entities conduct substantiated analysis, make informed decisions and define ways to make improvements.

In cases where the activities of HCERES and CTI (also a full member of ENQA) overlap, they work in partnership for the institutional evaluation of engineering schools. This relationship was officialised with the signing of a framework agreement in 2013, which simplifies and harmonises procedures (calendar, documents required from institutions under review) and sharing of best practice.

The CEFDG is responsible for organising quality control procedures for business and management higher education programmes. It also examines changes to management programmes in line with the overall framework for existing higher education programmes. The opinions of the Commission give rise to State decisions and recommendations to guide schools towards improvement. The CEFDG may also make decisions with regard to revoking accreditation or master's degree equivalence.

IUTs have a special system operated by the CCN-IUT with a secretariat run by departments of the Ministry of Higher Education. It has 34 members appointed by the Ministry, who represent stakeholders in IUT programmes. The Ministry consults the CCN-IUT on issues of general interest concerning IUTs and their qualifications. It provides opinions on curriculum, student recruitment conditions and changes to the available programmes and speciality.

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<sup>9</sup> Accreditation to award this degree was granted after consulting the CTI (French Engineering Accreditation Body), established by the Act of 10 July 1934.

### 3. HISTORY, PROFILE, ACTIVITIES AND NATIONAL POSITION OF HCERES

The French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) was created in July 2013 and established in November 2014 to replace the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES).

#### 1. AERES, from 2006 to 2013-2014

AERES was created by the French programme law on research of April 2006 and established by a decree in November 2006 as part of initiatives to re-assess the evaluation of public policies and changes to the French higher education and research system. It reflected the French State's desire to take a strategic place and create a standardised evaluation tool, while clearly separating State decisions from evaluation and inspection. AERES therefore combined three bodies with responsibility for evaluation:

- the French National Committee for Evaluation (CNE), the independent administrative body responsible for evaluating higher education and research institutions;
- the Scientific, Technical and Educational Mission (MSTP) supervised by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and responsible for evaluating research units, study programmes and doctoral schools;
- the French National Research Evaluation Council (CNER), responsible for evaluating research bodies.

As an independent administrative authority, its primary mission was to evaluate higher education and research institutions, research bodies, research units and programmes. AERES therefore had a notable distinction from other European quality assurance agencies in that its scope of activities included research bodies. By law, evaluation is a prerequisite for contractualisation with the State. As part of its missions, AERES was also asked to participate in partnership and evaluation programmes abroad.

Right from the start, AERES defended the principles of independent and transparent peer-based evaluations using its external evaluation standards. In late 2011, AERES completed a full cycle of evaluations. During that period, it changed its reference standards to reflect:

- the changes to the national structure of higher education and research, such as the recent creation of groupings of institutions;
- the newly widened responsibilities and competencies of universities;
- the strategic priorities of the national higher education and research policy, such as national plans to encourage successful programme completion, especially at the bachelor's level;
- the advances made by evaluated entities in internal quality assurance;
- the recommendations from its external review conducted by ENQA in 2010.

In the summer of 2012, national higher education and research conferences and discussions ("*assises*") were launched by the French Government in preparation for a new bill on higher education and research that would cover three major topics: "working to help all students succeed, increasing the ambitions of research, helping design the new landscape for higher education and research."

During these debates, AERES received some criticism, particularly concerning the burden of the evaluation process for evaluated entities. The December 2012 report that followed the discussions proposed to "redefine<sup>10</sup> the higher education and research evaluation system based on the guiding principles of ethical standards and independence...; to simplify the procedures for existing evaluations; to avoid duplication and implement the possibility of simply validating the procedures for evaluations organised by supervising ministries."

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from the report written by Vincent Berger, general rapporteur of the discussions, submitted to the French President - 17/12/2012

## 2. A transition period from July 2013 to November 2015

Act no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013, or the ESR Act, pertaining to higher education and research, replaced AERES with HCERES, which maintained the status of an independent administrative authority, with the same rights and obligations as AERES. The Act gave HCERES equivalent missions and introduced the possibility for evaluated entities to choose another body, provided HCERES validates the evaluation procedures beforehand. It maintained its international prerogatives and was given the mission of post-evaluation of "*Investissement d'Avenir*" investment programmes (to fund innovative and promising investments in France, especially those related to research).

Article 90 of the Act also specifies that "HCERES shall seek to follow best international practice in the performance of its missions. With regard to evaluation criteria, its methods are based on principles of objectivity, transparency and equal treatment for all organisations assessed, and, with regard to the selection of the individuals responsible for evaluations, on world-class scientific expertise, neutrality and balance in the representation of themes and opinions."

Once founded, HCERES had to wait for a Council of State decree setting out its organisational and operational procedures, and for two others to appoint the Board:

- the first was published on 14 November 2014 (Decree no. 2014-1365);
- the two others in October 2015 for the appointment of the Board members and early November for the appointment of its President.

From July 2013 to November 2015 the AERES Board and its President, Didier Houssin (appointed in May 2011), ensured the continuity of the evaluation public service mission. However, the lack of status and a deliberative body limited the changes that could be made concerning methods and standards.

## 3. Establishment of HCERES in November 2015

Thirty Board members, including its President, Michel Cosnard, were appointed by decrees dated 30 October and 5 November 2015.

### ► HCERES governance: a Board with 30 members

HCERES governance is defined in Decree 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014, and comprises a Board of 30 members, with equal gender representation. The members are appointed by the French Minister of Higher Education and Research for a 4-year renewable term. Most of them are put forward by evaluation stakeholders. The Board also includes two students, two elected officials (one Member of the National Assembly and one Senator) and three representatives from European quality assurance agencies. The President of HCERES is appointed by the French President, but to ensure the independence of the institution from the Government, after hearings conducted by the relevant commissions of the National Assembly and Senate. The powers of the Board and President are defined by the Act and the decree.

Article 92 of the Act states that "HCERES is governed by a Board which is responsible for the quality of its work. The Board shall set the annual evaluation programme of HCERES. It shall define the measures required for ensuring the quality, transparency and publication of its evaluation procedures."

Article 1 of the Decree states that "the Board... shall ensure that evaluations conducted by HCERES and other bodies using procedures that it has approved shall take into account the national and territorial aspects of higher education and research, particularly under the territorial coordination and groupings referred to in Article L. 718-2 of the French Education Code. It shall also ensure that evaluations take into account the relationships between training and research. It shall specify the framework, objectives, criteria and procedures for conducting evaluations based on the principles under the second paragraph of Article L. 114-3-1 of the French Research Code. The Board shall ensure that the selected criteria and evaluation procedures used or validated by HCERES take into account the diversity of the type and mission of evaluated organisations and study programmes and the diversity of disciplines. It shall also set the general framework for evaluations, assessments or analyses conducted at the request of Government ministers responsible for higher education and research. It shall ensure that HCERES communicates regularly with institutional stakeholders and bodies involved in various evaluations, in order to continuously improve evaluation criteria and procedures."

Article 2 of the Decree defines the powers of the Board: “The Board of the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education shall make decisions concerning:

- 1° The evaluation charter which defines the measures required for ensuring the quality and transparency of evaluation procedures.
- 2° The standards for evaluations conducted by HCERES.
- 3° The validation of all evaluation procedures provided for in Article L. 114-3-1 of the French Research Code.
- 4° The conditions under which experts are appointed.
- 5° A multi-year programme for evaluations in line with deadlines for the multi-year institutional contracts referred to under the fifth paragraph of Article L. 711-1 of the French Education Code and under the first paragraph of Article L. 311-2 of the French Research Code.
- 6° HCERES European and international cooperation policy.
- 7° The Government report provided for under Article L. 114-3-7 of the French Research Code and the Parliament report provided for under Article 91 of the abovementioned Act of 22 July 2013.
- 8° The general conditions for the recruitment, employment and remuneration of HCERES contract staff.
- 9° The conditions for reimbursing the travel and accommodation expenses incurred by all those working on behalf of HCERES, limited to the amounts actually spent.
- 10° At the proposal of its President, the Board shall make decisions concerning: the internal rules of HCERES; internal organisation into departments; the appointment of department managers; the creation of a local technical committee; the composition of the scientific steering committee for the observatory referred to in Article 9 hereof.”

The powers of the President are specified in Article 8 of the Decree: “the President of the Board shall oversee the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education. He/she shall ensure that evaluations are impartial, reliable and transparent. He/she shall sign decisions concerning the validation of evaluation procedures and attest to their compliance with the ethical standards and validation rules adopted by the Board. He/she shall appoint experts pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Article L. 114-3-1 of the French Research Code and 4° of Article 2 hereof. He/she shall countersign evaluation reports prepared by panels of experts and signed by their chairs. The President shall have authority over HCERES staff and be the authorising officer in charge of income and expenditure. The President shall appoint the General Secretary in charge of HCERES administration and operations, for a renewable period of four years. He/she shall also appoint department managers and the Director of the Observatory of Science and Technologies referred to in Article 9 hereof. He/she may delegate his/her power of signature to the General Secretary, department managers and to the Director of the Observatory for business pertaining to their respective functions and to agents under his/her authority for documents associated with HCERES operations and their duties.”

#### ► Internal organisation

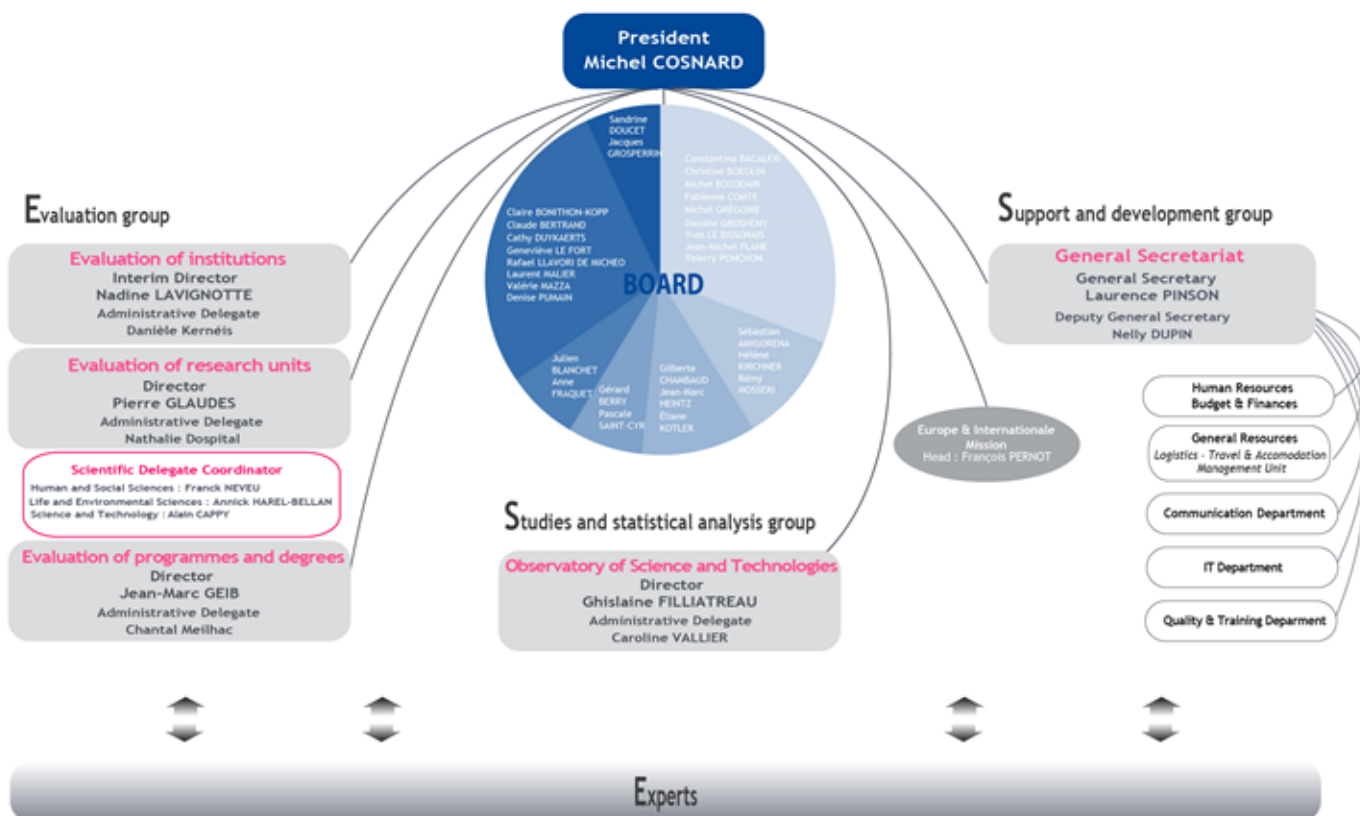
The HCERES Board and President are responsible for the organisation of HCERES. The decree only specifies that HCERES may organise itself into departments and that it must include an Observatory of Science and Technologies; “responsible for strategic research and analysis.” The General Secretary is responsible for the administrative organisation of HCERES.

HCERES has 102 administrative staff and 115 scientific delegates (part-time researchers and professors). It has 4 departments, one European and International Mission, and a Secretary general:

- three evaluation departments (institutions, programmes, research units - see Appendix point A -) responsible for organising evaluations and reviews. They are managed by a Director and Administrative Delegate. Directors are appointed by the President after being validated by the Board, for a four-year renewable term. The administrative team is made up of project officers and administrative assistants. Each department relies on the expertise of scientific delegates to scientifically organise evaluations;
- a department called the Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST) (see Appendix point B), integrated into HCERES by the Decree of 14 November 2014, is dedicated to strategic research and analysis. It became administratively part of HCERES and physically moved into their offices on 1 January 2015. It is managed by a Director and Administrative Delegate. The OST has a Scientific Steering Committee (COS) whose members have appointed after validation by the Board in March 2016. The Director of the OST is appointed by the President of HCERES at the proposal of the COS. The team is made up of research officers, analysts, project assistants, statisticians and computer engineers. The activities of this department lie mainly outside the scope of the ESG and are therefore not assessed in this self-evaluation report;

- A European and International Mission, made up of a Scientific Manager, a project officer and an Assistant, is responsible for developing activities in this area;
- The General Secretariat combines support activities such as financial and human resources, the IT system, the Travel and Accommodation Management Unit (responsible for organising travel arrangements for experts and scientific delegates), as well as communications and the quality department. It is managed by the General Secretary and a Deputy General Secretary.

Figure 2: HCERES organisational chart (as of 18/11/2015)



HCERES also has an internal consultation and dialogue body, the technical committee with 12 staff representatives (6 incumbents and 6 alternates) elected by a list system (last elections: March 2015).

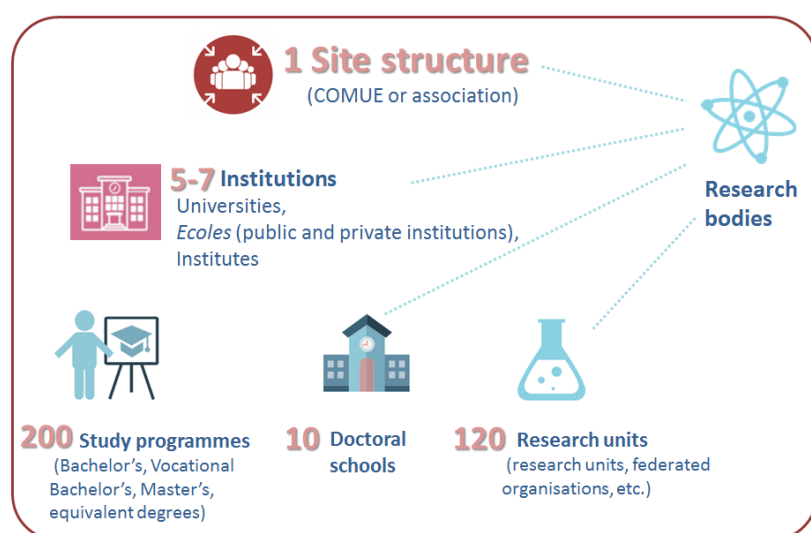
The current organisational structure will be reviewed between now and June 2016 and submitted for approval by the Board in order to incorporate the priorities of the 2016-2020 strategic plan, including those regarding consolidation of the integrated evaluation process.

# 4. HCERES EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES in HIGHER EDUCATION

When AERES was created, the development of external quality assurance activities reflected a desire to support the French higher education and research system as a whole, through integrated evaluation. The system underwent organisational changes and although integrated evaluation only concerned one institution at a time in 2010, AERES, and later HCERES, had to take into account the progressive restructuring of the higher education and research system around territorial coordination groupings, or “sites”<sup>11</sup>. External quality assurance implemented by HCERES therefore adapted its field of activities to cover the various components that make up a site.

Under the national strategy for higher education and research, institutions and sites sign contracts that cover strategy and resources with the ministry every five years. To organise the contract process, France is divided into 5 geographic zones (A, B, C, D and E). Evaluation is a prerequisite to contractualisation, and its results are taken into account in the contractual negotiations. Therefore, all higher education and research institutions undergo an HCERES external evaluation at least once every five years, one year prior to the renewal of their contract.

Figure 3: Typical organisation of a site (figures are based on averages)



Although the site and its institutions, programmes, doctoral schools and research units each undergo their own evaluation, they cannot be conducted separately.

The evaluation of higher education programmes, and master’s programmes and doctoral schools in particular, requires knowledge about the quality of their association with research. Likewise, the institutions are evaluated in such a way as to take into account the evaluations of the programmes and research units.

These activities are divided between the three evaluation departments at HCERES which coordinate their activities to develop an “integrated evaluation”.

► Study programme and doctoral school evaluation

This field of activity concerns the evaluation of bachelor’s, vocational bachelor’s and master’s programmes supervised by the French Ministry of Higher Education, or equivalent levels overseen by other supervising ministries, and the evaluation of doctoral schools (ED). Evaluations take place every five years, prior to the State national accreditation process. The external evaluation of study programmes only applies to those which have been in existence for at least two years.

The recent evolution concerning the accreditation of programmes led HCERES to develop the notion of training fields three years ago. This corresponds to a set of existing programmes at one or more institutions, which are thematically consistent (potentially multi-disciplinary) and enable the institution to communicate its strategy. Institutions are responsible for defining and delineating the training fields presented. This type of organisation provides a picture of the overall mechanisms implemented by institutions to ensure the quality and attractiveness of

<sup>11</sup> Whether in the form of COMUEs or associations, and previously in the form of Higher Education and Research Clusters (PRES).



programmes, and underlines the strategic weight of programmes in the general policy of the institutions and the site. Initially, training fields are not evaluated but they provide a source of essential contextual, strategic and organisational information about the territorial landscape. However, HCERES does not evaluate them but write a synthesis about them.

Doctoral schools are bodies within public institutions accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education to award doctorates and run doctoral programmes. They provide doctoral students with multi-disciplinary knowledge within the framework of a coherent scientific project. Doctoral schools bring together research units and teams from one or more higher education institutions, and at least one public institution. These institutions must be located on the same site or on sites that are in close to each other. They must have a partnership agreement that is appended to the application for accreditation. The HCERES integrated evaluation process assesses the quality assurance mechanisms of these bodies and takes into account the relationship between training and research, and the involvement of research units in the doctoral programmes.

The following table provides details on the number of reviews per type of programme performed by HCERES (figures based on the interval between Group B (2010-2011) and Group A (2014-2015)):

	Bachelor's	Vocational Bachelor's	Master's (academic disciplines)	Doctoral schools	Other Bachelor's & Master's*	TOTAL
<b>Total (France)</b>	1398	1671	1624	249	351	<b>5293</b>
<b>Average (per year)</b>	280	334	325	50	37	<b>1059</b>

\* *Other Bachelor's and Master's include bachelor's-level and master's-level degrees and programmes, engineering master's and programmes in health/healthcare.*

It is important to note that since 2007, the scope of evaluation has widened significantly:

- to bachelor's-level and master's-level degrees for architecture schools, master's-level degrees for art schools supervised by the French Ministry for Culture and Communication in 2011 and 2012;
- to degrees for bachelor's-level and master's-level programmes in medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and midwifery in universities offering health-related studies, as of 2015;
- to master's degrees in teaching, education and training, under experimentation as of 2016.

► Institutional and site evaluation

A significant number of evaluated institutions are supervised by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MENESR), as well as the Ministry of Culture and Communication, the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of the Economy, Industry and Employment.

The overall scope of activities currently covers roughly 310 public and private higher education and research institutions and research bodies, which corresponds to an annual volume of approximately 60 institutions (over a five-year period). In 2010, the scope of activities covered roughly 190 institutions, which corresponded to an annual volume of approximately 50 institutions (over a four-year period).

Since the Act of 2013, the concept of sites has been cemented and the MENESR now signs contracts with groupings of institutions, in the same way as it did for individual institutions, that cover the same number of years. As a result, sites are gradually coming under the scope of HCERES' activities. Even before they were established, HCERES (AERES) had begun various forms of evaluation of site policies (2009). Groupings of institutions are primarily territorial strategic coordination bodies. From an academic standpoint, they do not directly provide teaching but ensure that programmes offered by site institutions are well-coordinated (the level of coordination generally applies to doctoral programmes, and occasionally master's programmes). In this sense, the evaluation of these bodies' programmes lies outside the scope of the ESG. However, site-related reports written by the various departments of HCERES help in the evaluation of site academic and research policies.

► Research unit evaluation (outside the scope of the ESG)

The quality assurance of research units accounts for a major portion of HCERES evaluation activities. On average, 575 entities are evaluated each year: research units, federated organisations, clinical investigation centres (CIC), university hospitals (CHU), French comprehensive cancer centres, national research plans (cancer, rare diseases), and advanced research thematic networks (RTRA)

Research units are not directly responsible for academic programmes at bachelor’s and master’s levels. Professors, involved in research activities in units, organise programmes and provide a majority of teaching within the faculties of universities and schools. They provide the research potential required for all higher education programmes. In doctoral schools, besides supervising doctoral students, research units may also provide doctoral-level disciplinary teaching modules. The various types of “indirect” involvement of research units in training are examined under programme reviews (“place of research” criterion) and doctoral school reviews (“supervision and training for doctoral students” criterion), as well as under reviews of research entities themselves, under the criterion “research involvement in training”.

The following table provides details on the number of research units evaluated by HCERES (figures based on the period between Group B (2010-2011) and Group A (2014-2015)):

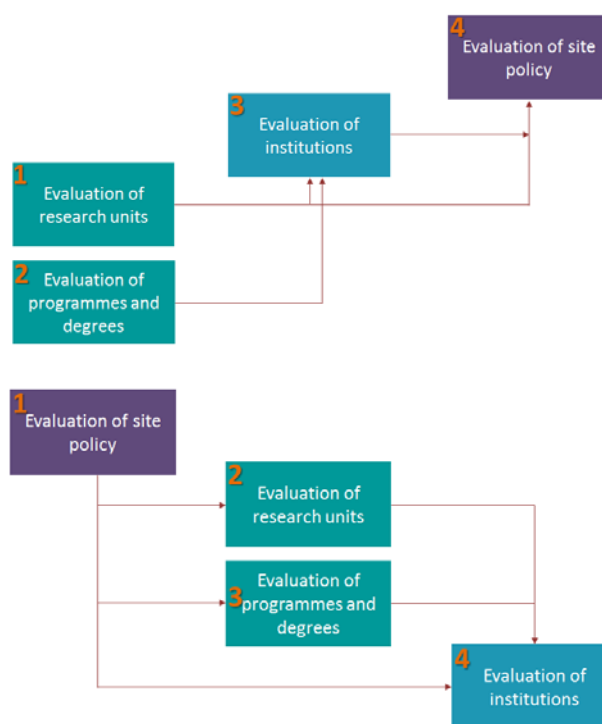
Group B (2010-2011)*	Group C (2011-2012)	Group D (2012-2013)	Group E (2013-2014)	Group A (2014-2015)	Total
855	216	600	650	552	2873
				Average	575

*\*Between Group B and Group C, the configuration of groups changed as a result of the creation of a 5<sup>th</sup> zone.*

# 5. HCERES EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS and METHODOLOGIES

As explained above (see Section 4), the quality assurance process used by HCERES is adapted to the organisation of sites. Due to the recent establishment of sites, they have not yet reached the same level of organisational maturity. Since the experiments in 2014 and 2015, HCERES therefore implements its evaluation process based on one of two methods after consulting the stakeholders of the site in question.

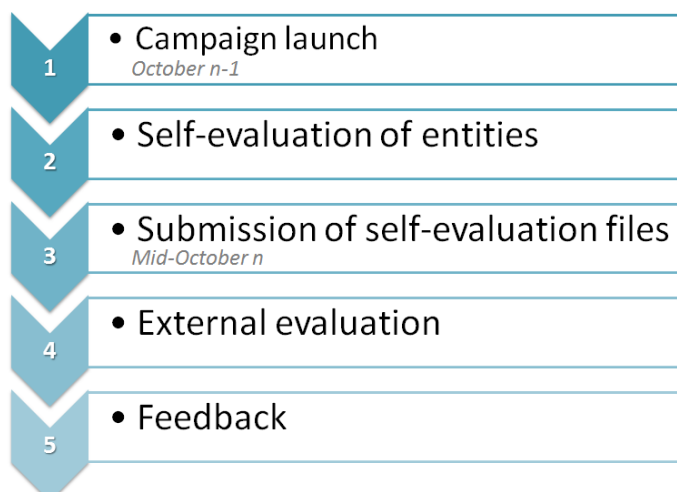
The process is either implemented in a “bottom-up approach”: programme and research unit evaluation reports feed into the evaluation of institutions, and all the results are then taken into account for the site policy evaluation.



Or the process is implemented in a “top-down approach”: the results from the site policy evaluation are taken into account for the evaluation of programmes and research units, and then for the evaluation of institutions.

Along with changes to the scope of integrated evaluations, all the HCERES evaluation standards were revised between 2011 and 2015 to simplify them and harmonise the layout with European models, as recommended in the findings of the 2010 AERES External Review.

Regardless of the selected process (bottom-up or top-down approach), the integrated evaluation of a site involves five steps:



In this report, methodology covers the “process, standards and other documents” used to structure evaluations.

**Step 1:** This first step involves organising and planning for the evaluation group within HCERES by identifying the entities to be evaluated, and “launching the campaign” with each site and their institutions. The campaign launch takes place in two stages:

- a half-day meeting at HCERES (in October of the previous year) with the presidents and directors of the relevant institutions. The overall evaluation process and the schedule are presented in detail, as are changes which may have been implemented since the previous evaluation;
- one on-site day (between January and February of the evaluation year) during which HCERES representatives meet the representatives of the evaluated entities (institutions, programmes, research units). This takes place after HCERES has posted all documents (mid-January of the evaluation year) required for preparation of the self-evaluation on its website. Each part of the integrated evaluation is presented with corresponding procedures and standards during workshops to inform participants and answer their questions.

In march of the evaluation year (n), evaluated entities are informed of the period during which the external evaluation will take place. HCERES breaks each group down into evaluation “mini-groups” based on the number of entities and defines the schedule for evaluations.

**Step 2:** In accordance with European principles, entities are required to complete a self-evaluation report. HCERES provides advice on the methodology and explanations of the reference standards, however entities are free to prepare their report based on their own methods.

**Step 3:** All entities in the same group must submit their self-evaluation files on a specific date (mid-October of the evaluation year), via an internet platform called “Pélican”. This platform is a document collection tool shared with the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research. It was launched in June 2011 for Group C (2011-2012) to simplify and centralise information exchange with parties involved in contract negotiations and evaluation. Prior to submission (early July of the evaluation year), training for new users of the platform (2 or 3 representatives per institution) is provided at HCERES.

**Step 4:** External evaluations begin after all files have been submitted. Each part of the integrated evaluation follows a general procedure common to all entities, which takes place in 3 phases:

- an evaluation preparation and organisation phase with the evaluated entity and experts;
- an assessment phase, including file analysis and, in some cases, an on-site visit;
- a post-evaluation phase, which includes report drafting, a response phase, and publication. Publication occurs after the reports have been forwarded to the evaluated entities and their supervising ministries.

**Step 5:** Once reports have been published on the website, each department organises feedback (online survey, feedback meetings) with evaluated entities and/or experts, or even with supervising ministries. Feedback is analysed to help HCERES adapt its evaluation procedures.

► Study programme and doctoral school evaluation

Up until Group D (2012-2013), programme evaluations concerned training programme projects for the next period (prior evaluation). Since 2013, with the start of Group E and the establishment of accreditation under the ESR Act, evaluation concerns training programme reviews (results from the self-evaluation) for the previous period (ex-post evaluation).

The evaluation methodology is based on the “national framework for study programmes”<sup>12</sup> and the Ministry accreditation process at the national level, and the “European Standards and Guidelines” (ESG) at the European level. The reference documents for these evaluations are compiled in a booklet divided into two sections:

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<sup>12</sup> MENESR Order of 22 January 2014, setting the national framework for study programmes leading to the awarding of national Bachelor’s, Vocational Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees, available on the following link:  
<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028543525&categorieLien=id>

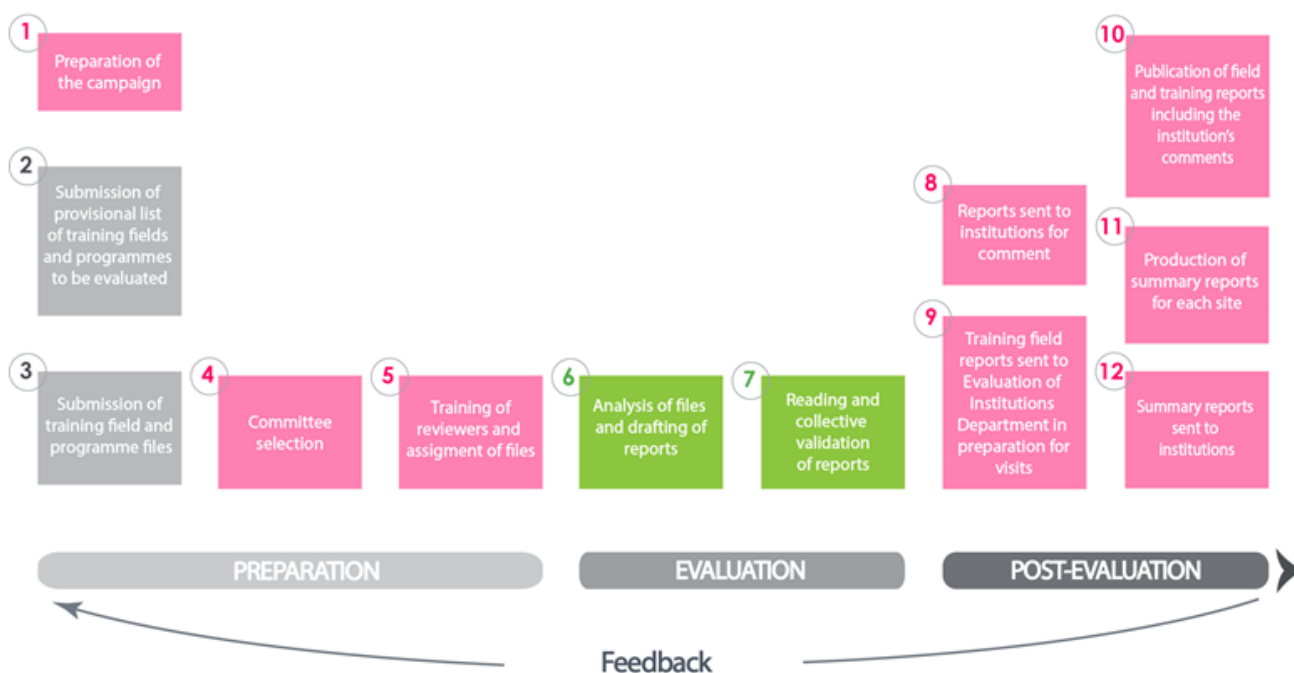
- standards: organised in a field/standards/criteria format. For bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's programmes, there are four fields (Aims, Position, Teaching Structure and Management of the Training Programme) and for doctoral schools, there are three (the school's operation and association with research, supervision and training for doctoral students, doctoral graduate follow-up and employment). Standards provide evaluated entities and reviewers with the tools to conduct their analysis with respect to objectives to be achieved or the actions to be taken which they define;
- key points: they cover all standards and help evaluated entities and reviewers organise their analysis and write self-evaluation and evaluation reports.

• External evaluation process for bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's programmes:

Panels of experts are organised with respect to the training fields defined by the institution, i.e. each panel evaluates the programmes of a given training field. A training field may include programmes for different levels (bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's) with no limit on the number of programmes. The organisation and work of each panel are managed by a scientific delegate and a HCERES administrative staff member. Each panel meets twice - once for a training and preparation session (Steps 4 and 5 of the following diagram), and once for a post-evaluation session (Step 7). The evaluations are based on the submitted files and take place between the two sessions. Two reviewers are assigned to each training programme and are responsible for filling out the evaluation form handed out during the preparation session. For bachelor's and master's degree programmes, both experts are academics and/or work in the socio-professional sector. For vocational bachelor's programmes, one of the two experts is always from the socio-professional sector. Between the two sessions, one reviewer is designated to draft the evaluation report, structured according to the 15 key points, after consideration of the evaluation forms filled out by the two reviewers. The reports for all programmes in a given training field are read by the panel chair. During the post-evaluation meeting, the reviewer who wrote the evaluation report presents it to the entire panel for discussion and collective validation. The panel chair is then responsible for writing the summary report giving an overall analysis of the field. A site scientific delegate is in charge of relations with the evaluation of institutions department in order to prepare the visit of the institutional evaluation panel.

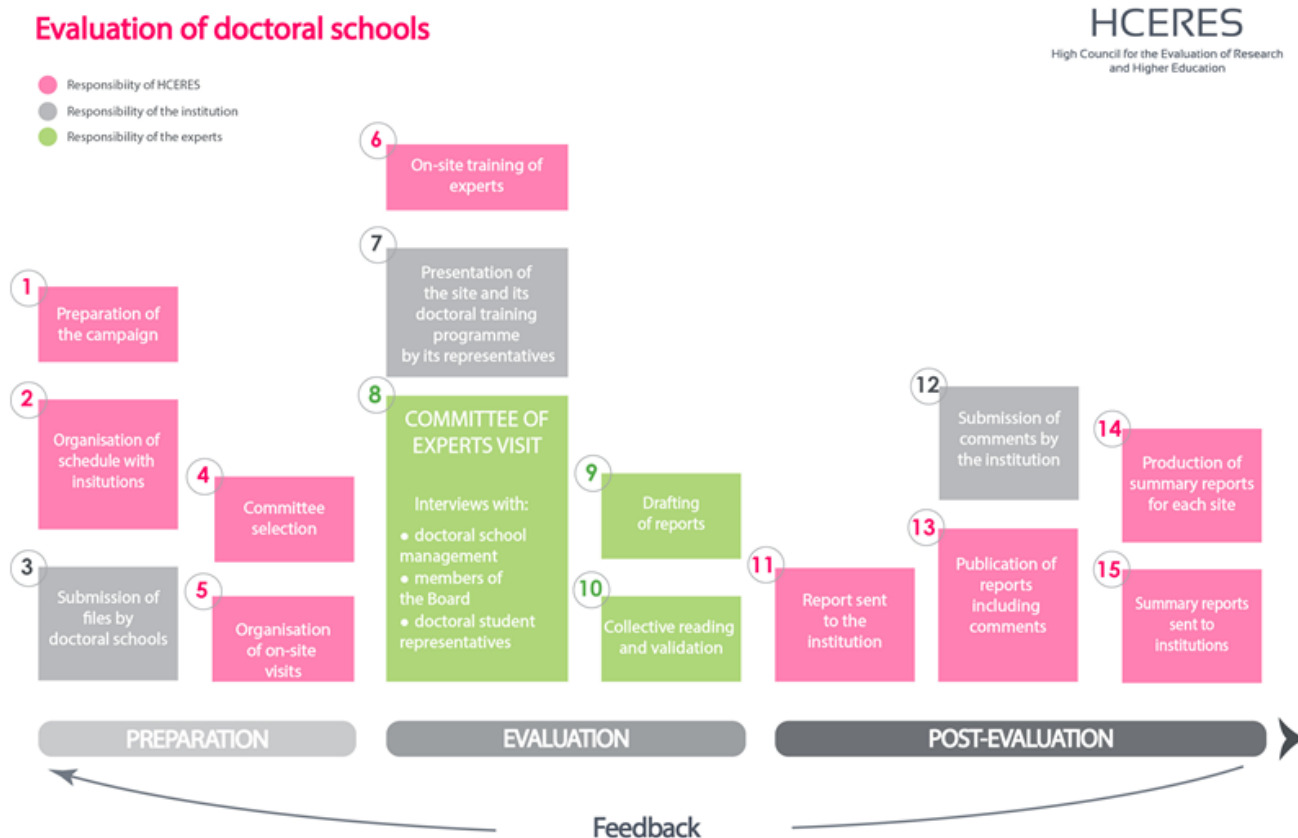
**Evaluation of Bachelor's, Vocational Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes**

- Responsibility of HCERES
- Responsibility of the institution
- Responsibility of the experts



- External evaluation process for doctoral schools

Each doctoral school is evaluated by a panel made up of five experts on average, including a chair and “young doctoral graduate”. The organisation and work of each panel are managed by a scientific delegate and an administrative staff member. Each evaluation includes a half-day on-site visit. All the visits of the doctoral schools of the same site are grouped over two or three days. A plenary session with all the panels evaluating the doctoral schools of the site is organised to present the strategy and organisation of the site’s doctoral programme (Doctoral College). The visit must include interviews with members of the doctoral school Board, a representative panel of doctoral students and the management team. A report is written for each doctoral school evaluation.



Each of these two levels involves a response phase in which evaluated entities are asked to share their comments, which are then incorporated into the evaluation report.

The evaluation of institutions department receives a report so that the results may be taken into account for the external evaluation of the institution. The evaluation reports for doctoral schools are also communicated to the evaluation of research units department. They are then forwarded to the supervising ministry of the institution in order to prepare for accreditation.

► Institutional evaluation

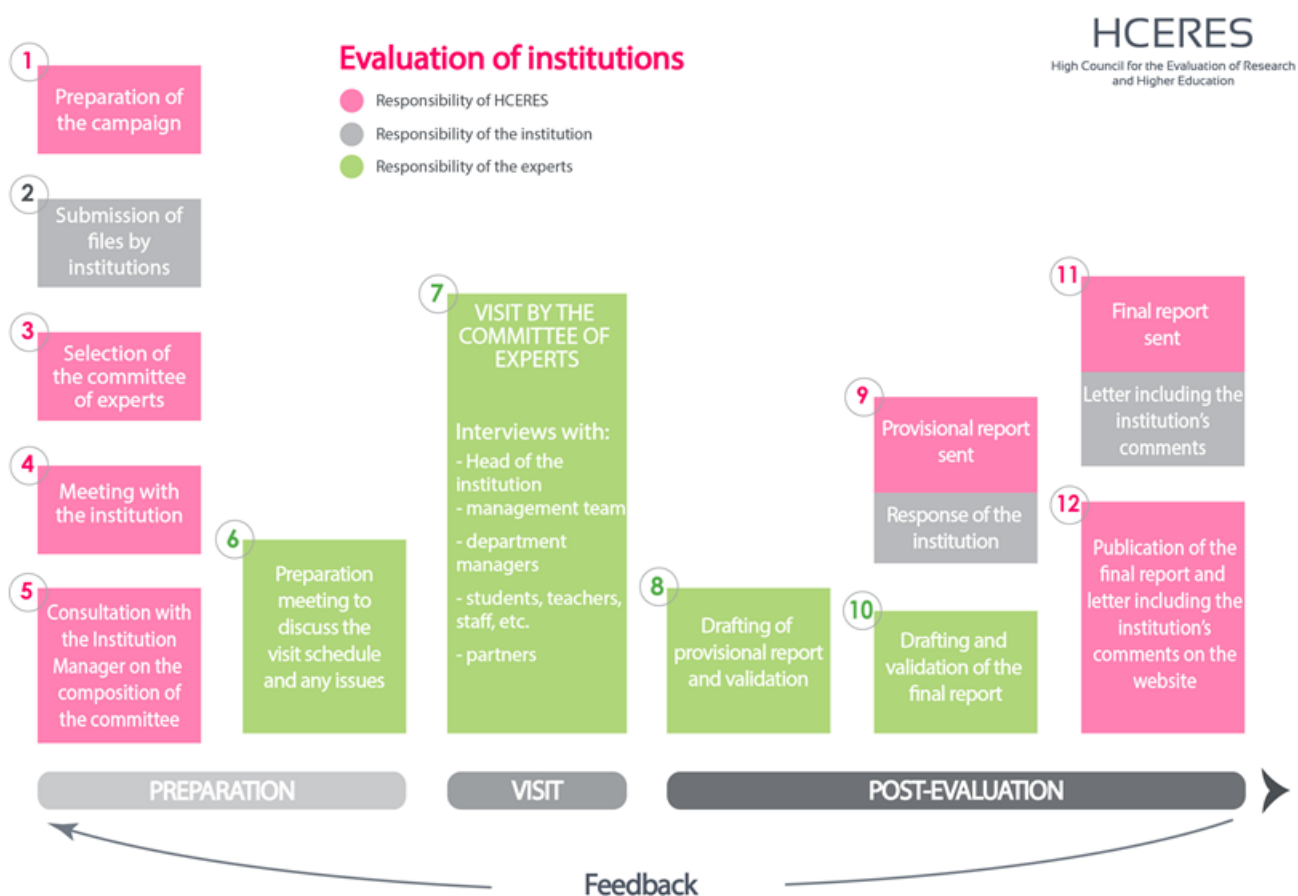
The evaluation of institutions is an “ex-post” evaluation that assesses the preceding five years.

The evaluation standards have been organised into six areas which represent the main sectors of activity corresponding to the missions of higher education and research: research and training, student success, exploitation of scientific results and scientific culture and international relations, as well as strategy and governance, and management. These 6 areas are subdivided into 17 fields, which define the main areas on which evaluation will focus. Each field includes one or more standards (34 standards in total) which state expectations, and the evaluation assesses to what extent they have been fulfilled. To this end, specific criteria are associated with each standard, which state the way compliance with the standard will be assessed by the reviewers. The criteria provided to reviewers are qualitative and generic. They include: consistency, sustainability and tenability, efficacy, effectiveness,

efficiency, comprehensibility, and relevance. This is not an exhaustive list as standards are designed to take into account diverse situations and help experts come up with their own assessments.

A team with a scientific delegate and a project officer from the department follow the entire process for each evaluation. The team organises and prepares the evaluation ahead of time (receives the file, collects documents, hears expectations from the institution, prepares the characterisation sheet and the visit schedule). The panels of experts are formed according to the profile of the institution (see Section 11.4). They are made up of 6 to 8 experts and always include one student, an administrative manager, an expert from the business world, and academic experts, at least one of whom works abroad. A meeting is organised with the institution before the visit (step 4 of the diagram below) to hear its expectations regarding the external evaluation and to help identify its specificities. The meeting also provides the opportunity to examine the state of progress as to the composition of the panel of experts in order to determine whether there are any conflicts of interest that have not been identified by HCERES.

Based on the self-evaluation report, the standards and the expectations expressed by the institution, the panel prepares a memo listing the issues that are specific to the institution. Meanwhile, the HCERES team prepares the visit schedule (2.5 to 3 days) in coordination with the panel chair and the institution. Selected interviews concern all the internal players of the institution and its various external partners. The panel then meets (Step 6) before the visit at HCERES to finalise work on issues and to go over methodology. The panel also prepares the questions for each interview with models provided by HCERES.



Following the visit, one of the first steps undertaken by the panel is to prepare the draft report under the supervision of the chair. The support team from the relevant HCERES department and an internal editorial panel check the consistency of the report, the quality of reasoning and the acceptability of the wording. The post-evaluation meeting provides a final opportunity for dialogue with the panel. After the meeting, the provisional report is validated by the panel and sent to the institution. The response phase gives the institution the opportunity to provide feedback on the report (factual errors, errors of interpretation, improper wording, etc.), and then to submit an official letter with its comments after receiving the final report. These comments are incorporated into the report that is published on the website.

► Sites evaluation (outside the scope of the ESG)

Despite the recent structuring of sites, the evaluation conducted by HCERES is based on the results but can also take future perspectives into account.

The external evaluation standards for territorial coordination strategies<sup>13</sup> are available to evaluated entities and reviewers. They structure the evaluation subject into three main areas: positioning and strategy, governance and organisation, and management of activities and coordination vision, with the third sub-divided into three fields. Each area is broken down into standards on which the evaluation of territorial coordination is based. The first two areas apply to all territorial coordination policies. The third examines things that can vary from site to site. The standards follow the same structure as the institution standards and the criteria provided to experts are also qualitative and generic.

A team with a scientific delegate and a project officer from the department follows the entire site evaluation process, which is the same as for the evaluation of an institution. The panels of experts are formed according to the profile of the site (see Section 11.4) and are made up of a maximum of 10 experts: 5 academic experts, including one from abroad, 1 or 2 administrative experts, 1 student, 2 experts from the business world. The panels include at least one expert with territorial, industry and business expertise and/or experience with project restructuring resulting from public policy reforms.

The documents used for the evaluation differ whether a bottom-up or top-down approach is undertaken for the overall process. The bottom-up approach starts with the evaluation of each of the entities in the site, and ends with the evaluation of the overall entity in order to analyse the consistency across the whole site. The top-down approach places the site's policies at the heart of the process. The evaluation therefore focuses on the analysis of the way the site's policies are applied in each entity (institutions, research units and programmes) to assess consistency and synergy across the whole site.

The report is written and published according to the same process as for institutions.

► Research units evaluation (outside the scope of the ESG)

The evaluation of research units takes into account both the evaluation of the entity's results and its project.

The standards for the external evaluation of research units are available to evaluated entities and reviewers<sup>14</sup>. They structure the evaluation into 6 main areas: scientific production and quality, academic reputation and attractiveness, interaction with the social, economic and cultural environment, organisation and life of the research entity, research involvement in training, and strategy and five-year scientific outlook. Each of these areas is characterised by 3 types of components:

- the field of application which summarises the aspects which the reviewer must assess, in general terms for all types of research units and for all areas;
- observable factual information (activities and results), which ensures that the evaluation is evidence-based;
- quality indices to assess the facts, determine what makes them valuable and enable reviewers to formulate a qualitative assessment. These are based on assessment information which the members of a disciplinary group widely adhere to.

The evaluation conducted by HCERES mainly concerns research activities and governance of the unit. To gain a better understanding of the relationship between research and training in the integrated evaluation, a new criterion was added in 2013: "Criterion 5: Research involvement in training". This criterion analyses the unit's involvement in training through research at the master's and doctorate levels, in connection with the academic bodies of these programmes. It considers the unit's involvement in bringing changes to teaching content, analyses the focus given to hosting and supporting master's and doctoral students, and assesses its attractiveness to these students. The way this criterion is taken into account is reflected in the analysis of the number of master's interns (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year) and doctoral students working in the research unit, the number of theses defended, the existence of a policy on hosting and supporting interns and doctoral students (number of supervisors, number of doctoral students who receive funding, technical and financial backing, scientific monitoring, thesis committees, etc.), involvement in developing or

<sup>13</sup> In French : <http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/25599/396880/file/ETAB-1-3-R%C3%A9f%C3%A9rentiel%20%C3%A9valuation%20externe%20des%20strat%C3%A9gies%20de%20coordination%20territorialeV1.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> In English : [http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/25610/396972/file/RECH\\_1\\_1\\_UR\\_UK\\_aide\\_redaction-16-12-2015.pdf](http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/25610/396972/file/RECH_1_1_UR_UK_aide_redaction-16-12-2015.pdf)



coordinating training modules and in bringing changes to teaching content, etc. These aspects are also taken into consideration in the evaluation of the related programmes, without being redundant with their evaluation. This comparative approach helps evaluated research units identify strategies to improve their results and practices for various missions. Although they have no direct involvement in training, it is still part of their responsibilities. The evaluation report for research units takes into consideration their levels of responsibility and conclusions are adapted accordingly.

Each evaluation is overseen by a scientific delegate and management officer. The scientific delegate prepares the evaluation by verifying the files, forming the panel of experts and preparing the visit schedule. The scientific delegate puts forward the names of experts and of the panel chair to be recruited to the director of the department based on their scientific fields and the size of the evaluated unit<sup>15</sup>. Then, the composition of the panel is presented to head of the evaluated unit in order to detect any conflicts of interest not identified by HCERES.

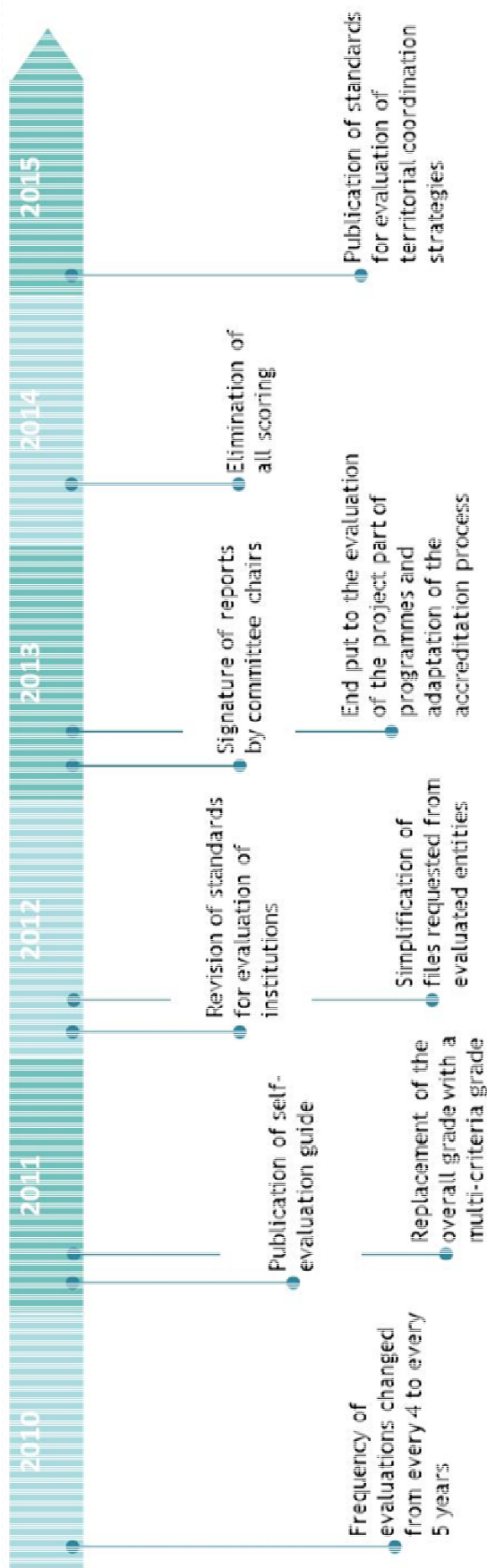
Before the visit, the panel prepares a preliminary report based on the analysis of the file. The visit includes interviews with the director(s) of the evaluated unit and its teams, with all staff and observers in attendance (supervising bodies, etc.), an interview with the doctoral and post-doctoral students, an interview with engineering, technical and administrative staff, and if applicable, an interview with researchers and professors with official status and interviews with representatives of supervising bodies (Vice-President for Research, CNRS, INSERM, INRA, etc.).

After the visit, the report is written under the direction of the panel chair, in close collaboration with the experts. It is organised into two main sections: one section for general assessment, and one section for detailed assessments. The report is then read several times by HCERES staff to ensure that it complies with HCERES principles. A two-stage response phase is organised to give the evaluated unit the opportunity to provide initial feedback (factual errors, errors of interpretation, improper wording, etc.), then validate the final report including their comments. The report is then sent to the evaluated entity and the supervising bodies. By virtue of the Decree pertaining to HCERES, only the general assessment section is made public on the HCERES website.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, please see internal procedure PRO-EVI2-02-Procedures for organising committees of experts and conducting visits (DS).

Figure 4: Changes to AERES/HCERES methodology between 2010 and 2015



## 6. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Research programme Act no. 2006-450 of 18 April 2006, which established AERES, already provided (in Article 9) that AERES could “take part in evaluating foreign or international research and higher education bodies, under European or international cooperation programmes or at the request of the competent authorities”. That possibility was reiterated in the same terms in Act no. 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 pertaining to higher education and research, which defined the missions of HCERES. The legal missions of HCERES therefore include an international aspect.

The international activities of AERES and HCERES were first designated as one of three major strategic areas defined in 2010 for the 2010-2014 period. It set out to “conduct all its actions with the international context in mind”, with the particular strategic objectives of developing international perspectives and expertise within AERES and increasing international visibility. These international aspirations were reaffirmed when the Strategic Plan was updated in December 2011. One of its four strategic axes was to “strengthen the role of AERES in Europe and on the international stage” with three well-defined objectives:

- develop the evaluation role of AERES in Europe and internationally;
- develop European and international benchmarking activities in fields where AERES has specific expertise, including the quality assurance of internationalisation processes;
- develop the long-term international visibility of AERES.

The achievement of these objectives and the growing involvement of HCERES outside France led to the creation of the Europe and International Mission (MEI) in 2011. This small-scale project-based mission<sup>16</sup> works in coordination with:

- internal partners in HCERES departments, as well as in close cooperation with the Quality Manager;
- external partners (French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Conference of University Presidents (CPU), CTI, CEFDG, Campus France, CIEP);
- and international partners, with other quality assurance agencies, depending on the types of activities conducted.

Despite a long transition phase, HCERES has thus maintained real European and international visibility through five types of activities:

- participation in European and international higher education networks, some of which are specific to quality assurance (including ENQA, EQAR, ECA, ACA, Bologna, FraQ-Sup), through involvement in bodies, working groups, and by contributing to discussion, or sharing best practices (which represents approximately 120 business trips over the reference period);
- active participation in five European projects, including CEQUINT (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation 2012-2014), which sets out to award internationalisation certificates for programmes and institutions, and QACHE 2013-2015 (Quality assurance of Cross-border Higher Education), aimed at defining best practices for evaluating out-of-country programmes and reviewing cross-border evaluation, and Tempus TLQAA Lebanon 2012-2013 (support in creating an agency in Lebanon);
- regular dialogue and partnerships with other European and international agencies (20 partnership agreements), particularly with the agencies in Spain (ANECA), Italy (ANVUR), Japan (NIAD-UE), Vietnam (VISTEC), China (CEAIE), Senegal (ANAO-SUP), Mali (AMAO-SUP), Angola (INAAREES), and Argentina (CONEAU);
- assistance in creating local quality assurance agencies and defining related policies (four projects currently underway in Tunisia, Angola, Mali, etc.);
- evaluation or evaluation for accreditation purposes, of institutions or programmes, alone or in partnership (20 programmes or institutions concerned). HCERES initially focussed on evaluation activities abroad, but has made a concerted effort to develop evaluation activities for accreditation purposes in line with the ESG:
  - in response to a major increase in foreign demand: the concept of accreditation is more widely used abroad than the concept of evaluation;

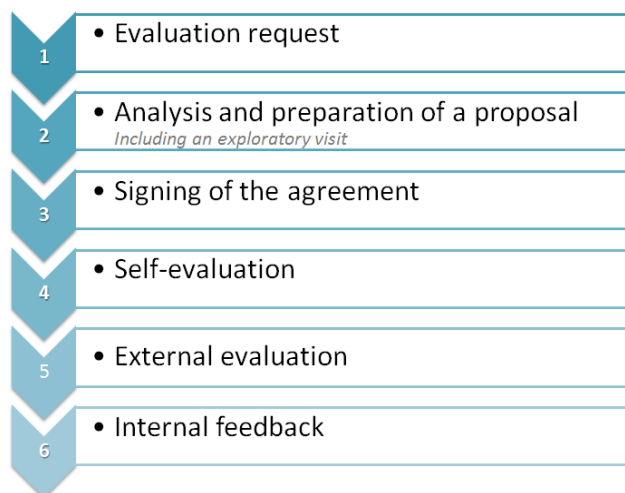
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<sup>16</sup> Made up of three people (one manager, one project officer and an assistant).

- while ensuring that, after consulting with departments of the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research, it offers accreditation equivalent to a “label”, as HCERES decisions do not grant any rights in France or abroad. The HCERES accreditation process therefore does not interfere with the process of recognition by France of diplomas that have been thus HCERES labeled.

The external evaluation process implemented abroad follows the same steps as those implemented in France.

**Step 1:** Evaluations conducted abroad directly depend on requests made by institutions. Contact can be made informally, at any time. However, if an entity is interested in an institutional evaluation or a programme evaluation, it must confirm its request in writing to the President of HCERES and the Europe and International Mission.



**Step 2:** For each request, a feasibility study is carried out to examine the available resources of HCERES, the scheduling constraints and the needs expressed by the institution. This is followed by a discussion phase with the entity to gain a better understanding of its request and determine whether HCERES can answer the request. From that step on, constant dialogue begins between the entity, the Europe and International mission, and if necessary, a scientific delegate designated to work on the project. At the end of that step:

- a draft agreement with a financial proposal is sent;
- an on-site exploratory visit is carried out to gain a clear understanding of the context in which the institution operates, its needs and how HCERES can conduct its work onsite. The evaluation standards, based on existing internal standards and applied to the international context, are also explained. HCERES and the institution then enter an agreement.

**Step 3:** Signature of the agreement forms the basis for the arrangement between the parties. This agreement sets out the fundamental principles and provides details on the following points: the schedule, the evaluation process, the proposed methodology, the appeals processes, the legal financial provisions. The aim of the evaluation report is to establish an assessment to serve as a decision-making support tool for the evaluated entity and, where necessary, its stakeholders. It is in no way binding or prescriptive. The decision issued by HCERES does not grant any rights whatsoever, whether in France or abroad.

**Step 4:** In accordance with European principles, entities must conduct their own self-evaluation and are free to prepare their own report based on their own methods.

**Step 5:** External evaluation takes place in three phases:

- An evaluation preparation and organisation phase with the evaluated entity and experts. Experts are selected in accordance with principles in force at HCERES, based on the criteria of professionalism, independence and ethical standards. Since the publication of the 2015 ESG, students are included in the panels of experts. The names of the experts are submitted to the evaluated entity prior to the evaluation, in order to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. In addition, an HCERES representative (project officer) supports them in their mission and remains the institution's permanent contact point. At the same time, the on-site visit (3 to 4 days on average) is prepared by the institution in close coordination with the HCERES project officer.
- A review phase, including file analysis and an on-site visit. The experts first study the self-evaluation report and the documents supplied by the institution. During the preparatory meeting, the experts share their individual assessments, the programme of the on-site visit is set and tasks are distributed among the experts. The visit provides the opportunity to meet all the stakeholders from the institution and add information to the self-evaluation report.
- A report writing phase, including the drafting of the report, a response phase giving the evaluated entity the opportunity to provide feedback, and the publication of the report or final decision. Following the on-site

visit, the experts draft an initial evaluation report called the provisional report. It is then submitted by the panel chair to HCERES for assessment by an editorial committee including at least three HCERES representatives. HCERES does not change the content of the provisional report, but checks the precision and consistency of the reasoning and the compliance with the methodology defined at the start. The provisional report is submitted to the institution for comment and correction of any factual errors, if required. Once the institution has replied, any necessary corrections are made, and the report is considered final. It can then be published on the HCERES website.

Following Step 5, if requested by the institution and stated in the agreement, the external evaluation may be followed by an accreditation. Accreditation is understood as the issue of an “accreditation label”, which attests to the quality of a programme or institution.

The experts write a proposal regarding the accreditation, which is sent to the institution along with the provisional report. The accreditation commission, whose members are appointed by HCERES separately from the experts, studies the final evaluation report and the accreditation proposal in the light of the accreditation criteria communicated to the institution at the start. Then, the accreditation commission makes a decision regarding accreditation, which may take the following forms:

- A five-year accreditation;
- A five-year accreditation with mandatory follow-up after two years;
- A refusal of accreditation.

The recent accreditation of an Armenian institution was conducted in partnership with ANECA (the Spanish Agency for the Evaluation of Higher Education), and the accreditation commission included HCERES members.

**Step 6:** After the evaluation reports or accreditation decisions have been published, opportunity for feedback is organised with the evaluated entities and/or experts for the purpose of continuous improvement.

HCERES European and international activities have developed steadily in line with the strategic areas defined in the previous strategic plan, with the goal of engaging in and continuing visible international work.

The expertise that has been developed along the way through the various missions has benefited and enriched the work of HCERES. The efforts already made to organise activities and strengthen the internal position of the Europe and International mission will lead to new projects, including the evaluation of French institutions abroad (Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education).

Since 2010, the international activities of HCERES have reflected a continuing desire to consolidate its experience, expand its missions, and structure methods and practices, deliberately developing a dynamic process to help HCERES grow internally and strengthen its international position.

# 7. HCERES INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The internal quality system has significantly changed since the creation of AERES and then HCERES, in line with contextual and strategic changes.

## 1. Governance

The HCERES Board plays a key role in the internal quality assurance system. It gives its opinion and decides on the evaluation methodologies to be implemented. Through its analyses, it ensures that HCERES completes its missions and that its methodologies comply with the founding principles of evaluation - objectivity, transparency and equal treatment for the entities evaluated. Reports that are submitted to the Board are carefully examined to ensure that the HCERES organisational structure allows the HCERES to meet its objectives and, where required, the Board votes the necessary changes.

The Executive Committee is responsible for managing the internal quality assurance system along with the quality department, under the management of the Secretary general.

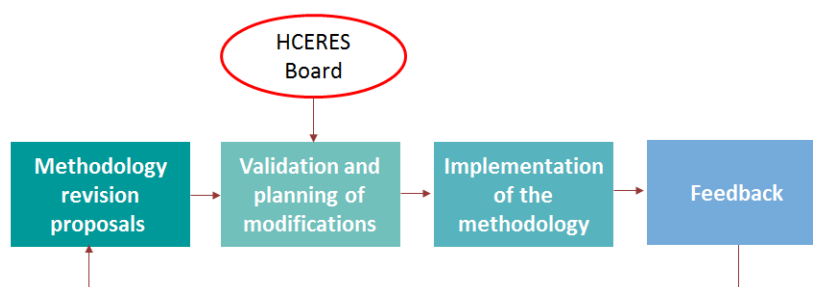
## 2. Organisational structure

During the external evaluation of AERES in 2010, the document, "Internal quality standards" played a dominant role. AERES took over from several institutions (CNE, MSTP, CNER, etc. - see Section 3), which had very different scopes of intervention, methodologies and cultures. These standards were organised in three parts and based on the ESG. They were extremely useful for structuring common principles and rules.

Using this basis and in the light of the integrated evaluation approach, each department was able to build its quality assurance tools. At the same time, the tools common to the various quality assurance activities were strengthened (see Section 7.3).

AERES and HCERES made sure that the activity of the quality department continued in order to support services and departments in their quality approach and the development of their internal and external tools, and to ensure compliance with the principles set out.

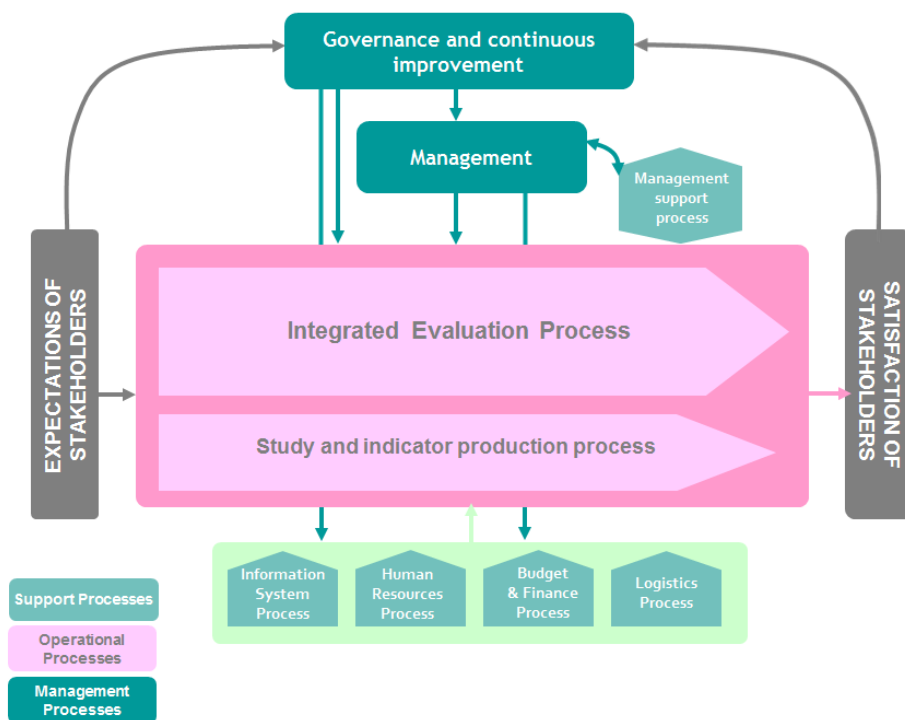
The institution adopted a flexible system due to the differences between the evaluation subjects and the resulting specific needs, and their evaluation experience. This system is based on an overall quality assurance approach (plan / do / check / act), which can be illustrated as follows:



Each department operates in line with this model. In this cycle of continuous improvement, the HCERES board ensures compliance with the institution's principles and missions.

The organisation and connections between the various HCERES processes are illustrated in the figure opposite.

This is all organised according to the cycle of continuous improvement described above and in accordance with changes to the institution's regulatory framework.



It should be stated that the activities of the Observatory of Science and Technologies have previously been certified in accordance with Standard ISO 9001, applied to project-mode operation for indicator development projects.

### 3. Tools

Through successive evaluation groups, regulatory changes and internal developments, AERES and then HCERES have implemented tools to manage and strengthen the quality of their activities. These tools are both common to the entire institution and specific to each type of activity. The whole system is coordinated by the governance and management bodies - the Board and the Executive Committee.

► Tools common to all evaluation activities

- The evaluation charter<sup>17</sup>: this is the cornerstone of evaluations performed by HCERES and the heart of its ethical standards. It sets the objectives determined by the institution and the major principles of its code of ethics. It includes the following principles: high-performance evaluation activities (skill, professionalism and frequency); impartial evaluation (equal treatment, independence of results, integrity of experts, collegial approach to evaluation) and finally, respect for the entities evaluated (diversity and autonomy, transparency and publication, and confidentiality). It is published on the website, sent to all experts and is part of the EDM / Pool of experts application.

- The “Expert status” and “Scientific delegate status”: these documents explain their commitments and roles on the basis of the evaluation charter. They are aimed at the persons recruited for these functions and the “Expert status” is one of the components in the EDM (Electronic Document Management) / Pool of experts application.

- The declaration of interests: in order to ensure the independence of its evaluations, HCERES asks all its members, whether Board members, permanent staff, scientific delegates or experts, to declare the positions they have held during the five years prior to their recruitment, and any posts and interests held over the same period in institutions or bodies that are subject to evaluation by HCERES. That system is integrated into the EDM / Pool of experts application for experts.

<sup>17</sup>It was revised in 2012 and will be resubmitted for approval from the new HCERES Board in June 2016.

- Digital evaluation management tools: in order to facilitate document sharing between evaluation stakeholders, HCERES and the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research (MENESR) jointly manage an application named Pelican, which evaluated entities use to submit their self-evaluation file and any other documents. That application is also used by the Ministry as part of its contract negotiation process.

In order to ensure the traceability of all evaluation files and to make them available to experts, HCERES uses an Electronic Document Management (EDM) application and a database on the experts (Pool of experts). These two applications are linked and used by HCERES staff and experts. Files submitted via Pelican are automatically transferred to the EDM application. The organisation of expert panels is entered into the EDM application (recording HCERES staff responsible for the file, the experts recruited, dates of meetings and/or visits, etc.), giving all experts direct access to the evaluation files which they are responsible for and any useful HCERES document resources. The experts can then submit their contribution and the draft report. The application can save different successive versions of a report. Reports are automatically published on the HCERES website from that application.

These two applications are at the heart of the evaluation system. Over the last three years, they have been significantly improved with a view to providing internal and external users with a better service. Improvements have focused on two aspects - simplification and process automation.

In order to improve use of the EDM application and the quality of data it contains, a management system has been implemented by the IT Manager and Quality Manager - "EDM contacts". The aim is to support departments and services in using the EDM and to keep it up to date in line with internal needs.

- Shared digital spaces: HCERES has reserved an area dedicated to the internal quality assurance system on its servers, with documents concerning procedures and processes.

- A survey management application (Sphinx) to provide more professional implementation of feedback.

- Archiving management: in 2013, AERES contacted the French Ministry of Culture and Communication archiving department for assessment and recommendations in this area. This work was launched with a view to implementing a quality approach for managing archives which would be common to all activities and prepare for the transition of AERES to HCERES. Standards were developed and people were appointed to coordinate their proper implementation.

- The introduction of internal seminars for all HCERES staff in order to improve employee knowledge on specific topics, such as the revision of the ESG, benchmark for accreditation, etc.

► Tools specific to each department or service

In addition to the above mentioned systems, internal quality assurance system coordination and control tools have been rolled out in various departments and services:

- periodical activity monitoring meetings: department meetings, service meetings, meeting between the Secretary general and administrative delegates;

- documented quality assurance procedures, drawn up with the support of the Quality Manager, in order to describe internal department and service processes, their operation, the role of each and control points. When applicable, these are supplemented by forms to facilitate information sharing between departments and/or services;

- shared tools for order management and application operation, etc.

- working groups: risk analysis for institution evaluation activities, upgrading of applications, etc.

That internal quality assurance system ensures that HCERES is conducting its missions in line with its ethical principles, while reducing risks to a minimum and continuing to work towards progress and continuous improvement of all its internal processes.



## 8. SWOT ANALYSIS

Before presenting the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) carried out as part of the self-evaluation, it might be useful to present a general analysis of HCERES progress over the most recent period.

### 1. Evaluations that contribute to the development of higher education and research

The French Acts of 2007 and 2013 significantly increased the autonomy of higher education and research institutions. This increased autonomy resulted in more confident positions, strategies and management practices for institutions and all of their training and research bodies. The expectations set out in the HCERES standards were written in this context and the evaluations carried out in its three main areas of intervention have pushed back the boundaries of French higher education and research. The following key points directly linked to these evaluations can be highlighted:

- the development of quality policies, internal evaluation practice and institution management indicators;
- better identification of teaching teams and programme management tools;
- emphasis on links between training and research;
- the operational implementation of institutional strategies.

### 2. Changing concept of integrated evaluation

The concept of integrated evaluation based on the evaluation of programmes, research units and institutions has gradually grown to include sites.

That concept is complex to implement and was developed by HCERES in a constantly changing context (see above). However, HCERES has confirmed its ability to plan and conduct a very high number of evaluations each year, engage in constructive dialogue with stakeholders, and make a set of public reports available to the entire community.

Nevertheless, that has generated some weaknesses, as revealed in the self-evaluation. Despite real progress, the operation of the three evaluation departments is not sufficiently integrated. This results in the development of standards that are not yet fully uniform and management of the pool of experts that still requires improvement with regard to recruitment and training processes in order to increase the effectiveness of evaluations.

The experience acquired in integrated evaluation has also raised a number of questions, which will be discussed for the 2016-2020 strategic plan, in particular concerning the scale and depth of evaluations and the use of HCERES outputs by a larger number of actors.

### 3. The realisation of an international dimension

Throughout this period, a number of requests have been made by the international community to HCERES. It has responded to these requests by very significantly increasing its international evaluation activity and by participating in the various international quality assurance networks. This has been a key step for HCERES, which has helped it strengthen its partnerships and capitalise on international know-how. This progress has also revealed the need to better identify HCERES priorities for action in that field.

### 4. Sound experience to meet coming challenges

In recent years, HCERES has capitalised on extensive know-how in external evaluations, and more broadly, quality assurance. Nevertheless, internal quality assurance policy now needs to be strengthened for better coordination and rationalisation of all continuous improvement processes in order to create a stronger and more formal momentum for HCERES.

Constant change against a backdrop of significant transformations in higher education and research in France could be construed as a form of instability. However, analysis of HCERES progress shows that this actually demonstrates real agility with, on the one hand, proof of openness and responsiveness to a changing environment and, on the other hand, evidence of a certain maturity from HCERES in its ability to manage continuous improvement and assert itself fully as a European quality assurance agency.

## 5. SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stakeholder involvement is enshrined in its organisational structure through Board membership. Stakeholders are regularly consulted in defining and updating methodologies.</li> <li>- A tried and tested evaluation methodology based on an evaluation charter and comprehensive quality system.</li> <li>- A tradition of producing summaries from evaluation reports.</li> <li>- A quality approach shared by all staff.</li> <li>- The existence of a strong administrative and scientific skill base and staff involved in organising and conducting evaluation operations.</li> <li>- Supervision of the evaluation process by peer scientific delegates working in the same disciplines.</li> <li>- Integrated evaluation to cover the ESG.</li> <li>- Suitable training given to all experts involved in the evaluation processes for programmes, institutions and sites.</li> <li>- Collegiality of the panel of experts.</li> <li>- Revised standards for evaluation of programmes and institutions with a uniform approach.</li> <li>- A structured, supervised and uniform design for evaluation reports.</li> <li>- A formal appeals process managed by a complaints committee and a very low rate of appeal.</li> <li>- Real international action capability.</li> <li>- Know-how of the OST for producing indicators and analyses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delicate balance between maintaining identical evaluation for all and a methodology revised each year.</li> <li>- Common formulation of standards and vocabulary which has not been totally finalised.</li> <li>- Follow-up is complicated to implement as the contractualisation process already lasts 5 years.</li> <li>- Difficulties involving students in the evaluation process for Bachelor's, Vocational Bachelor's and Master's programmes with regard to the number to evaluate each year and the financial implications.</li> <li>- Difficulties recruiting experts and scientific delegates in some disciplines.</li> <li>- Difficulties consolidating and renewing the pool of experts.</li> <li>- An internal organisational structure that does not promote smooth integrated evaluation.</li> <li>- Insufficient HCERES presence in public debates and discussions.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National context of simplification of the higher education and research system.</li> <li>- Implementation of groupings of institutions.</li> <li>- Stronger links between regional schemes with national higher education and research strategies.</li> <li>- Ongoing redefinition of programme accreditation.</li> <li>- Increase in international requests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued increase in the scope of evaluation for which HCERES is responsible without additional resources.</li> <li>- A distribution of powers between evaluation and inspection bodies that is sometimes redundant.</li> <li>- For recruiting scientific delegates, financial requirements set by their institutions, leading to difficulties.</li> </ul>

# 9. SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

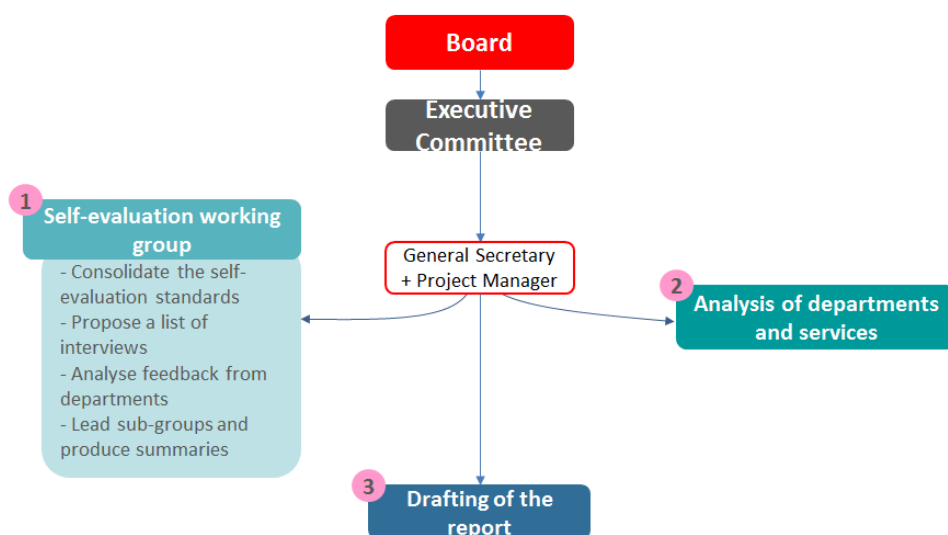
The HCERES self-evaluation process was intentionally designed as a participatory process bringing together the various HCERES players under the managerial oversight of the Executive Committee and the Board. The self-evaluation schedule coincided with the appointment of a new HCERES Board and President and it also aimed to highlight internal quality priorities in order to define the future quality policy of HCERES.

At the first HCERES Board meeting of 14 December 2015, the Board was informed of the initiative and the progress of work. Operational management was provided by the Secretary general and the Quality Manager as Project Manager. Their role was to detail the context of the evaluation of HCERES with regard to ENQA and EQAR standards and also produce guidelines for the Executive Committee.

A cross-cutting group was created to actively contribute to the self-evaluation work. This group was formed by each department proposing members from a list of profiles that were generally representative of HCERES activities and skills. Each of the 13 group members received a mission statement from the President of HCERES, describing the group’s objectives, working methods, and the spirit and ethic of the project. Members of the Board were involved in the group’s work.

The project took place in three major phases, the first two being launched simultaneously.

Figure 4: Diagram of the self-evaluation initiative



## 1. Analysis and coordination work by the “self-evaluation” group

The self-evaluation working group began by studying the reference documents (ESG, 2010 self-evaluation and external review reports) and considered how to evaluate the activities of HCERES not directly covered by the ESG so as to include them in the internal quality assurance approach.

After that initial work, the group defined three cross-cutting issues for HCERES activities:

- the evaluation of sites and analysis of the practice of integrated evaluation, and more specifically, the perspective on experiments in “evaluation modulation” (level of detail and focus);
- the coordination between department methodologies and the files requested from institutions;
- experts: recruitment process, management of the pool of experts, training, honorarium.

These issues were validated by the Executive Committee and discussed in working groups open to all HCERES staff. Twenty-five members of staff took part in these workshops in addition to the members of the cross-cutting group. A summary report was drawn up for each issue.

The cross-cutting group also presented proposals to identify the evaluation stakeholders to be contacted for the HCERES self-evaluation, the questions to be asked and the way of asking them. Feedback was summarised and attached to this report (see Section 12). The group held five meetings between 14 October 2015 and 8 February 2016.

## 2. Analysis work by the departments and general Secretariat

Each HCERES department was responsible for organising the analysis of its practices and operations with regard to European standards, where applicable, and its missions. Guidelines were set for the content to be produced (including changes since the previous evaluation, perceived difficulties/obstacles to carrying out activities, the quality assurance tools in place, planned changes in the coming years). The departments conducted their analyses in internal groups organised by their management from October to December 2015.

## 3. Drafting of the self-evaluation report

This self-evaluation report was drawn up under the responsibility of the Secretary general and Quality Manager on the basis of the above mentioned items: self-analyses, summary reports on issues and consultations. The report was assessed and completed by the self-evaluation group during review sessions (18 January and 8 February) and discussion continued until 27 February 2016.

The Executive Committee was systematically consulted for approval at each stage in the process and during the various self-evaluation report review phases. The final report was presented to the HCERES Board on 7 March 2016 and was adopted unanimously by all members present (26 in favour, 0 against, 0 abstained).

# 10.COMPLIANCE WITH THE ESG (Part 3)

The whole of Section 10 gives information relevant to all HCERES evaluation activities: evaluation of territorial coordination policies, higher education institutions, research units, study programmes, including cross-border evaluation activities. The status of HCERES, the provisions that ensure its independence, the internal quality assurance policy and the way it is implemented, are all cross-cutting issues that affect all these activities.

## 10.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

### ESG 3.1 - Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Sections 11.1 to 11.7 demonstrate how HCERES complies with ESG Part 2 through its processes and methodologies.

Act no. 2013-60 of 22 July 2013 pertaining to higher education and research, which established HCERES as the French evaluation body, clearly states its missions, which are primarily to evaluate study programmes and degrees, research units, higher education institutions and groupings (see Section 3). This information is also presented on the HCERES website.

The aforementioned Act also specifies the fundamental principles of evaluation, which are objectivity, transparency and equal treatment. HCERES seeks to draw inspiration from international best practices in designing its methods and establishing tools to ensure the quality of its evaluations.

The principle of cyclical contractualisation that includes the accreditation process is laid down by law, with a 5-year cycle established. The prerequisite evaluations also take place at 5-year intervals. At the time of the external evaluation of AERES in 2010, this interval was only four years. This extension is in line with international practice and has been implemented partly to relieve higher education institutions of some of the administrative burden associated with quality assurance mechanisms and give them time to implement the improvements identified and achieve their objectives.

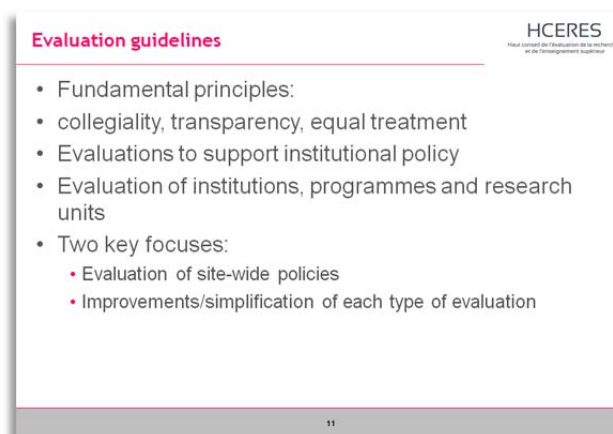
Day to day, the heart of HCERES work is therefore to develop and implement external quality assurance of study programmes, research units and higher education institutions. This can be seen in the increasing number of evaluations which HCERES is responsible for, as shown in the table below:

Group	D	E	A	B*	C*
Institutions	39	58	61	65	47
Programmes	591	1080	993	1168	1425
Doctoral schools	74	45	56	31	56
Research units	600	585	471	415	626
<b>Total</b>	<b>1304</b>	<b>1768</b>	<b>1632</b>	<b>1679</b>	<b>2154</b>

Evaluation Group D: 2012-2013  
 Evaluation Group E: 2013-2014  
 Evaluation Group A: 2014-2015  
 Evaluation Group B: 2015-2016  
 Evaluation Group C: 2016-2017  
 \* Estimates

At the start of each evaluation campaign, the evaluation principles and objectives are presented to the evaluated parties at launch meetings. As can be seen from the presentation slide opposite, the main aim is to support institutions and units in the continuous improvement of their practices and to provide decision-makers with the appropriate information.

In order to ensure its work is properly performed, HCERES is overseen by a Board, which defines the annual evaluation schedule and the measures required for



ensuring the quality, transparency and publication of its evaluation procedures. The Board is representative of all evaluation stakeholders: researchers, engineers or professors, student representatives put forward by student bodies and qualified figures, including members of European quality assurance agencies. Members of Parliament appointed by the standing committee for Higher Education and Research of each house of French Parliament also sit on the Board. All stakeholders in evaluation are therefore engaged in the governance of HCERES through membership of the Board.

In addition, the principle of internal quality assurance with annual methodology reviews (see Section 7 p.29, and Section 11.2) requires evaluation stakeholders to be consulted either on the existing methodology or any proposed changes. This mode of operation gives stakeholders an active and regular role in the way in which HCERES carries out its activities.

Finally, following on from the recommendation in the 2010 AERES External Review, AERES and HCERES have established consultative bodies in order to foster greater openness and regular dialogue, with a variety of stated objectives. A student committee was created in 2011, a “Business World” committee in 2013, a broader institutional stakeholder consultation committee called “Mikado” was established in 2012, and finally a “Regions” committee has been developed. Because of the transition from AERES to HCERES, the work of these bodies has been suspended (see Section 13).

#### Key points<sup>18</sup>

- + *Stakeholder involvement is enshrined in the HCERES organisational structure through Board membership. Stakeholders are regularly consulted in defining and updating methodologies.*
- ▶ *Redefine the scope and operating procedures for the HCERES consultative bodies, and start working with them once again.*

## 10.2 Official status

### ESG 3.2 - Official status

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

HCERES is an independent administrative authority, as was AERES. Its status and missions are defined in Article 90 of Act no. 2013-60 of 22 July 2013. Its organisation and operation are governed by a decree laid down by the French Council of State (Decree no. 2014-1365 of 16 November 2014).

Although this legislation allows evaluated parties to choose another evaluation body, HCERES has a unique role in guaranteeing any evaluation methodology, since HCERES alone “validates the evaluation procedures used” by other bodies.

These legal and regulatory provisions ensure that HCERES has the legitimacy and recognition necessary to carry out its quality assurance activities throughout France.

## 10.3 Independence

### ESG 3.3 - Independence

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

<sup>18</sup> In Sections 10 and 11, the “+” and “-” symbols denote strengths and weaknesses and the “▶” symbol highlights areas for improvement.

► Organisational independence

The independence of HCERES with regard to government authorities is guaranteed by its status as an independent administrative authority. This status applies to “administrative bodies that act on behalf of the State and which have real power, but not government authority”<sup>19</sup>.

In November 2015, a report by the French Senate commission responsible for “review and oversight of the establishment, organisation, activity and management of independent administrative authorities”<sup>20</sup> recognised that this status was appropriate to the work of HCERES, thus acknowledging the legitimacy of its statutory independence.

► Operational independence

HCERES is governed collegially by a Board of 30 members representing the full variety of evaluation stakeholders. The Board is appointed for a four-year term of office by official decree and its members are irrevocable. Article 4 of the HCERES organisational decree<sup>21</sup> seeks to enhance precautionary measures relating to the conduct of Board members, by identifying any roles that would be incompatible with appointment to the Board, in particular, another high-level post by appointment of the French Council of Ministers. The Board defines the framework, objectives, criteria and way in which evaluation procedures should be performed. It also establishes the general framework for evaluations, assessments or analyses, and seeks to promote the continuous improvement of evaluation criteria and procedures. All rules and methodologies defined and adopted by the Board are made public on the HCERES website for the sake of transparency.

HCERES funding is debated and voted on every year by the French Parliament. Its expenditure is not subject to any *ex ante* financial control. The Court of Auditors is the sole body authorised to perform *ex post* audits of HCERES expenditure (see Article 9, Decree no. 2014-1365).

Under said decree, the Board is also free to determine the HCERES organisational structure and operating methods. HCERES is thus entirely free to recruit its administrative and scientific staff.

The combination of the statutory provisions and measures taken by the Board ensure that HCERES has organisational and operational independence to define the way it operates and the methodologies it uses. This is all organised in a way that ensures regular and unfettered communication with institutional stakeholders and bodies involved in the various evaluations.

► Independence of outcomes

HCERES has a range of tools and preventive measures that the Board has adopted to prevent any external influence on evaluation outcomes:

- impartial evaluation is one of the three principles on which the ethical standards of evaluation are based. This is explicitly stated in the evaluation charter, the most recent version of which was adopted by the Board on 13 December 2012. The charter also sets forth requirements as to the integrity of experts, and requires utmost intellectual rigour. It specifies that the experts' assessments must be solely based on analysis of the information gathered. Acceptance of the charter is a prerequisite to any evaluation assignment. This is managed via the EDM / Pool of experts application. In accepting a role for HCERES, experts undertake to ensure no personal contact with the evaluated entity throughout the duration of the assignment;

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<sup>19</sup> Council of State - Public Report “*Les autorités administrative indépendantes*” (Independent administrative authorities)- 2001: “it is commonly agreed and accepted, in line with old and well-established Council of State jurisprudence, that within the State there are autonomous authorities, separate from the Government, but belonging to the State and vested with decision-making powers 79 (...) This implies the acknowledgement of the principle of administrative authorities that exist outside of the hierarchy of central government administrations answerable to the ministries.”

<sup>20</sup> Report available (in French) via the following link: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r15-126-1/r15-126-11.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Decree no. 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014 pertaining to the organisation and operation of the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029762447>

- the regulations governing the status of scientific delegates and experts also refer to the ethical principles set forth in the evaluation charter;
- since 2011, all members of HCERES and all experts are required to guarantee their integrity by declaring any positive or negative links or interests prior to any assignment;
- before the panel of experts is selected, a review is carried out, generally by the scientific delegate/project officer on any links between the potential experts and the evaluated entity;
- the list of experts is presented to the evaluated entity to give it the opportunity to highlight any conflicts of interest that had not been detected or declared;
- finally, since 2013, to highlight the responsibility of the experts and their independence of judgement, evaluation reports have been signed by the panel chairman to attest that the content is the reflection of the views of the panel as a whole, and by the President of HCERES to attest to compliance with ethical principles.

Article 12 of Decree no. 2014-1365 also states that HCERES Board members, experts and agents may not participate in deliberations or in writing reports pertaining to evaluated entities where they are employed.

#### *Key points*

- + *The status and organisational structure of HCERES ensure it has the independence necessary to carry out its work.*

## 10.4 Thematic analysis

### ESG 3.4 - Thematic analysis

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Ever since their establishment, both AERES and then HCERES have undertaken analysis work that goes beyond individual evaluation reports. That work includes the annual activity report and the summary reports on the national and international education and research environment.

#### ▶ Annual report

The HCERES annual activity report<sup>22</sup> and its submission to the Government is a legal obligation (Article L 114-3-7 of the French Research Code). Over and above this obligation, each year, AERES and HCERES have sought to publish a clear and detailed report, recognising that it is a key tool for information and transparency with regard to evaluation outcomes, the methodologies used and any changes in them, ethical principles and human and financial resources involved. The reports are published annually on the HCERES website and are submitted to the French Government, Parliament and all higher education and research institutions. An abridged version is also released in English for European partners.

#### ▶ Thematic summary reports

In the Framework of a European project, the MEI at HCERES has taken part into a one-off study leading to a publication of report. The aim of Erasmus Mundus QACHE Project (*Quality assurance of cross-border higher education*), launched in 2013, was to have a better understanding of higher education cross-border activities and to propose ways to enhance their quality assurance. An initial task was to identify French cross-border provision and the way it is quality assured. This analysis and study was performed using data collected through HCERES evaluations and

<sup>22</sup> AERES 2014 Annual Report (in French): [http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23504/364450/file/RAP\\_2014\\_22122014VD.pdf](http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23504/364450/file/RAP_2014_22122014VD.pdf)  
 2014 Summary annual report (English) [http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23506/364468/file/RAP2014\\_EnBrefAnglais.pdf](http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23506/364468/file/RAP2014_EnBrefAnglais.pdf)  
 2013 Annual Report (in French): <https://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/Actualites/Actualites-de-l-agence/Rapport-d-activite-2013>



reports, supplemented with national data. The publication of this report on the project website<sup>23</sup> contributed to domestic discussions on the issue of French higher education offerings abroad, in particular through Campus France<sup>24</sup> and France Stratégie<sup>25</sup>.

► Regular summary reports on higher education and research

The current internal discussions on the usefulness of summary reports based on the evaluation reports started when the integrated evaluation of the first four groups performed by AERES between 2007 and 2010 were being finalised. After covering the whole of French territory, AERES published a study entitled “AERES 2010”, presenting regional analysis of the evaluations and highlighting the broad trends observed<sup>26</sup>.

Following the release of this study, in autumn 2011, AERES consulted the regional councils to find out how they used the evaluations and to identify any additional needs. This inquiry confirmed that regional summary reports, restating the outcomes of all three levels of evaluation (programmes, research units and institutions) were most useful. In autumn 2012, the President of AERES decided to set up a group of six scientific delegates from the three evaluation departments in order to draw up the “regional summary reports”, which are now available on the HCERES website.

With the changes in the national structure of higher education and research and the focus on territorial coordination, the role and importance of these summary reports was enhanced. Drawing on the methodology used for the regional reports, AERES undertook to perform regular analysis to support higher education institutions in developing their site policies (higher education and research clusters, as they were formerly known, or following the Act of July 2013, Communities of Universities and Institutions (COMUE) or associations). It began to produce site summary reports covering study programmes, research units and institutions.

From the evaluations in Group A (2009-2010) to Group E (2013-2014), AERES wrote summary reports on the overall master’s offer within a given regional education authority. These summaries are drafted internally by a scientific delegate, drawing on the evaluation reports on the relevant programmes. Since evaluation Group A (2014-2015), the report structure has been reviewed to take into account the “training field” level. The aim of this new approach is to provide a “site-wide” overview and analysis of the range of study programmes and doctoral schools. These summaries are drawn up after publication of the evaluation reports and are sent to all institutions on the site, and to the supervising ministries, but are not currently published on the HCERES website.

Similarly since Group A (2014-2015), evaluation summary reports on research units have been drawn up using the same principles by an internal group of scientific delegates, based on the evaluation reports on research units on a given site. They are sent to the institutions of the site and to the supervising ministries. These summaries are also made available to the panels of experts evaluating the institutions in order to clarify their “Research and Training” overview prior to the expert mission.

That activity could benefit from the knowhow of OST in using data to improve the quality of the summary reports produced.

#### Key points

- + *A strong tradition of using evaluation reports to produce broader summaries (focusing on a site, region or thematic area) to serve the evaluated entities and society at large.*
- *Draw upon the skills of OST to develop expertise on site characterisation.*
- *Pursue reflection on site-specific summary reports, in conjunction with the strategic priorities of HCERES, and define expectations regarding site summary overviews.*

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/QACHE-Country-Report-France.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> [http://ressources.campusfrance.org/publi\\_institu/agence\\_cf/breves/fr/breve\\_02\\_fr.pdf](http://ressources.campusfrance.org/publi_institu/agence_cf/breves/fr/breve_02_fr.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/publications/investir-linternationalisation-de-lenseignement-superieur>

<sup>26</sup> Study results available here (in French): <http://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/Publications/Analyse-des-evaluations-etudes/AERES-2010-Analyses-regionales-des-evaluations-realisees-entre-2007-et-2010>

## 10.5 Resources

### ESG 3.5 - Resources

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

HCERES has all the human and financial resources required to carry out its work.

► *Human resources:*

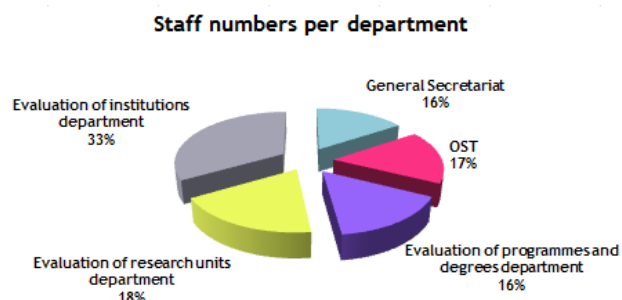
HCERES uses its permanent administrative staff, scientific delegates and experts (see Section 11.4 for experts) to perform its evaluations.

#### Administrative staff:

HCERES has 102 administrative staff members, who are either civil servants or contractual employees working on a fixed-term or permanent contract, depending on their length of service. It also uses contractual staff to handle periods of peak activity, for a maximum period of twelve months. It should be stated that HCERES, as a priority, seeks to recruit existing civil service staff. Every job vacancy is published on an inter-ministerial civil service employment opportunities website.

The rules for recruiting contractual staff, including pay scale, were adopted by the AERES Board in 2008. These rules and terms are included in the in-house regulations and will be reviewed in 2016, to take into account the new professions with OST and changes in roles since 2008.

Number of staff	Natural persons	FTE	Worked FTE
Civil servants	38,00	37,60	37,04
Contractual staff	47,00	46,00	51,03
12-month contractual staff	16,00	16,00	14,60
Apprentice	1,00	1,00	0,27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>102,00</b>	<b>100,60</b>	<b>102,94</b>



Data as at 31/12/2015

Administrative staff are assigned either to support services or to mission-support departments. Most work full time. The various roles are specified in job descriptions and are organised as follows:

- multi-functional administrative staff providing support for organising evaluations, managing human resources, IT resources or logistics, financial management or administrative tasks;
- project officers whose role is to contribute to carrying out the evaluation programme in France and abroad; research officers responsible for statistical analysis and data processing; thematic research officers (communication, quality, etc.);
- IT support staff;
- administration and management officers (heads of department, etc.).

HCERES uses an annual staff skills management system, covering all staff except contractual employees recruited for a twelve-month period. All staff members have an annual appraisal with their line manager, with the aim of reviewing their work, previous objectives for the period and achievements. Line managers use this opportunity to discuss their assessment of the staff member's professional qualities, drawing on criteria used for the entire French civil service (professional and technical skills; contribution to the work of the department; professional and relational skills; supervision and project management abilities). Future objectives are also set during this annual appraisal. The second part of the appraisal focuses on professional development training opportunities that will enable staff members to diversify their knowledge and increase their expertise.

Although HCERES organises occasional training courses on topics related to higher education and research, a more specific training plan on quality culture in France and abroad still remains to be designed.

**Scientific delegates:**

The 115 scientific delegates are responsible for organising the evaluations from a scientific perspective.

They are generally researchers or professors and are employed on a part-time basis, seconded to HCERES by their host institution in return for financial compensation.

The number of scientific delegates varies according to the number of evaluations planned in each group. Most of them are professors (56%) and a majority (62%) work in the department responsible for evaluating research units.

	Professors	Researchers	Others (civil society)	Total
Evaluation of institutions department	9	0	3	12
Evaluation of research units department	31	20	20	71
Evaluation of programmes and degrees department	21	0	4	25
OST	3	1	3	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>115</b>

Data as at 31/12/2015

More generally, the administrative structure will need to be changed following the incorporation of OST in January 2015 and the new strategic plan for the 2016-2020 period, aiming to enhance integrated evaluation. A change management plan will be required in order to support this process.

► *Financial resources:*

HCERES has a budget of €17.5 million in order to carry out evaluation work, which is chiefly funded through a State grant. Its budget is debated and adopted by Parliament as part of the annual discussions around the Finance Bill. The President of HCERES appears before the relevant commissions of the French National Assembly and Senate to explain the next year’s activities and challenges for HCERES and to present its funding needs.

HCERES funding comes under programme 150 “Higher Education Programmes and Research” and action 15 “Programme Support and Management”. Since 2015, funding also comes from programme 172 “Multi-disciplinary Scientific and Technological Research”. Since 2009, expenditure has varied between €12 million and €14.8 million depending on the number of evaluations to be carried out for each group. In 2015, the scope of the HCERES budget increased because of the incorporation of OST on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015. HCERES has some revenue from international evaluation work, which covers the expenditure incurred in the course of these activities.

The table below shows the variation in funding since 2011. Figures for 2015 also include operating and payroll expenses related to OST staff. The payroll costs include the salaries of permanent staff and the secondment fees paid for the work of the experts and scientific delegates. Between 2011 and 2014, the two largest items of operating expenses were related to organising travel for the expert evaluations (approx. 40%) and rent payments and related services charges (approx. 44%).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Payroll costs</b>	7,685,806	5,718,202	7,287,340	7,389,634	8,708,936
<b>Operating costs</b>	7,541,141	6,298,221	7,894,757	7,243,645	7,849,740
<b>Total expenditure</b>	15,226,947	12,016,423	15,182,097	14,633,279	16,558,676
<b>Revenue</b>	22,642	24,446	380,221	350,417	193,557

Data as at 31/12/2015.

HCERES, like any public institution, is subject to public accounting rules. Due to its status as an independent administrative authority, it is subject only to *ex post* control by the French Court of Auditors.

Since 2015, HCERES has paid close attention to the allocation of its funding in order to ensure it has all the resources necessary to carry out its work, particularly because since 2013, and with effect from 2016, HCERES has to increase the financial compensation paid to universities for the secondment of its professors. This change may have significant effects on the HCERES operating budget and will require careful thought with respect to the necessary business plan.

► *IT resources and information system:*

The IT resources used by HCERES for its evaluation activities operate on the Ministry of Higher Education network in order to reduce operating costs. Project officers in the evaluation of institutions department were recently allocated laptop computers in order to improve working conditions when travelling. In the new HCERES premises, from March 2016, additional services will be provided to users throughout the organisation, including staff and guest Wi-Fi access.

In order to support its day-to-day work, HCERES uses several applications:

- two accounting tools, Chorus and Girafe. Chorus, a package used by State bodies to manage expenditure, revenue and accounting, was deployed within AERES on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010. Girafe is a data entry tool for managing the secondment payments made for scientific delegates' secondments and evaluation-related payments.
- a HR management tool, developed internally and declared to French data protection agency CNIL, in order to manage the main information regarding the administrative status of HCERES admin staff in a database;
- transport and accommodation booking tools, assignment order and expense claim management tools, room booking and purchase order management tools.

Two further applications, the EDM and Pélican are used to provide support to the evaluation process. They have been described above.

In December 2011, the President of AERES requested a study of the IT system as a whole, in order to support implementation of the revised strategic plan. The report, by a scientific delegate who specialised in these issues, showed both the richness and the fragility of the IT system. The system is rich because large amounts of information are gathered and produced in the evaluation process, but also fragile because a variety of non-unified systems are used, leading to duplication and multiple entries. Following this study, an IT system steering committee was established, chaired by the AERES President and formed of key stakeholders with specialist knowledge in these areas. A user committee was also formed in order to gather suggestions for day-to-day improvements. Initial actions focused on the EDM/Pool of experts electronic document management application and better data exploitation.

With the transition from AERES to HCERES, the broader discussions about the IT system have been somewhat stalled, but with the incorporation of OST and the recent appointment of a new Board, the issue is back on the agenda.

► *Premises:*

HCERES rents premises of 3,003 m<sup>2</sup> at 20 rue Vivienne in 2<sup>nd</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris from a private landlord. The lease was signed on 1 April 2007 for a nine-year term. The premises include 2,528 m<sup>2</sup> office space, 475 m<sup>2</sup> modular basement-floor meeting rooms, 50 m<sup>2</sup> of archive space and 34 parking spaces.

The rent on these premises was relatively high and the floor area was too small for the staff numbers and activities, requiring large numbers of meeting rooms. As a result, efforts were made to find a new location. HCERES has recently moved into new 4000 m<sup>2</sup> premises in the 13<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris (mid-March 2016). The new offices are close to public transport provision and stations, and annual savings of nearly €1 million have been generated.

#### *Key points*

- + *A strong administrative and scientific skill base.*
- *Financial resources requiring stabilisation in order to ensure activities can be properly performed.*
- *Work to develop a training plan covering issues of quality culture, drawing on the skills of the Europe and International Mission and the Quality Manager.*
- *Review staff roles in conjunction with the future organisational structure.*

## 10.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

### ESG 3.6 - Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

The fundamental principles of quality and ethics in the evaluation process are described in the “evaluation charter”, which is the cornerstone of this activity. The charter sets out the institutions’ objectives and also defines expectations with regard to the professional conduct of all HCERES staff. It is published and sent out to all experts before they agree to work on an assignment. HCERES currently uses the charter approved on 13 December 2012 by the AERES Board. A revised version, applicable to all types of quality assurance carried out by HCERES, will be put before the new Board in June 2016.

The key measures adopted by HCERES to ensure the quality and improvement of its practices are described in Section 7 on HCERES internal quality assurance. These measures include the following:

- continuous improvement of practice and operating feedback enshrined in the way HCERES operates;
- all staff members commit to the evaluation code of ethics and to a strict non-disclosure obligation;
- strict selection procedures for the experts are used;
- systematic declarations of interest for staff, scientific delegations and experts;
- expert accountability through their undertakings via the regulations governing the expert status and the increased collegiality of panels;
- published evaluation methodologies fully inspired by European standards (ESG), which respect the diversity and autonomy of the evaluated entities (see Sections 11.1 and 11.7);
- information sent to the evaluated entities about the composition of panels prior to evaluation (see Section 11. 4);
- public evaluation reports that allow evaluated parties to include a response (see Section 11. 6).

Moreover, HCERES promotes transparency by publishing an annual activity report that describes any changes in methodology and a summary of results from the recent group of evaluations, together with reports on organisational structure and expenditure.

HCERES wishes to take a strong stand against discrimination in any form, and has joined other public bodies in higher education as part of an equal opportunities steering body called COMEGAL (Committee for Equality in Higher Education and Research).

Although HCERES has an evaluation charter to ensure the professional conduct of its staff and experts and the quality of its evaluations, the self-evaluation process has highlighted the need for a broader policy tool covering functional aspects and connecting the HCERES evaluation activities with its internal quality system.

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#### *Key points*

- + *A quality culture in the practices of every HCERES department and service.*
  - ▶ *Develop a broad, integrated internal quality policy for the whole of HCERES.*
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## 10.7 Cyclical external review

### ESG 3.7 - Cyclical external review of agencies

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

The first external review of AERES took place three years after its establishment. A self-evaluation report was published in February 2010 and an external review took place in May 2010. On the basis of these elements, ENQA granted AERES full membership status, valid to 05/09/2015, and the AERES application for inclusion on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) was accepted (valid to 31/05/2015).

The national discussions on higher education highlighted the importance of the AERES membership of ENQA and EQAR, emphasizing the indirect impacts, at an international and European level, of recognition by these bodies with respect to the promotion and recognition of the evaluated entities. ENQA and EQAR were informed of the replacement of AERES by HCERES in November 2014 and both bodies agreed to transfer the AERES membership to HCERES, since the activities and procedures applied remained substantially unchanged. In addition, in the light of the ESG revision, HCERES membership has been extended to December 2016.

Current regulations do not require HCERES to undergo external review, but AERES and HCERES have voluntarily submitted to the exercise with an eye to continuous improvement. The outcomes of the 2010 evaluation were used to a great extent to update AERES and HCERES practices, as illustrated in detail in Section 13. Furthermore, HCERES is very concerned about following developments in quality best practices for higher education and to promote its methodologies in a European context, and has therefore worked over the years to emphasize the links between its methodologies and European standards<sup>27</sup>.

This self-evaluation report was put before the Board on 7 March 2016 and its analysis will provide the basis for the HCERES strategic plan for the 2016-2020 period.

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<sup>27</sup> See the introduction to the standards for external evaluation of institutions (in French):

<http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/25694/397625/file/Livret%20Global%20Etablissements.pdf>

# 11.COMPLIANCE WITH THE ESG (Part 2)

## 11.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

This section draws a parallel between the ESG and HCERES evaluation standards to show that each of the standards in ESG Part 1 is covered in the external evaluation process. Although reference standards exist for each type of evaluation, consideration of the ESG is included in a complementary manner in the standards for evaluation of institutions and those for study programmes, in line with the principle of integrated evaluation.

The evaluation criteria have been updated on several occasions. At the time of the external review of AERES in 2010, the criteria were expressed in the form of questions. In 2011, following suggestions made in the external review report, the standards for evaluation of institutions were reworded on the basis of the following structure: Area / Field / Standard / Criteria. This new structure was published in 2012 and used for the Group E evaluation campaign in 2013-2014. The standards for evaluation of study programmes have since been updated in the same way.

This section focuses on the evaluation standards for study programmes and institutions. The way in which ESG Part 1 is taken into consideration in the evaluation standards for doctoral schools is shown in the HCERES standards comparison table on page 51. The standards used for evaluations in other countries are built on the national evaluation standards, with the requirements related to the French domestic context and French regulations removed. Links between these standards and ESG Part 1 are presented in the comparison table on page 51.

### ESG 1.1- Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

#### ► For evaluation of study programmes

This standard is assessed by the experts according to the HCERES standards for quality assurance in study programmes, and the 15 key points for completing files and evaluations based on the ESG. The experts are asked to pay special attention as to whether this policy is a reality in practice and whether it is published.

#### ► For evaluation of institutions

The evaluation standards for institutions includes this reference in Area 6 (Management), Field 2: "Quality assurance policy and tools for continuous improvement of activities", and specifically in Standard 1, which assesses whether "a quality assurance policy is led by the management team [and whether] for each main field of activity, it includes objectives and adapted methods which are formally approved and published," and whether "the quality assurance policy priorities are shared by staff and internal bodies. Appropriate organisation and quality management structures encourage the involvement of staff and bodies in the policy." Standards 1.3.1 and 3.2 also cover stakeholder involvement.

### ESG 1.2 - Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

#### ► For evaluation of study programmes

This standard is covered by Field 1 (Aims of the training programme). To illustrate, HCERES Standard 1-1 states: "The objectives of the training programme with regard to knowledge and skills to be acquired shall be clearly defined and communicated to students and other stakeholders. The name of the training programme shall be clear

with regard to its objectives and content, and understandable for all stakeholders. Supplementary information or a description shall be included with the degree to specify the knowledge and skills acquired by the student."

In addition, HCERES standard 3-2 reiterates that "the content of the training programme shall be consistent with the national framework for study programmes".

► For evaluation of institutions

These expectations are expressed in Area 2, Field 2 (Initial and continuing training policy), under Standard 1. This standard states: "The strategic priorities for training shall comply with the institution's missions, reinforce its distinctive features and shall be consistent with its strengths. There shall be a clear structure for the range of study programmes offered. Programme management bodies, in particular the training and university life commission or its equivalent, shall allow appropriate representation of training players and the expression of different points of view. They shall work in a democratic, transparent and effective manner. Through the development of relationships or alliances, the institution shall integrate its initial and continuing training activity into its territorial and regional environment, and shall reinforce its local, national and international attractiveness." HCERES Standards 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 also relate to this.

**ESG 1.3 - Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

► For evaluation of study programmes

HCERES standard 3-1, which focuses on student needs, diversity and pathways states that "the structure of the training programme shall be adapted to the different student academic pathways." This implies that the "programme shall include a set of teaching units that is consistent with the objectives defined"; that it shall be "structured around a common core that forms a base of knowledge, organised into sub-specialisms or standard academic pathways so that students can gradually specialise"; that there shall be "optional modules so that students can tailor the training programme to their career plans"; that it shall "offer academic pathways adapted to distance learning students"; and that it shall be "able to receive students with special needs or requirements (disability, students with sporting commitments or in employment, etc.)."

With respect to students playing an active role in their programme, HCERES Standard 4-2 adds: "there shall be consultation bodies that bring together all training programme players (teachers, students, administrators)".

► For evaluation of institutions

This standard is chiefly covered by Area 2 (Research and training) and Area 3 (Student success). In particular, HCERES Standard 2.2.2 states that the teaching methods shall be "adapted to its various audiences". Moreover, "the training methods implemented (initial training, apprenticeships, work-linked training, continuing training; multi-disciplinary courses, distance learning, innovative approaches) shall comply with the expectations of students and, where relevant, business or socio-cultural partners, and teaching objectives"; and "the institution shall develop an educational innovation policy and adapt its teaching methods, in particular with regard to the production of digital resources". HCERES Standard 3.1 also relates to this.

With respect to the active role of students, this commitment is included in the following standard under Area 3, Field 2 (Student life): "The institution shall support and recognise student involvement in governance and the democratic life of the institution, as well as in the life of associations and cultural and sporting activities. Students shall be involved in the institution's training policy, in particular within the various appropriate bodies; they shall participate in internal quality management and evaluation."

**ESG 1.4 - Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

► For evaluation of study programmes

HCERES standards seek to ensure that study programmes have established the different phases of the student life cycle:



- for admission: with respect to the programme's positioning within the overall training offering (Standard 2-1) and with respect to access (Standard 3-8): "The programme shall allow for the total or partial validation of acquired knowledge; the programme shall regularly award degrees via the validation of acquired knowledge (VAE) system; the programme shall be accessible via the following initiatives: partial validation of acquired knowledge (VAE), validation of professional experience (VAP) or validation of higher education (VES)";
- student progression: Standard 3-6;
- internships: Standards 2-3 and 3-3;
- student assessment and certification: Standards 3-3, 3-4 and 3-7;

► For evaluation of institutions

Student experience is covered chiefly in Area 3 (Student success), Field 1 "Academic pathways from career guidance to employment". Standard 1 states the following: "The institution and its training bodies shall develop consistent actions to help secondary and post-secondary school students, by providing a clear presentation of available study programmes, the knowledge and skills required, and the careers targeted. The institution shall have a policy for welcoming and providing information to all types of students at all levels of training. This policy shall include measures adapted to specific types of students, and in particular students with special needs. The institution shall analyse its potential recruitment pools; it shall implement a student recruitment policy, in particular for foreign students, and a policy for validation of acquired knowledge, for which it provides all information that could be of use. Policies for detecting difficulties, providing tools for success and supporting the various types of students shall be defined and implemented within training entities, in particular at the bachelor's degree level. Students shall be prepared for employment throughout their studies, via various teaching tools adapted to the programme level and methods."

#### ESG 1.5 - Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

► For evaluation of study programmes

This standard is covered by HCERES Standard 4-1 "The training programme shall be implemented by a formally identified teaching team." This standard states in particular that "students, and more broadly, any audiences concerned, shall be aware of the list of teachers and their roles. The role and responsibilities of members of the teaching team shall be clearly defined. The proportion of teaching entrusted to external teachers from the industrial, business or cultural sectors shall be consistent with training programme aims. Their skills level and responsibility shall be consistent with the training programme."

► For evaluation of institutions

The evaluation standards for institutions cover this point in various standards, in particular Area 2, Field 3, Standard 2: "The institution's strategy shall be based on a staff recruitment policy that contributes to the link between research and training". It further states that "the recruitment of professors and teachers shall be consistent with the institution's research and training objectives; it shall ensure the continuation or the renewal of themes and skills, in particular through sufficient external recruitment." The following standard, covering teaching policies, states that "the institution shall offer its teachers training in the use of digital tools and resources and understanding of the issues associated with them." More generally, this point overlaps with HCERES Standards 6.1.3 and 6.3.1.

#### ESG 1.6 - Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

► For evaluation of study programmes

This standard is addressed from a student success perspective. HCERES Standard 3-6 covers this aspect: "The training programme shall offer specific tools for successful programme completion." It goes on: "There shall be refresher courses for some students starting the training programme. Students shall receive individual support (from a personal tutor or via another system). The training programme shall implement tools for successful programme completion (tutoring, division into ability groups, etc.). There shall be opportunities to transfer to other study

programmes for a change of career plan while retaining some or all of the European credits acquired.” HCERES Standard 3-5 covers the use of digital technology as a learning resource.

► For evaluation of institutions

This standard is covered in Area 2, Field 2, under HCERES Standard 3: “The institution’s strategic decisions are effective, thanks to the quality of training management and organisation”. This standard further states: “Training programme support services shall be organised effectively, from the level of the institution down to the teaching teams. The human, material and financial resources allocated to training are known, costs are assessed and the institution has tools for monitoring this activity. Resources shall be allocated to the bodies responsible for training in accordance with transparent criteria that are consistent with the strategic decisions and the resources dedicated to training are controlled. The institution shall develop infrastructure and platforms (i.e. digital platforms) for training, with appropriate pooling and human resources.” The availability of learning resources is also covered in Field 2, Standard 2 and Field 4 (document resources).

### ESG 1.7 - Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

► For evaluation of study programmes

Information management is a topic that is covered on various levels in Field 4 “Training programme management”. The information expected is related to student numbers and composition of the student group, the attractiveness of the programme, cross-border flows (HCERES Standard 4-5) and information on programme graduates in Standards 4-6 and 4-7 (success rates, employment, time taken to find work). This information is supplemented with information pertaining to the evaluation of the programme (including evaluation by students) (HCERES Standard 4-8).

► For evaluation of institutions

Information management is mainly addressed in Area 6 “Management”, and in particular in Field 3, Standard 3: “The institution shall be managed with the support of a full and consistent IT system. IT resources shall contribute to the implementation of its strategy: the IT system master plan shall be consistent with the institution’s strategy, and relevant to its internal organisation, needs and resources. The IT system shall be managed through combined technical skills and policy management at the appropriate level, and ensure the consistency of the roles of the various players involved. The institution shall have financial management applications, databases and indicators to meet its management needs that comply with its management needs, both centrally and for its internal bodies, and with national information surveys or systems and, where relevant, the monitoring of its contract (...) The IT system shall serve as a quality assurance policy tool.”

### ESG 1.8 - Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

► For evaluation of study programmes

Public information for students and other stakeholders is covered by various HCERES standards relating to communication:

- programme objectives and skills to be acquired: Standard 1-1;
- outcomes and further study: Standard 1-2;
- position with regard to research: Standard 2-1;
- relations with the business, cultural and non-profit sectors: Standard 2-3;
- projects and internships: Standard 3-3;
- additional skills: Standard 3-4;
- list of teachers: Standard 4-1;
- assessment methods: Standard 4-3;
- success rates and further study: Standard 4-6.

► For evaluation of institutions

Area 1 (Governance), Field 4 on communication states that “internal communication shall contribute, in various ways, to providing staff and students with information and encourage their involvement. This communication shall be integrated into the life of the institution. External communication of the institution and its internal bodies shall be consistent with the strategy, in both form and approach. It shall be adapted to the various audiences that it targets.” Moreover, with respect to programmes (Area 2, Field 2), HCERES Standard 4 states that “the institution shall monitor and disseminate its results, and implement internal evaluation and quality management systems. Full, accurate and reliable information on study programmes shall be published regularly.” Standard 3.1.1 also states that “the institution and its training bodies shall develop consistent actions to help secondary and post-secondary school students, by providing a clear presentation of available study programmes, the knowledge and skills required, and the careers targeted.”

#### ESG 1.9 - On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

##### ► For evaluation of study programmes

This standard is covered in HCERES Standard 4-8: “Self-evaluation procedures shall be implemented for the training programme”. This is described in detail as follows: “the training programme shall have a self-evaluation procedure that has been formally defined by the institution. The advisory board shall be involved in the self-evaluation process. Methods for student evaluation of teaching, analysis of this evaluation and any follow-up actions shall be explicitly defined. Student and graduate evaluation of the training programme shall be taken into account in the self-evaluation process.” HCERES Standard 4-2 on programme management methods is also relevant to this issue: “the arrangements for, purpose and frequency of teaching team meetings shall be well defined. There shall be consultation bodies that bring together all training programme players (teachers, students, administrators). There shall be an advisory board with a specified list of members and their roles. This board is either specific to the training programme or common to a set of programmes.”

##### ► For evaluation of institutions

Area 2, Field 2 covers this issue under Standard 4: “The institution shall monitor and disseminate its results, and implement internal evaluation and quality management systems.” It states that “there shall be effective evaluation of study programmes and their content, and this shall be taken into account by teaching teams, the bodies responsible for training and the institution as a whole” and also that “the institution shall develop its study programmes in accordance with formally established periodic review procedures which are consistent with the national framework for study programmes”.

#### ESG 1.10 - Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

In France, external evaluation is a prerequisite both for having study programmes accredited and for negotiating the five-year contract with the supervising ministry (a process known as contractualisation). French higher education institutions and programmes therefore undergo mandatory external quality assurance every five years.

#### Key points

- + *The HCERES standards for external evaluation incorporate the approach used in the ESG.*
- *Continue work to harmonise the presentation of the standards, in order to move towards a common design. This issue was discussed in an internal working sub-group formed for the self-evaluation process on “coordinating methodologies used in different departments and the files required from institutions”.*

Figure 6: comparison between ESG Part 1 and the HCERES standards for evaluation

ESG	Evaluation of study programmes	Evaluation of doctoral schools	Evaluation of institutions	Cross-border evaluation of programmes	Cross-border evaluation of institutions
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	All standards	1-1, 1-2, 1-3	6.2.1, 1.3.1, 3.2	5.5, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10	1.1, 1.2, 5.1, 5.2
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1-1, 3-2	1-2, 2-2	2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3	1.1, 1.2, 1.3	2.1
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3-1, 4-2	1-2	2.2.2, 3.2, 3.1.1	1.11, 1.12, 3.1, 3.5, 4.2, 4.6, 4.7	2.1, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 5.2
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	2-1, 2-3, 3-3, 3-4, 3-6, 3-7, 3-8	1-2, 2-1, 2-2	3.1.1	1.6, 3.2	2.2, 3.1, 3.2
1.5 Teaching staff	4-1	1-1	2.3.2, 6.1.3, 6.3.1	5.1, 5.2	4.1, 5.2
1.6 Learning resources and student support	3-6, 3-5	1-1	2.2.3, 2.2.2, 2.4	1.12, 3.4, 5.4	4.2, 4.3
1.7 Information management	4-5, 4-6, 4-7, 4-8	3-1, 3-2	6.3.3	2.1, 3.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6	5.3
1.8 Public information	1-1, 1-2, 2-1, 2-3, 3-3, 3-4, 4-1, 4-3, 4-6	1-1, 1-2, 3-1, 3-2	1.4, 2.2.4, 3.1.1	1.2, 1.4, 1.12	5.3, 7.1, 7.2
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	4-8, 4-2	1-1, 3-2	2.2.4	5.5, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10	5.1, 5.2
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	In France, external evaluation is a prerequisite for accreditation and contractualisation. French higher education institutions and programmes undergo mandatory external quality assurance every five years.			5.11, 5.12	Institutions fulfill the obligations of their national regulations.

## 11.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

### ESG 2.2 - Designing methodologies fit for purpose

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

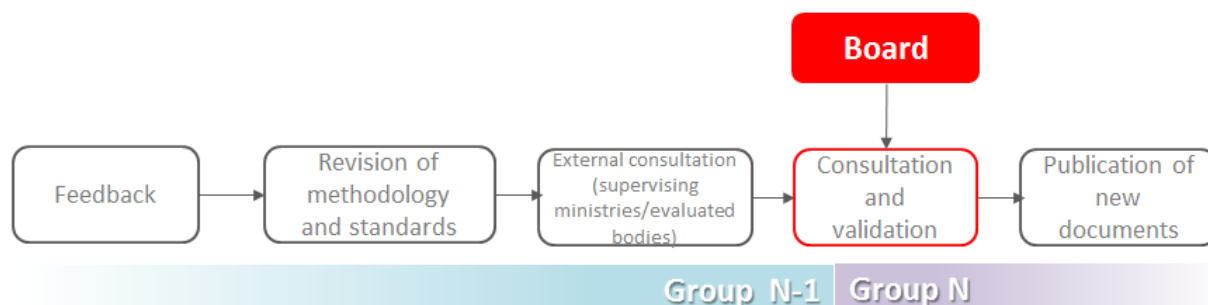
The HCERES Board gives its opinion and decides on the evaluation methodologies to be used, including methodologies used for evaluations performed outside France. Through its analysis work, it ensures that the methodologies are fit for the main purpose of supporting evaluated entities in the continuous improvement of their practices and providing the necessary information to decision-makers, in compliance with the regulatory framework applicable to HCERES.

The design and revision of evaluation methodologies draws on multiple sources:

- changes to the national structure of higher education and research, such as the recent creation of “groupings of institutions”;
- the newly widened responsibilities and competencies of universities;
- the strategic priorities of the national higher education and research policy;
- advances made by evaluated entities in internal quality assurance;
- the recommendations from the AERES external review in 2010.

AERES and HCERES have thus established a continuous improvement quality cycle (see Section 7). Following each evaluation campaign, each department organises and runs a process to gather feedback from the experts, evaluated entities and supervising ministries, as appropriate. The findings from this feedback are used to analyse and revise the methodology and standards. In addition, comments made by evaluated entities on their evaluation reports are analysed in order to feed into the process of reflection on methodologies.

Prior to their publication, any amendments to evaluation reference documents (standards) are discussed with representatives of institutions and their supervising ministries. The changes are presented and HCERES collects any observations and comments. Each revision is put before the Board for approval before publication.



This cycle requires HCERES to consider the scope of all changes. Feedback from the evaluation process leads to regular adjustments and improvements, without however prejudicing the equal treatment of evaluated parties from one group of evaluations to another. The process also enables HCERES to respond to changes in the higher education and research system by adapting its methodologies. In this case, the revisions are more thoroughgoing but necessary, to reflect the reality of the system evaluated.

This continuous improvement cycle ensures the credibility of the HCERES external quality assurance system, without losing sight of the need for simplification.

Moreover, in all the evaluation departments, work has been carried out to help the evaluated entities to own the self-evaluation process, by giving a more detailed presentation of the methodology and by publishing tools including a self-evaluation guide. This approach gives a key role to the internal quality assurance procedures at the evaluated entities, improving the quality of their self-evaluation reports. The external evaluation is therefore based on documents that provide the clearest understanding of evaluated parties' quality assurance systems.

Examples of some recent changes in the methodology are presented below.

► For evaluation of study programmes

Since 2012-2013, evaluated entities are now required to produce a single document presenting the training programme, self-evaluation results and raw student monitoring data. The evaluation procedure has been revised in order to take into account the accreditation process run by the ministry. It is now based on four main principles:

- evaluation of training results over the foregoing period;
- evaluation organised by "training field";
- additional simplified "training field" and "training programme" files;
- an evaluation process that promotes increased dialogue with evaluated parties.

One single procedure has been defined by the "training field" committees to evaluate bachelor's and master's level programmes. This has streamlined and harmonised the administrative processes around evaluations. The simplification has made the processes easier for the evaluated entities to understand.

► For evaluation of institutions

As described in the previous section, the standards for external evaluation were significantly revised in 2012 following stakeholder requests, in particular from representatives of university presidents, directors of institutions and of the relevant ministries. The simplified set of evaluation standards has now been aligned with the spirit of the European standards and has taken account of changes in the French system with regard to the "site"-related aspects of contractual policy.

In 2011, AERES drew up a self-evaluation guide following feedback from the evaluated institutions and analysis of the self-evaluation reports submitted. The aim of this guide is to support the evaluated entities in improving their self-evaluation process.

Likewise, a simplified approach has been developed to the characterisation data required from the institutions. A reduced set of basic characterisation has been developed and Ministry of Higher Education and Research databases are used (PAPESR portal and ministerial HR files).

The characterisation sheet produced by the HCERES department prior to evaluation of each institution provides contextual information that enables the experts to gain a better understanding of the institution. Its structure has been revised to include the strengths, weaknesses and non-mandatory recommendations of the previous evaluation.

For Group B (2010-2011), the department reviewed the support provided to experts in preparing for the evaluation process. Firstly, an initial meeting is organised between the chair of the panel of experts and the HCERES team, to make contact, discuss the chair's moderating and facilitating role and to support him or her in starting preparations for evaluation. Secondly, the panel (under the responsibility of its chair) now has to write an issues paper before the visit, based on an analysis of the self-evaluation report. This additional step means that the collegial aspect of the review process is included from the early stages, and also ensures that the experts have gained a good understanding of the situation.

Since evaluation Group C (2011-2012), the procedure includes an initial meeting with the institution's senior management team in order to understand their expectations of the external evaluation process and to identify any distinctive features the panel should take into account.

These changes have made a significant contribution to the development of a quality culture within the evaluated entities. This was already the case in 2010 and has been confirmed through improvements in the quality of self-evaluation reports and the progress of the evaluated entities since their previous evaluation.

Given the fact that fairly small numbers of evaluations are performed outside France and that the European and International Mission (MEI) and its activities are relatively recent, the standards used have not been updated at the same rate as the national standards and the changes applied by other HCERES departments have not yet been included in the methodological documents for evaluations performed abroad. These documents are currently being revised and are due for validation by the HCERES Board by the end of 2016.

### Key points

- + *Stakeholder involvement in the methodology revision process has ensured that the methodologies meet their objectives or are adapted accordingly.*
- *Delicate balance to strike between maintaining identical evaluation processes for all and revising the methodology every year*

## 11.3 Implementing processes

### ESG 2.3 - Implementing processes

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

Before each campaign starts, the improvement cycle referred to in point 11.2 is applied. The documents become official for the evaluated parties when they are published.

The campaigns are organised in 5 groups on a geographical basis, enabling each department to design its evaluation schedule in an integrated manner.

The preparatory phase starts by identifying the entities to be evaluated. Each department develops management and monitoring tables of the entities to be evaluated. This process leads to a team (pair) from the relevant department being commissioned to supervise each evaluation: one scientific delegate and one project officer or administrative assistant, regardless whether the quality assurance process is being applied to a programme, institution or research unit.

This team supervises the whole evaluation process:

- checking the documents filed;
- gathering documents that are useful for the evaluation process;
- contacting experts and forming the necessary panels;
- preparing the visit schedule and/or programme of meetings;
- managing contacts with the evaluated entity;
- managing contacts with the panel of experts.

This team ensures that the methodology is applied at each step of the procedure. In order to better manage the implementation of methodologies, the departments have documented internal quality procedures, which these pairs can use to monitor progress.

The HCERES evaluation methodology is based on the European guidelines:

- self-evaluation by the evaluated entity. The self-evaluation report is the central document in the process;
- external evaluation by a panel of peers;
- a report drafting phase by the panel following the evaluation;
- publication of the report, after the institution has been given the right to respond.

- ▶ For evaluation of study programmes

Implementation of a single procedure for programmes at different levels (bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's) has streamlined, harmonised and simplified the associated administrative processes for staff. In addition, the department has provided additional training to scientific delegates and HCERES staff in how to lead panels and train the experts, through a number of sessions prior to meeting with the panels of experts. The fact that the

scientific delegates now train the experts has improved the experts' understanding of the evaluation procedure and standards. In order to take into account the new groupings of higher education institutions, a scientific delegate and an administrative staff member are always appointed to coordinate and monitor actions on each site, in order to ensure that information is communicated and that a site overview is maintained.

Descriptive documents are produced presenting the expectations applicable to master's, bachelor's or vocational bachelor's degree programmes, to help each expert gain a clear understanding of the expected quality of the programmes evaluated. Finally, the evaluation forms and "programme" and "training field" report templates given to the experts have been reviewed and improved to guide the experts in their analysis and help them write reports of a consistent level of quality.

► For evaluation of institutions

The department has developed a number of actions to enhance the professionalism of its teams and the rigour of their approach to the methodologies:

- training has been provided for the scientific delegates and project officers, including a recent induction session for new staff and recurring in-work seminars. Staff also take part in other occasional training sessions on issues such as the exploitation of research, evaluation of university hospitals or the financial management of higher education institutions. In addition, newly recruited project officers always have to undergo a phase of observation, which includes taking part in an evaluation as an observer;
- the twice-monthly departmental meetings have been restructured to properly monitor current evaluations and those that are in preparation and to discuss issues around methods and practices as a team;
- improved tools: the content of the expert's handbook has been reorganised, providing a tool that describes the different stages in the external evaluation procedure, a reminder of the methodological basis of evaluation and a set of advice for the experts in the operational implementation of evaluations. It is a guide for the expert in the tasks required at each stage in the evaluation. In addition, the department has worked with experts to ensure that the interview guide is systematically used. This practical tool enables the experts to prepare the questions to be asked and information to be gathered during visits, and enhances collegiality;
- the content of expert training sessions has been reviewed and improved and a specific session for panel chairs has been initiated;
- since Group B (2010-2011), an issues paper is now produced prior to the visit, under the responsibility of the panel chair and the experts, to ensure that the evaluation issues are properly understood by the team of experts (see Section 11.2);
- the Electronic Document Management (EDM) tool is used more widely to log monitoring data for each evaluation;
- a set of procedures has been defined in coordination with the Quality Manager and practical memos have been drafted, contributing to greater professionalism in the teams that support each external evaluation. These procedures will need to be updated, as the methodology and processes used evolve.

These various changes and updates have led to significantly stronger support structures for the evaluation process and have increased the professionalism of HCERES staff and experts. This has improved reliability in the implementation of methodologies.

Follow-up is always a part of any subsequent evaluation. Each evaluated entity is asked to state its position with regard to the previous evaluation, explain its progress and the way in which recommendations have been implemented. The updated characterisation sheet which now includes the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations from the previous evaluation encourages the experts to analyse the progress of the institution and the measures it has taken since its previous evaluation.

The issue of follow-up has already been discussed with representatives of evaluated entities. If an interim evaluation process were to be introduced, there would be issues around the additional burden for evaluated entities. Following the self-evaluation process (the year before evaluation) and then the external evaluation by HCERES, the evaluated entities have to produce documents related to the contractualisation or accreditation process the next year. The arguments and discussions presented in these documents are supported by the evaluation outcomes. Since external evaluation takes place on a five-year cycle, the evaluated entities start the self-evaluation process not much more than two years after completing the final set of formalities. In this context, the decision was made during the AERES-HCERES transition period not to change the existing methodology, but to emphasize the evaluation of institutions' progress since the previous evaluation. Other solutions, such as asking institutions to make a brief



presentation of any changes without going as far as full evaluation, are being studied, but will require further discussions with all stakeholders.

► For cross-border evaluations

The procedure used abroad by the European and International Mission (MEI) is the same as for evaluation of programmes and institutions, in order to standardise and simplify practices. This procedure always includes:

- an initial discussion with the evaluated entity to understand the request,
- an exploratory on-site visit to better understand the needs,
- signature of an agreement specifying the key steps and evaluation procedures,
- the entity's own self-evaluation,
- an external assessment, which always includes a site visit;
- drafting of a report, with a response phase,
- publication of the report on the HCERES website.

The evaluated entity is made aware of these processes on several occasions (e.g. prior discussions, exploratory visit, agreement). They are also explained to the experts during the preparatory meetings. The whole procedure is set out in documents produced by the MEI:

- Standards and Guidelines for the external evaluation of international study programmes;
- Standards and Guidelines for the external evaluation of international institutions (with a specific version for Armenia);
- Guide to the institutional evaluation and accreditation process in Armenia (joint ANECA - HCERES document).

Templates of the documents to be completed by the evaluated entities, and of the report to be written by the experts are also presented in these documents.

#### Key points

- + *For the evaluation of institutions, the evaluation procedures are well understood and implemented, thanks to the introduction of the issues paper.*
- *Follow-up is difficult to implement as the contractualisation process already lasts five years.*

## 11.4 Peer-review experts

### ESG 2.4 - Peer-review experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

For all evaluation departments, the composition of the panel of experts is determined by common rules, laid down by law and by HCERES internal regulations. Article 10 of Decree no. 2014-1365 states that "Experts shall be appointed by the President of the HCERES Board in accordance with procedures and criteria validated by the Board. The names and curriculum vitae of French and foreign experts participating in evaluations shall be made public. The composition of the panels of experts and appointment of their chairs shall be discussed beforehand with the evaluated entity, which shall report any conflicts of interest."

The rules for selection of experts are also determined by the nature of the evaluation subject (type of organisation, or scientific field, etc.) and the areas covered by the evaluation standards (governance, management, scientific quality, etc.). The number of experts on the panels can vary depending on the size of the evaluated entity.

The responsibilities and ethical principles applicable to the role of expert are described in the regulations governing the expert status, which are sent to all experts recruited for evaluation purposes. The role of the chair is clearly identified and he or she is recruited through a separate procedure from the rest of the panel in line with the skills that this position requires.

From its establishment in 2007, AERES used stakeholder consultation to form a “pool” of experts. In 2013, this “pool” and the “EDM / Pool of experts” application used to manage it were upgraded to improve performance. It is now easier to search for expert profiles and for the experts to complete the necessary data; obsolete “expert” records have been deleted and the data updated; the application now manages declarations of interests and requires the experts to accept the evaluation charter. HCERES has continued to use this system.

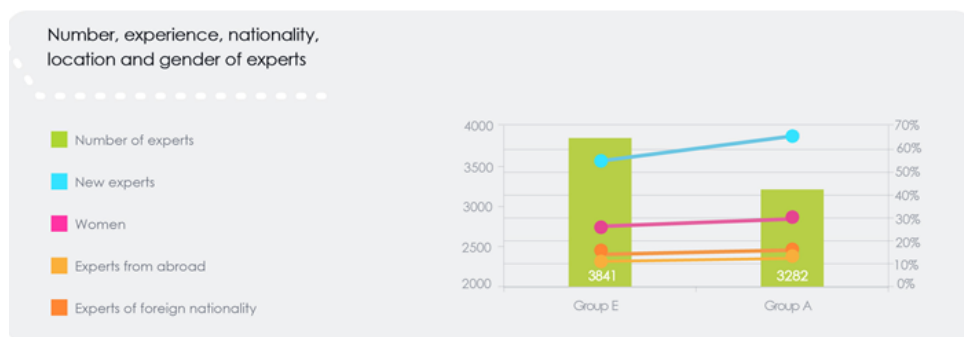
There are four categories of expert: academic, business, administrative and student experts. The database contained 18,185 experts as at January 2016.

Expert type	Number
Academic	17,270
Business	462
Administrative	353
Student	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>18185</b>

The EDM / Pool of experts application was designed and developed in order to track the experts mobilized (evaluation history, etc.), their actions within the application (acceptance of evaluation charter, CV updates, etc.) and to view the composition of panels of experts. This data is published twice monthly as “HCERES key figures”, which includes monitoring indicators for the current group of evaluations.

However rich this database is, the information is incomplete and it is not completely satisfactory, particularly for use in searching for expert profiles. When experts are recruited, the process still relies to a significant extent on scientific delegates’ knowledge of the scientific community. Other methods are being used within the departments in order to enrich the database, such as consulting the directors of entities evaluated during the previous group.

On average, 40% of experts in any group of evaluations have already participated in an evaluation. 60% are first-time recruits. The diagram shows the experts used over the last two groups of evaluations (Group A (2014-2015) and Group E (2013-2014)) and their experience, nationality, location and gender distribution.



*Number of experts and experience, nationality, location and gender distribution used by HCERES for Groups A (2014-2015) and E (2013-2014)*

It is sometimes complex to work with experts from the business world, because it is hard to find candidates who have enough knowledge of higher education and research to fully play a role as an expert. In addition, there are limited sources of candidates and the options for recruiting suitable candidates are not well known. There are issues around whether working as an HCERES expert is an attractive option, particularly with regard to the compensatory pay on offer and expert availability. These issues are more acute for experts from the “business” world. Similarly, it is sometimes difficult to find students or academics who have knowledge about site policy governance.

► For evaluation of study programmes

The recruitment process varies according to whether the evaluation will focus on a doctoral school or on bachelor’s, vocational bachelor’s or master’s programmes (see Section 6). In both cases however, the process starts with the relevant scientific delegate determining the profiles required for the panel chair and the experts in accordance with the focus of the evaluation (scientific area). Recruitment is then discussed within the team of scientific delegates for related scientific areas. The head of department then approves the composition of the panel.

The annual workload of HCERES includes the evaluation of more than 2000 programmes. At present, bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes are evaluated by two academic experts and vocational bachelor’s degree programmes by an academic expert and a representative from the business world. Experts often perform several evaluations during one evaluation campaign (or group). Given the number of programmes to evaluate, HCERES does not have the financial resources necessary to broaden and diversify the number of experts. By using an integrated evaluation approach, the evaluation of study programmes can be enriched at the time the institution is evaluated, by a panel comprising one student expert and one foreign expert, in a process that draws on the summary report on programme evaluations. With new training fields being developed as part of the future offering by higher education institutions, HCERES quality assurance activities could potentially be adapted to a wider scale of evaluation than the initial entity. Discussions are underway both within and outside HCERES.

The experts are trained during the first panel meeting for bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's degree programmes. For doctoral schools, this training takes place in two phases. Firstly, the methodological documents that have been sent to them are presented, and then an experts meeting is held in camera during the visit, led by the scientific delegate. All experts used thus receive training, during which the HCERES team presents the procedure and its objectives, explains the standards, the different roles and how to use the evaluation forms. The team also gives instructions on how to write the reports.

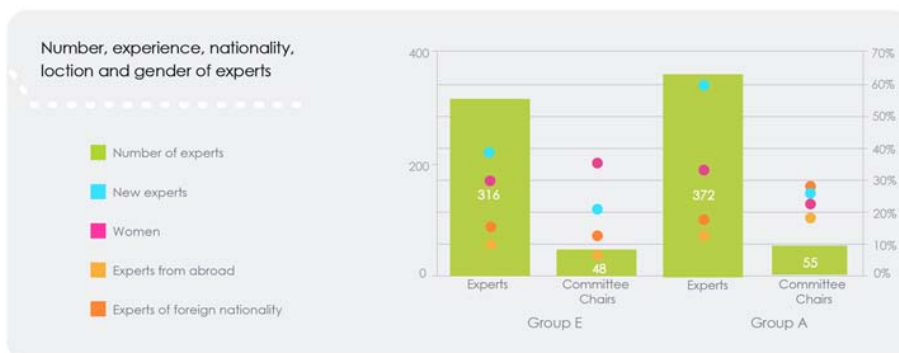
► For evaluation of institutions

As explained in Section 6, panels of experts are formed of 6 to 8 experts, depending on the size and complexity of the institution. The panels always include at least one expert working abroad, one student expert, one administrative manager of an institution and one expert from the business world, alongside peer reviewers. The main selection criteria for experts are their competency and the responsibilities they have assumed in the governance and management of institutions.

The process for forming the panel was redesigned in 2012. It is now a three-phase process. The first phase involves recruitment of panel chairs; this is coordinated across all the institutions evaluated during the campaign (group). In the second phase, the experts are selected according to the nature of the institutions to be evaluated. Each expert has to be approved by the head of department before HCERES enters into any discussion with the expert. The final stage of the process involves presenting the list of experts to each institution to allow them to report any connections or conflicts of interest that may not have been detected. The head of department then appoints the experts, by delegation of the HCERES President. Before the panels are validated, the evaluated institutions also have the opportunity to suggest profiles - and even names - of experts to take part in the panels and thus to promote their legitimacy (as long as they are selected after checking there are no conflicts of interest). Any such proposals are entered into the "Pool of experts" database.

All the experts recruited are invited to a training session at the start of the evaluation campaign. A separate session is held for panel chairs.

For evaluation Group A in 2016, more than 50% of the experts were trained in September/October 2015. Nearly 60% of the experts mobilized had already taken part in at least one evaluation during previous campaigns. Almost all experts have therefore been trained, either this year or in previous years. In addition, methodological documents are provided to all experts during the preparatory meetings.



*Number of experts used and experience, nationality, location and gender distribution for the evaluation of institutions during Groups A (2014-2015) and E (2013-2014)*

Three measures are in place as part of the prevention of conflicts of interest in all HCERES evaluation activities:

- at the time of selection, a review is carried out, generally by the scientific delegate/project officer on any links between the potential expert and the evaluated institution;
- the potential expert has to state any positive or negative links or interests on the declaration of interests;
- the list of experts is presented to the evaluated entity to give it the opportunity to report any conflicts that had not been detected or declared;

The combination of these actions prevents any conflict of interest in the evaluations. Furthermore, in the interests of transparency, the profile of the experts is published on the HCERES website at the end of the evaluation campaign (a single publication for all evaluations).

► For cross-border evaluations

For evaluations performed abroad, the European and International Mission (MEI) works closely with the study programme and institution evaluation departments. It works with the scientific delegates from these departments and draws on the common pool of HCERES experts. The experts involved in evaluations outside France are recruited according to the general HCERES principles and included in the EDM/Pool of experts application. They sign the evaluation charter and complete a declaration of interests via the application.

Experts are carefully chosen for their professionalism and independence, either by scientific delegates or in partnership with another agency (ANECA for evaluations of institutions in Armenia). Once the panel has been formed, its composition is approved by the head of the MEI, in consultation with the head of the relevant evaluation department. The panel is then presented to the institution to allow them to report any connections or conflicts of interest that may not previously have been detected.

For the evaluation of study programmes, the panels have so far included three experts (two academics, and where possible, one representative from the business world). Since the ESG revision in June 2015, the panels have comprised four experts, and have always included a student. This was already the case for the evaluation of institutions, for which panels included four people, including one student.

Experts are trained at two points, at the time they are recruited to the evaluation departments, but also during the preparatory meetings prior to evaluations.

### Key points

- + *Training given to all experts involved in the evaluation of programmes and institutions, as well as close support from HCERES.*
- *Difficulties involving students in the evaluation process for bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's programmes with regard to the number to evaluate each year and the financial implications.*
- *Difficulties recruiting experts from the business world, and problems finding academics associated with the evaluation of site policies.*
- *The planned changes in the scale of programme evaluations should enable ESG recommendations on the composition of panels of experts to be better taken into account, particularly with respect to student participation.*
- *Using the "Pool of experts" database more actively, particularly the expert selection system would provide an opportunity to add supplementary content, particularly "keywords" and "competencies".*
- *The "Pool of experts" could also be used to ask the institutions for new candidates; this function should be implemented.*

## 11.5 Criteria for outcomes

### ESG 2.5 - Criteria for outcomes

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

For all types of quality assurance, the design process for methodologies and standards described in Section 11.2 always involves the publication of all elements used for evaluations well before the campaign starts. HCERES is an evaluation agency that does not issue formal decisions, but the reports nonetheless imply judgements. Scoring of evaluated entities (for programmes and research units) was abandoned in 2013. The standards used explicitly state the criteria on which any judgements are based (see also Section 11.1).

► For evaluation of study programmes

The standards for evaluation of study programmes and doctoral schools were reviewed in 2013-2014 to adapt to the accreditation process developed by the Ministry. The most recent revision of this methodological tool<sup>28</sup> is based on the national objectives set for each programme in order to achieve a level of quality recognised across France and Europe. These objectives are set forth in the document "HCERES quality assurance standards for study programmes", based on four fields (aims, position in its environment, teaching structure, management). Each of these fields is detailed as 22 standards or "objectives", which are further broken down into explicit criteria.

The criteria appear on the analysis forms that the experts fill in, which provide the structure of the evaluation reports. These standards and criteria are presented to the evaluated parties during the launch meetings.

Various measures are taken to ensure they are applied consistently:

- the standards and criteria are an integral part of the training of experts;
- the evaluations are managed and monitored by a pair of HCERES staff (one scientific delegate, one permanent staff member);
- "templates" are used to structure the way reports are written, in order to remind the experts the information and arguments required;
- the reports are discussed collectively during the post-evaluation meeting led by the panel chair, with the assistance of the HCERES pair, who ensure the criteria are properly considered.

► For evaluation of institutions

The HCERES standards for evaluation of institutions<sup>29</sup> are structured into 6 broad areas, which break down into 17 fields of activity, describing the main issues that the evaluation will focus on. There are 34 standards in total, each of which include multiple objectives, alongside information that is provided for interpretation purposes in an appendix entitled "Components of the standards".

This set of documents states expectations, and the evaluation process assesses the extent to which they are fulfilled. To this end, specific criteria are associated with each standard, which state the way in which compliance with the standard will be assessed by the reviewers. For example, the second standard states the need for the existence of a strategy: "the institution develops a strategy corresponding to its missions and environment". The associated criteria set out the way in which the missions are taken into account, the context in which the institution acts, its relations with its supervising ministry or ministries, and finally its main investment projects.

The criteria which HCERES provides to reviewers are qualitative and have been developed based on generic criteria. Those most frequently used include the classic criteria of consistency, effectiveness/efficiency, comprehensibility and relevance.

The criteria are presented to the experts during their training, to ensure that they are handled consistently. An HCERES pairing (one scientific delegate and one permanent staff member) monitor the way in which the criteria are taken into account in preparations for the evaluation by analysing the interview guides prepared by the experts. The project officer sits in on the panel's closed-doors discussions. The reports are read through by an editorial committee to ensure that all criteria are properly considered.

The revised and harmonised HCERES standards and the explanatory information provided with them help both the evaluated parties and the experts better understand what is expected. The evaluations are accompanied and supervised by the HCERES pair, which strengthens these measures and contributes to ensuring a consistent quality of evaluations by HCERES.

► For cross-border evaluations

For the evaluation of programmes and degrees outside France, the standards used include 5 fields:

- educational project;

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<sup>28</sup> For evaluation Group C (2016-2017) (french): <http://www.hceres.fr/MODALITES-D-EVALUATIONS/Campagne-d-evaluation-2016-2017/Evaluations-des-formations>

<sup>29</sup> In French : <http://www.hceres.fr/MODALITES-D-EVALUATIONS/Campagne-d-evaluation-2016-2017/Evaluations-des-etablissements>

- positioning in the scientific and socio-economic context;
- students;
- employment opportunities and continuation of studies;
- programme management.

These fields partly correspond to those used in the domestic French standards for Group C (2011-2012), which the international standards are based on, but are worded as a list of questions. These questions are given for guidance and have been designed to cover a range of very varied international situations, but also to allow the institutions plenty of freedom in their self-evaluation process.

For the evaluation of institutions, the standards were designed in partnership with the Spanish agency ANECA, based on the standards used by HCERES for the evaluation of French institutions in Group E (2013-2014). It includes 7 criteria, with a reference to explain them. In total there are 24 sub-criteria, which are themselves divided up as far as necessary to ensure clarity and precision.

Various tools have been developed to ensure the criteria are applied consistently:

- the experts are always provided with methodological documents;
- the preparatory meetings are used to raise the experts' awareness of these points;
- the HCERES staff responsible for the evaluation ensure the methodology is properly applied throughout the process;
- the experts are provided with templates (e.g. interview guides, report template).

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#### *Key points*

- + *Revised form of evaluation standards, based on international best practices, which helps experts and evaluated entities to understand the expectations.*
  - ▶ *The harmonised approach to standards could be further extended to the evaluation standards for research units; a common evaluation culture and vocabulary could be improved.*
- 

## 11.6 Reporting

### **ESG 2.6 - Reporting**

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

The principle of transparency is enacted through the systematic publication of all evaluation reports. Since 2014, the one exception is for evaluations of research units, for which a final summary only is published, as stipulated by the HCERES founding decree (no. 2014-1365). This provision was implemented in view of confidentiality issues related to certain research activities. Since publication is the rule, HCERES has a computerised mechanism for report publication.

The experts first post the evaluation reports to the EDM. The reports are then read and formatted by HCERES. An additional step has been included and rolled out, following the recommendations in the 2010 external review. The reports are sent to the evaluated entities once to enable them to respond by highlighting any factual error. The reports are then sent back a second time to allow the institutions to respond with comments regarding the opinions and recommendations included. Any comments made in an official letter are included at the end of the report. This final version is saved in the EDM system and the status of the evaluation is switched to "finalised". This automatically uploads the report to the HCERES website for publication, in accordance with the report characterisation data.

Reports can be accessed on the HCERES website via 3 different search methods:

- search engine;
- various lists (alphabetical list of institutions, thematic lists, etc.)<sup>30</sup> ;
- interactive map<sup>31</sup>.

► For evaluation of study programmes

Evaluation reports are prepared under a two-phase process:

- one evaluation form is drawn up by each expert, in order to ensure the training programme analysis is presented in a way that is consistent with the criteria;
- the evaluation report is written on the basis of the two programme evaluation forms. The report is always presented in two sections. The first section summarises the evaluation, highlighting characteristic points based on the evaluation forms in no more than one page, and concluding with a set of strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. The second part of the report is a factual analysis of the evaluation criteria organised according to each key point.

The department has also developed tools for the experts, to guide them in writing the programme evaluation reports and to harmonise report content:

- instructions on report writing;
- templates with comments, specifying the expected structure of each report and describing the content type required for each section.

To ensure the quality of content and compliance with HCERES rules, each report is read by the pair of HCERES staff members responsible for organising the evaluation and by a second scientific delegate. A fully documented quality procedure formally describes the report writing and follow-up process.

► For evaluation of institutions

The report-writing process is supervised by HCERES according to methods specified on page 5 of the expert handbook. The report should be concise (approx. 20 pages), well-constructed (with 6 chapters to match the 6 Areas of the HCERES standards, and an introduction presenting the main characteristics and the position of the institution) and well-argued (the report must assess not describe and the arguments must follow a structure based on presenting the issue, analysis and making a judgement).

The content of the introduction and conclusion is specified, in part, in the expert handbook (Appendix 4). Each conclusion must include a brief summary of the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations identified by the panel following the evaluation process.

The composition of the panel of experts and the HCERES support team is described at the end of the report.

The report-writing process includes an editorial committee, whose role is to check the quality of writing, compliance with ethical principles and that judgements made have been properly substantiated. This committee meets before the post-evaluation meeting, at which the comments made are studied collectively by the panel before validation of the final draft of the report.

The reports are signed by the panel chairman to attest to the independence of the views expressed, and by the President of HCERES to attest to compliance with ethical principles.

► For cross-border evaluations

Evaluation reports are drafted by the experts. The report structure and requirements in terms of arguments and consistency are specified in the methodological documents (Guide for Armenia and study programme evaluation standards). All evaluation reports conclude with a summary of strengths and weaknesses and recommendations, in the interests of accessibility.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.hceres.fr/PUBLICATIONS/RAPPORTS-D-EVALUATION/Rapports-d-evaluation-acces-par-listes-alphabetiques-des-etablisements-et-organismes-evalues>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.hceres.fr/PUBLICATIONS/RAPPORTS-D-EVALUATION/Acces-par-carte-de-geolocalisation-interactive>

The procedures for evaluation of study programmes and institutions outside France include a response phase, which allow the institution to correct any factual errors in the report. Reports on study programmes are signed by the HCERES President and the chair of the panel of experts. For Armenia, the reports are signed by the HCERES President and the Director of the evaluation of institutions department.

Publication of the reports is always covered by bilateral agreements between HCERES and the evaluated entity. Reports are published, with the response of the institution, on the HCERES website.

#### Key points

- + *Systematic publication of all evaluation reports, according to a content structure supervised by HCERES (report structure, editorial process).*

## 11.7 Complaints and appeals

### ESG 2.7 - Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

A general complaints management system was put in place in 2009 for all AERES activities, including activities performed outside France. This was revised in 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, AERES should look into the prospect of setting up a proper appeals 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 guided by the committee’s opinion.

In June 2012, the President of AERES appointed new members to the complaints committee. This committee comprises 6 members of the Board, one of whom is appointed committee chair by the Board. The composition of this committee, the internal rules, and details of the complaints system are available on the AERES website<sup>32</sup>.

As at 31 December 2015, a total of 70 complaints had been filed since the establishment of AERES, of which 49 referred to evaluation quality, including 31 related to scoring. Only 3 have led to a repeat evaluation. For one evaluation that was challenged, the score awarded was revised. The number of complaints is low compared to the total number of evaluations (0.7%), covering study programmes, research units and institutions.

Given the transition from AERES to HCERES and the long delay in appointing a new Board, a complaints committee should be in place by December 2016.

#### Key points

- + *A formal appeal process is managed by a complaints committee.*
- + *The rate of appeal is very low, highlighting the recognition of the HCERES evaluation process.*
- ▶ *When a new complaints committee is appointed, its composition and operating methods will be published on the HCERES website in order to ensure this information is fully and widely communicated to the evaluated entities.*

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/Actualites/Actualites-de-l-agence/Commission-des-plaintes-et-reclamations>



# 12. INFORMATION AND OPINIONS FROM HCERES STAKEHOLDERS

## 1. Annual feedback

### ► Organisation

In order to improve the quality of feedback and make it easier to use, HCERES has adopted a dedicated survey management application called Sphinx. The work of organising the feedback-gathering process used to be under the sole responsibility of the departments, but a statistician from the IT systems service now supports the process.

Lessons learned through feedback have gradually been incorporated in the annual cycle of work within the three evaluation departments. As described earlier in this report, feedback survey findings are taken into consideration for updates to the methodologies used, and are a component part of the quality management system.

Each department defines the scope of its surveys, but the following items are included in all surveys: how useful the evaluation, documents and standards were, how the evaluation process and visit went, the composition of the panel of experts, the evaluation report and its publication methods.

The table below shows which stakeholders are involved in the feedback process:

	Stakeholders consulted
Evaluation of study programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- management teams of doctoral schools</li> <li>- experts</li> </ul>
Evaluation of research units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- directors of research units</li> <li>- chairs of expert panels</li> <li>- scientific officers of the institutions and bodies to which the evaluated units are attached</li> </ul>
Evaluation of institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- heads of institutions</li> <li>- experts involved in evaluation</li> </ul>

This feedback is summarised in a report that is chiefly for internal use in discussing and improving practice.

### ► Outcomes

Among other things, the surveys provide a means of measuring stakeholder satisfaction with the evaluation process.

The tables below summarise the feedback on the evaluation of institutions for the period 2011-2014, firstly from institutions and then from experts. The figures give the satisfaction rates averaged over the number of questions asked on the relevant phase of the process (aggregating results from several questions), and thus offer better statistical robustness. For each question, 4 choices are possible: satisfied (dark green), fairly satisfied (light green), fairly dissatisfied (light orange), dissatisfied (dark orange). For ease of interpretation, the second row groups together satisfied/fairly satisfied responses and fairly dissatisfied/dissatisfied responses.

Variation in average satisfaction rates for evaluated institutions

Stage of the process (number of questions)	Group B (2010-2011)				Group C (2011-2012)				Group D (2012-2013)				Group E (2013-2014)			
Preparatory phase (4)	NA*				28	44	21	7	34	49	16	1	59	32	8	1
					72		28		83		17		91		19	
Pre-evaluation phase (10)	42	43	12	3	37	45	12	6	42	40	13	5	71	26	2	1
	95		15		82		18		82		18		97		3	
Visit (5)	59	29	8	4	44	46	10	0	48	34	14	4	74	20	3	3
	88		12		90		10		82		18		94		6	
Post-evaluation phase (5)	34	34	20	13	56	30	14	0	44	36	13	7	65	27	5	3
	67		33		86		14		80		20		92		8	
Full process (20)	44	38	12	5	44	42	12	3	44	37	13	5	70	25	3	2
	82		18		85		15		82		18		95		5	
Use and impact of the report (11)	32	49	14	5	14	67	19	0	31	48	17	4	55	38	5	3
	81		19		81		19		79		21		92		8	

\* NA: Information not available

Variation in average satisfaction rates for experts involved in the evaluation of institutions

Stage of the process (number of questions)	Group B (2010-2011)				Group C (2011-2012)				Group D (2012-2013)				Group E (2013-2014)			
Pre-evaluation phase (17)	NA				56	36	7	1	60	35	5	0	59	35	5	1
					92		8		95		5		94		6	
Visit (10)	NA				70	22	6	2	71	25	4	0	67	27	5	0
					92		8		96		4		94		5	
Post-evaluation phase (8)	NA				54	35	9	2	59	35	5	1	52	40	7	1
					89		11		94		6		92		8	
Full process (35)	NA				60	32	7	2	63	32	5	0	60	34	6	1
					92		9		95		5		94		7	
Files and tools made available (7)	NA				51	36	10	3	52	39	7	2	53	39	7	1
					87		13		91		9		92		8	
Engagement of the evaluated institution (4)	NA				60	29	9	2	46	40	11	3	56	35	7	1
					89		11		86		14		92		8	

These surveys also serve as information sources for updating HCERES practices. A few specific examples of actions or conclusions drawn from the feedback are presented below:

Feedback from Group D evaluations (2012-2013)

- The experts expressed somewhat limited satisfaction with the document drafted by the HCERES team to characterise the institution. In response, the standard content and sources used to draft this document were reviewed and improved for the next evaluation campaign.

- The comments made by the experts in response to the survey also highlighted that the usefulness of the issues paper and the interview guides were not properly understood and that they were consequently little used. Special attention was paid to the presentation of these tools in the training sessions for the experts involved in the next evaluation campaign (Group E). As a result, they were more widely used, and according to the survey results for Group A, the experts found that using these tools increased the collegiality of the panel.

- The satisfaction of evaluated institutions with the new version of the evaluation standards increased significantly. Their comments highlighted the fact that the new standards facilitated comprehension and completion of their self-evaluation.

### Feedback from Group E evaluations (2013-2014)

- The experts' survey showed somewhat equivocal satisfaction with the way the report drafting process took place, in particular with the scheduling of the post-evaluation meeting prior to the editorial committee. According to the experts, this method did not give them an opportunity to validate the report together and discuss the comments made by the editorial committee, requiring the panels to continue exchanges after their final meeting. In response, the department reviewed the process and since Group A (2014-2015), the editorial committee is scheduled before the post-evaluation meeting. This enables the panel of experts to discuss the editorial committee's comments in the post-evaluation meeting.

- The time taken between the visit and report publication was also commented on by the institutions. In order to improve the satisfaction of evaluated institutions, the department provides a schedule containing meeting dates and deadlines for contributions to each expert, in order to provide them with clear information on timeline constraints and to better manage the evaluation process.

## 2. External input to the self-evaluation process

As part of the self-evaluation process, HCERES wanted to get input from various French higher education and research stakeholders. Initially, letters were sent to various directorates within the supervising ministries. Two electronic surveys were then sent out, one to the Vice-Presidents for Programmes and University Life and another to the Vice Presidents for Students of French higher education institutions. Through these contacts, surveys were also sent to French networks of student organisations.

### ► Supervising ministries

Letters were sent to directorates within the ministries, containing three questions:

- Are the evaluation reports you receive useful to you in your work? Have you any suggestions about their content?
- In what ways could the evaluation system be improved over the next few years?
- What is your perception of the role of HCERES in the French higher education landscape?

When the self-evaluation report was being finalised, HCERES had received no response to these letters.

### ► Vice-Presidents for Students

An electronic survey was sent out on the way in which HCERES evaluation reports are used. After having asked whether the respondents had ever looked at an evaluation report, the survey sought to identify why the report was consulted (information on a training programme, comparison of different programmes, information about an institution, comparison of different institutions) and to ask how readily accessible the reports were perceived to be.

Although they play a particularly key role in the life of their institution as Vice-Presidents for Students, 48% of respondents said they had never looked at an evaluation report. The main reason for accessing a report was to find information about a training programme or institution. Suggestions made included publishing the evaluation reports on the institution's own website for easier access by students, since the HCERES website is perceived to be less well known. The type of information sought also highlights the fact that students' chief concerns are around employment opportunities. They would like to see more information about this issue in HCERES reports.

This survey also suggests that students are less well-informed about HCERES evaluations and the content of reports. Some requests concerned items that already included in evaluation reports (evaluation date, SWOT analysis, consideration of the quality of student life, etc.).

### ► Vice-Presidents for Programmes and University Life

These Vice-Presidents were sent electronic surveys about the evaluation process and how useful it is.

The following questions were asked: How is the self-evaluation used within your institution? Do the evaluation reports have any effect on the way the training offer is managed? If so, how? How are the reports used within your institution and by whom (job titles)? Does the support provided by HCERES in the evaluation process seem appropriate? Is the evaluation frequency appropriate? Does the scope of evaluation seem appropriate? In your view, what is the main purpose/use of the "training programme" reports? What is the main purpose/use of the "training field" reports? What is the main purpose/use of the "research and training" part of the "institution" report?

This survey had a 35% response rate (25 Vice-Presidents out of 72).

75% of respondents were satisfied with the process as a whole (support, frequency and scope). 75% of respondents stated that the evaluation had a direct impact on management of their institution's range of study programmes.

The survey also allowed respondents to give further detail in support of their answers. These additional answers highlighted aspects of the report that are particularly well appreciated, but also points that require further thought.

This exercise has provided additional information that will be taken into account, along with the feedback gathered by the departments, in the continuous improvement of HCERES practices.

# 13. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REVIEW, AND ACTIONS BY HCERES

The May 2010 Review Report included the areas for improvement listed below, which AERES and HCERES have taken great care to take into account in changing their methods.

- AERES must continue its efforts to develop an evaluation culture within institutions by paying greater attention to the quality of the self-evaluation provided by institutions and to the participation of professors, students and staff in producing it.

HCERES has continued and increased the development of an evaluation culture in French higher education. Every year, campaign launch meetings highlight the importance and usefulness of internal evaluation both for the evaluated parties themselves and their development, and also for external evaluation. The documents required for external evaluation have been revised to further strengthen this aspect.

In order to help evaluated parties better manage their self-evaluation process, AERES published a guide for evaluated parties for the first time in January 2013, presenting issues and usefulness, a summary of methodologies and an introduction to quality assurance. This guide was taken over by HCERES and remains one of the tools given to the evaluated parties. It is available on the HCERES website<sup>33</sup>.

Seminars have been introduced which are open to higher education and research stakeholders. In March 2012, AERES organised a two-day conference on the topic of "Evaluation for better study programmes: testimonials and best practices". This conference was organised around four themes: quality assurance in study programmes and institution policies, follow-up of student cohorts and graduates, the skills-based approach and links between training and business. Around 200 participants attended including senior management teams, programme managers and partners, and students).

AERES and HCERES representatives are regularly asked to take part in seminars and study programmes in order to explain and promote institution-led evaluation and associated quality processes.

- AERES should improve its evaluation guide by incorporating criteria focusing specifically on the quality assurance strategy of institutions or by making existing criteria more precise, and ensure that the means provided for in this strategy are put into practice.
- AERES has excellent Quality Standards. It would be worth linking these explicitly with its evaluation guide.
- With this in mind, the panel suggests that AERES makes the criteria in its evaluation guide more precise and ensures that they concern both the effectiveness and existence of quality assurance procedures and policies.

As previously stated, the AERES Quality Standards were developed to structure the guidelines and founding principles of internal quality from the start. Sound internal procedures for each type of evaluation were developed. HCERES now plans to revise its internal standards by December 2016 on the basis of this corpus of procedures in order to define the key principles within a quality policy adapted to the context and methodologies of HCERES.

The evaluation standards used by both the experts and the evaluated parties for their self-evaluation have been reworked and restructured in order to clarify them and make them easier to understand, and in order to

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<sup>33</sup> Self-evaluation guide (French) :

[http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23370/363395/file/S11\\_4Rep%C3%A8res%20pour%20l'auto%C3%A9valuation.pdf](http://www.hceres.fr/content/download/23370/363395/file/S11_4Rep%C3%A8res%20pour%20l'auto%C3%A9valuation.pdf)

promote the quality assurance mechanisms evaluated, over and above the policies that underpin them. The standards for evaluation of programmes and institutions now make more visible reference to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in order to draw the evaluated parties in the European quality assurance approach.

- The AERES' procedures for evaluating Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees should be revised to bring them more into line with the ESG requirements.

Each programme (Bachelor's, Vocational Bachelor's and Master's) is evaluated externally based on expert analysis of file documents and meetings bringing together experts in a training field. Given the considerable and increasing number of programmes to be evaluated (over 1000 programmes each year), HCERES does not conduct an on-site visit for each of the programmes evaluated. However, the HCERES integrated evaluation process seeks to connect up the various evaluation types (evaluation of programmes, research units, institutions and sites) for optimised results. On-site visits are conducted and designed for the evaluation of institutions.

Each visit always involves academic experts, a student, an administrative expert and an expert from the business world. Three of the six areas in the standards for the external evaluation of institutions are linked to the evaluation of study programmes (Area 2: Research and training; Area 3: Student success; Area 5: European and international relations).

Coordination of institutional evaluation with the evaluation of study programmes developed through the period, with the aim of providing the experts responsible for the evaluation of institutions with the results of the evaluation of programmes before the visit to the institution.

Until Group E (2013-2014), this was coordinated by an academic expert appointed in each panel of experts for institutional evaluation, known as the EOF (for "interview on range of study programmes"), in order to link the two processes. The key points of the evaluation of programmes (strengths, weaknesses) and a set of questions raised by the experts were sent to the EOF expert. During the on-site visit for the institutional evaluation, the EOF expert was responsible for discussing these questions during interviews and sharing the responses with the evaluation of study programmes department so that they could be included in the overall reports on the range of study programmes.

Since the introduction of training fields and the associated organisational processes in 2015, "training fields" summary reports are produced by the panels of experts for the evaluation of programmes using the reports on programmes in a training field. These reports highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant programmes and any key points. They are sent to the institutional evaluation panel and are used to prepare and conduct the visit.

In this way, evaluation of the institution prolongs the programme evaluation process by taking into account its results, while exploring management of the whole range of study programmes, student life and any cross-cutting systems to support students in their academic pathway (from career guidance to employment) and in their broader student activities.

Through this integrated evaluation process, external evaluation reports for institutions consolidate the individual evaluation of study programmes, which is supplemented by analysis of cross-cutting aspects.

This complementarity between evaluation of programmes and evaluation of institutions is used in the programme accreditation process, and more broadly, for contract negotiation with the State.

- The AERES' strategic plan has its positive points, but could be improved by the agency specifying the means it intends to implement to achieve its objectives, the persons responsible for this and the timeframes.

The AERES' strategic plan was revised and adopted by its Board in December 2011. It takes into account the recommendations of the previous report by specifying the annual operational objectives, the completion schedule and the people responsible. However, since 2013, progress with the strategic plan has been shaken up by the replacement of AERES by HCERES. The new HCERES governance was appointed in October and November 2015 and immediately launched work to draw up the 2016-2020 strategic plan. The major priorities were presented at the Board meeting in December and the detailed plan, including objectives, annual deadlines and people responsible, will be presented to the Board for approval in June 2016.

- In its strategic plan, AERES wants to add a greater international dimension to its activities. The panel encourages it to do so, amongst other things by calling more systematically on international experts to carry out its evaluations.

Both AERES and HCERES have sought to include international experts in their panels. On average, they represent around 20% of the total number of experts per evaluation campaign. They are always involved in institutional evaluations, and in particular for research units. In order to help non-French speaking experts to integrate into the panels, evaluation documents are translated into English (for research units) and the experts are provided with a formal outline of the French higher education and research system.

- With the current evaluation cycle, there is a risk that evaluations become routine and ineffective. The panel suggests that the AERES look into the possibility of extending the current cycle.

The cycle of evaluations is set by law through the contract negotiation process. HCERES has the task and obligation of evaluating (or validating the evaluation procedures for) the entities defined by law prior to contract negotiation. It therefore has no power over the cycle.

However, AERES strongly lobbied the Ministry for change and, since 2010, the contract duration has been set at five years. The evaluation schedule has therefore been adapted to this cycle and evaluations are spread over a period of five years instead of four.

At the same time, the entities evaluated by HCERES have also continued to increase to include artistic programmes, architectural programmes, healthcare programmes, site policies, clinical research, French comprehensive cancer centres and private higher education institutions under contract with the state. There has therefore been little benefit from extending the cycle of evaluations for the HCERES workload.

HCERES is currently considering changing its evaluation methods in order to better take into account the French territorial coordination context and avoid a loss of effectiveness caused by “routine” evaluation. These considerations include a possible change to the scale of evaluation to focus on groupings of base units with regard to their consistency and relevance, based on the self-evaluations performed.

- Alongside its Board, the members of which are stipulated by Law, it could be in AERES’ interests to set up an advisory committee with members from various sectors – particularly students and international specialists.

Following this recommendation, AERES has implemented a number of temporary consultative bodies for different groups of stakeholders in order to develop understanding of the expectations of these players and to help them take ownership of the evaluation performed by AERES and HCERES.

A student committee founded in 2011, including representatives from student organisations, student health insurance companies, Vice-Presidents for Students and the ESU<sup>34</sup>. The proposed objectives of the group involved taking part in discussion of the evaluation methods and criteria (for student life and any sector with a direct or indirect impact). Two sessions were held. Limited involvement from students and the following transitional period led HCERES to suspend this committee and to postpone consideration of how to involve students to a later date.

A “Business world” committee founded in 2013, with the aim of raising awareness of AERES outputs and associating them with the needs and expectations of business stakeholders. The composition and objectives of this committee were reworked in September 2015, in particular to help form a pool of experts from this sector.

A committee bringing together stakeholders in the evaluation of higher education and research In 2012, an institutional space for consultation called “Mikado” was introduced to discuss recurring topics, including changes to contract negotiation and their impact on evaluation, report publishing and the validation of evaluation procedures drawn up by other bodies. The creation of a major body for mutual understanding will be considered with members of the Board during 2016.

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<sup>34</sup> ESU: European Students’ Union

A “Regions” committee. In Autumn 2011, AERES wanted to find out more about how the regions were using the various AERES reports and identify changes that could better meet their expectations. Events and meetings identified the regions’ shared request for regional evaluation summaries and more specific analyses of certain topics. AERES responded to this need by creating a unit of six scientific delegates in 2012 to draw up these summary reports. They were produced for the regions of several evaluation Groups and communicated to the institutions in question and the French Ministry of Education and Research. Following the changes in the French Act of 22 July 2013 to site policies, these summary reports are now included in the HCERES annual activity process and carried out for site policies.

During preparation of the decree on the organisational structure and operation of HCERES, the institution strongly lobbied to include people “qualified in higher education quality assurance” and students on its Board. This initiative was approved by the HCERES organisational decree and the HCERES Board now includes three members of European quality agencies and two students.

- The AERES’ procedures are promising. They could be improved from several aspects:
  - AERES could send the preliminary version of its evaluation report to institutions to obtain their comments before writing the final report. This stage should not, for all that, change the procedure in place of integrating the institution’s reactions to the final report.
  - AERES could also send the final version of the report to the experts before it is put on its website.
  - The question of scores and their publication raised several comments during the site visit. AERES should perhaps discuss this issue with the main stakeholders - particularly in the research sector. It would also do well to consider the possibility of revising the score when clear improvements have been made.
  - AERES would gain from annually updating its pool of student experts.

AERES and HCERES adapted the procedures associated with drawing up reports to reflect this, in particular with regard to the three following points:

- reports are now drawn up in two phases. A draft report is submitted to the evaluated parties to identify any factual errors. The validity of feedback from the evaluated parties on these points is assessed and any justified requests are taken into account. The final version is then presented to the evaluated parties for their comments (sent via official letter) and their responses to the report findings. The comments are included in the final report, which is published, as is, on the website;
- the French Act of July 2013 states that reports must now be signed by the chair of the evaluation panel. The final report, including any modifications and comments from the evaluated parties, is sent to the panel chair who approves it on behalf of the panel of experts and signs the report prior to publication;
- scoring was reconsidered for both research units and study programmes. The overall score was a source of dissatisfaction for the university and scientific community due to the resulting impact on reputation. It was initially replaced in 2011 by a multi-criteria scoring system (an evaluation subject no longer received a score of A / B / C, but instead a score of, for example, AABA or ABBB according to identified criteria). Scoring was then completely removed in 2014.

As previously explained in this report, the pool of experts database has undergone a number of changes to improve its diversity and the reliability of information for all profiles (academic, administrative, business or student). Finding new experts is still an issue, in particular for the last two categories.

- AERES should set up follow-up procedures to enable it to assess the measures taken following its evaluations quickly.

External evaluation performed by HCERES is not prescriptive. The report lists the strengths and weaknesses of the entity and makes recommendations, which are then studied through contractual dialogue and taken into account in accreditation decisions. In this context, the State requests that institutions provide their road map for the coming five-year period and a review is performed half way through this period as means of follow-up. This mechanism is a result of the distribution of competencies and roles between evaluation and decision-making.

HCERES follow-up occurs during the following evaluation. Evaluated entities evaluated are systematically requested to state in their self-evaluation any progress made with regard to their previous situation and the way in which they have taken the recommendations into account.



# 14. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

HCERES began discussions on its 2016-2020 strategic plan following the appointment of its new governance in October 2015. This plan and its breakdown in terms of objectives, indicators and deadlines will be presented to the HCERES Board at its meeting of 6 June 2016.

The major strategic priorities have already been drawn up and were presented at the Board meeting of December 2015. They are based on HCERES missions and previously acquired experience. The text below lists these major priorities (still being finalised at the time of writing the self-evaluation report), which will form the basis of HCERES actions and developments for the next five years.

- Put HCERES at the service of the evaluated institutions and strengthen its position among other evaluation stakeholders;
- Promote ethical and high-quality evaluation and consolidate peer-led evaluation;
- Conduct integrated evaluation for site policies;
- Implement the validation of evaluation procedures;
- Simplify evaluation processes;
- Increase the independence of HCERES;
- Increase the international visibility of HCERES;
- Fully utilise the skills of OST;
- Implement an internal organisational structure adapted to integrated evaluation.

## 1. Put HCERES at the service of the evaluated institutions and strengthen its position among other evaluation stakeholders

HCERES is the independent administrative authority responsible for evaluating higher education and research institutions in France. The evaluation process is carried out every five years and offers institutions and their components support in their progress and the achievement of their strategic priorities. HCERES thereby supports the scientific and educational policy of institutions.

A consultation mechanism will be designed and introduced to help institutions exercise their free choice of evaluating body, as provided for by French law. For situations where evaluations are carried out by a body other than HCERES, a system will be developed for validating evaluation procedures.

For evaluations carried out by HCERES, work should be continued to implement an evaluation model for improving the quality of our country's higher education and research. This requires a shared vision between HCERES and the relevant institutions, recognition of the diversity of institutions, programmes and laboratories, and the adaptation of criteria in line with this diversity.

Special attention will be paid to evaluating territorial coordinations. Given their diversity, an integrated evaluation system will be implemented to give a general understanding of the grouping, the institutions attached to it, and its laboratories and programmes.

The evaluation of national research institutions will be carried out in accordance with their missions, specific fields of research and position in the research system. Finalised standards for evaluating institutions or standards which are primarily focused on technological research will be reviewed to take all missions into account.

In order to carry out its activities, HCERES must work in accord with other evaluation bodies, such as the French Universities Board (CNU), French National Committee for Scientific Research (CoNRS), institutions' evaluation committees and academic boards (or equivalent). Some HCERES missions can overlap with the missions of other bodies such as the French General Inspectorate of the Administration of National Education and Research (IGAENR) or the French Court of Auditors (governance, management, etc.). Work will be carried out to avoid duplication. Finally,

there needs to be better coordination of the evaluations carried out by bodies such as the CTI for engineering schools, the CEFDG for business schools, or the CCN-IUT for IUTs.

## 2. Promote ethical and high-quality evaluation and consolidate peer-led evaluation

### ▶ Promote ethical evaluation

Implementation of evaluation must comply with the main principles of independence, transparency, impartiality and equal treatment. It must also meet international ethical rules for peer-led evaluation, in particular by preventing and excluding any possibility of a conflict of interests. The aim is to develop a culture of ethical standards and integrity for HCERES experts and staff.

### ▶ Consolidate the pool of experts

The transparency and quality of the recruitment process for experts, their training, and renewal of the pool of experts are key for the credibility and success of an evaluation agency. The aim is to increase the rigour of the recruitment of experts by including ethical standards, ensuring equality and opening up to international experts.

### ▶ Consolidate the work of scientific staff

The role of scientific staff (or scientific delegates) is key to the quality of the implementation of evaluations. They need to demonstrate great integrity with regard to HCERES, while remaining in contact with their respective communities. They also play an important role in the quality and acceptability of evaluation practices and any changes to them. The aim is to harmonise the missions of scientific delegates in HCERES and to clarify their recruitment processes and criteria.

## 3. Conduct integrated evaluation for site policies

The stakes for HCERES are high in this area and they affect the entire strategic plan. It is going to have to move from the integrated evaluation of institutions to integrated evaluation of sites, starting the evaluation process with the strategy of the institution responsible for territorial coordination, which is then expressed in its components.

### ▶ Adapt to diverse territorial configuration groupings

The diversity of site configurations, operating modes and fields of activity require evaluation to be adapted to each of them, while maintaining the goal of stabilising their approach by 2020. The goal is to prepare for and strengthen dialogue with the coordinating institutions and stakeholder institutions (definition of the scope, objectives, evaluation methods, gathering expectations, information on positioning, etc.) and increase dialogue with the supervising ministries.

### ▶ Implement a new integrated evaluation process

This will involve pursuing connections, complementarity and added value at each stage of evaluation, for each of the evaluation subjects. This work will result in the revision, adaptation and harmonisation of the various evaluation standards (for territorial coordination strategies, institutions, study programmes and research). The various HCERES evaluation processes will therefore be adapted accordingly. In each process, the evaluation will have to assess how the territorial coordination strategy is taken into account in each of the stakeholder institutions and, in return, what each stakeholder contributes to the territorial coordination strategy, while retaining their autonomy.

### ▶ Rely on the OST department to contribute to the reasoning of evaluations

OST will use its skills and outputs to contribute to these evaluations. At the scale of a region or grouping of large institutions, the scientific, technological and educational output indicators are fairly reliable for compiling

information that is useful for all stakeholders. This information will support qualitative and collaborative peer-led evaluation.

#### 4. Implement the validation of evaluation procedures

By law, HCERES has been given the task of validating the procedures for evaluations carried out by other bodies. Standards and procedures should be adopted that ensure equal treatment between the entities evaluated by HCERES and those evaluated by other bodies. This system will encourage the phasing of evaluations in order to maintain the current integrated evaluation process of the French system.

The legal texts (act and decree) state in general terms that evaluations carried out by other bodies shall be subject to the same ethical and methodological requirements. The principles of objectivity, transparency and equal treatment for evaluated organisations are restated. Experts involved in evaluations are required to abide by the principles of neutrality and balance in the representation of themes and opinions. The requirement to comply with international best practice is also mentioned.

The decree specifies that the scope of evaluations must take into account the national and territorial aspects of higher education and research, in particular for territorial coordination and groupings, relationships between training and research, the diversity of the type and mission of the organisations and programmes evaluated and the diversity of disciplinary fields.

These texts do not require the evaluation procedures to be identical to those of HCERES, only that they share the same main ethical and methodological principles. Nevertheless, this high standard must be maintained over time.

It is important to identify the main aspects of the evaluation process for which HCERES may have expectations:

- the self-evaluation process carried out by the institution and expectations with regard to the self-evaluation report sent to the experts;
- rules for forming the panel of experts and checking for conflicts of interests;
- the external evaluation standards;
- the external evaluation procedure;
- expectations with regard to the external evaluation report;
- the external evaluation report publishing process.

For the evaluation of study programmes, the validation system must fully comply with the ESG.

#### 5. Simplify evaluation processes

The evaluation work carried out by HCERES has promoted the development of evaluation culture within higher education and research institutions. Evaluation procedures now need to be simplified and reduced to give the scientific and teaching community more time to focus on their main profession, and to ensure that the cyclical frequency of evaluations provides added value.

- ▶ Simplify the evaluation of institutions and adapt to site specifics

Increased autonomy for institutions and the variable levels of site coordination have led to a greater differentiation between the modernisation, governance and management processes of institutions. All institutions will be able to request adaptations to the depth of analyses by focusing evaluation on certain fields, with the aim of improving the added value for the institution.

Furthermore, two types of simplification are possible for institutions that are stakeholders in site policies or signatories of multi-annual site contracts:

- simplification via prior evaluation of the site policy: activities that fall under the territorial grouping will no longer be evaluated for the institution;
- simplification via the simultaneous evaluation of institutions, programmes and research: the evaluation will focus on the strategy drawn up and rolled out by the institution in its various fields of activity, and on the management of continuous improvement mechanisms for its activities, rather than on their results.

For site policy evaluations, the scope and competencies of lead institutions for territorial groupings are not fully consistent, so this will involve adapting existing standards to the specific situations and coordinating them as best as possible with the standards for the evaluation of institutions, study programmes and research, as part of integrated evaluation.

► Simplify the evaluation of study programmes

The HCERES evaluation process for study programmes has taken into account the changes to the dialogue between the State and higher education institutions brought about by the French Act of 22 July 2013 with the notion of prior accreditation of institutions following the *ex-post* evaluation of programmes. However, in order to avoid the submission of two files for evaluation and accreditation, HCERES will extend its evaluation to include the planned programmes of institutions. The Ministry will make its decision on the basis of an overall opinion issued by HCERES, based on a single file (review/project sent to HCERES). This single file will greatly simplify coordination between evaluation and contract negotiation.

Choices still need to be made between a narrow-scale evaluation for each training programme and a wider scale (for departments, disciplines, institutions and/or sites). One possibility for simplification would involve adapting the scale of the evaluation according to the site specifics or evaluation theme. Each programme still needs to be evaluated for specific themes like health programmes, paramedical training, schools under the responsibility of the French Ministry of Culture, and schools of teaching and education (ESPE), etc., but the evaluation of range of study programmes for university sites has greater added value if the focus is on training fields (coherent sets of programmes). Training fields at institution and site levels would become the most detailed level of evaluation. This would greatly simplify institution files.

► Simplify the evaluation of research units

The evaluation of research units needs to change in order to adapt both to changes to the evaluation of programmes and to the development of site policy evaluation as part of territorial groupings. The aim of HCERES is, firstly, to simplify the “narrow-scale” evaluation of research units, while at the same time maintaining it, as it provides the internal evaluation bodies of research bodies with vital information when accrediting mixed research units; and secondly, to associate this narrow-scale evaluation with wider-scale evaluation for research fields (i.e. disciplinary or thematic groupings on a site), which should introduce a more strategic dimension into the evaluation of research organisations.

The aim will be to define a reworked evaluation process for research units (reduced number of criteria, etc.) and to specify the content of the evaluation of research fields with all stakeholders.

## 6. Increase the independence of HCERES

The impartiality of HCERES evaluations is recognised. However, the concept of independence must not prevent dialogue with evaluation stakeholders. Prior dialogue with institutions is now included in HCERES practices, but dialogue with the supervising ministries, various conferences and representative organisations (including student organisations) is limited. It is important to find a framework and methods to meet the needs for consultation with a larger audience on the development of methodological tools and the use of evaluation reports. This involves going beyond the practices of feedback and founding a body for institutional dialogue.

HCERES must also adapt the business model of evaluation in line with three principles:

- evaluation free of charge;
- a constant number of entities to be evaluated;
- participation from universities and research bodies by delegating or seconding scientific staff (known as scientific delegates).

This fundamental question for the proper operation of HCERES will be discussed by the Board in close collaboration with the Ministry and the presidents of institutions. Evaluation must remain free of charge and delegations / secondments must be reimbursed to ensure the independence of evaluations.

## 7. Increase the international profile of HCERES

Since 2011, HCERES has consolidated its international evaluation methods and practices and strengthened its European base by actively participating in networks of European quality assurance agencies. It is already a committed national player thanks to its proposals for the revision of the ESG and for defining the French objectives of the Bologna Secretariat. The goal is to consolidate its achievements.

- ▶ Promote HCERES as a top French player internationally.

HCERES will strengthen its presence on the European and international stage by developing actions, discussion and collaborations with other French and foreign agencies and players in higher education, quality assurance and evaluation.

- ▶ Develop evaluation and accreditation missions at a European and international level.

Given that HCERES is now identified on the international scene as a known and recognised player in training programme evaluation and that foreign institutions have clearly expressed the fact that the “values / qualities” of French higher education are ones that they would like to promote, HCERES will consolidate its evaluation and accreditation processes abroad and continue its international evaluation and accreditation actions.

- ▶ Become a reference in analysis, discussion, producing summary reports and forecasting with regard to opening French higher education and research up internationally.

Within the scope of its competencies, HCERES will contribute to the organisation of European and international benchmark activities and will support European agencies in their own improvement processes.

## 8. Fully utilise the skills of OST

Incorporating and strengthening OST as an HCERES department will boost the influence, visibility and security of the activities of both organisations. Three priorities for action are proposed:

- performing and disseminating quantitative studies and analyses of the research system and its momentum to public and private decision-makers, the media, the general public, etc.;
- taking part in integrated evaluation work for sites so that the reviewers and evaluated parties can base their activities on a set of shared indicators and analyses as part of a methodological system that ensures stringent ethical standards in the use of these indicators for evaluation;
- performing a pilot study programme for the development and implementation of indicators and analyses in order to better meet the needs of players.

The success of these actions assumes that the contributions and recommendations of the OST Scientific Steering Committee can be taken into account in HCERES governance so that operation of OST is efficiently coordinated with that of the other departments.

## 9. Implement an internal organisational structure adapted to integrated evaluation

A new internal HCERES organisational structure will be introduced in line with the development of integrated evaluation for sites and in order to increase the visibility and understanding of HCERES for our external partners. This structure will take the form of a matrix-type organisation combining departments and a project-based mode. The challenge is to coordinate the evaluation of site policies, harmonise evaluation standards, coordinate the production of summary reports or the production of indicators defined and produced by OST, implement a policy for continuous improvement of processes (feedback, risk management), and multi-annual plans for recruiting and supporting experts. To this end, the IT system and internal quality assurance will also be strengthened.



# GLOSSARY

## A-B

ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
AERES	French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
AMAO SUP	Malian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ANAQ-SUP	National Authority for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Senegal)
ANECA	<i>Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación</i>
ANVUR	<i>Agencia di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca</i>
BTS	Higher Technical Certificate

## C

CCN-IUT	French National Advisory Commission for University Institutes of Technology
CEAIE	China Education Association for International Exchange
CEFDG	French Evaluation Commission for Management Programmes and Degrees
CEQUINT	Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation
CHU	University Hospital
CIC	Clinical Investigation Centre
CIEP	International centre for education research
CNE	French National Committee for Evaluation
CNER	French National Research Evaluation Council
CNIL	French Data Protection Agency
CNRS	French National Centre for Scientific Research
COMEGAL	Committee for Equality in Higher Education and Research
COMUE	Community of Universities and Institutions
CONEAU	<i>Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria</i>
COS	Scientific Steering Committee
CPGE	Preparatory classes for <i>Grandes Écoles</i>
CPU	Conference of University Presidents
CTI	French Engineering Accreditation Body
CV	<i>Curriculum vitae</i>

## D-E

DROM	Overseas <i>départements</i> and regions
DUP	Single Project Document

ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfert System
ED	Doctoral School
EDM	Electronic Document Management
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region - National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EPO	European Patent Office
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESR	Higher Education and Research
ESU	European Students' Union

## F-H

FTE	Full-time equivalent
Worked FTE	Worked full-time equivalent
FraQ-Sup	French-speaking network of quality agencies for higher education
HCERES	French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
HR	Human Resources

## I-L

INAAREES	National Institute of Evaluation, Accreditation and Recognition of Higher Education Studies (Angola)
INRA	French National Institute for Agricultural Research
INSERM	French Institute of Health and Medical Research
IS	Information System
IUT	University Institute of Technology
L	Bachelor's
LMD	Bachelor's-Master's-Doctorate
LP	Vocational Bachelor's
LRU	French Law on university freedoms and responsibilities

## M-N

M	Master's
MAE	French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MEI	Europe and International Mission
MENESR	French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research



MSTP	Scientific, Technical and Educational Mission
NP	Natural person
NIAD-UE	National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation

## O-P

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OST	Observatory of Science and Technologies
PAPESR	Higher Education and Research Management Support Portal

## Q-R

PRES	Higher Education and Research Cluster
QACHE	Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education
RAP	Annual Performance Report
RTRA	Advanced Research Thematic Networks

## S-T

STS	Skilled Technician Programmes
TLQAA	Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency

## V

VAE	Validation of Acquired Knowledge
VAP	Validation of Professional Experience
VES	Validation of Higher Education
VISTEC	Vietnam Science and Technology Evaluation Center



# APPENDICES

## A. Evaluation of research units

This activity represents a large proportion of the total evaluations carried out by HCERES, with an average of 575 units evaluated each year including research units, federated organisations, clinical investigation centres (CIC) and university hospitals (CHU). One evaluation group involves the work of approximately 3,500 experts, whereas the evaluation of study programmes includes an average of 700 experts and the evaluation of institutions, around 350 experts. The importance of a rigorous methodology and particularly suitable tools for organising and carrying out evaluations is therefore an even more crucial issue for this department. The evaluation of research units therefore also follows the HCERES drive to improve its methodologies and any general quality assurance measures.

### ► Changes to the internal organisational structure

The department calls on a large number of scientific delegates to manage this particularly high flow of evaluations. To support them in applying the methodology defined by HCERES, the department has developed its internal quality system and formally drawn up its entire process in the form of documented procedures. Procedures have also been introduced to support the scientific delegates in using the EDM / Pool of experts application.

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary organisational structure has been introduced in the department in order to aid the comprehension of interdisciplinarity in all its forms (multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches) through evaluation. Scientific delegate representatives are appointed to help coordinate the evaluations of these research units. The choice of experts and evaluation criteria are adapted in line with the interdisciplinary characteristics of the unit.

### ► Changes to methodology

The scoring of research units in the evaluation process was subject to much internal and external discussion. Scoring meets different objectives and follows different processes to evaluation, but was implemented by HCERES, particularly in order to meet the expectations of decision-makers responsible for allocating resources or changing organisational structures. In order to refocus evaluation on helping the evaluated units and supporting them in moving forward with their continuous improvement approaches, and in order to reduce the impact on their reputation as highlighted in the 2010 external review, scoring was gradually phased out before its definitive removal in 2014.

In the same way, a new version of the evaluation standards was drawn up in 2013 (see page 23) in order to increase the transparency of evaluation, clarify its methodology and help the evaluated units and experts in completing the evaluation. The number of criteria in the standards increased from four to five in 2014 in order to ensure that evaluation can give a more detailed and comprehensive report on all the activities and results of research units.

The methodology revision also took into account the goal of simplification. Since 2013, two thirds of the tables to complete for the self-evaluation file were removed in order to simplify the work of research unit directors and experts, and in order to give laboratories and experts more time to dedicate to research.

This revision also led to the removal of the individual form so as to avoid possible confusion between the evaluation of individuals and the evaluation of organisations. The criterion regarding productive researchers was also removed following discussion of the relevance of this indicator.

### ► Outlook

External quality assurance applied to research units as part of integrated evaluation uses the same design and revision system as the other types of evaluation. Current discussions, as elsewhere in HCERES, focus on evaluation scale.

## B. Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST)

The Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST) joined the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2015 (see Decree no. 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014). OST was created in 1990 and previously had the status of a public interest grouping, managed under private law.

It is responsible for designing and conducting studies to help all players in the French higher education and research system position themselves in the international environment, compare themselves with others and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

OST's projects are structured around four major themes: the international position of players in the French higher education and research system, research and the business world, site policies and finally, scientific potential. Its operation also includes a cross-cutting programme that combines all activities for maintaining and developing the tools and methods required for its activities.

### ► The main activities of OST

OST has developed three main types of activity to carry out its missions:

#### • Data management

The missions of OST require access to varied and high-quality data. In particular, OST relies on databases or reference indicators (data and indicators from the OECD, Eurostat, Web of Science, EPO, etc.), for which it has specific know-how. Each year, this data is checked for reliability and supplemented, particularly with regard to thematic classification and the identification of institutions and geographical entities.

#### • Production of indicators and studies

Since its creation, OST has produced and widely distributed studies describing the French higher education and research system, and regularly-updated reference indicators showing the international position of this system.

OST also carries out studies to analyse the strategic position of the diverse range of higher education and research system players, including institutions and their groupings (e.g. sites, regional groupings), research topics or fields (e.g. cancer, disability, defence-related technologies). Some of these studies are carried out in response to specific orders (from a government ministry or institution, etc.).

This activity includes active support for users through methodological support documents, the presentation of basic indicator uses, presentation meetings and the possibility of contacting a member of the team for additional information.

For example, OST took part in work leading to the publication of the Leiden Manifesto for research metrics, which proposed ten principles for improving the use of indicators for the evaluation of research.

#### • Development of new knowledge and methods

OST also runs development projects to increase and improve the quality of its outputs, in particular projects for:

- designing new indicators to describe all kinds of aspects of stakeholder activity (research, innovation, partnerships, training, socio-economic impacts, etc.) by working with researchers, experts or users;
- exploring new processing methods such as text mining, machine learning or network analysis;
- exploring new data (such as French National Research Agency projects, parliamentary documents).

Collaboration with researchers makes this production of new knowledge possible and the quality thereof can be seen through publications in international journals.

Finally, OST seeks to work with European or international peers so that the methods and indicators adopted become *de facto* standards.

### ► Internal organisational structure

OST draws on the complementary skills of many professions thanks to its project-based organisational structure:

- IT skills (3 computer engineers, 1 project manager for IT decision-making support and 1 IT department manager)
- statistical skills (1 statistical engineer, 1 econometrics research engineer);
- 7 research officers and project officers;
- 8 associate researchers who work part time in the various OST fields;
- 2 project assistants.

In addition, OST teams work closely with external players on most projects, depending on needs. These players include sponsors, partners, experts, researchers in scientometrics, the economics of science and the economics of innovation, etc.

In 2008, OST introduced an ISO 9001 quality management system applied to its project-based operation. This system was in operation until 2014 and provided a clear structure for activity. Most tools are still available, in particular the single project document (DUP), validation procedures and project document resources.

#### ► Outlook for integration in HCERES

Integrating into HCERES presents a two-fold opportunity for strengthening evaluation skills and developing OST activities. Many collaborative projects have already been identified or initiated to strengthen collaboration.

A cross-cutting project has already been initiated by OST and the HCERES evaluation departments to define a common data policy, with a view in particular to sharing some data and learning to work with new data (e.g. for humanities and social sciences).

By helping to design and implement the integrated evaluation of sites, OST will support evaluation. This could lead, for example, to the implementation of self-evaluation support services for institutions, or contributing to the design of the methodological framework for evaluations (support for data collection, design and production of indicators and their use).

### C. Validation of the evaluation procedures of other bodies

The ESR Act of 2013 which replaced AERES with HCERES also introduced the possibility for evaluated entities to choose a body other than HCERES for external evaluation. This provision is applicable to each of the evaluation types (study programmes, research units, institutions). In this instance, the law requires HCERES to validate the evaluation procedures produced by other bodies.

Since the creation of HCERES in November 2014, it has contacted institutions at the launch of a campaign in order to find out who would like take advantage of this provision. The few that take it up are usually associated with the institutional evaluation of research bodies.

The principles guiding the delegation, the methods for analysing the standards of other bodies, and the internal organisational structure of HCERES, which will be responsible for this, are currently being studied. HCERES is working on drawing up a validation procedure for evaluation procedures in order to present it to the Board for its opinion. Once adopted, it will be published on the HCERES website.

The HCERES strategic plan anticipates a gradual implementation of this provision, which will be fully operational by late 2016.

## D. List of evidence

	Documents	Relevant standards
D1	Decree no. 2014-1365 pertaining to the organisation and operation of the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education	3.1- 3.2
D2	Excerpt from French Act no. 2013-660	3.1- 3.2
D3	Internal quality package (Evaluation charter / Scientific delegate status / Expert status)	3.3
D4	Declaration of interests	3.3
D5	Standards for evaluation of institutions	2.1
D6	Standards for evaluation of study programmes (bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's)	2.1
D7	Standards for evaluation of doctoral schools	2.1
D8	Programme evaluation form	2.1
D9	HCERES - Cross-border evaluation guide (programme level)	2.1
D10	Cross-border evaluation standards (institutional level) - Armenia	2.1

