

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

**HIGH COUNCIL  
FOR THE  
EVALUATION OF  
RESEARCH AND  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
(HCERES)**

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27 APRIL 2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) was legally established in 2013. It is responsible for evaluating all higher education and research entities, and also for approving the evaluation procedures implemented by other bodies in France.

Hcéres, formerly AERES, has been a member of ENQA since September 2010 and in EQAR, since May 2011. With this review, Hcéres is applying for renewal of membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the way in which and to what extent Hcéres fulfils the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The following activities of Hcéres had to be addressed in the external review:

- Evaluation of institutions (schools and universities),
- Evaluation of study programmes and doctoral schools,
- Evaluation of programmes and institutions abroad.

Based on documentary and oral evidence, the review panel made the following commendations, recommendations and suggestions for further improvement (in view of ESG standards).

## **Commendations:**

- Hcéres has a sound budget, which is used, among others, for the systematic development of employees, as well as for the improvement of technological systems in order to reduce the workload of staff and the institutions being evaluated. (ESG 3.5)

## **Recommendations:**

- A strategic plan / strategic directions 2021-2025 need to be developed in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, while taking into serious consideration the reinforced autonomy and coordinating responsibilities of the agency. (ESG 3.1)
- In order to inform the public about the progress and challenges in higher education, a system for analysing and publishing general findings of different evaluations needs to be developed. (ESG 3.4)
- The agency should clarify who will take the responsibility of thematical analysis and who will define what issues and themes should be tackled in that analytical effort. (ESG 3.4)
- The collection of feedback from reviewers and evaluated institutions needs to be systematised and implemented in a coherent way. (ESG 3.6)
- Hcéres is recommended to consider further simplification and harmonisation of its standards. (ESG 2.1)
- The panel recommends that Hcéres be more systematic and proactive in involving stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions and students, in the development of evaluation objectives and methodologies. (ESG 2.2)
- Hcéres should find a follow-up method that is appropriate and useful for all involved parties and apply it consistently to all evaluations. (ESG 2.3)
- Stakeholders should be adequately informed about the follow-up process. (ESG 2.3)
- Hcéres is recommended to make every effort to expand their reviewers pool with current students and socio-economic experts in order to include them systematically. (ESG 2.4)
- The systematic involvement of international experts, at least in institutional and international evaluations, could provide significant added value and is therefore highly recommended. (ESG 2.4)

- In order to facilitate the comparability of the reports, the development of a reporting template in line with the standards of the Protocol is recommended to be considered also in the programme evaluation. (ESG 2.6)
- Hcéres should make greater efforts in promoting the accessibility and readability of the reports. (ESG 2.6)

**Suggestions for further improvement:**

- Hcéres is suggested to develop opportunities to learn from the more experienced reviewers in an interactive way (e.g., by promoting live or online events). (ESG 3.6)
- In order to reduce the workload of HEIs, the required indicators could be harmonized with all relevant bodies. (ESG 2.2)
- The panel suggests Hcéres to ensure that during a visit, all relevant stakeholders – especially students - have the opportunity to express their opinion. (ESG 2.3)
- Hcéres could consider, together with the relevant ministries, improving the information provided both higher education institutions and the public on the impact of evaluation results on accreditation decisions. (ESG 2.6)

The panel's judgements are provided below:

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	Substantially compliant
ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS	Fully compliant
ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE	Fully compliant
ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Partially compliant
ESG 3.5 RESOURCES	Fully compliant
ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT	Substantially compliant
ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES	Fully compliant
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES	Fully compliant
ESG 2.6 REPORTING	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	Fully compliant

Hcéres is at the center of adapting its functions to the new legal framework. The agency's human resources and stable financial situation provide a solid foundation for successful progress. The panel hopes that its observations will provide useful input for the development and implementation of the agency's new strategy.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (*Le Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*, Hcéres) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in June - November 2021 (from self-analysis until the finalisation of the review report).

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

With this review, Hcéres is applying for renewal of membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR. As this is Hcéres' third review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2016 REVIEW

The 2016 review panel found Hcéres to be fully compliant with ESG 2.2, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, and 3.7; substantially compliant with ESG 2.1, 3.4, and 3.6; and partially compliant with ESG 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.7.

Hcéres was commended for its approach to the design of standards and criteria for programme and institutional evaluation, addressing employability of students and doctoral students, for well-developed software that facilitates exchange of documents and improves the management and transparency of the review process, as well as for establishing a clear and robust quality 'cycle' of continuous improvement (ERR 2017, pp. 3-4).

The panel identified the following areas for improvement (ERR 2017, pp. 50-51):

**ESG 3.3** To consider further developing its procedure for non-conflict of interest, in order to help easily detect and prevent potential conflicts of interests. This may be achieved by including in the expert's declaration of interests explicit definition of a conflict of interest in the context of the agency work. In addition, panels' independence can be reinforced by providing a written guidance on what may constitute a conflict of interest in evaluator's work, how it can be detected and avoided, including examples from the agency's practice.

**ESG 3.4** To better utilise information gathered from institutional and programme evaluations, in order to show the progress and problems encountered by higher education institutions and reinforce the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes through the publication of regular analytical reports.

**ESG 3.5** HCERES could revise the roles and responsibilities attached to scientific delegates in order to curtail the cost of universities' contribution to external quality assurance.

**ESG 3.6** To publish HCERES' internal quality assurance policy on the website. To avoid changing the methodology every year and consolidate various internal quality assurance tools, both common and specific, into a single Handbook.

ESG 3.7 To regard more constructively external periodic reviews and use their findings to reflect on its policies and activities.

ESG 2.1 Further review and revise its external quality assurance processes and the various standards and criteria used for them, in order to fully address the requirements of ESG Part I. This particularly concerns external quality assurance of programme design and approval and the development of teaching staff. HCERES should revise the complex structure, definitions, the language and style of its quality assurance standards and criteria with a view of providing clarity and consistency of approach. The agency is advised to revise its processes and standards for evaluation of cross-border and foreign higher education, considering the Toolkit on quality assurance of CBHE for agencies and HEIs and the agreed standards for quality assurance of joint programmes, approved by EHEA Ministers in May, 2015.

ESG 2.2 To open up to external stakeholders by systematically involving them into the assessment and design of its methodologies through various working groups and committees.

ESG 2.3 To encourage institutions to follow-up its panels' recommendations by including options for follow-up of recommendations in evaluation reports.

To consider revising its flexible approach to the selection of standards for self-evaluation to ensure comparability and consistency of its published reports.

ESG 2.4 To publish on the website the agency's policy and criteria for nomination and appointment of experts.

To consider active involvement of international experts in review panels by developing and implementing consistent approach to their selection and recruitment, including for the evaluations abroad.

HCERES should involve students and employer representatives in the panels for all types of evaluations and strengthen their role as equal members, and ensuring proper and regular training.

ESG 2.5 To refine outcomes' criteria for different evaluations, in order to ensure consistency in their application by different panels and institutions.

ESG 2.7 To coordinate its complaints procedure with accrediting and contracting ministries, in order to promote coherent approach to complaints and appeals;

To get ready for work its complaints committee as soon as possible in order to be able to take account of the adequacy and effectiveness of its new methodology.

## REVIEW PROCESS

The 2021 external review of Hcéres was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of Hcéres was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- **Pedro Teixeira**  
Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Porto; Director, Centre for Research on Higher Education Policies (CIPES)  
Portugal  
*Chair, academic (EUA nominee)*
- **Maiki Udam**  
Quality Manager, Rector's Strategy Office, University of Tartu; Independent Consultant  
Estonia

*Secretary, quality assurance professional (ENQA nominee)*

- **Isabel Ortega**  
Quality Assurance Coordinator, Aragon Agency for QA and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA)  
Spain  
*Quality assurance professional (ENQA nominee)*
- **Iuliu Gabriel Cocuz**  
PhD student in Medicine, Doctoral School of Medicine and Pharmacy, University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology George Emil Palade of Targu Mures  
Romania  
*Student (ESU nominee, member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool)*

The panel received the self-assessment report (SAR) from ENQA review coordinator in June 2021. During the review panel's preparatory Zoom-meeting on July 13, the ENQA review coordinator reminded the panel members of their roles and responsibilities, and of the importance to use the ESG, in identifying evidence provided in the SAR and supporting the conduct of the site visit. The review panel members submitted their comments and questions regarding the SAR's alignment with the ESG to the secretary in time before the site visit. Based on the feedback, the chair and the secretary aligned the individual findings to the areas of inquiry. In consequence, they were linked to specific interview sessions. During briefing sessions, the review panel checked repeatedly whether enough evidence had been collected for each standard of the ESG. The panel members took notes during the interviews and shared them with the secretary afterwards. During the final private meeting among panel members, all judgements, recommendations and suggestions on each standard were agreed collectively based on gathered evidence. Based on the agreements, the secretary collated an initial draft of the review report that was circulated among panel members and finalized based on their written comments. The report therefore reflects information gained from the SAR, interviews during the site visit, and additional documentation provided by Hcéres before the visit. Hcéres had the opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

### **Self-assessment report**

Hcéres produced a 73-page SAR, which provided the review panel with the first source of evidence it used to draw its conclusions. The review panel received the SAR from the ENQA review coordinator in June 2021. The report addressed the relevant components following the report template as provided by ENQA. As this is considered a third review of the agency's compliance with the ESG, the SAR provides reflections on the previous (2016) review recommendations and the follow-up actions undertaken by the agency with subsequent developments. Hcéres provided the review team with all requested additional documentation/information in a timely and open manner.

### **Site visit**

The agenda for the site visit was prepared jointly by the review team and Hcéres' contact person. The programme of the visit, provided as Annex 1 to this report, identifies all interview partners, who actually participated in the meetings. Due to the Covid pandemics, the panel members and Hcéres agreed to have an online visit which took place on the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September 2021. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, a pre-visit meeting with the agency's representatives (the president, the deputy general secretary and the contact person) to clarify any remaining question took place.

During the two and a half day visit to Hcéres, the panel met with representatives of management and staff and particularly with those working in the departments responsible for institutional, programme

and research evaluations, as well as with the staff responsible for cross-border higher education accreditations, and with a group of Hcéres reviewers. The panel was also able to meet representatives of the coordinating ministries, reviewed higher education institutions, and other quality agencies supervised by Hcéres.

The review panel appreciated the openness of the interviewees, and would like to thank the president of Hcéres', the contact person and all other staff members for the time and effort they invested in this review.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM<sup>1</sup>

There are more than 3,600 public and private higher education institutions in France: 72 universities, 25 Communities of Universities and Establishments (ComUE) or other types of groupings, 227 engineering schools, 220 business and management schools, 45 public schools of art, 22 schools of architecture, and 3,000 private specialised higher education institutions and institutes.

At the start of the 2019 academic year, 2.725 million students were enrolled in the French higher education system, 10.7% of them from abroad. This covers all post-secondary study programmes, which are taught mainly by:

- universities, including University Institutes of Technology (IUTs),
- Grandes Écoles (including engineering schools, business schools, Écoles Normales Supérieures, veterinary schools, military schools and initial officer training schools),
- specialised institutes and schools (including schools of art and architecture, paramedical training schools, etc.).

These institutions are supervised mainly by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, although some institutions are under the authority of "technical" ministries such as the Ministries for the Armed Forces, Agriculture, Industry, Culture and Health.

French higher education is mainly public, with the private sector accounting for only one in five enrolments.

Public research is carried out in universities, schools and research bodies, which may be general or specialised, and be granted different statuses. Public research is carried out in research units that frequently involve one or more universities, schools and research bodies.

The last thirty years have seen profound changes in the Higher Education and Research system, and the reforms have accelerated since 2006. Three major trends are emerging: greater institutional autonomy, intensified evaluation and contractualisation with the State, and greater cooperation between participants in the higher education and research system in order to curb their fragmentation and raise their international profile.

In 2013, the French Law on Higher Education and Research established a more precise framework for the territorial coordination of higher education institutions, by requiring each higher education institution (university, school, institute, etc.) to participate in a ComUE, to join forces with another institution, or merge with at least one other institution. The objective was to promote the coordination of programme offerings and research strategies, improve student living conditions, and

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<sup>1</sup> SAR, pp. 6-8

pool resources in order to raise the national and international profile of institutions. A multi-annual contract, covering a five-year period, is now concluded between the State and groups of institutions.

Several reforms of the study and training sector were conducted between 2014 and 2017, including the accreditation of study programmes, which had implications for their evaluation methods.

The "Student Plan" (Plan étudiants), a national plan to transform undergraduate education and support success for all students, was announced in 2017. This plan required the mobilisation of additional resources, with a special focus on student life (housing, health, culture, voluntary sector, etc.). This was followed by the promulgation of the Law on Student Guidance and Success in 2018, which created the "Parcoursup" platform for pre-enrolment in the first year of higher education. Another law was passed in 2018: the "Law on the freedom to choose one's professional future", which transformed both apprenticeship-based and professional training.

The holders of a qualification awarded at the end of secondary education have a legal right to access certain post-secondary study programmes at universities, which have been required to follow a pre-enrolment procedure since 2018. Access to other programmes is selective (subject to passing an examination, a competitive selection process, or recruitment based the student's application file), particularly for the Grandes Écoles, classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles, Sections de techniciens supérieurs (STS) and the IUTs.

Since 2002, France has applied the Bologna Process at the national level by dividing its range of study programmes into three cycles: "Bachelor-Master-Doctorate" (BMD). The curricula are divided into semesters. Each academic semester is worth 30 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits, and 60 ECTS credits are therefore available for each academic year. Consequently, a three-year bachelor's degree corresponds to 180 ECTS credits, a two-year master's degree to 120 ECTS credits and a three-year doctorate to 180 ECTS credits. ECTS credits are also divided into competencies, which are listed in the diploma supplement.

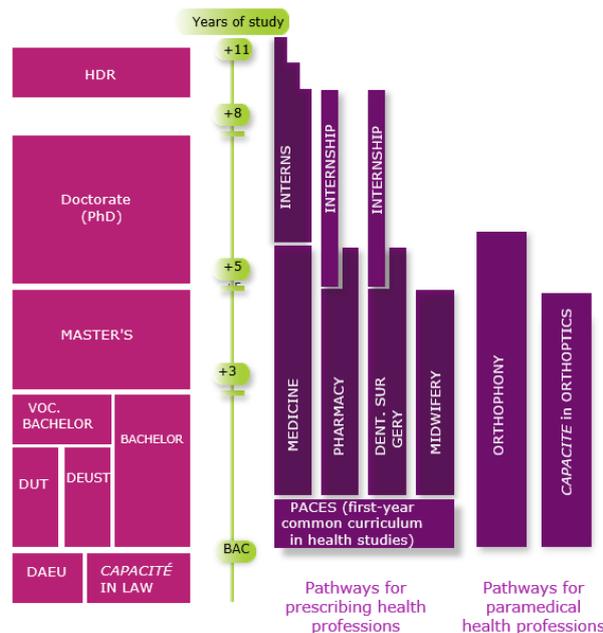


Figure 1. Diagram of the structure of the range of programmes proposed by French higher education institutions

The State is responsible for awarding national degrees and diplomas. A degree is said to be "national" when it is accredited, i.e. recognised by the State. This recognition concerns the following degrees and diplomas:

- “Brevet de technicien supérieur” (BTS – Advanced Vocational Training Certificates), “Diplômes universitaires de technologie” (University Technological Diplomas), bachelor’s and vocational bachelor’s degrees, masters, doctorates, and health diplomas, issued by French universities;
- Master's-degree-level engineering degrees awarded by the Commission des titres d'ingénieurs (CTI).

Private schools recognised by the State can deliver "certified" degrees or diplomas. The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation's endorsement gives a degree its national value, and is granted to study programmes from the three-year bachelor's degree level to the five-year master's degree level for a maximum period of six years (renewable). This is the case for business and management school degrees that have been approved by the Evaluation Committee for Qualifications issued by Business Schools (CEFDG), as well as design and journalism degrees.

Certain professional training programmes can apply for registration on the French National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP). State certification attests to a level of studies that corresponds to the registered qualification.

When a degree or diploma is not recognised by the State, it bears the name of the institution that awards it. This qualification may have value on the job market, but it does not provide equivalence for further study.

There is no automatic equivalence between foreign diplomas and French degrees. Each institution determines its own admission criteria, according to the student's previous experience, the requirements of the study programme in question and European principles. With this in mind, the French ENIC-NARIC centre – "France Education International" – has adopted a comparative approach to the processing of applications for recognition submitted by holders of foreign diplomas. These qualifications are evaluated in relation to the French system, and their holders receive a certificate of comparability. This is not a certificate of equivalence, but it is sometimes requested by higher education institutions, which then decide on a case-by-case basis.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE<sup>2</sup>

In France, five institutions with distinct fields and scopes of action are responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions and study programmes. The multi-annual Research Programming Law (LPR), promulgated in December 2020, empowers Hcéres to coordinate the activities of these national evaluation bodies.

### I. The French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres)

Hcéres is responsible for evaluating all higher education and research entities, and also for approving the evaluation procedures implemented by other bodies.

The evaluations concern:

- study programmes (bachelor's degrees, vocational bachelor's degrees, bachelor's-degree-level qualifications, master's degrees, master's-degree-level qualifications), and doctoral schools and doctoral colleges (or equivalent structures);
- research units;

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<sup>2</sup> SAR, pp. 9-10

- higher education institutions: universities, engineering schools, schools of art, schools of architecture, private public-interest higher education establishments (EESPIG);
- research bodies;
- their territorial clusters.

The Hcéres evaluation is non-prescriptive and is designed to help the evaluated institutions conduct a substantiated self-analysis, define improvement measures, and feed decision-making by the institution and by the State (contractualisation).

In the specific context of programme evaluation, the evaluation reports are accompanied by opinions on the accreditation project and on the proposed programmes, which are transmitted to the supervising ministry for the accreditation instruments. At their decision-making, the ministries may take the Hcéres' accreditation opinion into account, although it is not always followed.

Hcéres is a member of ENQA and has been registered on EQAR.

## 2. Commission des titres d'ingénieur (CTI, French engineering accreditation body)

CTI is responsible for ensuring the periodic evaluation of all engineering training programmes proposed by French institutions in France with a view to their accreditation to award an engineering degree. Its decision is final concerning the accreditation of private institutions and bodies run by chambers of commerce and industry. For public institutions, it issues opinions to the competent ministries.

When their scopes of operation are likely to overlap, Hcéres and the CTI cooperate on institutional evaluations of engineering schools. This activity was formalised by the signing of a framework agreement in 2012 (renewed in 2016), which sets out to simplify and harmonise procedures (timetable, documentation requested from evaluated entities) and exchanges of best practice.

CTI is a member of ENQA and has been registered on EQAR.

## 3. The Evaluation Committee for Qualifications issued by Business Schools (CEFDG)

The CEFDG's mission is to organise the quality control procedures for higher education programmes in business and management. It also examines the development of advanced study programmes in management, in line with the global scheme for existing higher education programmes. Its opinions give rise to decisions by the State, accompanied by recommendations intended to encourage the school to adopt an improvement-oriented approach. It may also be asked to state its position on the withdrawal of an endorsement or of master's-degree-level status.

## 4. The National Advisory Committee of University Technology Institutes (CCN-IUT)

A special system applies to University Technology Institutes (IUTs), run by the CCN-IUT, whose secretariat is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. The CCN-IUT is consulted on matters of general interest relating to IUTs and their diplomas. It submits opinions on teaching methods, student recruitment conditions, and changes to the map of programmes and subspecialties.

## 5. The Research University Engineering Training Network (Figure)

The *Réseau Formation en Ingénierie d'Universités de Recherche* (Figure) – launched in 2011 and run as an association since March 2013 under the Law of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1901 – is a network of universities proposing engineering training programmes based on new models, in addition to the existing degrees: the Master's Degree in Engineering (*Cursus Master en Ingénierie*), and the Bachelor's Degree in Engineering (*Cursus Bachelor en Ingénierie*), which is a more recent addition offered by certain institutions. This network has developed and implemented a dedicated quality assurance framework, including an evaluation standard approved by member institutions, which was first introduced in 2016/2017. This framework was evaluated by Hcéres in late 2019 and validated in January 2020. Figure has been an

associate member of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAAE) since 2014. Since 2021, Figure is an ENQA affiliate.

### Hcéres<sup>3</sup>

The Higher Education and Research Law 2013-660 of 22 July 2013, also known as the "Fioraso Law", replaced AERES (created in 2006) with Hcéres. Like AERES, Hcéres benefited from independent administrative authority status and inherited all of AERES' rights and obligations. In addition, this law introduced the opportunity for evaluated entities to choose an evaluation body other than Hcéres, provided that the High Council validated the evaluation procedures beforehand. Hcéres also retained certain prerogatives in the international field and was tasked with conducting ex post evaluations of programmes in the Plan d'investissements d'avenir (Investments for the Future Programme to finance innovative nationwide investments, particularly in relation to research). Hcéres' structure was finalised in late October 2015, after the publication of a Council of State decree specifying its organisational structure and operating procedures, followed by two other decrees on the appointment of its board and its president.

In 2020, a new law – the Multi-Annual Research Programming Law (LPR) – was adopted by the French Parliament. It set three priority objectives: "to improve the funding and evaluation of public research, increase the attractiveness of careers in research and foster an open relationship between science and society as a whole". This law confirmed Hcéres' evaluation missions and established its legal personality. In addition, it set Hcéres the new task of "coordinating the actions of national evaluation bodies in the fields of research and higher education, with the exception of bodies responsible for evaluating personnel, in accordance with the specific characteristics of the missions carried out by these national bodies".

The LPR has therefore revised and extended Hcéres' missions:

- The evaluation of higher education institutions and their groupings, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency (ANR). When these evaluations are conducted by other bodies, Hcéres is responsible for their quality assurance.
- The evaluation of research structures and units at the request of their parent institution, in the absence of the validation of their evaluation procedures, or in the absence of a decision by the parent institution of these structures and units to appoint another body. When the institution decides to appoint another body, the High Council validates the evaluation procedures of this body beforehand<sup>4</sup>.
- The evaluation of the study programmes, degrees and diplomas of higher education institutions or, where necessary, the validation of evaluation procedures implemented by other bodies. The High Council ensures that the range of programmes offered by the institution is consistent with student guidance and success. Evaluation is a prerequisite for the accreditation and for its renewal.
- Hcéres ensures that the evaluations of higher education and research staff take into account all of the missions assigned to them by law and their specific statuses. The evaluation of major national research infrastructures (Grandes infrastructures de recherche – GIR), and of private-sector structures receiving public funds destined for research or higher education.
- The evaluation of activities relating to the dissemination of scientific, technical and industrial culture within institutions, research structures, units and programmes, and activities involving the provision of scientific expertise to public authorities and Parliament.
- The promotion of research integrity and its inclusion in the evaluations that Hcéres conducts or whose procedures it validates.

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<sup>3</sup> SAR, pp. 10-29

<sup>4</sup> This activity falls outside the scope of the ESG and is not expanded upon in this report.

- The evaluation of the implementation of measures to promote gender equality in institutions contributing to the public service of higher education and the public service of research.
- The High Council meets the evaluation needs expressed by the Ministers for Higher Education, Research and Innovation.
- At the request of the competent authorities, it may also evaluate the research activities of other institutions whose statutes provide for a research mission.
- It also coordinates the actions of national evaluation bodies in the fields of research and higher education, with the exception of bodies responsible for evaluating personnel, in accordance with the specific characteristics of the missions carried out by these national bodies. This is a new mission whose terms will be set out in a future decree.

The LPR provides for a change in Hcéres' status: currently an independent administrative authority, it will become an Independent public authority (Autorité publique indépendante – API) with a legal personality on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022. This change will increase the institution's autonomy: the Board will have the power to adopt the budget and an accounting agency will be assigned to Hcéres; it will become an employer, and will be able to institute legal proceedings. Another important change will be the coordinating role assigned to Hcéres over the other evaluation bodies, which requires an overall reflection on how different functions both in Hcéres and in other evaluation bodies, are performed at present and in the future.

## HCÉRES' ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

The governance of Hcéres was delegated<sup>5</sup> to a Board of 30 members (including its president), with gender parity, and appointed for a renewable four-year term by the Minister for Higher Education and Research. The majority of members of the Board are proposed by the stakeholders in the evaluation process (Conference of University Presidents (CPU), French Universities Board (CNU), research bodies). The Board also includes two students, two national elected representatives (one Member of Parliament and one Senator), and three representatives of European quality assurance agencies. The president of Hcéres is appointed by decree of the President of the Republic, after a public call for applications and the examination of these applications by a commission whose members are appointed by the French Prime Minister after nomination by the Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The new governing body was appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020, one year after the end of the term of the previous governing body (29 October 2019). The secretary general had taken over these duties on an interim basis, and the absence of a Board meant that only day-to-day operations could be carried out. No decisions were made concerning methodologies, standards or the functioning of Hcéres.

The LPR limits the composition of the Hcéres Board to 24 members, including the president. As this law was adopted after the renewal of the Board, the new provisions concerning the governance of Hcéres will not be applied until its renewal in the autumn of 2024.

The powers of the Board and the president are defined by the law and Decree n° 2014-1365.

The Board and its president are responsible for the organisation of Hcéres. The secretary general is in charge of the functioning and administrative organisation.

Hcéres has 117 administrative staff (2019). To organise and carry out the evaluations, it recruits scientific advisors, who are researchers or professors in French higher education and research institutions. They continue to work in their home institutions and are seconded on a part-time basis. There were 99 scientific advisors in 2020/2021.

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<sup>5</sup> Decree 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014

Hcéres is organised into the following departments:

- **5 evaluation departments**, reorganised since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, each led by a director with the support of a department head. Directors are appointed by the president after approval by the Board, for a renewable term of four years. The evaluation departments are:
  - **The Department of Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions (DEE)**, responsible for the evaluation of institutions, universities and Grandes Écoles,
  - **The Department of Academic Programme Evaluation (DEF)**, in charge of evaluating the programme offerings and training policies of higher education institutions, in addition to study programmes (bachelor's, master's and equivalent degrees), doctoral schools and doctoral colleges,
  - **The Department of Research Evaluation (DER)**, responsible for the evaluation of research units and research policies,
  - **The Department of Evaluation of Research Bodies (DEO)**, tasked with the evaluation of national research bodies, research infrastructures and their relations with universities and schools,
  - **The Europe and International Department (DEI)**, responsible for developing Hcéres' international evaluation and cooperation activities.
- **The Science and Technology Observatory (OST)**, incorporated into Hcéres in 2015 and dedicated to the performance of thematic and bibliometric studies and analyses. The majority of this department's activities, which are outside the scope of the ESG, are not analysed in this report;
- **The French Office for Research Integrity (Ofis)**, created in March 2017. Ofis is a platform with three missions: reflection, monitoring the implementation of the commitments in the Research Integrity Charter, and coordination by promoting the sharing and pooling of practices in this field.
- **The IT Department (DSI)**, which organises and develops the Hcéres information system to support its evaluation and study activities.
- **The General Secretariat** covers all support activities, i.e. human resources, financial management, the evaluation support unit (responsible for booking transport and accommodation for Hcéres' teams, including experts), communication, legal affairs, external projects and the Quality and Training Delegation.

Hcéres also has its own social dialogue and consultation body – the Technical Committee – composed of eight staff representatives (four permanent and four alternate members).

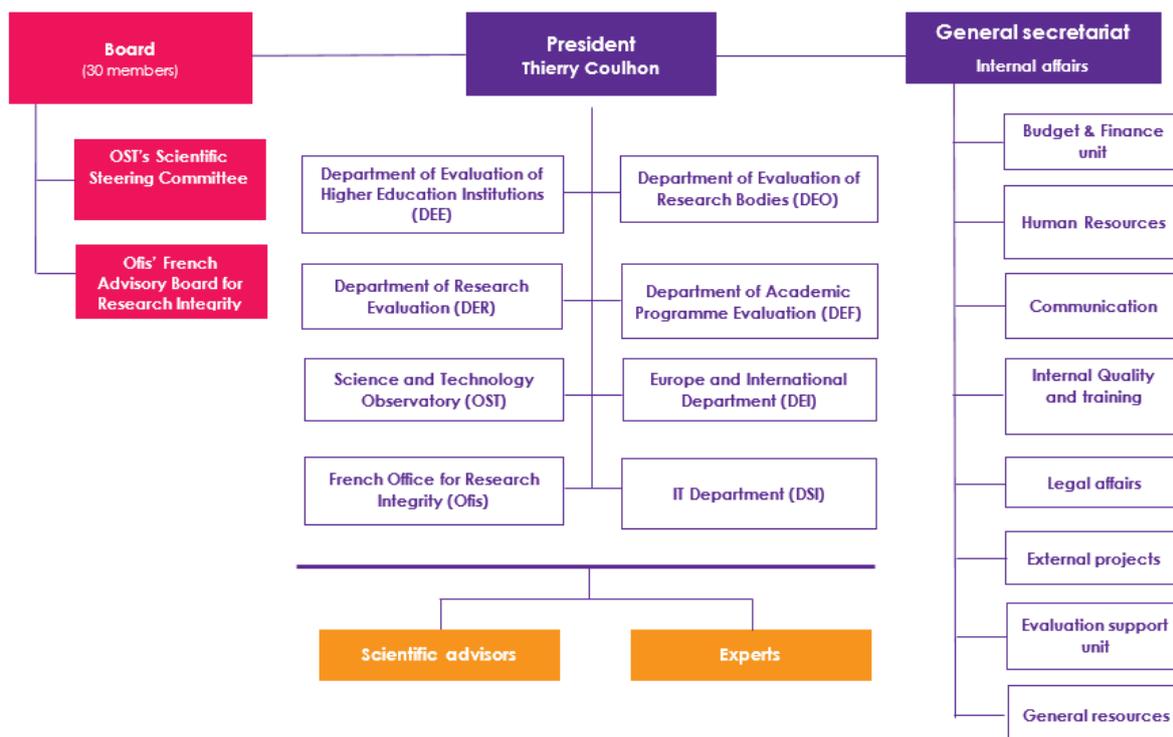


Figure 2. Hcéres' organisational structure

## HCÉRES' FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

The evaluation activities of Hcéres that fall within the scope of the ESG are:

- Evaluation of institutions (schools and universities),
- Evaluation of study programmes and doctoral schools,
- Evaluation of programmes and institutions abroad.

The evaluation of research entities and of research organisations as well as of territorial clusters<sup>6</sup> are outside the scope of the ESG, and not analysed in this report. During the review visit the panel learned that territorial coordination in the form of clusters did not lead to a steady state and it could be regarded as a transition instrument, i.e., either the entities involved in each cluster have evolved (or are evolving) to more consolidated forms (even to a full merger) or they have not taken further that path and are likely to stay in limited forms of cooperation. In the first case, the consolidated entity is evaluated as a whole institution; in the latter situation, each of the institutions is evaluated individually. Although the agency considers that clusters have had a major impact on changing the system, its leadership considers that these structures are likely to lose their relevance, with external evaluation refocusing on the institutions.

Over the course of a five-year cycle, Hcéres evaluates approximately:

- 310 higher education institutions (universities, schools), including groupings thereof;
- 5,300 programmes (bachelor's degrees, vocational bachelor's degrees, master's degrees), including doctoral schools and doctoral colleges;
- 2,500 research units.

<sup>6</sup> Clusters of institutions are above all strategic coordination bodies at the territorial level. With respect to study programmes, their role is to ensure that the programme offerings proposed by the site's member institutions are properly structured. (SAR, p. 15)

## **I. Evaluation of institutions**

The evaluated institutions (universities, schools, and territorial clusters) are supervised mainly by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, although some institutions are under the authority of "technical" ministries such as the Ministries for the Armed Forces, Agriculture, Industry, Culture and Health. The evaluation reports are used, generally between six months and a year after their publication, among other elements, by the supervisory ministries to take decisions (allocation of resources, accreditation, etc.) and to define the objectives of the multi-annual contract for the coming period of five years. The institutional evaluation standard is based on a model of institutional management revolving around the following key dimensions: operational and strategic management, research, training, and student success.

The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

- Preparation of the evaluation campaign
- Launch of the evaluation campaign and planning of the group
- Preparation of the evaluation and formation of panels
- Meeting with the institution to enable it to specify its expectations and the particular issues to be taken into consideration
- Preparation for the visit: meeting with the review team; starting to work on the 'issue paper' - an internal working document used by the panel to formulate its initial evaluative judgements, based on the institution's self-evaluation file, a review of the expectations and a short follow-up report on the actions taken on the recommendations after two years.
- Visit (approximately 3 days)
- Drafting and proofreading of the report
- Response phase (factual check of the report by the institution) and publication of the report
- Feedback from the evaluated entities and experts
- Follow-up report on the actions taken onto the recommendations<sup>7</sup>: two years after their evaluation, Hcéres asks institutions to produce a document summarising the main actions implemented in response to the recommendations set out in its evaluation report. This document will be sent to the panel of experts in charge of the next evaluation.

## **2. Evaluation of programmes and doctoral schools**

This field of activity concerns the evaluation of bachelor's, vocational bachelor's and master's degree programmes, which come under the authority of the Ministry of Higher Education, or of equivalent degree levels, which are also overseen by other supervisory ministries, as well as the evaluation of doctoral schools and doctoral colleges. It takes place before the national State accreditation process, and is carried out every five years. The external evaluation of study programmes concerns only those that have been in existence for at least two years.

The ESR Law replaced the degree accreditation procedure with the institutional accreditation procedure. The Order of 22 January 2014 sets out the procedures for accrediting a higher education institution to award national degrees and diplomas, and defines the requirements for the accreditation file. The range of study programmes is simplified (elimination of subspecialties; creation of a national nomenclature of degrees and diplomas). Institutions are free to organise their study programmes by introducing training pathways which they may modify at their discretion during the course of the contract.

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<sup>7</sup> The first follow-up reports were received in 2019 and used by experts during the institutional evaluations in 2021.

Hcéres has made substantial changes to its programme evaluation process in order to take account of the Law on Student Guidance and Success, the changes in the regulatory framework for study programmes, and greater diversity in programme offerings and organisations at the undergraduate level (first cycle of higher education) in universities.

In practical terms, Hcéres examines institutions' policies and actions at the undergraduate level. It examines each study programme in a simplified manner, using a self-positioning process for the programmes, supported by contextualisation and associated indicators, with the aim of evaluating the implementation of the institution's strategy in each programme while verifying the consideration of the accreditation criteria.

The evaluation of graduate-level (second-cycle) programmes is based on breaking down the provision into fields of study, and consists in evaluating the field and each study programme within it. This breakdown into fields is defined by the institution, at its own discretion, on the basis of its strategic, disciplinary or thematic strengths. A field of study can be either a coherent set of study programmes, one of the institution's areas of expertise, or a reflection of the institute's strategy vis-à-vis the delivery of study programmes. In the future, the methodology adopted for the undergraduate level will be extended to the graduate level cycle as a whole by abandoning the breakdown into fields.

Doctoral schools (EDs) are internal organisations within public institutions, which are accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to award doctorates and implement doctoral training. They establish a multidisciplinary culture for doctoral students within the framework of a coherent scientific project, and bring together research units and teams from one or more higher education institutions, including at least one public institution located on the same site or on nearby sites. Doctoral schools based on one site are generally grouped together within a doctoral college (or an equivalent structure), which is wholly or partially responsible for several missions assigned to doctoral schools; the college is therefore a key player in the implementation of doctoral studies. When institutions or groups of institutions jointly implement doctoral studies on the site, Hcéres also conducts an evaluation of doctoral colleges.

These evaluations take place prior to accreditation and provide decision makers with an opinion on accreditation. They follow the rate and breakdown of the contractualisation process.

The evaluation process is similar to the institutional evaluation, although the follow-up phase has not been introduced here.

### **3. Evaluations conducted outside the national scope**

The law authorises Hcéres to conduct evaluations at the request of foreign institutions. These requests may concern accreditation of an institution, study programmes (bachelor's, master's or doctorate), or research.

Hcéres' Standing Committee on Accreditation is composed of at least 8 members: the president of Hcéres, the director of the DEI, the director of the Department of Evaluation of Higher Education and Research Institutions or the Department of Academic Programme Evaluation according to the type of entity to be accredited, three members of the Hcéres Board, including one student, and one representative of a foreign agency. The committee meets three to four times a year, on average, usually on the same dates as the Hcéres Board, and publishes its decisions on the website.

Three kinds of decisions can be made:

1. An accreditation decision for five to six years for programmes evaluated under the European Approach – without conditions;
2. Accreditation, under two conditions:

- consideration of the prescriptive recommendations identified in the evaluation report;
- verification of documentation or a follow-up visit (on site or online) after two or three years of operation to check on the implementation of the prescriptive recommendations. At the end of this visit, Hcéres will decide whether to extend the accreditation for a further two to three years.

### 3. A decision against accreditation.

As international evaluations end with an accreditation decision, the process is also somewhat different from the national evaluations. It is divided into the following steps:

- Analysis of the application for evaluation and accreditation received and its feasibility
- Prior contact with the local quality assurance agency (if there is one) and the diplomatic post
- Exploratory on-site/online visit
- Drafting of the agreement
- Preparation for the evaluation and formation of the panel
- Preparation for the visit (initial conformity check of the SAR by Hcéres before sharing it with experts; practical arrangements of the visit etc)
- On-site/online visit
- Invoicing
- Drafting of the evaluation report
- Response phase and publication of the report
- Accreditation
- Follow-up to the evaluation (and accreditation, if applicable): in the event of a partial accreditation decision (2 or 3 years), Hcéres requests a follow-up report on the points for which accreditation was conditionally granted. A virtual visit, and if necessary, an on-site counter-visit are then organised. This is followed by the decision of the Accreditation Commission, whether or not to extend the accreditation by two or three years.

### International activities

International activities are coordinated by the The Europe and International Department (DEI) that includes three full-time project managers, a part-time (50%) assistant and a permanent scientific advisor. According to the missions to be carried out, the DEI uses five to six scientific advisors from the Department of Academic Programme Evaluation (DEF). The DEI provides a range of tailor-made services for all international higher education and research institutions that request its support. These are based on four areas:

- **Participation in the development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework**  
Hcéres plays an active role in European debates and projects on quality assurance in higher education via the international networks (ENQA, ECA, INQAAHE, etc.), and contributes in this way to reflection on best practices and their dissemination. Hcéres is one of the founding members of the FRAQ-Sup network, which brings together educational quality assurance agencies whose activities are conducted wholly or partially in French.
- **Partnerships for international projects.** Hcéres participates in numerous projects, e.g, a European twinning project in Azerbaijan, development of postgraduate quality assurance in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Ukraine (C3QA), and the creation of quality assurance systems for higher education in Kazakhstan and Ukraine (EDUQAS). Hcéres participates in an average of 5 to 10 applications for European calls for projects per year.

- **Assistance with the development of quality assurance policies and support to help foreign countries or agencies define or improve their quality assurance policies**  
Over the last couple of years, Hcéres has been working to launch quality agencies, establish common standards and/or conduct joint evaluations in, for example, Lebanon, Algeria, Peru, Panama, Senegal and Mexico.
- **Evaluation and accreditation abroad.** In 2019, around ten exploratory missions were conducted in Poland, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an overview of the entity's strengths and weaknesses, and to formulate recommendations. Before the pandemic, these missions were constantly growing: in 2019, twelve institutions sought the DEI's expertise across the globe, from Central America (three universities in El Salvador and one in Honduras), to Luxembourg, Lebanon and Djibouti. In 2019, the DEI also evaluated 32 international study programmes, ranging from bachelor's degrees to doctoral programmes.

## HCÉRES' FUNDING<sup>8</sup>

Hcéres' primary source of funding is a government grant. The Hcéres budget is debated and voted upon by the French parliament during the annual discussions of the draft finance bill. To cover the entirety of its missions, Hcéres was allocated an operating budget of approximately €19 million in 2020.

Hcéres also possesses its own resources, derived from its international evaluation activities, which offset the expenses incurred by such activities, as well as external commissions to produce analyses and indicators for the OST.

Table 1. Hcéres' budget 2017-2020

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Payroll costs <sup>9</sup>	€ 8,946,055	€ 8,870,409	€ 10,302,707	€ 9,860,191
Operating expenses	€ 8,825,497	€ 9,517,108	€ 9,644,603	€ 9,259,618
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>€ 17,771,552</b>	<b>€ 18,387,517</b>	<b>€ 19,947,310</b>	<b>€ 19,119,809</b>
Own resources	€ 0	€ 318.788	€ 720.260	€ 459.361

Like all public institutions, Hcéres is bound by public accounting standards and only the French Court of Auditors has the power to order retrospective inspections. An inspection of this nature was conducted in January 2020, but the resulting report has not yet been published.

<sup>8</sup> SAR p. 33; see also ESG 3.5

<sup>9</sup> Payroll costs include the salaries of Hcéres staff as well as the remuneration paid to scientific advisors and experts' fees (SAR, p. 33).

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF HCÉRES WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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.

#### Evidence

Research Programming Law 2020-1674 defines Hcéres' mission and its main activities (§4.2, p 11). It stipulates that periodic evaluation must be conducted on the basis of objective criteria that are pertinent to the organisation under evaluation, taking inspiration from international best practices. From 2022 onwards, the law identifies Hcéres as the organisation responsible for coordinating national evaluation bodies in the fields of research and higher education. The missions, entrusted to Hcéres, are presented on Hcéres' website<sup>10</sup>.

The scope of Hcéres' evaluations over the current 5-year period extends to almost 5,300 study programmes, including doctoral schools, around 310 institutions, and 2,500 research units. Hcéres also operates internationally, both evaluating/accrediting foreign institutions and contributing to the development of systems and institutions. During the review visit, Hcéres' representatives confirmed that there was no conflict of interest between counselling and reviewing, as they did not review the institutions where they had assisted development, and vice versa – as stated also in the bilateral contracts.

The strategic plan for 2016-2020 defined 9 quality objectives with criteria and indicators, as well as an improvement strategy for the institution; published on the Hcéres website,<sup>11</sup> this plan ended at the end of the outgoing president's term of office. The preparation of a new strategic plan is still in its infancy. According to the interview with the president of Hcéres it will incorporate the guiding principles set out by the new Hcéres executive team.

The mission objectives of different evaluations are presented in the respective standards<sup>12</sup>. The evaluations take place every 5 years.

The Board, Hcéres' governing body, includes representatives of all the stakeholders in the evaluation process: researchers, engineers, research and teaching staff, student representatives nominated by student associations, along with a number of qualified figures, including members of European quality assurance agencies.

#### Analysis

Hcéres is a nationally and internationally recognised agency that carries out various evaluations: institutions, study programmes, including doctoral schools, and research units. The objectives of

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/missions>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/fr/publications/plan-strategique-2016-2020>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/standards-external-evaluation>

different evaluations are defined in the methodology documents and publicly available on the Hcéres website. The quality objectives along with the criteria and indicators were published in the strategic plan for 2016-2020, but as the recruitment of a new president took longer than originally planned and therefore the strategic planning for the next period has been delayed and is still at an early stage, the review panel cannot confirm full evidence. The objectives of the strategic plan 2016-2020 were translated into the daily work of Hcéres to a great extent, and most of them were also achieved by 2020, e.g., tighter cooperation with CTI, implementation of a non-conflict of interest policy, strengthened international cooperation etc. Some of them need still further development, e.g., satisfaction surveys among institutions and evaluators and simplification of evaluation procedures (see ESG 3.6 and 2.1).

As mentioned in the evidence, Hcéres' Board includes representatives of all the stakeholders in the evaluation process along with a number of qualified figures, including members of European quality assurance agencies. As the Board had started its mandate only in 2021, the interviewed Board members were still establishing their role and expected contribution to the fulfilment of the agency's mission, since the pandemic has hindered more intense communication and interaction. Thus, in the coming years it is expected that their role and contribution will become clearer and more substantive, notably regarding the strategic development of the agency. The preparation of the next strategic document may be a good opportunity to move forward in that direction.

During the visit, Hcéres named various opportunities for stakeholders to express their views about the daily work of the agency, especially related to the evaluation standards and process. However, it seems that stakeholder consultation is mainly based on feedback and depends on a departmental approach, and a systematic institutional approach has not yet been implemented (tackled in ESG 2.2).

### **Panel recommendations**

A strategic plan / strategic directions 2021-2025 need to be developed in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, while taking into serious consideration the reinforced autonomy and coordinating responsibilities of the agency.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

Formally established by Law 2013-660 of 22 July 2013 (Article 90), Hcéres is an independent administrative authority (AAI), a status specially created in French administrative law for public structures operating independently of ministerial supervision (cf. § 5.1.).

The Research Programming Law states that the organisation will take on a new status as an independent public authority (API) as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022, thus reinforcing Hcéres' independence.

According to the applicable legal texts, Hcéres is responsible for the evaluation of the training programmes, research units and institutions. The Research Programming Law also designates Hcéres as the organisation responsible for coordinating national evaluation bodies. These legislative changes have been made in recognition of Hcéres' expertise and legitimacy in the field.

Hcéres' expertise and legitimacy is also recognised at the international level (see chapter "International activities" above).

### **Analysis**

Hcéres operates on a solid legal basis and has even been designated to coordinate other national evaluation authorities from 2022 onwards.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

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.

### **2016 review recommendation**

To consider further developing its procedure for non-conflict of interest, in order to help easily detect and prevent potential conflicts of interests. This may be achieved by including in the expert's declaration of interests explicit definition of a conflict of interest in the context of the agency work. In addition, panels' independence can be reinforced by providing a written guidance on what may constitute a conflict of interest in evaluator's work, how it can be detected and avoided, including examples from the agency's practice.

### **Evidence**

#### **- Organisational independence**

Hcéres' independence from government agencies is guaranteed by its status as an independent administrative authority and, from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 onwards, as an independent public authority. This means that the Board will have the power to adopt the budget and an accounting agency will be assigned to Hcéres. The agency will become an employer and will be able to institute legal proceedings.

<sup>13</sup>

The members of the Hcéres Board are appointed for a renewable four-year term by the Minister for Higher Education and Research. The majority of members of the Board are proposed by the stakeholders in the evaluation (Conference of University Presidents (CPU), French Universities Board (CNU), research bodies). The Board also includes two students, two national elected representatives (one Member of Parliament and one Senator), and three representatives of European quality assurance agencies. The President of Hcéres is appointed for a renewable four-year term by decree of the President of the Republic, after a public call for applications and the examination of these applications by a commission whose members are appointed by the French Prime Minister after nomination by the Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation. (See also the chapter "Hcéres' organisation/structure").

#### **- Operational independence**

While stakeholders in evaluations are consulted by the departments during the process of drafting or reviewing evaluation standards and methodologies, writing of these documents and final decisions are made by the Hcéres' executive teams and the Board.

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<sup>13</sup> The Research Programming Law 2020-1674.

The recruitment of experts remains the responsibility of heads of department, informed by the proposals of the scientific advisors in charge of evaluations, who determine the range of competencies and profiles required to make up a successful panel, who are then appointed by order of the Hcéres president. According to the “Experts Status”, experts must carry out an objective, impartial and independent evaluation in accordance with the evaluation charter and the ethical rules of the High Council adopted by its Board. Among others, all experts need to complete the declaration of interests<sup>14</sup>.

As per the decree on the organisation of Hcéres<sup>15</sup>, the Board is free to make decisions about its organisation and operations. Within this framework, Hcéres is able to recruit its own administrative and scientific personnel. The combined effect of these arrangements is to guarantee the autonomy and operational independence of Hcéres, which is free to define its own methodologies and operating practices.

- Independence of results

Hcéres experts are responsible for writing reports, based on the Hcéres methodology and evaluation standards. Before embarking upon an evaluation mission, experts must undertake to abide by the evaluation charter (Annex D of SAR), which sets out the principles of impartial evaluation.

Accreditation decisions for the evaluations abroad are made by the Hcéres’ permanent accreditation commission that is composed of at least eight members: the President of Hcéres, the Director of the DEI, the Director of the Department of Evaluation of Higher Education and Research Institutions or the Department of Academic Programme Evaluation (according to the type of entity to be accredited), and three members of the Hcéres Board (including one student, and one representative of a foreign agency). The standing rapporteur of the committee is the Director of the DEI.

The experts’ reports are proofread by the Hcéres team in order to ensure that the evaluation standards have been covered, and that the style guide has been respected. The joint consultation phase provides an opportunity for the evaluated entity to correct any factual errors in the reports, but not to contest the analysis itself. Any objections to the substance of the report can be attached to the report in the form of a letter conveying the institution’s comments. Since 2013, in order to underline the responsibility of experts and their independence of judgement, evaluation reports have been co-signed by the chair of the evaluation panel, attesting to the collegial dimension of the report, and by the president of Hcéres, confirming compliance with the relevant ethical principles.

## **Analysis**

The Research Programming Law ensures Hcéres’ organisational independence from the authority of the government. Hcéres also possesses operational independence to decide on its regulations, methodologies etc. Although stakeholders are consulted during various processes, Hcéres and its Board will always make the final decisions. The evaluation outcomes of national institutions and accreditation decisions of foreign institutions are a full responsibility of Hcéres. In the context of programme evaluation, the evaluation reports are accompanied by opinions on the accreditation project, which are transmitted to the supervising ministry for the accreditation instruments. The ministries may take the Hcéres’ accreditation opinion into account, although it is not always followed.

In the case of doctoral school evaluations, the opinion on the accreditation project is not explicitly included in the evaluation report. The supervising ministry bases its accreditation decision on the weak points, strong points, and the recommendations included in the report.

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<sup>14</sup> Template of Declaration of interests was provided to the review team.

<sup>15</sup> Decree 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014.

The national accreditation is a separate and independent process and not directly connected to the Hcéres evaluation, so the agency is still responsible for the final results of its own evaluation process. Therefore, the review panel did not see any conflict between the independence of the evaluation results of Hcéres and accreditation decisions by the respective ministries.

Hcéres has followed the recommendation of 2016 review and implemented a sound non-conflict of interest policy: before an evaluation, experts need to get familiar with the principles of impartial evaluation, defined in the evaluation charter, and sign a declaration of interests.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

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

### **2016 review recommendation**

To better utilise information gathered from institutional and programme evaluations, in order to show the progress and problems encountered by higher education institutions and reinforce the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes through the publication of regular analytical reports.

### **Evidence**

While working on the evaluation of territorial clusters, Hcéres has produced summary reports - “summative analysis of integrated evaluation” - for entire sites on two occasions: for the HESAM<sup>16</sup> and PSL<sup>17</sup> clusters. The summative analysis of integrated evaluation includes the analyses that have been produced along with appendices, including a bibliometric analysis of the cluster prepared by the Science and Technology Observatory (OST). This summative analysis is a tool designed to be used by the executive team responsible for the combined institutions, as well as local, regional and national decision-makers and officials from the relevant ministries, providing a clearer view of the progress made by the territorial cluster and highlighting its strengths, weaknesses and development priorities.

According to the SAR, these activities require a considerable amount of work, combining input from both internal sources, including the scientific advisors tasked with writing integrated summaries of their evaluations of training programmes and research units, and external sources, since overall responsibility for drafting the integrated review rests with one of the chairs of the evaluation panels established for the institutions belonging to the cluster.

In 2019, at the request of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of Culture, Hcéres published a “summary and future perspectives” report containing a series of proposals for enhancing the international reputation and influence of French research in the field of archaeology. This report – the first of its kind – characterised all of France's 102 archaeological research units, providing an integrated overview of their theoretical and methodological approaches.

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<sup>16</sup> Hautes Écoles Sorbonne Arts et Métiers Université, known by the acronym HESAM - [https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/05\\_HESAM\\_bilanIntegre\\_complet\\_V3.pdf](https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/05_HESAM_bilanIntegre_complet_V3.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Université Paris sciences et lettres - [https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/PSL\\_Bilan%20int%C3%A9gr%C3%A9\\_02.07.2019.pdf](https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/PSL_Bilan%20int%C3%A9gr%C3%A9_02.07.2019.pdf)

Three new summary reports are currently in progress: one on mathematics, another on genetics and epigenetics, and a third on virology and epidemiology.

Hcéres also publishes regular reports on the scientific positioning of France in Europe and in the world. The most recent report,<sup>18</sup> published in February 2021, covers the 2005-2018 period; it updates the observations contained in previous versions and builds upon them by analysing different facets: the new panel structure for calls for submissions to the European Research Council (ERC), a comparative analysis of publications produced by Initiatives for Excellence (Idex) projects, and those produced by European and American research universities, and a look at the different scientific profiles of France's regions. The preparation of this report was overseen by OST. In 2019, OST prepared an analysis about the research in archaeology.

During the visit, the panel heard about potential plans to launch an education observatory in addition to OST or leave the responsibility for analyses to the evaluation departments.

### **Analysis**

The evidence for the analysis of Hcéres' overall quality assurance results is rather limited in terms of both quantity and scope. The evidence presented focuses mainly on research and bibliometric issues. Although important, they fall largely outside the remit of the ESG and do not essentially address the evaluation of institutions and programmes. During the visit, the panel heard promising plans, but these were clearly not sufficiently discussed and communicated: some interviewees suggested opening a new education observatory, some leaving the task to evaluation departments and some strengthening OST. The panel concluded that progress since the 2016 review has been very modest.

Developing a system of useful thematic analysis will require significant attention and effort from Hcéres' leadership. Moreover, this should take into consideration the role that the agency will have in the coordination of the French QA system from 2022 onwards, since the thematic reviews may be very relevant for guiding strategic options at the system level.

### **Panel recommendations**

In order to inform the public about the progress and challenges in higher education, a system for analysing and publishing general findings of different evaluations needs to be developed.

The agency should clarify who will take the responsibility of thematical analysis and who will define what issues and themes should be tackled in that analytical effort.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

### **2016 review recommendation**

HCERES could revise the roles and responsibilities attached to scientific delegates in order to curtail the cost of universities' contribution to external quality assurance.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/fr/publications/la-position-scientifique-de-la-france-dans-le-monde-et-en-europe-2005-2018-ost>

## Evidence

The agency's primary source of funding is a government grant. The Hcéres budget is debated and voted upon by the French parliament during the annual discussions of the draft finance bill.

Hcéres was allocated an operating budget of approximately €19 million in 2020. During the review visit, the president confirmed that the budget was sufficient to cover the entirety of its missions and to invest in the technological resources required to reinforce and develop the agency's tools. In 2019, for example, the first version of a collaborative report-writing application, known as Sarali, was made available to experts working on Hcéres' evaluations. This tool is connected to Hcéres' electronic document management (EDM) system, and experts are granted access rights enabling them to add their contributions. A revised version, intended to better reflect the realities of the evaluation process and experts' working practices, was delivered in autumn 2020.

Hcéres also possesses its own resources, derived from its international evaluation activities, which offset the expenses incurred by such activities, as well as external commissions to produce analyses and indicators for the OST.<sup>19</sup>

Since the external evaluation of 2016, Hcéres has recruited around fifteen new members of staff in order to keep pace with the expansion of the agency's activities. As of 31 December 2019, the Hcéres administrative and technical team comprised 117 staff members, who are either civil servants, or employed on a contractual basis. Depending on the employees' seniority, these contracts are either fixed-term or permanent. During the visit, the president informed the panel that one of his goal is to reduce the number of staff and change the structure of the agency, including hiring new leading staff. At the time of the visit, all but one of the senior posts had already been filled.

Hcéres has implemented a competency management policy for employees, who have annual evaluations and training reviews with their line managers. In 2019, this system allowed Hcéres employees to participate in 184 training programmes, amounting to over 1,507 hours of training. The panel heard that on average, each employee participates in two trainings a year in addition to language training.

The Hcéres team also includes scientific advisors (*conseillers scientifiques*), who are seconded or delegated by their institutions for between one and three days each week, and responsible for overseeing the scientific preparation of evaluations. They are lecturers and/or researchers. Hcéres remunerates them for their involvement and pays a form of compensation to their home institution. This compensation is not included in payroll costs but is instead considered as an operating expense. In order to offset the impact of increases in the level of compensation requested, Hcéres now uses scientific staff on a mission-by-mission basis. The scientific project managers (*chargés de mission scientifique*) are primarily recruited by the Department of Research Evaluation. They may oversee between one and five evaluations and are paid according to the number of missions they complete. They are expected to take on these missions alongside their usual work, which means that no financial compensation is paid to their home institutions.

Since 2017, an annual orientation and induction session for new arrivals (administrative and technical staff as well as scientific personnel) has been organised before the start of each new evaluation campaign. The sessions are organised by the Quality and Training Delegation of the General Secretariat, and they provide an opportunity to introduce Hcéres and to discuss the values that underpin the evaluations and the guiding ethical principles.

During the visit, both the reviewers and Hcéres' permanent staff expressed their satisfaction with the input of the scientific advisors. The scientific advisors themselves appreciated the opportunity to learn

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<sup>19</sup> See also the chapter „Hcéres funding” in the Introduction.

from other institutions and thus spread quality thinking in their own organisations. No-conflict of interest policies are carefully followed: scientific advisors never coordinate evaluations within their organisations.

### **Analysis**

The Hcéres budget is sufficient and sustainable to cover all of the evaluations required by law, and to invest in the technological resources to support the internal and external work of the agency. Furthermore, it allows the agency to organise annual conferences and seminars to inform the public about its activities.

The number and competence of the staff will ensure a high level of performance of the tasks assigned to Hcéres. The staff development is systematic. Employees provide and receive feedback on their work during the annual evaluations and are provided with the necessary training.

### **Panel commendation**

Hcéres has a sound budget, which is used, among others, for the systematic development of employees, as well as for the improvement of technological systems in order to reduce the workload of staff and the institutions being evaluated.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

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

### **2016 review recommendation**

To publish HCERES' internal quality assurance policy on the website.

To avoid changing the methodology every year and consolidate various internal quality assurance tools, both common and specific, into a single Handbook.

### **Evidence**

Hcéres' quality policy is described in detail on the agency's new website.<sup>20</sup>

The Executive Committee, consisting of the president, department heads, the secretary general and the head of internal affairs, is in charge of the in-house quality assurance system, together with the quality delegation attached to the general secretariat. It meets on a weekly basis.

According to the SAR, since its inception, Hcéres has adopted a global approach to quality assurance (plan / do / check / act), which requires regular feedback, both from the experts involved and from the representatives of the evaluated entities. However, during the interviews, the panel learned that feedback is not always implemented systematically, for example some reviewers said they were not formally asked for any feedback, and also the representatives of universities explained that although Hcéres always informally welcomes suggestions for improvement, they have not experienced any formalised feedback system apart from the remarks to the evaluation report and the final letter.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/quality-approach>

The fundamental principles that define the quality and ethics of evaluations are set out in the Evaluation Charter<sup>21</sup>. By spelling out the institution's objectives, this charter also defines Hcéres' expectations in terms of the professional conduct of individuals involved in evaluations. This charter is publicly available, and systematically sent out to all experts before their recruitment is finalised.

The principal measures adopted by Hcéres to guarantee the quality and ongoing improvement of working practices are described in Chapter 7 of SAR, which addresses internal quality assurance at the agency. They include:

- Continuous improvement of practices, and systematic feedback processes;
- A quality framework, comprising an evaluation charter, definitions of the status of experts and scientific advisors, an obligation for all employees to abide by the ethical standards of evaluation, and a strict confidentiality requirement (declarations of commitments signed electronically);
- Each evaluation is coordinated by a Hcéres team (a scientific advisor and a project manager) throughout the procedure, with one of the two representatives accompanying the committees during the visits to ensure that it runs smoothly;
- Rigorous selection procedures for experts, including collegial discussions within the departments;
- Systematic declarations of interest for all staff, scientific advisors, coordinators and experts;
- Evaluation methodologies, aligned with the ESG, are publicly available and respect the diversity and autonomy of the entities under evaluation;
- Initial information for evaluated entities about the composition of panels;
- Published evaluation reports; giving evaluated entities the opportunity to correct any errors and issue a response containing their own observations.

The number and frequency of the evaluations that Hcéres is required to carry out have led it to develop a tailor-made information system. All of the evaluation procedures employed are managed via the EDM/Pool of experts application, which is actually a combination of two applications:

- an Electronic Document Management (EDM) system;
- a database of experts (Pool of experts).

These two applications are linked and used by Hcéres staff and experts.

Hcéres is striving for achieving gender parity in its expert panels: the proportion of women on evaluation committees is more than 40%.

## **Analysis**

Since the 2016 review, Hcéres has developed and published its own quality policy and largely follows a continuous quality assurance model of the Plan-Do-Check-Act. Hcéres makes every effort to ensure that all persons involved in the evaluations and other related activities are competent, act professionally and ethically (see also 3.3 and 3.5). The internal feedback and development system is well established (see 3.5).

With regard to the 2016 recommendation to avoid annual changes to the methodology, the panel agrees with Hcéres' explanation that the changes are merely to improve the clarity of the wording and to respond to feedback from stakeholders.

As the representatives of institutions and reviewers gave different opinions on the possibilities for feedback, this indicates that the feedback system has not been fully implemented and that there is room for improvement in clarifying the available instruments for feedback. Interaction with reviewers and institutions should be strengthened regarding the collection of feedback and reflecting it in further activities.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/publications/evaluation-charter>

### **Panel recommendation**

The collection of feedback from reviewers and evaluated institutions needs to be systematised and implemented in a coherent way.

### **Panel suggestion**

Hcéres is suggested to develop opportunities for novice experts to learn from the more experienced reviewers in an interactive way (e.g., by promoting live or online events).

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

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

### **2016 review recommendation**

To regard more constructively external periodic reviews and use their findings to reflect on its policies and activities.

### **Evidence**

In its present form, the French regulatory framework does not oblige Hcéres to undergo external evaluation. This is a voluntary measure, undertaken in the interests of continuous improvement and full participation in the European framework. Despite that, both AERES and Hcéres have undergone external reviews for ENQA membership and EQAR registration from the very beginning of their history.

According to the SAR and interviews, Hcéres has carried out several corrective actions based on the recommendations from the 2016 review, for example the development of an internal quality policy, a complaints and appeals procedure, a declaration of independence, and the implementation of evaluation follow-up procedures.

### **Analysis**

Hcéres is undergoing its third external evaluation against the ESG. The previous ones took place in 2010 (AERES) and 2016. Both reviews confirmed agency's compliance with the ESG. Hcéres is a member of ENQA and is listed in EQAR.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

## **2016 review recommendation**

Further review and revise its external quality assurance processes and the various standards and criteria used for them, in order to fully address the requirements of ESG Part I. This particularly concerns external quality assurance of programme design and approval and the development of teaching staff. HCERES should revise the complex structure, definitions, the language and style of its quality assurance standards and criteria with a view of providing clarity and consistency of approach. The agency is advised to revise its processes and standards for evaluation of cross-border and foreign higher education, considering the Toolkit on quality assurance of CBHE for agencies and HEIs and the agreed standards for quality assurance of joint programmes, approved by EHEA Ministers in May, 2015.

## **Evidence**

Hcéres has provided a comprehensive analysis how standards in different evaluations - institutional evaluation of universities and specialised higher education institutions; evaluation of bachelor and master programmes as well as of doctoral schools and doctoral colleges; and international evaluations and accreditations - in Group B (2020-2021) correspond to the ESG Part (SAR pp. 36-48). In addition to that, the review panel was provided with the respective standards as annexes to the SAR (Annexes A, B, C)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/standards-external-evaluation>

ESG PART I	A: External evaluation standard for universities	B: Hcéres evaluation standards for the external evaluation of institutions of higher education (specialist institutions/schools)	C: Hcéres standard for the evaluation of Bachelor's degree programmes	D: Hcéres standard for the evaluation of Master's degree programmes	E: Hcéres evaluation standards for doctoral schools	F: Hcéres evaluation standards for doctoral colleges (or equivalent structures)
	Corresponding Hcéres standards					
I.1 Policy for quality assurance	5	7	3, 5.4	3.8, 5.4	1.2, 2.2, 2.3	2.4, 3.3
I.2 Design and approval of programmes	11, 12	17	1, 2.3, 3, 3.4, 4.2, 4.3	1.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.4, 4.3, 4	1.4, 2.3	2.3, 2.4
I.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	12, 14	18, 26	3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7	3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5	1.3, 2.2, 2.3	2.4
I.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	14	24	2.4, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2	2.4, 3.6, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2	1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1	2.2, 2.4, 2.5
I.5 Teaching staff	7, 12	11	2.2, 4.1, 4.4	2.2, 4.1, 4.4	2.1	2.4
I.6 Learning resources and student support	2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	10, 20, 25	3.6, 4.2	3.7, 4.2	1.3, 1.4, 2.2	2.2, 3.2
I.7 Information management	2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14	9	3.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3	3.5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3	2.2, 3.2, 3.3	1.2, 2.5, 3.3
I.8 Public information	4, 10, 12, 14	8, 20, 24	1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 4.1, 4.2, 5.2	1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 4.1, 4.2, 5.2	1.2, 1.3, 3.2	2.5, 3.1, 3.2
I.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	9, 11, 12, 14	16, 20, 24	5.4	5.4	1.2, 2.3, 3.2, 3.3	2.5

<b>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</b>	5, 9, 11	In France, external evaluation is a compulsory requirement for institutions seeking contractualisation with their supervising ministries. External evaluations must be conducted every five years.	5.4	5.4	In France, external evaluation is a compulsory requirement for institutions seeking contractualisation with their supervising ministries. External evaluations must be conducted every five years.
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<b>ESG PART I</b>	G: Hcéres standard for the evaluation of international higher education and research institutions	H: Criteria for the accreditation of a higher education institution by Hcéres	I : Hcéres standard for the external evaluation of international bachelor's and master's degree programmes	J: Criteria for the accreditation of a study programme by Hcéres	K: Hcéres standard for the evaluation of a doctorate abroad - (ISCED level 8)	L: Criteria for the accreditation of a doctorate abroad by Hcéres - (ISCED level 8)
	<b>Corresponding Hcéres standards</b>					
<b>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</b>	1.1.3, 6.1, 6.2	1, 6	4.6	-	4.3	4
<b>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</b>	2.2.1, 2.2.2	2	1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2	1, 2, 3	1.1, 1.2, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2	1, 3, 4
<b>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</b>	2.2.2, 2.2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	2, 3	3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 4.2, 4.3	2, 3, 4	3.1, 3.2, 3.3	3, 4
<b>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</b>	2.2.4, 3.1	2, 3	4.2, 4.3, 4.4	-	2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	3, 4
<b>1.5 Teaching staff</b>	2.3, 5.2	2, 5	2.2, 4.1	4	2.1, 3.1	2, 4
<b>1.6 Learning resources and student support</b>	2.2.2, 2.2.3, 3.2, 3.3	2, 3	3.1, 3.5, 3.6	-	3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3	3

<b>I.7 Information management</b>	2.2.5, 3.1, 5.3	2, 3, 5	4.4, 4.5	-	4.2, 4.3	4
<b>I.8 Public information</b>	2.2.5, 1.3, 3.1	2	1.1, 2.1	1	1.1	1
<b>I.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</b>	2.2.5, 6.1	(6)	4.6	-	2.1, 4.2, 4.3	4
<b>I.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</b>	6.1	(6)	4.6	-	4.3	4

**1.1 Policy for quality assurance is reflected.** In the institutional evaluation standards of universities<sup>23</sup> it is required that “the university is committed to the continuous improvement of its operations and activities, and has implemented a structured university-wide quality policy. This policy is based on the principles of transparency, integrity, justification of choices, reporting and remediation. It is consistent with the strategy and drives the university's governance.” (Std. 5). Likewise, in the study programme evaluation the implementation of a continuous improvement process based on a self-evaluation is assessed (Std. 5.4<sup>24</sup>). While evaluating doctoral schools, Hcéres evaluates, among others, whether the doctoral school carries out regular self-evaluations, including surveys of its doctoral students (Std. 1.2). During institutional accreditation, the universities need to prove that they have a publicly available quality assurance and ethics policy (Std. 6). The programme accreditation does not address this standard.

**1.2 Design and approval of programmes** is addressed in several standards in all evaluations, although, for obvious reasons, it is more prominently exposed in programme evaluations (both nationally and internationally, see the table above). For example, institutional evaluation requires a university to ensure the provision of lifelong learning and teaching methods development in line with its positioning and its national and international strategy (Std. 1.1); in the evaluation of doctoral schools, requirements for programme development are specified under Standard 2.3: „The doctoral school offers its doctoral students an appropriate range of study programmes and activities.“ In the institutional accreditation, the particular ESG standard is addressed at the Area 2 (Research and Teaching), Field 2 (Teaching Policy) Standard 1: “The programme offering is structured in a comprehensible manner and the entities responsible for implementing it are identified.“ In the programme accreditation, it is addressed in three standards: aims of the study programme (Std. 1), position of the study programme (Std. 2) and study programme teaching structure (Std. 3).

**1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment** is in the focus of all evaluations, e.g., “The university promotes student success through appropriate measures and pathways, from the orientation process through to the job-market integration of students.” (Institutional evaluation Std.14); “The programme structure is adapted to different student profiles.”, “The evaluation of knowledge and competencies is conducted according to precisely established procedures that are known to the students” (Programme evaluation, Std. 3.2, 4.3); “The doctoral school and its partners adopt a clear policy for the recruitment and hosting of its doctoral students.” (Doctoral schools evaluation, Std. 1.3); “The teaching methods implemented (initial training, apprenticeships, work-linked training, continuing training; multi-disciplinary courses, distance learning, innovative approaches) comply with the diversity and needs of students.“ (Institutional accreditation of foreign institutions, Std. 2). In programme accreditation, student-centred learning is addressed in standards 2, 3 and 4 (Study programme management), e.g., „The study programme includes a set of teaching units that are coherent, gradual and adapted to all kind of students. The study programme allows students to acquire additional skills that are useful for employment or further study.“ (Std. 3); “Methods for checking knowledge are explicitly stated and communicated to students.“ (Std. 4).

**1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification.** This standard is again more specifically addressed in programme evaluation, although other evaluations (except programme accreditation) address it at least to some extent as well. Institutional evaluation: “The university guarantees the coherence and coordination of the processes guiding the entire student pathway” (Std.14); programme evaluations: “Students are recruited according to a transparent procedure in which the decision-making criteria are made public” (Std. 5.1), “Monitoring the acquisition of competencies is a priority in the study programme“ (Std. 4.4); doctoral schools: „The doctoral school

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<sup>23</sup> The analysis addresses only evaluations of universities, evaluations of other (specialised) higher education institutions have similar requirements, although sometimes in different standards.

<sup>24</sup> While analysing programme evaluations, the references to are made to BA programme evaluation standards; the content of MA standards is similar, although the numbers of standards may in some cases be different. The same is valid for evaluation of foreign degree programmes. (See the table above)

lays down precise rules for the recruitment of its doctoral students. The procedures adopted (choice of thesis topics, publications, recruitment procedures, admission requirements, funding threshold, etc.) are accessible, clearly explained and fair.“ (Std. 1.3); institutional accreditation: “Student admission, progress and qualification procedures are defined and implemented.” (Std. 2).

**1.5 Teaching staff.** In France, recruitment of teaching staff is not in the hands of institutions, as teachers are civil servants and centrally recruited. Therefore, the review panel focused more on staff development. In the institutional evaluation, it is required that the human resource management policy and the development of social dialogue reflect the university's strategy and contribute to the well-being of its staff at work, and that the human resource management policy and the development of social dialogue reflect the university's strategy and contribute to the well-being of its staff at work (Std. 7, 12). During the programme evaluation it is assessed whether “the teaching team is trained in and supportive of competency-based course content and the competency-based approach. /.../ and receives training designed to improve their teaching skills” (Std. 4.4). A doctoral school should prove that it is in line with its scientific affiliations and supervision potential (and developments in these areas), and lays down precise and explicit rules on supervision (number of doctoral students per supervisor, supervision methods, training for supervisors, management of joint supervision and co-supervised theses, co-supervision, specific doctoral student profiles, etc.) (Std. 2.1). Institutional accreditation checks if human resources are managed and organised in a defined and well-controlled manner (Std. 5), and programme accreditation requires that programmes are carried out by an educational team which benefits from clear and up-to-date data. (Std. 4).

**1.6 Learning resources and student support** is addressed in various standards in all evaluations except programme accreditation. Some examples: in the evaluation of universities, resource management is assessed in standards 7 and 8, and the arrangements for accommodating specific student populations, including students with disabilities, elite athletes and student artists; numbers involved, and trends recorded, in Standard 14; programme evaluations take into consideration if the programme offers personalised support mechanisms to promote student success (Std. 3.7); the doctoral school should ensure that the recruited doctoral students benefit from sufficient financial resources (in line with their qualifications), and appropriate conditions in which to prepare for their doctorate (supervision, material resources, etc.), through to the defence of their thesis (Std. 1.3); Institutional accreditation assesses whether the institution is attentive to learning resources and the quality of life of students. It should also ensure that students are well-informed and provided with student services throughout their academic careers. (Std. 3). Programme accreditation does not cover this standard.

**1.7 Information management** is also a topic that is addressed in several standards in Hcéres' evaluations (except programme accreditation), e.g., the document of the institutional evaluation of universities states that “the organisation of the information system is /.../ explained, and its characteristics and performance are analysed.” (Std. 6); programme evaluation: “Comprehensive information about student success on the programme is known and published.” (Std. 5.2); doctoral schools: “The data collected are analysed, disseminated and exploited by the doctoral school.” (Std. 3.3); institutional accreditation: “The institution has an IT system adapted to its strategy and objectives.” (Std. 5). Programme accreditation does not address this standard.

**1.8 Public information.** Institutional evaluation of universities assesses, for example, external communication regarding the university's positioning and strategy and its contribution to the identification of its identity and actions, as well as its influence (Std. 4). In addition, the university needs to define and implement a policy to disseminate scientific knowledge and assets, and scientific culture, and uses it to enhance its reputation (Std. 10). Programme evaluations check if the learning objectives for the programme are clearly defined, presented and known by students and other stakeholders (Std. 1.1). Doctoral schools need to have clear and functional means of internal and external communication, which enable the doctoral school to ensure that doctoral students and their thesis supervisors have access to and are familiar with the administrative procedures (1.2). In the institutional accreditation it is required that the institution has a clear programme offering (Std. 2) and in

programme accreditation, “the objectives of the study programme with regard to knowledge and skills need to be /../ clearly defined and communicated. Students and other stakeholders are aware of outcomes in terms of job opportunities and further studies.” (Std. 1).

**1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.** In the evaluations of universities, programmes and doctoral schools the following examples were found: “The university conducts a coordinated policy of periodically reviewed training content.” (Std. 12); “The study programme implements a continuous improvement process based on a self-evaluation.” (Std. 5.4); “The doctoral school should carry out regular self-evaluations.” (Std. 1.2). In institutional accreditation, this standard is indirectly addressed in Standard 6: „The institution has defined a quality policy for all its missions and strives towards continuous improvement.“ It is not addressed in programme accreditation.

**1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance.** For specialised higher education institutions and doctoral schools and colleges, external evaluation is a compulsory requirement for institutions seeking contractualisation with their supervising ministries. External evaluations must be conducted every five years. Institutional evaluations check also the manner in which the recommendations made in the previous Hcéres conducted evaluation were followed up, in addition to the mid-term report produced at Hcéres’ request (or evaluation by other bodies), where relevant (Std. 5). In programme evaluations it is also required that the internal evaluation process for the programme and its results are submitted for analysis during the periodic external evaluations. (5.4) In international accreditations, this standard is not addressed.

## Analysis

The review panel analysed carefully the compliance maps of the SAR, as well as Hcéres’ evaluation standards and compiled a summary of the corresponding standards to ESG Part I (see the table above).

The panel concluded that Hcéres addresses all standards of the ESG Part I in its evaluations, including those set out in the 2016 recommendations to the extent that is allowed in the French legislation (for example, institutions cannot influence recruitment of teaching staff), thereby recognising and supporting the institutional responsibility for the internal quality assurance. In international accreditations, 1.10 could be strengthened in both institutional and programme accreditation, although the panel understands that in foreign countries and institutions, this requirement can not be directly influenced by Hcéres. In programme accreditation, several standards are not addressed (1.1, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9, 1.10), thus not meeting the ESG. Hcéres explained during the visit that they adapt their standards according to the foreign context. As ESG is very general and adaptable to most higher education contexts, the panel recommends to revise the programme accreditation standards so that they meet ESG Part I. While programme accreditation is small in numbers, compared to national programme evaluation - according to the Annual Report 2020, Hcéres carried out 29 programme accreditations, compared - to 1329 programme evaluations -, the panel proposes substantial compliance.

The panel noted also that there are still too many different standards and that in several cases Hcéres uses many standards to assess each of the standards identified by ESG Part I up to a level of detail that seems hardly justifiable given the repetition of evaluation processes. Moreover, this is also questionable given the explicit aim of delegating responsibility for pursuing quality culture to the institutions. The panel acknowledges Hcéres’ desire to strike a balance between equal treatment (similar approach to all institutions and evaluations) and diversity (taking into account the context of each institution/programme), but there is room for simplification and harmonisation, such as, for example, merging standards of doctoral schools and doctoral colleges, and bachelor and master programmes. The panel considers that the agency should take advantage of its current strategic reflection and of the forthcoming coordinating role in the French system to put forward a more simplified and effective approach regarding the assessment of ESG part I that would have as its

cornerstone the prime responsibility of HEI for fostering its quality commitment in education and learning.

### **Panel recommendations**

Hcéres should revise the programme accreditation standards to bring them into line with the ESG Part I.

Hcéres is recommended to consider further simplification and harmonisation of its standards.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

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.

### **2016 review recommendation**

To open up to external stakeholders by systematically involving them into the assessment and design of its methodologies through various working groups and committees.

### **Evidence**

During the preparation of an evaluation campaign – approximately two years before the evaluation for a group - Hcéres draws up a list of institutions to be evaluated and establishes working parties to define and, if necessary, develop its standards and methodologies on the basis of feedback and regulatory changes. According to the SAR, the evaluation departments consult stakeholders during the revision process e.g. informal consultation, consultation of panels, working meetings, surveys and feedback, opinions and suggestions on the documents, criteria and indicators to be filled in by the institutions during the self-evaluation. The methodologies and evaluation standards are debated and approved by the Hcéres Board. During the visit, the review panel heard from Hcéres' staff that stakeholders' involvement depends on the evaluation departments, and changes in methodologies are presented to the stakeholders (institutions) mainly at the annual conferences/seminars and they can give their suggestions first and foremost during the feedback phase after evaluations, which can then be integrated into methodologies or standards.

For the international evaluations contact is made with the national evaluation agency for the country in question, where relevant, in order to inform it and potentially involve it in the Hcéres procedure. Discussions with France's diplomatic representatives in the country in question also supports taking into account the local regulations and context.

For the evaluation of engineering schools, Hcéres and the CTI have implemented a joint plan to complement their evaluations and reduce the workload of evaluated institutions. The main aim of this cooperation is to facilitate and simplify the involvement of institutions by requesting a single file, drawn up according to a jointly defined plan based on the two agencies' standards, and by carrying out a visit at a common time with shared interviews. The interviewed representatives of HEIs considered this integration to be very positive. At the same time, HEIs felt overwhelmed by the need to report to different institutions (Hcéres', other agencies, ministries) and recommended that the indicators in question be harmonized with all relevant bodies.

## Analysis

In its SAR and during the visit, Hcéres named various opportunities for stakeholders to express their views about the evaluation standards and process. However, it seems that stakeholder consultation is mainly based on feedback and depends on a departmental approach, and a systematic institutional approach has not yet been implemented.

The HEIs appreciate forward-looking and enhancement-oriented analysis in evaluation reports, as well as integrated approach to Hcéres' evaluation and CTI accreditation.

For international evaluations, the HEIs are consulted on feasibility and context, and the methodology is adapted accordingly. The representatives of foreign HEIs found Hcéres' approach very supportive and relevant to their needs.

The panel concluded that both fitness for purpose and institutions' workload have been taken into account in all types of evaluations. At the same time, HEIs feel overwhelmed by the need to report to different institutions (Hcéres', other agencies, ministries). The panel agrees that the required indicators could be harmonized with all relevant bodies.

## Panel recommendation

The panel recommends that Hcéres be more systematic and proactive in involving stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions and students, in the development of evaluation objectives and methodologies.

## Panel suggestion

In order to reduce the workload of HEIs, the required indicators could be harmonized with all relevant bodies.

## Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

## ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

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

## 2016 review recommendation

To encourage institutions to follow-up its panels' recommendations by including options for follow-up of recommendations in evaluation reports.

To consider revising its flexible approach to the selection of standards for self-evaluation to ensure comparability and consistency of its published reports.

## Evidence<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See also the chapter "Hcéres' functions, activities, procedures" in the Introduction.

The quality assurance processes/methodologies for all evaluations are defined in the standards for external evaluation and published on the Hcéres website before each evaluation campaign<sup>26</sup>.

The external evaluation of both the institutions, programmes and doctoral schools in and outside France is based on the self-evaluation report (SER). The “Guidelines for Self-Evaluation” sets out the goals and expectations of the self-evaluation process.

The institution must also produce a strategy document setting out their key priorities for the coming contract period.

In response to a point raised in the 2016 ENQA evaluation report, new instructions have been drawn up for universities on the production of self-evaluation reports, including the obligation to address each standard individually. So, the evaluation reports produced by universities must now conform to the organisational structure imposed by the chapters and reference numbers of the evaluation standards; the report must provide an evaluative judgement and recommendations for each standard, and identify the evaluation factors corresponding to the institution’s expectations.

In all types of evaluations, the panels of experts are accompanied by both a scientific advisor and a project manager, responsible for the methodology implemented and the respect of deadlines, equipped with clearly documented internal quality procedures (“the guide”) for each evaluation procedure.

Before the visit, the panel of experts analyses the SER and produces a diagnosis of the situation, following the organisational structure defined by the evaluation standard. This process should yield the first batch of assessments which are more than just questions, along with key questions which may subsequently define the structure of the interview forms to be used during the on-site visit. For engineering schools, Hcéres visits are coordinated with those of the CTI (see above).

According to the SAR, on-site visits have four main objectives:

- To analyse the issues identified in advance by the panel in greater detail, and thus confirm or refute the hypotheses formulated during the preliminary analysis.
- To gather additional information not found in the self-evaluation file, with particular regard to the expectations expressed by the institution and, where relevant, referring to the document reporting on the follow-up of recommendations after two years.
- To assess the extent to which the various internal and external stakeholders have appropriated the research institution’s policies and self-evaluation activities.
- To finalise the main assessments and recommendations that will form the backbone of the external evaluation report.

During the visit, the panel got acquainted with some of the visiting agendas for institutional and programme (both BA and MA) evaluations, and learned that although the protocol requests that HEIs must incorporate students into their internal quality assurance systems, the reviewers of the particular programme evaluations did not meet with them during the review visits.

The report should either confirm or contradict the self-evaluation judgements expressed by the institution in the SER. The report should reach a conclusion regarding the quality of the self-evaluation process adopted by the institution, consider the progress made since the most recent evaluation, and assess the feasibility of its plans for the future.

With regard to follow-up measures, Hcéres has taken account of this observation by asking, since 2018, all universities evaluated in Group B 2015-2016 to submit a report explaining how they have integrated each recommendation. The reports submitted are analysed by the Hcéres team and attached to the file passed on to the panel responsible for the next evaluation of the university in

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/standards-external-evaluation>

question, whose report must include an assessment of the extent to which the recommendations have been followed.<sup>27</sup>

For programme and doctoral school evaluation no follow-up is foreseen, although according to Hcéres (SAR p. 63), “the implementation of programme accreditation, replacing the approval process, has enabled the inclusion of measures in response to the recommendations made by the panels. The analysis of accreditation project files whether the institutions have implemented relevant responses to the recommendations made in the evaluation of the reviews.” During the visit, the panel was told that introducing a follow-up was too burdensome both for institutions under evaluation, as well as for Hcéres.

For international evaluations<sup>28</sup>, in the event of a partial accreditation decision (2 or 3 years), Hcéres requests a follow-up report on the points for which accreditation was conditionally granted. A virtual visit, and if necessary an on-site counter-visit are then organised. This is followed by the decision of the Accreditation Commission, whether or not to extend the accreditation by two or three years.

The information by the interviewees on the implementation of the follow-up was somewhat confusing. Hcéres claimed that they introduced follow-up for institutional evaluations three years ago, reviewers said it started this year and HEIs told the panel that they had prepared a follow-up report to the CTI but not to Hcéres.

## **Analysis**

All Hcéres’ evaluations include a self-evaluation report prepared in accordance with the evaluation standards, a review visit, and an evaluation report. The evaluation protocol requires HEIs to involve students into their internal quality assurance systems, but according to the revised visit agendas, programme evaluation reviewers do not meet with students during review visits, which excludes a group of important stakeholders from the evaluation process.

Follow-up has only recently started for institutional evaluation only. HEIs are requested to present a follow-up report two years after the evaluation. The report is taken into consideration along with the self-evaluation report by the review panel before the next evaluation. It means that the follow-up report remains “untouched” for three years and may not be relevant by the time of next evaluation anymore. Current practice makes it difficult to understand the pertinence of the follow-up report, given that no feedback is provided to the institution. Moreover, it is not clear how much value it adds to the subsequent SAR that the programme or institution has to submit, given that nothing happens between those two moments.

For programme evaluations and evaluations of doctoral schools, no follow-up has been implemented. Hcéres staff explained this by the lack of (human) resources needed to handle the follow-up reports. Regarding international evaluation, in the event of a partial accreditation decision (2 or 3 years), Hcéres requests a follow-up report on the points for which accreditation was conditionally granted.

The interviews revealed that the follow-up process is perceived differently by different stakeholders and its communication needs to be improved.

## **Panel recommendations**

Hcéres should find a follow-up method that is appropriate and useful for all involved parties and apply it consistently to all evaluations.

Stakeholders should be adequately informed about the follow-up process.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/evaluation-institutions>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/evaluation-and-accreditation-abroad>

## Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel suggests Hcéres to ensure that during a visit, all relevant stakeholders – especially students – have the opportunity to express their opinion.

## Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

### ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

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

#### 2016 review recommendation

To publish on the website the agency's policy and criteria for nomination and appointment of experts. To consider active involvement of international experts in review panels by developing and implementing consistent approach to their selection and recruitment, including for the evaluations abroad.

HCERES should involve students and employer representatives in the panels for all types of evaluations and strengthen their role as equal members, and ensuring proper and regular training.

#### Evidence

According to the SAR and the information heard during the review visit, the experts involved in evaluations are approved by heads of department at the recommendation of scientific advisors, drawn from the Hcéres pool of experts or from networks providing the expertise required for a given evaluation. The selection of experts takes into account the specificities of the institution (scientific disciplines, institutional missions, geographical location, conclusions of the previous evaluation and follow-up on recommendations after two years, etc.). In the interests of transparency, the CVs of experts are published on the Hcéres website, and their names are listed in the Evaluation Report. The turnover of experts is around 30% per campaign.

During the recruitment process, the independence of experts is verified, and all experts sign the Evaluation Charter along with a confidentiality agreement. The institution under evaluation is informed of the composition of the panel.

Recruitment and appointment process, responsibilities, ethical rules etc. are published in the "Status of experts, scientific advisors and scientific project managers" (Annex E to the SAR). In addition, a separate area of the website has been dedicated for Hcéres' experts<sup>29</sup>.

The panel learned during the interviews that most of the reviewers were personally contacted by Hcéres and invited to participate in a training (one day for institutional evaluations and two days for programme evaluations) - either in person or via webinars - and subsequent reviews. In addition to the basic training for all reviewers, there is a separate training for panel chairs and a 2-hour refresher session on the evaluation methodology during the panel's first meeting prior to its visit (the preparatory meeting). All interviewees were very satisfied with the content and organisation of the training. Reviewers are also supported by written guidelines, which helps to ensure consistency in the methodology used by the different panels. The support of scientific advisors and Hcéres' staff was also highly valued.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/panels-experts>

Institutional evaluation panels have seven members, on average, including a chair; some panels may have five to twelve members depending on the complexity of the institution in question. According to the SAR, each panel should comprise a majority of academic experts and at least one administrative expert, one student expert (a current student or a graduate whose most recent qualification was obtained within the last two years), an expert from the socio-economic sector or non-academic cultural sector (but who nonetheless has experience of dealing with the academic sector), and an expert who is currently or has been very recently employed outside France. For academic experts, previous experience involving significant managerial/governance responsibility in the field of higher education and/or research (presidency, senior management role, vice-presidency etc.) is preferable. Similarly, student members must have direct experience of involvement in the running of an institution (membership of an advisory board) and/or experience with a student association (president of the students' union etc.). Administrative experts must have occupied a senior management position in higher education and research, and/or in a public or private higher education or research institution. All panel members, including students, are treated and remunerated equally.

Panels for evaluations of programmes and doctoral schools generally comprise six experts, including several academic experts, one expert from civil society or business, and one student (a doctoral student or recent PhD for doctoral schools).

In international evaluations, a panel generally consists of four to eight experts, including one student and international expert(s). The composition of the panel must also meet certain specific national requirements. If the evaluation request requires two or more agencies to work together, the panel may be selected to ensure equal representation.

According to the SAR and discussions during the interviews, the constitution of expert committees faces three difficulties:

- the recruitment of experts from the socio-economic world who, due to a lack of time, do not always wish to participate in evaluation missions;
- the recruitment of international experts, as the criterion of French-speaking countries limits the possibilities;
- the recruitment of student experts, as this type of expert is, by its very nature, subject to rapid obsolescence.

These difficulties are also reflected in the data on experts, presented by Hcéres during the visit. This shows that, while a wide range of expertise is represented in the evaluation of French higher education institutions, the number of experts with socio-economic and international background was very small compared to the number of committees involved in the programme evaluations and non-existent in the evaluations of doctoral schools. For example, in 2019-2020, there were 101 committees of programme evaluation with only 32 experts from the socio-economic field and no international expert. The same trend applies to the evaluations of foreign institutions and programmes: 7 committees versus 2 experts from the socio-economic field and 2 international experts. During the visit, the panel heard that besides language requirements, one of the obstacles to recruiting international experts was that they did not understand the complex system of higher education in France.

In the future, Hcéres plans to launch targeted communication campaigns aimed at student, socio-economic and international experts to overcome the difficulties of identification and recruitment.

## **Analysis**

Compared to the previous review, Hcéres has made visible progress in expanding the assessment panels' expertise, for example, students or former students belong to all panels.

The main means of recruiting experts is sourcing, identification of specialized experts recognized in their field and use of the Hcéres database for experts. Evaluation coordinators use also their personal

contacts to recruit reviewers. Nevertheless, recruitment of candidates from socio-economic groups as well as students remains a challenge for Hcéres. The panel believes that the planned targeted recruitment campaigns may expand the number of interested candidates from all groups: academic staff, socio-economic representatives and students. Currently, many student experts have already graduated and are no longer students. It would be recommendable that student experts were still students during the evaluations or at least during the composition of the review panel.

The number of international experts is very limited, being virtually non-existent in programme and doctoral school evaluations. Even in international evaluations, foreign expertise is hardly used. Although the team is aware that proficiency in French is a requirement, it is not convinced that this may be an unsurmountable barrier. There are many colleagues in European countries fluent in French with background in the various disciplines and with experience in programme and institutional evaluation. The main purpose of using international experts is to get fresh ideas and support innovation in teaching and learning. Therefore, the team recommends Hcéres to develop stronger efforts to involve foreign experts, either by closer dialogue with other European agencies or by finding ways to make their participation more viable.

Training of experts is organised systematically and, based on the feedback of reviewers, at a very good level. Hcéres may benefit even more from inviting experienced reviewers as resource persons for training (see also 3.6).

The no-conflict-of-interest policy is being implemented consistently.

### **Panel recommendations**

Hcéres is recommended to make every effort to expand their reviewers pool with current students and socio-economic experts in order to include them systematically.

The systematic involvement of international experts, at least in institutional and international evaluations, could provide significant added value and is therefore highly recommended.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

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.

### **2016 review recommendation**

To refine outcomes' criteria for different evaluations, in order to ensure consistency in their application by different panels and institutions.

### **Evidence**

The elements used for evaluations are systematically published before the beginning of each new campaign, and the evaluation standards are presented to the evaluated entities at the kick-off meeting for each evaluation campaign to ensure that Hcéres, the institution and the panel of experts all use a common language.

In order to ensure uniformity and consistency in the interpretation of the standards, the reports will be proofread before publication by the scientific advisor and the project manager, the head of the relevant department as well as the president.

Detailed criteria explain how the requirements of the standard should be addressed in the self-evaluation report and enable the experts to assess the extent to which the institution has engaged with the expectations enshrined in the evaluation standards.

According to the SAR, no ranking of the criteria is imposed in order to maintain the ability to adapt the standard to the highly diverse range of institutional organisational systems.

The results of external evaluations are presented in reports, divided into chapters according to an overarching structure which ensures the comprehensive coverage of all evaluation standards. These reports contain non-prescriptive judgements and recommendations, the most important of which are reiterated in the conclusion (strengths and weaknesses of the institution and principal recommendations of the evaluation). In accordance with the autonomy of the institutions, these recommendations are not prescriptive as Hcéres is not directly involved in decision-making.

In the evaluations of programmes and doctoral schools, the evaluation standards provide the experts with benchmarks to inform their opinions on the quality objective in question. When forming an opinion about the policy of an institution with regard to the national regulations, as is the case for undergraduate programme offerings, specific aspects of the regulations are taken into consideration.

Within the framework of the French accreditation system, the panel of experts issues an opinion regarding the “project” developed by the institution for its next five-year plan, with a view to securing accreditation from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

In international evaluations, the evaluation standard corresponds to the quality standards and criteria imposed by Hcéres. Outside these fundamental areas, evaluated entities are entitled to request the evaluation of additional aspects, as long as they are clearly connected to the national legal requirements. This would apply, for example, to a request for evaluation for accreditation purposes made by an international agency with regard to a qualification issued within its territory.

The experts' evaluation report concludes with an accreditation statement, drawn up on the basis of the evaluation carried out in accordance with the Hcéres accreditation criteria. This opinion is sent to the Hcéres permanent accreditation commission. This commission analyses the experts' statement, studies the accreditation criteria and takes a decision. The accreditation decision taken by the accreditation commission is sent to the evaluated entity and may be appealed. The entire procedure is defined, sent to the evaluated entity as soon as the agreement is concluded and made available on the Hcéres website.

In addition, each evaluation procedure is coordinated by a Hcéres team to ensure that the methodology and the standards are properly and consistently applied.

During the visit, the panel heard that Hcéres' structural changes are aimed at greater collaboration among departments, especially regarding the evaluation of programmes and institutions.

## **Analysis**

Hcéres has been addressing the issue of consistency in the various phases of the process. The agency has developed and published explicit criteria for all evaluations and applies them consistently. During the online visit the review panel was able to confirm that the criteria and protocols are public and easily accessible to all stakeholders. The consistency of the outcomes is also ensured by the support of all review panels by two Hcéres' staff members, as well as by proofreading of the reports by department heads and the president. The structural changes in Hcéres give a good basis for greater

cooperation among departments and thus harmonisation of the methodologies and criteria for different evaluations.

The views expressed in the various meetings held with the panel indicated a positive disposition towards the consistency and fairness of the different review processes and no issues were raised by any of the stakeholders in this regard. Moreover, the experience of the agency and of many among its staff has also contributed to a consolidated approach in order to ensure consistency of outcomes.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

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.

### **Evidence**

After all evaluations, full reports are published on the Hcéres website<sup>30</sup>, along with letters of observations from the evaluated institutions and, where relevant (international evaluations), the final accreditation decision. Institutional evaluation reports written in foreign languages are also published in French. The final reports with the observations made by the institution is also transmitted to the supervising ministries. The panel heard from different stakeholders that the circulation and usability of the reports is rather limited. The president informed the panel that Hcéres is aware of this and making effort to further raise stakeholder awareness of the evaluation results.

Reports for institutional evaluations (including foreign institutions and their programmes) are structured as follows:

- An executive summary.
- An introduction, containing a descriptive section which surveys the territory in which the institution is based (this section is the same for all institutions belonging to the same territorial cluster), key information about the institution (HR, budget, legal status, organisation etc.), and a reminder of the principal recommendations made in the most recent evaluation and the expectations of the institution with regard to this evaluation.
- The body of the report: an evaluative judgement which may be followed by a number of recommendations, and a substantiated analysis.
- The conclusion of the report: a summary analysing the institution's strategy and its implementation; institution's main strengths and weaknesses; recommendations on issues of clear strategic significance.
- The composition of the panel of experts.

In the case of foreign institutions and programmes, the accreditation decision shall also be attached to the report.

In the evaluations of programmes and doctoral schools in France, Hcéres' evaluation reports are presented into two distinct pieces "results" and "plan". They contain an overview of the evaluation procedure, a description of the context, an analysis of the institution's situation, its strengths and weaknesses, a number of recommendations and points to be monitored, and an "accreditation opinion" for each programme in the draft report for all evaluations other than for doctoral programmes.

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<sup>30</sup> [https://www.hceres.fr/en/rechercher-une-publication?key=&f%5B0%5D=themes\\_publications%3A43](https://www.hceres.fr/en/rechercher-une-publication?key=&f%5B0%5D=themes_publications%3A43)

While the structure of the institutional evaluation reports follows the criteria set out in the protocol, the evaluation of the programmes is more general, organised into chapters other than the protocol.

The response phase provides an initial opportunity for institutions to correct any factual errors or inappropriate formulations/misunderstandings.

The panel of experts will consider this feedback, choosing whether or not to take it into account, before producing the final version of the report. Subsequently, the institution is given the opportunity to respond to the content of the report, in a letter that will be appended to the report.

Each report is signed by the chair of the expert panel and by the president.

The representatives of HEIs appreciated the forward-looking analysis of Hcéres' reports, which will help the institutions to improve. It was not clear for some HEI representatives, though, how the process between the evaluation of Hcéres and the accreditation of ministries is related and whether the evaluation report of Hcéres has any impact to the accreditation decision made by the respective ministry.

### **Analysis**

Since the 2016 review, Hcéres has paid attention to reports' format and made it more concise with a clear and simple style, in order to facilitate the exploitation of the report by the evaluated institution and stakeholders. The agency has made visible efforts to develop consistent, structured, and helpful reports of its quality assurance activities. The panel has found that in general those were competently done and fulfilled those aims.

While the structure of the institutional evaluation reports follows the criteria set out in the protocol, the reports of the programme evaluation is more general, organised into chapters other than the protocol. It might be worth to consider developing a report template, following the standards in the Protocol, also for the programme evaluation in order to facilitate the comparability of the reports.

Furthermore, the link between Hcéres' evaluation and ministries' accreditation is not clear and should be better communicated. Besides that, awareness of evaluation outcomes is rather limited and requires better communication, especially among students and employers. For a well-established agency it is very important that its work is disseminated and relevant for the various stakeholders, so that they may incorporate the outcomes of the reviews in their appraisal of the various programmes and institutions (and their specific profiles) and their suitability for their specific needs and preferences.

### **Panel recommendations**

In order to facilitate the comparability of the reports, the development of a reporting template in line with the standards of the Protocol is recommended to be considered also in the programme evaluation.

Hcéres should make greater efforts in promoting the accessibility and readability of the reports.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

Hcéres could consider, together with the relevant ministries, improving the information provided both higher education institutions and the public on the impact of evaluation results on accreditation decisions.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

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

### 2016 review recommendation

To coordinate its complaints procedure with accrediting and contracting ministries, in order to promote coherent approach to complaints and appeals;

To get ready for work its complaints committee as soon as possible in order to be able to take account of the adequacy and effectiveness of its new methodology.

### Evidence

Details of the appeals process, i.e. the rules of procedure and membership of the complaints and appeals committee, were updated at the Board meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021. They are published on the Hcéres website<sup>31</sup>. The appeals committee consists of five representatives of HEIs (Hcéres Board members), four staff members of Hcéres and a qualified expert not attached to Hcéres - a representative of the Conference of University Presidents (CPU). The secretary of the committee is the secretary general of Hcéres.

The term “appeal” is used to refer to all measures taken with a view to securing the withdrawal, cancellation or modification of a report or decision<sup>32</sup> originating from Hcéres. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction regarding Hcéres’ activities. Complaints are handled directly by the president of Hcéres and, according to the information on Hcéres’ website, should be submitted directly to him.

The Appeals commission has the authority to handle all claims relating to:

- The conduct or results of an evaluation carried out in France or elsewhere (e.g. conflict or coincidence of interest, doubts about the competency of experts, disrespectful behaviour, disputes relating to the conclusions reached by experts etc.).
- Decisions made by the accreditation commission internationally (e.g. appeals against decisions or refusals to grant accreditation on the basis of information contained in evaluation reports, disputes relating to the duration of accreditations).
- Decisions to approve the evaluation procedures put in place by other bodies (e.g. appeals against refusals to accredit the evaluation procedures put in place by other bodies).

All claims relating to decisions taken by government ministries on the basis of Hcéres evaluations are passed on to the ministry in question. In its response to the 2016 review recommendation regarding the coordination of complaints procedure with respective ministries, Hcéres explains that “*while Hcéres strives to maintain a constructive relationship with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the panel’s suggestion to coordinate the complaints procedure with the ministry could give the impression that Hcéres allows the supervising ministries to intervene in the results of its evaluations. This would be seriously detrimental to the independence that is required for the conduct of the evaluation missions entrusted to Hcéres and to the recognition accorded to the High Council by the French higher education community.*” (SAR p. 65)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.hceres.fr/en/stakeholders>

<sup>32</sup> Hcéres only takes decision for evaluations conducted abroad, related to the accreditation process by the Hcéres International Accreditation Commission.

Acting on the recommendation made in the external evaluation conducted in 2016, Hcéres has decided that commissions should include a qualified expert not attached to Hcéres. The person in question is a representative of the Conference of University Presidents (CPU).

Since the external evaluation of 2016, Hcéres has not received any appeals nor complaints.

### **Analysis**

Hcéres has defined the appeals and complaints processes and designated those responsible for them. The information is accessible to the public on Hcéres website and communicated to the institutions. However, since the 2016 external evaluation, Hcéres has not received any appeals or complaints. During the visit, the representatives of the higher education institutions explained this by the fact that Hcéres does not make any decisions, so there is no need to appeal and all minor concerns have been resolved in the ongoing communication with Hcéres. The latter was also confirmed by the representatives of foreign institutions accredited by Hcéres.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

Hcéres has a sound budget, which is used, among others, for the systematic development of employees, as well as for the improvement of technological systems in order to reduce the workload of staff and the institutions being evaluated. (ESG 3.5)

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1 Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendation:*

- A strategic plan / strategic directions 2021-2025 need to be developed in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, while taking into serious consideration the reinforced autonomy and coordinating responsibilities of the agency.

### ESG 3.2 Fully compliant

### ESG 3.3 Fully compliant

### ESG 3.4 Partially compliant

*Panel recommendations:*

- In order to inform the public about the progress and challenges in higher education, a system for analysing and publishing general findings of different evaluations needs to be developed.
- The agency should clarify who will take the responsibility of thematical analysis and who will define what issues and themes should be tackled in that analytical effort.

### ESG 3.5 Fully compliant

### ESG 3.6 Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendation:*

- The collection of feedback from reviewers and evaluated institutions needs to be systematised and implemented in a coherent way.

### ESG 3.7 Fully compliant

### ESG 2.1 Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendation:*

- Hcéres should revise the programme accreditation standards to bring them into line with the ESG Part I.
- Hcéres is recommended to consider further simplification and harmonisation of its standards.

### ESG 2.2 Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendation:*

- The panel recommends that Hcéres be more systematic and proactive in involving stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions and students, in the development of evaluation objectives and methodologies.

### **ESG 2.3** Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendations:*

- Hcéres should find a follow-up method that is appropriate and useful for all involved parties and apply it consistently to all evaluations.
- Stakeholders should be adequately informed about the follow-up process.

### **ESG 2.4** Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendations:*

- Hcéres is recommended to make every effort to expand their reviewers pool with current students and socio-economic experts in order to include them systematically.
- The systematic involvement of international experts, at least in institutional and international evaluations, could provide significant added value and is therefore highly recommended.

### **ESG 2.5** Fully compliant

### **ESG 2.6** Substantially compliant

*Panel recommendations:*

- In order to facilitate the comparability of the reports, the development of a reporting template in line with the standards of the Protocol is recommended to be considered also in the programme evaluation.
- Hcéres should make greater efforts in promoting the accessibility and readability of the reports.

### **ESG 2.7** Fully compliant

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, Hcéres is in compliance with the ESG.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

Hcéres may wish to consider the following suggestions when reflecting on its further development:

- Hcéres is suggested to develop opportunities to learn from the more experienced reviewers in an interactive way (e.g., by promoting live or online events). (ESG 3.6)
- In order to reduce the workload of HEIs, the required indicators could be harmonized with all relevant bodies. (ESG 2.2)
- The panel suggests Hcéres to ensure that during a visit, all relevant stakeholders – especially students - have the opportunity to express their opinion. (ESG 2.3)
- Hcéres could consider, together with the relevant ministries, improving the information provided both higher education institutions and the public on the impact of evaluation results on accreditation decisions. (ESG 2.6)

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

DAY 0 (10.09.2021)			
SESSION No.	TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
1	13.00-15.00	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day 1	
2	15.00-16.00	A pre-visit meeting with the agency's resource person to clarify any remaining question; context of evaluations/accreditation; transformations in HCERES	Thierry Coulhon, President
			Gwendoline Joly-Jagot, Deputy General Secretary
			Julien Lecocq, Head of internal quality (SG)

DAY 1 (15.09.2021)			
SESSION No.	TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (UP TO 7)
	8.45-9.00	Connection set-up	
3	9.00-9.30	Review panel's private meeting	
4	9.30-10.10	Meeting with the President/chair of the Board	Thierry Coulhon, President
	10.10-10.20	Review panel's private discussion	
5	10.20-11.00	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	Alice Bouet, Project manager (DEF)
			Antoine Devoucoux Du Buysson, Project manager (DEI)
			Julien Lecocq, Head of internal quality (SG)
			Stéphane Onnée, Scientific advisor (DEE)
			Anne Vial-Logeay, Scientific advisor (DEF)
	11.00-11.10	Review panel's private discussion	
6	11.10-12.00		Stéphane Le Bouler, General Secretary

		Meeting with the Secretary General and Directors of DEE, DEF and DEI	Maria Bonnafous-Boucher, DEI Director
			Lynne Franjé, DEF Director
			Pierre Glaudes, DEE Director and former DER Director
	12.00-12.10	Review panel's private discussion	
7	12.10-12.45	Meeting with representatives from the Board	Valérie Botta-Genoulaz, Hceres Board member, Professor of industrial and computer engineering at INSA Lyon
			René Guinebretière, Hceres Board member, Professor of condensed matter physics at the University of Limoges
			Caroline Gruson, Hceres Board member, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Lorraine
			Ronny Heintze, Hceres Board member, Commissioner for International Affairs, AQAS (Germany)
			Aurélié Perrier-Pineau, Hceres Board member, Senior Lecturer at the University of Paris
			Marine Ribals, Hceres Board member, vice-president of academic affairs at the Fage (student organisation)
	12.45-13.30	Lunch break	
	13.30-14.00	Review panel's private discussion	
8	14.00-14.50	Meeting with representatives of the Europe and International Department (DEI), including scientific advisors	Maria Bonnafous-Boucher, DEI Director
			Pierre Courtellemont, Scientific advisor
			Antoine Devoucoux Du Buysson, Project manager
			Michelle Houppe, Project manager
			Solange Pizarz, Project manager
	14.50-15.00	Review panel's private discussion	
9	15.00-15.50	Meeting with representatives of the Department of Academic Programme Evaluation (DEF), including scientific advisors	Lynne Franjé, DEF Director
			Françoise Ruffier d'Epenoux, DEF Departement Head
			Pierre Courtellemont, Scientific advisor
			Evelyne Lande, Scientific advisor
			Bruno Robert, Scientific advisor
			Emmanuel Mahé, Scientific advisor

	15.50-16.00	Review panel's private discussion	
10	16.00-16.40	Meeting with representatives of the departments for evaluation of research and research bodies (DER and DEO), Ofis and OST	Pierres Glaudes, Former DER Director
			Astrid Lanoue, DER department head
			Bernard Larrouturou, DEO Director
			Stéphanie Ruphy, Ofis Director
			Frédérique Sachwald, OST Director
	16.40-16.50	Review panel's private discussion	
11	16.50-17.40	Meeting with representatives of the Department of Evaluation of HEIs (DEE), including scientific advisors	Pierres Glaudes, New DEE Director
			Florian Marquis, DEE department head
			Stéphane Onnée, Scientific advisor
			Jean-luc Clément, Scientific advisor
			Diego Velasquez, Project manager
12	17.40-18.30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	

Day 2 (16.09.2021)			
SESSION No.	TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (UP TO 7)
13	9.00-9.30	Review panel private meeting	
	9.30-10.20	Meeting with ministry representatives	Isabelle Prat, Head of the Training Strategy and Student Life Department (Dgesip), Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation
			Géraud de Marcillac, Head of Contractualisation Strategy, Funding and Property Department (Dgesip), Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation
			Catherine Malinie, Head of the Department of Higher Education and Private Higher Education (Dgesip) Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation
			Françoise Profit, Head of Department for Site Contracts and Accreditation (Dgesip), Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation
			Myriam Burdin, Head of the Higher Education Office, Ministry of Culture
			Priscilla Gustave Perron, Head of the Research Office, Ministry of Culture

			Didier Brunaux, Head of the Specialised and Higher Education Office, General Direction of Artistic Creation, Ministry of Culture
			Sabine Scanga, Head of Higher Education, General Direction of Artistic Creation, Ministry of Culture
			Jérôme Coppalle, Deputy Director of Higher Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Food
			Pascale Gueriaux, Head of the Scientific and Policy Support Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Food
	10.20-10.30	Review panel's private discussion	
15	10.30-11.20	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs (incl. foreign HEIs) representatives: recent institutional evaluation, programme and doctoral school evaluation	Frank Bournois, Director of ESCP Business School
			Benoît Roig, President of the University of Nîmes
			Arnaud Godevin, Director of The École supérieure du Bois (ESB)
			Fabienne Alary, Vice President in charge of the Committee on Education and University Life and Professor of Physical Chemistry and Quantum Chemistry at Paul Sabatier University
			Dorota Piotrowska, Director of the TUL International Cooperation Centre, Poland
	11.20-11.30	Review panel's private discussion	
16	11.30-12.20	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool – institutional reviews (incl. students and employers)	François Dumas, university professor (mathematics) at the university of Clermont-Auvergne (academic expert - DEE)
			Veronique le Courtois, former Executive director of educational programme at Centrale de Lille from 2016 to 2019 (academic expert - DEE)
			Françoise Monti, former Inspector at the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (administrative expert - DEE)
			Eric de La Guéronnière, Director of training and skills development at Suez Environment (expert from the socio-economic world - DEE)
			Charlotte Catel, former student of the Ecole des Ponts (2019) (Student expert - DEE)
			Cyrille Van Effenterre, retired, former president of PRES Paristech, and director of ENGREF (DEI expert)
	12.20-13.10	Lunch break	
	13.10-14.00	Review panel's private discussion	
17	14.00-14.50	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool – programme review (incl. students and employers)	Christian Hurson, Lecturer at the University of Rouen (Programmes evaluation– Academic expert)
			Yann Sapet, Student at the University of Saint-Etienne (Programmes evaluation – Student expert)
			Elisabeth Taffin de Givenchy, Lecturer at the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis (Doctoral schools – Academic expert)

			Jean-Pierre Congy, Quality Consultant, Associate teacher at the University of Tours (Programmes evaluation – expert from the socio-economic world)
			Marion Cordonnier, Recent PhD student (2018) in ecology, post-doctoral researcher at the University of Regensburg (Doctorate schools – Student expert)
			Eric Godelier, University Professor at the Ecole Polytechnique X (Programmes evaluation DEF and DEI – Academic expert)
	14.50-15.00	Review panel's private discussion	
18	15.00-15.50	Meeting with representative of CTI, CEFDG, CCN-IUT, Figure	Farid Ouabdesselam, Chair of the Accreditation Committee of the Figure Network
			Jean-Louis Allard, member of the academic college, vice-president of the CTI
			François Germinet, President of the CCN-IUT
			Mathilde Gollety, University Professor, President of the CEFDG
	15.50-16.00	Review panel's private discussion	
19	16.00-16.50	Meeting with representatives of IT department, HR unit, Internal Quality and Training unit	Myriam Amimeur, Head of HR unit
			Gwendoline Joly Jagot, Deputy General Secretary
			Claude Guéant, Digital and data department (DND) Director (former IT department)
			Jean-Christophe Martin, Head of IT unit
			Julien Lecocq, Head of internal quality and training unit
	16.50-17.15	Break	
20	17.15-18.30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	

Day 3 (17.09.2021)			
SESSION No.	TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (UP TO 7)
21	9.00-10.00	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
22	10.00-11.00	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	Thierry Coulhon

23	11.00-12.00	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
24	12.00-12.30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	Executive committee, Hcéres staff
25	12.30-13.30	Meeting among panel members: preparation of the next steps	

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

### I. Background and context

Created by the Law No. 2013-660 of July 22nd, 2013 relative to higher education and research, the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), is the independent administrative authority responsible for evaluating higher education and research entities in France (universities, research organisations, doctoral schools, study programmes), as well as approving the evaluation procedures implemented by other organisations. Through its analyses, evaluations and recommendations, HCERES accompanies, advises and supports the process of continuously improving the quality of higher education and research in France.

The law tasks the HCERES with the following missions:

- evaluate higher education institutions and groupings, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency, or, where applicable, oversee the quality of evaluations carried out by other bodies;
- evaluate research units on request from their overseeing institutions, in the absence of validation of evaluation procedures or in the absence of a decision by the overseeing institutions to use another evaluation body, or, where applicable, validate evaluation procedures carried out by other bodies. If more than one institution oversees a unit, HCERES carries out only one evaluation. If the oversight institutions jointly decide to use another evaluation body, HCERES validates the evaluation procedures used by this body. In the absence of a joint decision by the institutions to use another body, or in the event that the evaluation procedures have not been validated, HCERES evaluates the research unit;
- evaluate programmes and degrees offered by higher education institutions or, where applicable, validate evaluation procedures developed by other bodies;
- ensure that all missions defined by law and the specific status of higher education and research personnel are taken into account in their evaluations;
- ensure that activities relating to the dissemination of scientific, technical and industrial culture are properly taken into account in the career progression of higher education and research personnel;
- conduct a posteriori evaluation of investment programmes and private bodies receiving public funding intended for research or higher education.
- HCERES may take part in evaluating foreign or international research and higher education organisations.
- HCERES also includes an Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST) in charge of strategic research and analysis and the French Office for Research Integrity (OFIS) created in March 2017 to provide for a scientific integrity framework at national level.

HCERES has been a member of ENQA since 2000 (at that time, it was known under the name of the National Council for Evaluation of Universities (CNÉ) and from 2007 to 2014 under the name of the Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES) and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

HCERES has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2011 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration.

### 2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the extent to which HCERES fulfils the requirements of Parts 2 and 3 of *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of HCERES should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support HCERES application to the register.

## 2.1 Activities of HCERES within the scope of the ESG

In order for HCERES to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of HCERES that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is independent of whether the activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA and whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of HCERES have to be addressed in the external review:

- Evaluation of programmes and degrees;
- Evaluation of doctoral schools;
- Evaluation of French higher education institutions;
- Evaluation of foreign programmes and of foreign institutions;

The self-evaluation report and the external review report is expected to also cover issues where the Register Committee concluded in its last decision that the agency complied only partially with the ESG, namely ESG 2.3, ESG 2.4, ESG 2.5 and ESG 2.7.

Due to the narrow scope in addressing elements of teaching and learning and due to its discontinuation, the activity “external evaluation of clusters / site dimension” (*Association, COMUE, merged establishment or experimental establishment*) the activity will not be considered within the scope of the ESG. The review report should however address:

- If, and how the results of this activity contributed/fed into HCERES’ regular evaluations;
- How HCERES ensures a clear distinction of its external QA activities within the scope of the ESG from its cluster evaluations<sup>33</sup>, taking into account Annex 5 of the [Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG](#)<sup>34</sup>.

## 3. The review process

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with *the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between HCERES, ENQA and EQAR;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by HCERES including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to HCERES;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Decision making by the EQAR Register Committee on the agency’s registration on EQAR;
- Follow-up of the panel’s and/or the ENQA Board’s recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

### 3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

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<sup>33</sup> Please see : Évaluation des universités et des coordinations territoriales : <https://www.hceres.fr/fr/principes-et-methodologie-3>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case, an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide HCERES with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitarum to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the HCERES review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by HCERES, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

HCERES is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part 2 and 3) addressed individually, and considerations of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the ENQA Board's membership decision letter and the instances of partial compliance noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which HCERES fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat which has four weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within two weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A site visit by the review panel**

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to HCERES at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted in a site visit by the ENQA Review Coordinator.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency or the granting or reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each standard of part 2 and 3 of the ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language, and it will be then submitted to HCERES usually within 10 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If HCERES chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by HCERES and finalise and submit the document to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the consideration of the Register Committee of the agency's application to EQAR<sup>35</sup>.

For the purpose of applying for ENQA membership, HCERES is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which HCERES expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be taken into consideration by the Board together with the final evaluation report when deciding on the agency's membership.

## **4. Follow-up process and publication of the report**

HCERES will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has approved the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. As part of ENQA Agency Review follow-up activities, HCERES commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to the ENQA Board within the timeframe indicated in the Board's decision on membership. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report could be complemented by a small-scale progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered to be of particular importance or a challenge to HCERES. Its purpose

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<sup>35</sup> See here: [https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2020/09/RC\\_12\\_1\\_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG\\_v3\\_0.pdf](https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2020/09/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v3_0.pdf)

is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or judgment of compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

## 5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the ENQA Board for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether HCERES can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report is also used as a basis for the Register Committee's decision on the agency's registration on EQAR. The review process is thus designed to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by ENQA. Once submitted to ENQA and until it is approved by its Board, the report may not be used or relied upon by HCERES, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. The approval of the report is independent of the decision of the ENQA Board on membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once approved by the ENQA Board) via email to EQAR before expiry of the agency's registration on EQAR. The agency should also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, full curriculum vitae (CVs) of all review panel members and any other relevant documents to the application (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report, updates). EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in May/June 2022.

## 6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	December 2020
Appointment of review panel members	February 2021
Self-assessment completed	14 May 2021
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	End-May 2021
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	June 2021
Briefing of review panel members	July 2021
Review panel site visit	Mid-September 2021
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA Review Coordinator for pre-screening	Early November 2021
Draft of evaluation report to HCERES	December 2021
Statement of HCERES to review panel if necessary	December 2021
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2022
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	February 2022
Publication of report	February/March 2022
EQAR Register Committee meeting	May/June 2022

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AAI	<i>Autorité administrative indépendante</i> (Independent administrative authority)
AERES	Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
API	<i>Autorité publique indépendante</i> (Independent public authority)
BTS	<i>Brevet de technicien supérieur</i> (Advanced Vocational Training Certificate)
CCN-IUT	<i>Commission consultative nationale des instituts universitaires de technologie</i> (National Advisory Commission for University Technology Institutes)
CEFDG	Evaluation Commission for Qualifications issued by Business Schools
COMUE	<i>Communauté d'universités et institutions</i> (Community of Universities and Institutions)
CPU	<i>Conférence des présidents d'université</i> (Conference of University Presidents)
CTI	<i>Commission des titres d'ingénieurs</i> (Engineering qualifications commission)
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EDM	Electronic Document Management
ENAE	The European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
ESR	<i>Enseignement supérieur et recherche</i> (Higher Education and Research)
ESU	European Students' Union
FrAQ-Sup	<i>Réseau francophone des agences qualité pour l'enseignement supérieur</i> (Network of French-Speaking Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education)
FTE	Full-time equivalent
Hcéres	French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
HR	Human Resources
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
OST	<i>Observatoire des sciences et techniques</i> (Science and Technology Observatory)
PRES	<i>Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur</i> (Higher Education and Research Cluster)
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
SER	self-evaluation report
STS	<i>Section de techniciens supérieurs</i> (Advanced Technical Studies Units)

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY HcéRES:

1. Self-assessment report
2. Annex A – Institutional evaluation standards – Group B
3. Annex B – Evaluation standards for degree programmes and for doctoral schools – Group B
4. Annex C – International evaluation standards and accreditation criteria
5. Annex D – Hcéres Evaluation Charter and Charter for online visit
6. Annex E – Status of experts, scientific advisors and scientific project managers
7. Annex F – Declaration of interests
8. Annex G – Declaration of commitments
9. General data on Hcéres activities
10. Data on Experts
11. Hcéres Key Strategies
12. Hcéres rapport activite 2020
13. Hcéres 2021 evaluation rapport teleservice
14. Hcéres 2019 Synthese archeologie
15. Hcéres Synthese Recherche Occitanie
16. Hcéres Synthese Site Grenoble Alpes Savoie publication

## ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2022

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), undertaken in 2021.

**enqa.**

European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education