

Decision on the Substantive Change Report by High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES)

Register Committee

Ref. RC49/C157

Ver. 1.0

Date 2026-03-25

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| Decision of: | 2026-03-23 |
| Result: | Take note |
| Report received on: | 2026-02-20 |
| Agency registered since: | 2010-05-01 |
| Last external review report: | 04/2022 |
| Registration until: | 2027-04-30 |
| Absented themselves from decision-making: | Geneviève Le Fort (Register Committee member) |
| Attachments: | 1. Substantive Change Report, 2026-02-20 |

1. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 2026-02-20.
2. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 2026-02-20.
3. The Register Committee took note of the following changes:
 - A) Updated methodologies of the activities “Evaluation of French higher education institutions” and “Evaluation of programmes”**
4. In order to prevent quality assurance fatigue in the French higher education system, HCERES has recently revised its methodologies. **The Register Committee did not have prima facie concerns that the updated procedures comply with the ESG overall, but found that the upcoming external review should evaluate both of the activities in full.**
 - B) Introducing of new activity “Evaluation of foreign higher education institutions (governance and educational policy)”**
5. HCERES introduced a new methodological framework for evaluation of foreign institutions that do not engage in research activities. The evaluation will only focus on the teaching elements, as well as the governance of the institution. **The Register Committee inquired that the new methodology as well as its practical implementation is evaluated in the next external review of HCERES.**
 - C) Discontinuation of the activity “Evaluation of doctoral schools”**

6. HCERES has ceased the activity due to lack of implementation. The evaluation of PhD programmes has now been formally incorporated in the updated institutional and programme evaluation methodologies (see point A). **The Register Committee took note of the change.**

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EQAR Substantive Change Report

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| Reference # | 32404246 |
| Status | Complete |
| Agency #1 | High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education |
| Agency acronym | Hcéres |
| Expiry date #1 | 30/04/2027 |
| Contact #1 | Sophie Guillet |
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| Other organisations? | No |
| A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed? | No |
| B. Has the organisational structure changed? | No |
| C. Changes in EQA activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1. One or several new external QA activities were introduced• 2. Substantive changes carried out to one or several existing external QA activities (e.g. changes to their methodology, criteria or procedures) |
| Description new/changed | <p>1.Until recently, Hcéres relied on a single framework for the evaluation of higher education institutions within the context of its cross-border quality assurance activities. This framework was derived from the standards applicable to French universities and included a substantial component dedicated to institutional research and innovation policy. However, it proved insufficiently suited to a number of foreign higher education institutions whose missions did not</p> |

place significant emphasis on research. In response, Hcéres adapted the standards originally developed for private higher education institutions in France to the international context, thereby establishing a new institutional evaluation framework that places greater emphasis on governance and education policy, and is therefore better aligned with the specific profiles and needs of certain foreign institutions. Furthermore, the framework has been mapped against the ESG in order to ensure full compliance with European standards and guidelines.

2. Following consultations with its national stakeholders, Hcéres has undertaken a comprehensive revision of its institutional and programme evaluation standards and procedures. Its renewed approach places particular emphasis on the educational offerings and on the governance and management of study programmes. Within this framework, only a representative sample of programmes is examined in greater depth through interviews conducted during the site visit.

The revised procedure is structured around key dimensions of evaluation — namely governance, partnerships, management, student life, educational offerings, and research strategy — complemented by a series of guiding questions addressed to higher ...

...education institutions. Institutions are not required to respond exhaustively to all questions; rather, they are invited to engage selectively with those most relevant to their specific context.

This comprehensive evaluation procedure has been designed to alleviate quality assurance fatigue by introducing more proportionate

processes that strengthen institutional autonomy. It is intended to replace Hcéres's previous institutional and programme evaluation frameworks.

1. New EQA activity:

1

Evaluation of the governance and educational policy of foreign higher education institutions

Focus

study programmes or higher education institutions

ESG 2.1

The new institutional framework for institutional evaluation focusing on governance and education policy followed the ESG and address them all.

The mapping is included as an annex to the standards (see last page of the standards):
https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/documents/DEI/en-2025_hceres_standards_governance_education.pdf

ESG 2.2

Feedback was collected through discussions with French embassies and higher education institutions abroad that were interested in being evaluated by Hcéres, but which would not benefit from a full institutional evaluation, including a significant section on research, as their remit did not include research.

The institutional framework used until now included a significant component on the research and innovation policy of institutions and was therefore not fit for purpose for these types of foreign institution. This framework has been retained and is now reserved for institutions with a research mission, whereas the new framework targets 'teaching universities'.

ESG 2.3

ESG 2.3

All Hcéres' cross-border quality assurance procedures, including this new one, are based on predefined procedures that are published and applied consistently. They are designed to guarantee the reliability of evaluations, the comparability of results and compliance with the fundamental principles of external quality assurance, while taking into account the specific characteristics of international contexts. Each process systematically includes a self-evaluation phase carried out by the entity being evaluated, followed by an external evaluation conducted by a panel of independent experts trained by Hcéres. This evaluation systematically includes an on-site visit with interviews and campus visit or, in rare cases, equivalent arrangements adapted to logistical constraints (e.g. conflict zones) with online/hybrid meetings organised with the support of the French Embassy to check evidence. The procedures result in the production of a detailed evaluation report and an accreditation decision highlighting the strengths and weaknesses identified, accompanied by recommendations aimed at supporting continuous improvement.

ESG 2.4

When selecting experts, particular attention is paid to ensuring that their profiles are suited to the characteristics of the institutions being evaluated, particularly in terms of disciplinary scope, knowledge of the foreign country and language skills. The composition of the panel aims to ensure a balance of profiles, while seeking parity, by combining expertise in academia, institutional governance, student life

and the labour market. Experts play a central role in conducting the evaluation, from analysing self-assessments to formulating findings, conclusions and recommendations. The panel are generally composed of four to six experts, depending on the size of the institution being evaluated, and always include a student expert. They participate in interviews with the various stakeholders of the entities being evaluated and contribute to the collective drafting of the evaluation report. The expert committee is chaired by an academic expert who has already carried out several evaluations for Hcéres and whose mission is to coordinate the work of the panel. Their work is supervised by the Hcéres teams, who ensure compliance with procedures, methodological consistency and fair treatment of the institutions being evaluated. This supervision helps to guarantee the quality of the analyses produced, while preserving the independence of the experts in their assessments. The Hcéres teams are also responsible for organising online training with the experts to present to them the specific Hcéres methodology and the discuss the institution's self-evaluation report.

ESG 2.5

Hcéres' standards, which are public, ensure that the procedures are applied consistently, under the supervision of the Europe and International Department teams. Where necessary, they may be supplemented by specific requirements linked to national frameworks or agreements concluded with international partners in order to guarantee the relevance of the evaluations. At the end of an international evaluation procedure, the experts draft an evaluation report and an accreditation proposal, which are sent to the members of Hcéres Accreditation Committee. The committee examines the analyses, assesses their

consistency with previous evaluation reports, and makes a final decision that may lead to full accreditation for five years, partial accreditation for three years, or no accreditation. In this context, the accreditations awarded are quality labels and do not confer any regulatory rights on French territory. They aim to certify the quality of the institutions and programmes assessed against French standards, adapted to an international context and in accordance with the ESG.

Hcéres teams are also key in ensuring consistency across all the procedures they coordinate. They are subject to Hcéres' international regulations, which are made public and contain specific sections relating to professional ethics. Hcéres teams are therefore subject to strict ethical and professional standards, ensuring that they perform their duties with dignity, impartiality, integrity and probity. They also have a duty of neutrality.

ESG 2.6

1

https://www.hceres.fr/en/recherche?content-type-search=on&type=publications_report&f%5B0%5D=type_publication%3A476&f%5B1%5D=type_publication%3A489&f%5B2%5D=type_publication%3A490&f%5B3%5D=type_publication%3A660&q=/en/recherche%3Fcontent-type-search%3Don&k

ESG 2.7

The institutions evaluated first have the opportunity to submit a complaint to Hcéres concerning the conduct of the evaluation or the content of the report. The complaint is initially examined by the director of the department concerned and a response is provided by the

chair of the High Council within 10 working days, after consulting the director concerned.

If the evaluated institution considers that its previous exchanges with Hcéres or the response to its complaint have not taken its comments into account, it may lodge an appeal to Hcéres. The Hcéres President may either reject the appeal by sending a letter stating the reasons for its decision or refer the matter to the appeals committee. The Appeals Committee is composed of five members appointed by the President of the High Council, including two members of the College and two or three qualified external members (the President of France Universités, the President of the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the National Research Agency, and the President and Director General of the National Research Agency). The committee issues an opinion, on the basis of which the president of Hcéres makes a reasoned decision, published on the website, which may, where appropriate, lead to the evaluation report being amended.

ESG 3.4/ESG 3.6

Only Hcéres' national procedures lead to thematic analyses. This new evaluation framework for foreign institutions is conducted as part of Hcéres' cross-border quality assurance activities and do not lead to thematic analyses.

In addition, the Europe and International Department which is in charge of cross-border quality assurance and has developed this new framework also regularly organises internal seminars bringing together permanent staff and the department's two academic advisors. These meetings are important for reviewing the department's strategy and the relevance of its methodologies and procedures for foreign

entities. This new evaluation framework actually stems from discussions with the stakeholders and decisions made during the last internal seminar.

2. Changed EQA activity

1 Evaluation of French higher education institutions => we changed our standards and procedures but the activity remains

2 Evaluation of programmes and degrees => we changed our standards and procedures but the activity remains. For better accuracy, we would like to rename it "Evaluation of study programmes" (we never really evaluated the degrees, this was a translation mistake)

3 Evaluation of doctoral schools => we no longer evaluate doctoral schools as we now focus on the programme level

ESG 2.1

Institutional and programme evaluations are now complementary and are treated as a "package" and cover all ESG part 1 altogether. A mapping against the ESG is provided on the last page of the two guides:

Hcéres - Higher education institutions evaluation guide

https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/hceres-higher_education_institutions_guide.pdf

Hcéres - Study programmes evaluation guide

<https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/hceres-study-programmes-evaluation-guide.pdf>

ESG 2.2

The new comprehensive evaluation procedure was developed after a large consultation of

national stakeholders to gather feedback on our previous evaluation procedures. After hearing out the feedback of the stakeholders and after conducting a benchmark of European best practice, a draft comprehensive evaluation procedure was presented to national stakeholders (national association representing universities (France Universités) and the National Council for Higher Education and Research (CNESER), which is a national advisory body on higher education topics. The comprehensive evaluation procedure was then discussed with Hcéres' Board members, which includes student representatives, representatives of higher education institutions and research organisations, representatives of the National Assembly and the Senate, and representatives from two European quality assurance agencies (ANVUR – Italy and UKÄ – Sweden). The Board then officially approved the comprehensive evaluation procedure on 29 January 2026.

ESG 2.3

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https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/hceres-higher_education_institutions_guide.pdf

2

<https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/hceres-study-programmes-evaluation-guide.pdf>

ESG 2.4

The adoption of a new standards for evaluating study programmes involves several fundamental changes:

- While student experts and experts from the socio-economic and cultural spheres continue to be involved, administrative experts responsible for the management of their institutions will now also be included.

- The profile of the experts recruited will be updated, and they must now have skills in management.
- The training of experts will be overhauled to ensure that they are able to evaluate the study programmes offered by institutions in accordance with the new standards.

These structural changes are intended to ensure high-quality external evaluation for the continuous improvement of the institutions evaluated.

Regarding the evaluation of institutions, the composition of the expert panel remains essentially the same, comprising a majority of academics with management experience in higher education institutions. One of these experts must specialise in education policy and another in research policy. The panel will also include at least one student expert, one administrative expert, and one expert from the socio-economic sector.

From next year, the education policy expert will also be responsible for institution study programme evaluations. While all Hcéres experts are trained, the format of the training varies greatly from one department to another. A working group has been set up to develop these training courses into a model common to all departments, and to improve experts' understanding of Hcéres' evaluation methods.

ESG 2.5

Institutions and programmes are now evaluated using a new framework structured around “dimensions,” which are linked to a very limited number of generic questions that must be addressed in the self-evaluation report. These dimensions are further clarified by a set of

questions that they can use, depending on their specific characteristics, to give substance to their self-evaluation. In the past, experts were asked to follow the structure of the previous standards in their evaluation reports. As this method led to redundancies and overly long reports that were difficult to use, especially for small institutions, the process has evolved: experts must now prepare a report organised around the institution's major challenges and issues, covering all the dimensions of the new guide. This approach aims to produce reports that are better suited to the diversity of institutions, without undermining their comparability.

Meetings with the institutions being evaluated are scheduled to explain the content of the evaluation framework and answer their questions, with the aim of making the self-evaluation process as efficient as possible. In addition, a team of academic and administrative staff from Hcéres supports the institutions being evaluated and the expert panel, in particular to ensure compliance with the methodology.

For both institutions and programmes, the aim is to achieve a contextualised evaluation and to analyse their trajectory while ensuring consistency across evaluations. This is made possible by the support of Hcéres' staff and the key dimensions of each new framework that must be addressed in all evaluation procedures.

ESG 2.6

1

https://www.hceres.fr/en/recherche?content-type-search=on&type=publications_report&f%5B0%5D=type_publication%3A476&f%5B1%5D=type_

publication%3A489&f%5B2%5D=type_
publication%3A490&f%5B3%5D=type_
publication%3A660&q=/en/
recherche%3Fcontent-type-search%3Don&k

D. Activity outside the scope of the ESG

No

Submit form?

I am ready to submit the change report form

Last Update

2026-02-20 14:52:08

Start Time

2026-02-20 13:55:42

Finish Time

2026-02-20 14:52:08

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