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ENQA AGENCY REVIEW:  
HIGH COUNCIL FOR THE EVALUATION OF RESEARCH  
AND HIGHER EDUCATION (HCERES)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016 HCERES – the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education asked to be reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) by a Panel appointed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The present review analyses the compliance of HCERES to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in order to 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.

This is a second review of the agency; HCERES, and formerly AERES, has been a full member of ENQA since September 2010 and in EQAR, since May 2011.

The external review process followed the revised Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies. The panel for external review of HCERES was appointed by ENQA and included the following members:

- Jean-Marc Rapp, Professor at the University of Lausanne, President of Swiss Accreditation Council, and Director of the Business Law Centre (CEDIDAC), Switzerland (Chair of the panel, EUA nominee);
- Patricia Georgieva, Vice-Rector with responsibility for Quality Assurance and Accreditation at the University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Plovdiv, Bulgaria (Secretary, ENQA nominee);
- Maiki Udam, Director of Development and International Cooperation, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA), Estonia (ENQA nominee);
- Blazhe Todorovski, Master student at University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Vice-President of the European Students' Union (ESU nominated student member), Macedonia (FYROM).

The review panel considered the evidence, provided in the self-assessment report and performed a site-visit in the process of which requested additional evidence. The panel analysed all the evidence and considered HCERES' compliance with the ESG. It concluded that HCERES fully, substantially or partially complied with the ESG as follows:

- ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE - Fully compliant
- ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS - Fully compliant
- ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE - Fully compliant
- ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS - Substantially 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 - Fully compliant
- ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES - Partially compliant
- ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS - Partially compliant
- ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES - Partially compliant
- ESG 2.6 REPORTING - Fully compliant
- ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS - Partially compliant

HCERES is 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. At the same time, the panel identified some areas for improvement, for which it provides detailed analysis and proposals for improvement in the relevant sections of the present report.

In late 2015, HCERES Board and President have been appointed, thus completing the transition from AERES to the new agency. This included new remits to HCERES, related to the evaluation of institutional groupings and 'sites', validation of other evaluation bodies' procedures and introduction of evaluation of programmes at subject level.

HCERES' activities can be classified in several groups:

- quality assurance evaluations of research units, doctoral schools, study programmes and institutions, including cross-border higher education evaluation and, upon request, evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes;
- evaluation of territorial coordination in the context of 'sites', as well as strategic research and analysis of the higher education and research sector; Next to the 'sites' is included the evaluation of investment programmes and private bodies, receiving public funds;
- Validation of other evaluation bodies operating in the field of higher education and research.

HCERES performs a large variety of activities that require adaptation and time in order to achieve coherence between different processes and procedures. Its significant human resources and stable financial situation provide a strong ground for the adjustment to the new legal and regulatory framework and the progress of HCERES.

The panel hopes its observations will provide source of ideas and support to the agency in accommodating its new functions into the quality assurance framework.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur, HCERES) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in ten months period from February till November, 2016.

## 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 substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As stated in the Self-evaluation report, the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) has "officially replaced the French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), two years after HCERES was instituted by the Act of 22 July, 2013." (SER, p.6) This is, therefore, the agency's second external review and the panel provides evidence of results in all areas and progress made from the previous review of AERES. With the replacement of AERES with HCERES, to the existing model of integrated evaluation of institutions with their teaching and research has been added also evaluation of 'sites', representing geographically located groupings of research, innovation and training institutions, business companies and other stakeholder organisations. This new development falls outside the scope of the present review, as well as the evaluation of research units. The panel, therefore, focused on the evaluation of institutions and programmes, including doctoral studies, as well as the evaluation of cross-border provision. It has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies. This is the first HCERES' review after the revised ESG were adopted in Yerevan (Armenia) in 2015, and the first review following the revised ENQA methodology for agency reviews.

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2010 REVIEW

The previous review report of AERES concluded that the agency conformed to the majority of ENQA standards. The agency was commended for its methodology of 'integrated evaluation' and 'staged' evaluation reports, allowing for the establishment of a comprehensive picture of the institution as a whole. AERES was also praised for its ability to attract significant resources and staff, which enabled the agency to complete impressive number of evaluations for a short period of time.

With the advantages of original and effective methodological approach, substantial resources and number of experts, come also difficulties of a large agency with a long list of procedures and institutions to evaluate with all their programmes both at home and abroad. This led the 2010 review panel to outline the "risk that evaluations become routine and ineffective" (2010, p.38). The absence of site visits in programme evaluations indicated of a potential danger for 'reliability of evaluation' results (2010, p. 3). Being a large agency, with complex activities and long in operations, it took considerable time between actual evaluations and publication of reports. AERES was also found to be missing a key aspect of its external quality improvement role, related to the setting up of a follow-up procedure. Being focused primarily on the higher education institutions' and programmes' strategic development, the agency processes overlooked some key internal quality features, like the systematic checks of 'existence and effectiveness of quality assurance policies and procedures' within the higher education institutions (2010, p. 38). Therefore, the 2010 review panel recommended the agency to improve precision of evaluation criteria with regard to binding them with the requirements of Part 1 of ESG's and particularly with ESG 1.1., 1.2., and part of 1.4., related to improvement measures for teaching staff. (2010, pp. 17-18).

In relation to Part 2 and Part 3 of ESG's, AERES was recommended the following (2010, p. 36-37):

- The panel suggests that the AERES make the criteria in its evaluation guide more precise and ensure that they concern both the effectiveness and existence of quality assurance procedures and policies (within institutions).
- The AERES must continue its efforts to develop an evaluation culture within institutions by paying greater attention to the quality of the self-evaluation provided by institutions and to the participation of professors, students and staff in producing it.
- Along the same lines, the AERES should improve its evaluation guide by incorporating criteria focusing specifically on the quality assurance strategy of institutions or by making existing criteria more precise, and ensure that the means provided for in this strategy are put into practice.
- AERES has excellent Quality Standards. It would be worth linking these explicitly in with its evaluation guide.
- The AERES' procedures for evaluating bachelor's degrees and master's degrees should be revised to bring them more into line with the ESG requirements.
- The AERES' strategic plan has its positive points, but could be improved by the agency specifying the means it intends to implement to achieve its objectives, the persons responsible for this and the timeframes.
- In its strategic plan, the AERES wants to add a greater international dimension to its activities. The panel encourages it to do so, amongst other things by calling more systematically on international experts to carry out its evaluations.
- With the current evaluation cycle, there is a risk that evaluations become routine and ineffective. The panel suggests that the AERES look into the possibility of extending the current cycle.
- Alongside its Council, the members of which are stipulated by Law, it could be in the AERES' interests to set up an advisory committee with members from various sectors – particularly students and international specialists.
- The AERES' procedures are promising. They could be improved from several aspects:
  - The AERES could send the preliminary version of its evaluation report to institutions to obtain their comments before writing the final report. This stage should not for all that change the procedure in place of integrating the institution's reactions to the final report.
  - The AERES could also send the final version of the report to the experts before it is put on its website.
  - The question of scores and their publication raised several comments during the site visit. The AERES should perhaps discuss this issue with the main stakeholders – particularly in the research sector. It would also do well to consider the possibility of revising the score when clear improvements have been made.
  - The AERES would gain from annually updating its pool of student experts.
- The AERES should set up follow-up procedures to enable it to assess the measures taken following its evaluations quickly.

#### **REVIEW PROCESS**

The 2016 external review of HCERES 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 HCERES was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Jean-Marc Rapp, Professor at the University of Lausanne, President of Swiss Accreditation Council, and Director of the Business Law Centre (CEDIDAC), Switzerland (Chair of the panel, EUA nominee);

- Patricia Georgieva , Vice-Rector with responsibility for Quality Assurance and Accreditation at the University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Plovdiv, Bulgaria (Secretary, ENQA nominee);
- Maiki Udam, Director of Development and International Cooperation, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA), Estonia (ENQA nominee);
- Blazhe Todorovski, Master student at University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Vice-President of the European Students' Union (ESU nominated student member), Macedonia (FYROM).

HCERES delivered a self-assessment report with attachments, which all together produced a substantial part of evidence to inform the panel findings and conclusions. The present review is based on the information provided by HCERES in the SAR, on various types of HCERES' evaluation reports, on legislation and additional material sent before and during the site visit, and on the information gathered from the interviews during the site visit. The panel conducted a site visit to validate the self-assessment report and clarify any questions raised in the process of initial investigation and analysis. Prior to the site visit, individual panel members worked privately to develop the main lines of inquiry, which they discussed and agreed upon a consolidated version. During the site visit each panel member was assigned with responsibility for leading particular interviews, collating evidence and heading discussions. Decisions were reached collectively by the panel led by the Chair. The panel used a mapping grid, supplied by ENQA, to ensure consistency in evidence gathering and decision making. Members discussed and agreed judgments on each criterion. Finally, the review panel produced the present report on the basis of proof-reading of the initial draft, collated by the panel secretary, and written comments by all members of the panel, with subsequent refinements and additions. In doing so, it provided an opportunity for HCERES to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review.

### **Self-assessment report**

Panel members received the Self-assessment report (SAR) from ENQA Secretariat in May, 2016. It addresses all major components of the self-assessment report template, offered by ENQA, and contains useful discussion of the extent to which, in its own view, HCERES adheres to the ESG. As this is considered a second review of the agency's compliance with the ESG, the Self-assessment report provides reflections on 2010 review recommendations and the follow-up actions undertaken by HCERES with subsequent developments. SAR provides limited information about the activities that fall outside the scope of the ESG. The evaluation of research units, reviewed by the 2010 panel, was determined as one such activity in the agency's self-evaluation report. The review panel requested additional information prior to and during the site visit. HCERES provided to the review team all requested information in a timely and open manner.

### **Site visit**

The programme for the site visit was prepared in cooperation with HCERES' contact person. The site visit took place at High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education's premises in Paris, France from 11 to 13 July, 2016.

During the two and a half days visit to HCERES, panel met with representatives of staff and management of HCERES and particularly with those working in the departments responsible for institutional, programme and research evaluations, as well as with the staff working in the European and International department responsible for cross-border higher education accreditations, with representatives of HCERES Board and President, and with a group of HCERES reviewers. The panel was also able to meet representatives of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research,

representatives of students' and employers' organisation. The Panel also met representatives of higher education institutions that had undergone various forms of HCERES' evaluations. A detailed schedule of the site visit is provided in Annex 1 to this report. The panel benefited from the discussions that provided a better understanding of the processes currently applied by HCERES and greatly appreciated the openness and overall very well- prepared visit.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

French higher education system is distinguished by a diversity of institutions. The size of the student body in French HEI's is one of the largest in Europe with its 2 470 700 students at the start of academic year 2014-2015. The vast majority of them are studying in public higher education institutions, as private sector accounts for 18% of students (SAR, p.8). Public universities are funded by the government.

There are three main categories of higher education institutions in France: public universities, the Grandes Écoles (which include prestigious schools of engineering, business and management), and schools of art and architecture. France's public universities award degrees at all levels, ranging from the three years Bachelor degree (Licence) to the Master's and Doctorate's degree. Grandes Écoles, which can be either public, or private are typically smaller in size. Their national network includes 250 institutions, comprising engineering schools, business schools, écoles normales supérieures and veterinary schools. The various types of higher education institutions are supervised by various ministries. The Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research, for instance, supervises universities, engineering schools, management schools, medical schools and other institutions offering health and social services programmes. Another 6 ministries are involved in supervising specific groups of higher education institutions: Ministry of Defence (supervises Ecole Polytechnique and other advanced technology institutions); Ministry of Health (supervises medical schools and other institutions offering health and social services programmes); Ministry of Agriculture (supervises Veterinary colleges and institutions offering Landscape, Agricultural engineering and Agrarian studies); Ministry of Environment (supervises Schools of civil engineering); Ministry of Culture and Communication (supervises Art schools and institutions teaching heritage and architecture); Ministry of Trade and Industry (Mining engineering schools).<sup>1</sup>

To add to this complex representation, depending on their legal status some of the higher education institutions issue their own degrees and qualifications, while others award the French state's degrees and qualifications.

Recent changes in the French higher education and research system led to the increased institutional autonomy, prompted by the French Act of August, 2007 (LRU Act) on university freedoms and responsibilities. The act particularly gave universities autonomy in managing their payroll and human resources, and independent degree awarding powers. Legal changes in the contracting policy of the state extended the contracts with the higher education institutions from 4 to 5 years' period, which also affected the validity of evaluations and the organisation of evaluation processes by HCERES. Another development in French higher education has been the one of '**territorial groupings**' of higher education and research institutions. The Government intends to improve the sector coordination by bringing together scientific research, innovation, development and educational potential and resources into 25 university and scientific 'groupings', according to their territorial/regional belonging. With the introduction of groupings the government intends to bring together resources for better 'national and international visibility'. Objectives also include improved coordination of research and

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<sup>1</sup> QACHE Country report – France, p. 13.

educational offer and excellence in partnerships between various types of institutions and their stakeholders.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Within this context, encompassed by the growing institutional autonomy, strengthened contractual policy of the ministry and transformed institutional network based on territorial groupings, the national evaluation and external quality assurance framework has also changed. The High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education has replaced the AERES, following the Law No. 2013-660 of July, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. The new agency- HCERES has the purpose to support the new policy through independent regular (every 5 years) evaluation of these groupings of research and higher education institutions. The High Council's evaluations also form the basis for their 5-years contracts with the state. The recent legislative change has clearly defined role for HCERES as a body informing the state policy and strategy in the higher education and research sector, as well as a change factor for higher education institutions.

Alongside HCERES, there are two more state authorised quality assurance bodies in France: the Commission for Engineering qualifications (Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur- CTI) and Commission for qualifications issued by Business Schools (Commission d'Evaluation des Formations et Diplômes de Gestion- CEFDG). CTI is a key body involved in accreditation and certification of engineering training programmes at Master level. Based on CTI's *opinion*, state institutions are certified by the relevant ministry, while private institutions' certification by the government is made upon CTI's *decision*. CTI is a member of ENQA. CTI evaluates engineering programmes, awarding the national engineering diploma. HCERES' evaluations lead to nation-wide qualification awarding powers, e.g. the state diploma.

CEFDG is responsible for checking the quality of programmes offered by Business schools and making proposals to the relevant minister for granting degree-awarding powers to these institutions. Only courses featured on CEFDG official website (<http://www.cefdg.fr>) are authorised by MENESR to award degrees on behalf of the state.

Although CTI and CEFDG function independently, HCERES' mandate includes validation of their evaluation procedures as part of wider remit for validation of external quality assurance bodies' procedures.

Ministries supervising different types of HEI's also play a role in external quality assurance in France, with the Ministry of Education Higher Education and Research having the wider remit of them all. Until the recent legal changes, the primary function of MENESR was to assess projects for new institutions and programmes. These ex-ante evaluations served licensing for operation purposes. At present, MENESR is not involved any longer in any evaluations, but makes accreditation decisions, based on HCERES' evaluations.

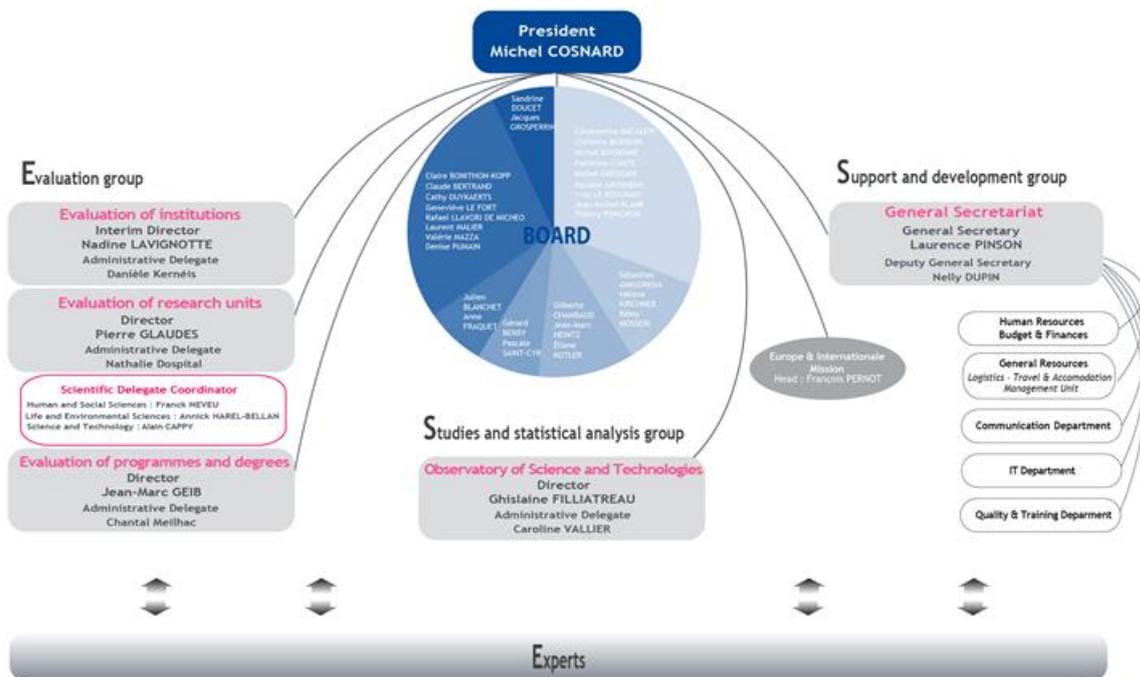
#### **FRENCH HIGH COUNCIL FOR THE EVALUATION OF RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) was established by the Act of 22 July, 2013 as an independent administrative authority which performs evaluations directly or 'verifies the quality of evaluations performed by other bodies by validating their procedures' (SAR, D2, p. 1). HCERES' evaluations are obligatory for institutions and their programmes and the costs are fully covered by the state budget.

#### **HCERES' ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE**

In 2014-2015 some adjustments have been made in the organisational structure of HCERES, in line with its added missions and renewed legal framework. The Board, HCERES' governing body,

was enlarged with 5 additional members, which led to the full integration of students' and employers' representatives in the governing body of the agency. The new Board also includes three members from quality assurance agencies belonging to the ENQA family. The formation and development of a new department with a key role in the organisation of institutional and programme evaluations abroad, namely the Europe and International Mission, was another important change. The integration of Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST) into the structure of HCERES in January 2015 took place in response to the need to provide appropriate research and development framework of shared indicators for HCERES' evaluations and analyses of sites and groupings. The current structure of HCERES is presented in the organisational chart below, copied from the SAR (Fig. 2, p. 15):



The organisational chart of HCERES (as at November, 2015) illustrates well its structure arranged around the main activities of evaluation, research and statistical analysis, and administrative support, including internal quality assurance of the agency operations.

The Board guides the development of HCERES in line with its broad mission and the strategy for the period of the next five years. The composition, procedures for appointment of the Board and President and their four years term of office, renewable once, are determined by several government decrees. Board members are compensated for their work, which suggests their responsibilities are taken seriously and with due respect to the government's and the wider public's expectations.

The composition and functions of the Board ensures the representation of main stakeholders in the Board and involves 30 people. In line with HCERES' statutory role of setting up and improving continuously the evaluation methodology, the Board and the President oversee HCERES' evaluations, as well as the evaluations performed by other agencies. The Board has the task to determine "the framework, objectives, criteria and procedures for conducting evaluations" against a set of principles that would also apply to other evaluation bodies, which procedures are validated by HCERES (SAR, D1, p. 3). HCERES' Board approves the annual activities' report to the Government and decides about the annual evaluation programme. A set of Board's decisions follow the proposals from HCERES' President. These include: internal rules and regulations, organisation into departments, the appointment of departmental managers, the

creation of a technical committee, and the composition of the scientific steering committee for the Observatory of Science and Technology. The President supervises the organisation, ensures impartiality, transparency and reliability of evaluations, appoints the evaluation experts and countersigns evaluation reports (SAR, D1, Art.8). Particular responsibilities of the President may be delegated to departmental heads and director of OST, in line with their terms of office.

HCERES' executive body consists of the Secretary General, the Heads of evaluation departments and the Director of OST. They are appointed by the President for four years' term. The Secretary General coordinates HCERES' operations on a daily basis and his/her term of office is renewable. The Observatory for Science and Technology (OST) is managed by the chair of the scientific steering committee, who manages the work of the Observatory.

The evaluation departments have added new roles and responsibilities to the existing ones after the abolishment of AERES and the establishment of HCERES. They have to provide for evaluation of 'sites' and validation procedures, dealing with other agencies' evaluations of research, study programmes and institutions. Programme department also has to run the new process for evaluation of disciplinary fields. Departments share a similar structure, with each managed by a Director, appointed by the President, and an administrative delegate. The administrative personnel consist of project officers and administrative assistants. The organisation of evaluations in each department is entrusted to scientific delegates, seconded to HCERES from universities and research organisations.

HCERES' evaluation panels operate under the supervision of evaluation departments' Directors and HCERES' President, who co-signs the evaluation reports with the panel chair.

HCERES renewed structure includes European and international mission, responsible for organisation and coordination of cross-border higher education evaluations. The unit is under the supervision of the President and consists of a Director, a project officer and an assistant (SAR, p. 15).

HCERES organises feedback from stakeholders through its 'Internal quality and training' department in close cooperation and technical support from the IT department, where the feedback information is collected and processed for the purpose of analysis. Currently this department consists of only one member of staff, supervised by the Secretary General.

HCERES has an Executive Committee, responsible for the management of internal quality assurance. This Committee works in close cooperation with the quality department and with the Secretary General (SAR, p. 30).

The Scientific Steering Committee which oversees the work of Observatory for Science and Technology (OST) also plays a role in the development and improvement of HCERES' operations, as a body which provides HCERES' management with statistical analyses and research into higher education system.

HCERES has also a Technical Committee which serves as internal consultation and dialogue body. The Committee consists of 12 staff representatives, elected for a set term (SAR, p. 15). The decision for establishment of such committee is made by HCERES' Board.

Upon request, the review panel was provided with documentation, which revealed the existence of another important body, the Complaints Committee. It is responsible for providing opinion on the answers to complaints, prepared by the Chair, before sending them to the President for final resolution. The President of HCERES is obliged to follow the committee's decision. This committee was

established in 2012 and consists of 6 members, including the Chair. They are appointed by HCERES' President.

#### **HCERES' FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES**

Since the previous review in 2010, HCERES' mission has been further developed and clarified and is now defined as to evaluate higher education institutions, their programmes and degrees, and research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency, as well as to oversee quality of evaluations carried out by other bodies and validate their evaluation procedures. HCERES' mission includes also evaluation of 25 university and scientific groupings, defined by the French Education Code and consisting of 20 communities of universities and institutions (COMUE) and 5 associations (SAR, p 7). This new type of evaluation is called 'site's evaluation'.

The recent legal change entitles HCERES also with the mission to conduct a posteriori evaluations of investment programmes and private bodies, receiving public funding intended for research or higher education. HCERES' responsibilities include additionally and upon request the evaluation of foreign or international research and higher education organisations. The purpose of HCERES' evaluations is threefold:

- to help evaluated entities carry out self-analysis on a regular basis, thus informing decisions for their development and defining ways for institutional and programme improvement;
- to provide evaluation reports which enable accreditation decisions of MENESR and other relevant ministries;
- to inform government policies and programmes related to territorial groupings of higher education and research institutions within the same 'site' in order to help coordinate the range of study programmes and research strategies, improve student learning environment and pool together study and research resources for better national and international visibility.

The evaluations made by the agency also have to ensure that all missions (of higher education institutions and research bodies) defined by law are taken into account. HCERES' activities, therefore, can be grouped in several main areas:

1. quality assurance evaluations of research units, doctoral schools, study programmes, grouped under large subject fields, and institutions, including cross-border higher education evaluation and, upon request, evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes;
2. evaluation of territorial coordination in the context of 'sites' to support higher education and research policy decisions at regional level, as well as strategic research and analysis of the higher education and research sector; Next to the 'sites' evaluation is also included the evaluation of investment programmes and private bodies, receiving public funds;
3. Validation of other evaluation bodies operating in the field of higher education and research, which could be attributed to the first group of quality assurance evaluations, however at the level of external evaluation agencies.

#### **Evaluation at institutional level**

##### *Evaluation of Doctoral Schools*

HCERES undertakes initial (ex-ante) and ex-post evaluations of Doctoral schools. Both types of activities (for the evaluation of projects for establishment of new Doctoral schools and for the evaluation of already operating doctoral schools) are conducted in line with documented and published on the agency website "Standards for Doctoral Schools", containing also guidelines to institutions submitting their documentation for evaluation. The institution, where the doctoral school is located, should prepare a self-evaluation report, supported by additional documentation indicating the research activity and supervising potential of the staff involved in the training of doctoral students, the research unit/s associated to the Doctoral school and specific data concerning doctoral students.

Regarding the evaluation standards, three aspects of quality are in focus: Doctoral school operation and scientific community; supervision and training for doctoral students; and doctoral student follow-up and employment. Under each of the three main standards, a list of sub-standards is provided, to inform the expectations to the organisation of supervision and support to doctoral students, their achievements and defence of doctoral theses, up to the tracking of their post-doctoral destinations and employment. Each doctoral school is evaluated by a panel, composed by 5 experts on average, including a chair and young doctoral graduate. The organisation and work of the panel is managed by a scientific delegate and administrative staff member, while the overall coordination of the evaluation process is run by the Programme and degrees evaluation department of HCERES. Doctoral school evaluation process includes a site visit. The report structure follows the analysis of the doctoral school performance against the three main standards and its sub-standards. In the final part of the report the strengths and weaknesses are provided, together with the panel recommendations for improvement. Published reports also include the response from the host institution, where the doctoral school is located.

#### *Evaluation of higher education institutions*

Evaluations at institutional level are designed so as to enable all higher education institutions to be evaluated within a 5-years' period. At the same time, they allow for evaluation of institutional groupings belonging to a specific geographical 'site'. The process relies on individual reports for each institution, submitting to the agency its self-evaluation report with the supporting documentary evidence. A visit schedule and review panel are then proposed and agreed through a series of meetings between HCERES and the institution concerned. Panels are currently composed of 6-8 experts, involving a student, an administrative manager, an expert from the business world, and academics. At least one of academics needs to be from an institution abroad. The site visit includes meetings of the panel with institutional managers, department managers, teaching and support staff and students, as well as with stakeholders from the business and the world of work. HCERES supports its evaluation panels with model interview questions to ensure consistency of the panel's site visits and evidence collection and verification. The panel report is then drafted under the supervision of the panel chair, checked by HCERES' editorial panel and sent to the institution for feedback on factual errors, before the final report is published on the official HCERES' website. **Together with the evaluation reports for other institutions, belonging to the same group in the 'site', this report forms the basis for the analysis and evaluation of the 'site' as a whole. The 'site' evaluation report is then presented to the Ministry to inform its contracting policy.**

#### *Evaluation of research units (beyond the scope of the present review)*

HCERES' evaluations of research units provide important material for programme evaluations at masters' and doctoral levels, concerning the involvement of the unit in providing training through research and supporting master and doctoral students in the preparation of their theses. Currently research units' evaluation is of two types: initial, or ex-ante evaluation of projects for establishment of new units, and ex-post evaluation of existing research units. The evaluation is focused on the research quality and management of the unit and therefore it falls outside the scope of this report.

#### **Evaluation at programme level**

At programme level the previous programme-by-programme evaluation has been broadened to a review of disciplinary 'fields' and production of a summary report for the field as a whole. The guidelines recently prepared and published on HCERES' website provide directions for panels and institutions for organising the simultaneous process concerning all programmes within a particular subject field, with a reference to the national classification of higher education qualifications. This led to a different system of expert panels' work, based on completing of evaluation forms for each individual programme belonging to the disciplinary field and then analysing the information in the separate forms to produce a single 'subject field' report. The number of experts in the panel is

determined by the number of programmes offered by the institution in the particular field, as for each programme HCERES appoints two experts. As now HCERES is responsible also for the evaluation of professional higher education programmes and degrees, the composition of the panels also changed. When there is a professional programme in the 'field', one of the two experts is always coming from the professional sector. HCERES provides preparatory briefing sessions for its panels. The evaluation process starts with the distribution of submitted programme files to each team of two reviewers assigned to the respective programme. These programme-by-programme reports are then sent to the 'grand' panel chair and discussed at a panel meeting. Upon collective validation of individual programmes' reports, the panel chair drafts a summary report providing an overall analysis of the entire 'field'. The process at programme level ends up with sending the report to the 'site scientific delegate' in charge of relations with the institutional evaluation department of HCERES, in order to feed in the preparations for institutional evaluation of the institution, belonging to the 'site'.

SAR indicates that study programmes at bachelor, professional bachelor and master level undergo HCERES' evaluation after their initial (ex-ante) evaluation and approval (accreditation) by the relevant Ministry. Currently four aspects including 15 standards of programme quality are subject to review regarding Bachelor, Professional Bachelor' and Master' programmes: Consistency of the curriculum with programme objectives, environment of the Programme, teaching staff, and the number of students in the programme and their learning achievements. For 2016-2017 evaluation campaign the standards cover programme objectives, organisation, position in its environment, teaching team, student numbers, employment and further studies, links to research, preparation for employment, student projects and internships, international dimension, recruitment, transfer opportunities and tools for successful programme completion, teaching methods and the role of digital technologies, student assessment, skills acquisition monitoring, graduate tracking, advisory board and self-evaluation procedures.

### **Evaluation of cross-border higher education and of foreign institutions and programmes**

HCERES evaluates cross-border higher education provision of French universities and other higher education institutions on the basis of its national framework, which apply to the evaluation of programmes and institutions. HCERES' activities related to the evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes are based on a framework specifically designed for the purpose.

#### *Evaluation of programmes operating in international context*

HCERES' activities in the area of programme evaluation are regulated by a guide, designed for institutions that have programmes delivered in an international context. The evaluation process follows a number of steps: submission of programme files, setting up of a review panel and on-site visit, production of an evaluation report and HCERES' decision to propose/not to propose or propose for conditional accreditation the reviewed programme. The proposition of conditional accreditation includes recommendations which must be taken into account and, in some cases, a follow-up visit after two years of operation to check implementation of the panel recommendations. The accreditation decision is made by the accrediting agency or accrediting body chosen by the HEI, which will send its accreditation decision to the HEI. The appeals procedure follows the local requirements and protocols. Selection of experts and composition of the programme evaluation panel are set to follow European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) principles for the selection of experts. HCERES' evaluations of programmes operating in international context are based on three main criteria: the programme is well structured; the programme can be (ex ante evaluation) or has been (ex post evaluation) correctly run; the learning outcomes actually correspond to what is expected by the programme and described on the degree certificate. These main criteria are operationalised in a questionnaire with 42 items, against which the quality of the programme under review is to be checked. The items are organised into 5 groups, or aspects of programme quality, including (a) "Educational project", where programme objectives, structure, organisation, workload, international

context, assessment, learning environment, mobility, internationalisation policy, information and communication system are in the focus of assessment; (b) “Place occupied in the scientific and socio-economic environment”, with a focus on institutional and faculty/departmental profile, positioning of the programme on the regional, national and international map, links with the socio-economic, business and cultural environment, etc.; (c) “Students” with a close attention to their profile in the programme, admissions policies and procedures, student support and guidance; (d) “Integration of graduates into the job market and further studies”, with particular attention to the graduate achievements of intended learning outcomes, graduation rates, and graduate destinations; (e) “Programme management”, concerned with the constitution and operation of advisory board, use of student feedback for programme improvement, programme self-monitoring and internal quality assurance, as well as the follow-up of the recent accreditation.

#### *Evaluation of foreign higher education institutions*

HCERES undertakes evaluations of foreign higher education institutions upon their request. This type of activity is regulated by a set of criteria and sub-criteria, related to a number of evaluation aspects (SAR, D10). These include: (1) Governance, mission and strategy; (2) Research and training; (3) Students; (4) Resources; (5) Internal quality assurance; (6) International relations; and (7) Information transparency and social responsibility. Each standard includes a number of sub-standards, which are 24 in total. Following the SAR, the process follows 6 steps: following the evaluation request from the institution abroad, HCERES organises an exploratory site visit and then signs an agreement. Following that agreement, the next steps follow the pattern of programme level evaluation: preparation of a self-evaluation report by the institution, external evaluation from the panel of experts, including a site visit of 3-4 days, writing a provisional report and sending it to the institution for comments on factual errors, and publication of the final report on HCERES’ website.

#### **Evaluation of ‘sites’ (beyond the scope of the present review)**

HCERES’ activities related to the evaluation of ‘sites’ are based on simultaneous evaluation of all institutions belonging to the ‘site’. Three main areas are subject to evaluation: positioning and strategy; governance and organisation; and management and coordination of activities. The overall evaluation process is built on two approaches, guided by specific documentation. The ‘top down’ approach is characterised with the evaluation of site policy *before* evaluating individual institutions belonging to the site with their study programmes and research units. The ‘bottom-up’ approach suggests the evaluation of the site policy *after* evaluations of all institutions, with their research units and study programmes (SAR, p.19).

#### **Strategic research**

HCERES activities include also strategic research and analysis of higher education and research system as part of the role and responsibilities of the Observatory of Science and Technology. OST also runs development projects, leading to the design of new indicators for the quality of research, or new methods for network analysis.

#### **Validation of other evaluation agencies**

HCERES’ supplemented mission includes validation of other bodies’ external quality assurance activities. In line with its new role, the agency developed a validation procedure, where it adopted the main principles of the Evaluation Charter and specified general and specific expectations regarding the evaluation/s performed by the agency. General expectations (or standards) for validation include independence, recruitment and training of experts, external evaluation standards and process, and copies of self-evaluation and external evaluation reports. Specific expectations concern different type of evaluations, performed by the applicant agency, e.g., at programme and institutional level.

HCERES' validation process has three phases: 1) the relevant evaluation department considers the file in which the body commissioned by the applicant institution presents its procedures; the file is checked against the 'expectations' set by HCERES and a written 'analysis' note is presented by the department to the validation committee; 2) assessment of the validation application file and the analysis note by the validation committee chaired by the HCERES President. The committee's decision is based on four possibilities: validation, validation with recommendations, refusal with requests for modification, refusal. 3) Submission of the decision to both the commissioned body and the applicant institution. A substantiated opinion is attached to the decision. The validation committee involves equal balance of members of the HCERES Board and ad hoc members appointed by HCERES. The validation process equally applies to recognised quality assurance agencies (e.g., EQAR registered, ENQA members), as well as to newly established ones. As a form of follow-up of validated external quality assurance arrangements, HCERES appoints a scientific delegate to attend as observer the evaluation process undertaken by the commissioned body and, if deemed necessary, report back to HCERES' validation committee. The validation process and standards are well documented, but not published yet on the website, as the actual implementation of HCERES' validation activity is to take place by late 2016, following a timeframe set in the Strategic plan 2016-2020.

### **HCERES' INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

HCERES' international activities, apart from its external quality assurance of cross-border and foreign institutions and programmes, include four types of activities: (1) Networking with European and international quality assurance bodies as a member and subscriber of such networks like ENQA, ECA, ACA, EQAR, etc., where HCERES is involved and contributes to the discussions, sharing of best practices and commitments to various working groups; (2) Participation in European projects, including CEQUINT in 2012-2014, which concerns the award for internationalisation of programmes' and institutions' certificates, QACHE in 2013-2015, aimed at defining good practice in quality assurance of cross-border higher education; (3) assistance in creating local quality assurance agencies and related policies, with recent commitments in Lebanon, Tunisia, Mali and Angola; (4) bilateral partnerships and regular dialogue with other European and international agencies, based on 20 partnership agreements. HCERES' international activities reflect the strategic objective of raising its European and international profile and consolidate its experience.

### **HCERES' FUNDING**

HCERES is funded from the budget through a state grant, debated and voted every year by the French Parliament. The President defends the Council's financial needs before the relevant commissions of the French National Assembly and the Senate. HCERES produces annual financial statements on the use of funds and is subject to ex post financial audits by the Court of Auditors.

HCERES' funding comes from two state programmes: "Higher Education Programmes and Research" and "Multi-disciplinary Scientific and Technological Research". In addition, HCERES has some revenue from the evaluation of foreign higher education, which covers the associated expenditures. A comparison of the funding levels between 2011 and 2015 shows relatively stable levels of operation costs over the 5-years' period, with an increase in 2015 due to higher payroll costs. Compared to 2014, the difference of 1,319,302 EUR is significant, which can be explained with the inclusion of OST's staff salaries (HCERES Annual Report, 2015, p. 14). The financial compensation paid to universities for the secondment of scientific delegates is also included into this category of HCERES' expenditures (SAR, p. 43).

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF HCERES 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.

**2010 review recommendation:** “AERES’ strategic plan... could be improved by the agency specifying the means it intends to implement to achieve its objectives, the persons responsible for this and the timeframes. “The panel suggests that AERES looks into the possibility of extending the current (four-year’s) cycle of reviews (2010, p. 37).

#### **Evidence**

HCERES external quality assurance activities that fall in the scope of the ESG include evaluations of institutions and programmes, both at home and abroad, as well as evaluation of doctoral schools. The annual number of evaluations include on average 60 institutions and 1000 programmes, involving 800 evaluation experts (HCERES’ Annual Report for 2015, p.5).

Quality assurance evaluations of the agency have been subject to change since the 2010 review. To existing evaluation activities new ones have been included: initial evaluation of doctoral schools and evaluation of professional bachelor programmes. The programme-by-programme evaluation has been replaced by evaluation of all programmes within a subject field simultaneously, following the national register of higher education qualifications<sup>2</sup>. The evaluation cycle has been extended to five years (instead of four previously). Another change is related to the introduction of evaluation of ‘sites’. The scoring system has been eliminated, and the evaluation departments are now considering rules for final overall statements for different types of evaluations and evaluation reports.

At its core, HCERES’ approach to external quality assurance activities has not changed and it is still based on a staged process of evaluation of doctoral schools, study fields, and the institutions as a whole. With the introduction of the evaluation of ‘sites’, the respective units of evaluation belonging to the same ‘site’ are evaluated simultaneously at each stage (of doctoral schools, programmes or institutions). The resulting ‘site’ report informs the Ministry decision for contracting the ‘site’ grouping as a whole, rather than the individual institution.

Following these changes, HCERES undertook a revision of its methodology, which encompassed a new structure of the standards for programme and institutional evaluation, more detailed standards’ definitions, supported by guidelines for improved understanding. For the 2016-2017 evaluation campaign, each standard is supplied with guidelines, clarifying the expectations to the performance of the evaluated institution or programme. The new documentation is published on HCERES’ website, together with clear descriptions of procedures for each evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> The list of national qualifications published as an annex to the French Act of 22 January, 2014 sets out 45 qualifications at the Bachelor level, 173- at the professional Bachelor level, and 252 qualifications at the Master’s level. (SAR, p 8).

Following its mission and legally defined role, HCERES is concerned with the evaluation of sites and groupings in the first place. As indicated in the SAR, its external quality assurance activities play an important yet complementary role in the agency's work (SAR, p. 46). In their entirety, the findings from HCERES' evaluations are used to inform a higher level of evaluation of 'sites' and groupings of institutions. Currently, the agency's methodology separates its 'sites' operations from external quality assurance evaluations. Following the indications in the SAR, the strategic plan and from the site visit interviews, the panel considers the agency's intention to implement an integrated approach to evaluations as promising way to reduce workload with too many evaluations and eventually enhance the role of external quality assurance.

HCERES operations are guided by the Strategic Plan, set for the period 2016- 2020. The plan is structured around 9 strategic priority areas, broken down into operational objectives, milestones for the set period of time and monitoring indicators.<sup>3</sup> The Plan is clearly focused on areas for further development and improvement of external quality assurance, including: strengthening the commitment and services to the evaluated institutions (Area 1); simplification of evaluation processes (Area 6); consolidation of peer review system and promotion of ethical and high quality evaluation (Area 2), ensuring HCERES' independence (Area 3). One of HCERES' key strategic objectives attends to the incorporation of various types of evaluations into the integrated evaluation of 'sites' and territorial groupings.

The strategic plan clearly indicates HCERES' commitment to quality improvement of French higher education and research institutions and their programmes. The plan engages the agency in promoting high quality evaluations and developing a culture of transparency, impartiality and integrity. The review panel was pleased to find that some of the tasks planned for 2016 were accomplished already, e.g., the adoption of Evaluation Charter and performance of satisfaction surveys.

### **Analysis**

HCERES addressed the 2010 review recommendations by providing its clear goals and strategic objectives with annual monitoring indicators and milestones that reflect means it intends to implement to achieve its objectives and the timeframes. The Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 is published on the agency's website. Concerning the next 2010 review recommendation, HCERES' revised methodology and processes reflect the extended review cycle from four to five years' period.

The aim and scope of HCERES' work are legally defined and published on the website, although it would be beneficial for the agency and its stakeholders to bring together the texts from various legislative documents into a single policy paper, with its mission, vision, goals and purposes, values and principles, structure and function of its bodies.

The staged approach to HCERES' external quality evaluations and the extended 5-year's review cycle help to integrate evaluation results into a 'site' evaluation report, providing a broad view of the effectiveness of institutions belonging to the specific 'site' and grouping. HCERES is guided and supported in its complex and multi-level work by the strategic plan, which allows the management to streamline the resources and operations in an effective and efficient manner to achieve the set goals and objectives on time.

The agency managed to review its standards and guides and produce a revised documentation, which integrates standards and guides for their improved understanding with outline of the stages in the evaluation process and directions to help institutions prepare. The panel reviewed and compared the arrangements for the 2015-2016 and for 2016-2017 evaluations and found numerous changes, which clearly demonstrate that the process of improvement of HCERES' standards is ongoing. In panel's view,

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<sup>3</sup> HCERES' Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (Adopted by the Board on 6 June, 2016). 20 p.

the agency is aware of the need to finalise and improve the development of standards, as indicated in its SWOT analysis (SAR, p. 34). This is also seen from the Strategic plan, where one of the agency priorities includes simplification of processes and implementation of an integrated evaluation. The panel addressed in greater detail this issue in a separate section, dealing with Part 2 of the ESG's in this report.

HCERES revised (upon consultations with stakeholders) its procedures and a number of improvements took place: the evaluation of programmes under the same study field now includes a site visit and is based on self-evaluation report; draft reports are now sent to the evaluated institution for comment, before being finalised. Experts' panel finalises the report before it is published on HCERES' website. While fully understanding that the agency's transformation is still under way, the panel wished to bring to HCERES' attention that it should publish on the website its formal procedure for the composition of expert panels. This also applies for the criteria for decisions, which are to replace the abolished scoring system.

From the discussions with representatives of the supervising ministries, higher education institutions, external panels' experts, students and employers it was obvious that the agency work has been appreciated and its value for the development of the higher education and research system widely recognised. The fact that it has been entrusted with additional powers, including the validation of other agencies procedures, supports this view.

**Panel conclusion: fully 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**

HCERES holds the legal status of independent administrative authority after the abolishment of AERES through an amendment to the French Research Code, made in 2013. The Code legally recognises HCERES as responsible for evaluations of higher education institutions, their programmes and degrees, alongside the evaluations of research units, 'site' groupings, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency.

HCERES is the key instrument for the government policies and strategies in the sector of higher education and research, as the ministry takes its accreditation decisions and signs the 5-years' contracts with institutions and 'site' groupings on the basis of its evaluation reports. According to the existing legal framework, HCERES' main mission is to provide independent regular (every 5 years) evaluation of 'site' groupings of research and higher education institutions, based on evaluations of individual institutions, and their study programmes, research units and doctoral schools in order to inform the government policy throughout. HCERES' central role in the French quality assurance and evaluation system is recognised by the fact that it has the legal power to validate other similar agencies' procedures, if the higher education institutions wish to undergo evaluation by another agency. HCERES operation and organisation is governed by Decree no. 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014, which specifies the rules and procedures for HCERES' business.

**Analysis**

The review panel finds that HCERES clearly retains its independent legal status after the abolishment of AERES, which is secured by the appropriate changes in the French Research Code and the government Decree no. 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014. During the site visit, the panel met with

representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Culture, who expressed their appreciation of HCERES' work and pointed to the helpful summaries of programme evaluations by major fields for their decision making. Their reflections on various HCERES' activities and overall perception of the agency were very positive, including its input to promoting links between higher education and research, achieving the synergy between the institutions and their economic environment, the focus of their evaluation standards and the panels on employability of graduates, as well as the agency's contribution to a greater accountability of the private higher education sector towards the public. The panel, however, raised concerns about increased responsibilities of HCERES and legally required multiple tasks and its capacity to fulfil all expectations carried by its membership in ENQA and listing in EQAR. This calls for reflection on the part of the agency and the ministries, who have a role in the legislation and its improvement, about the effectiveness of its processes.

**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.

#### **Evidence**

In terms of HCERES' legally established independence, its independent status remains unchanged since the previous review in 2010. The French Research Act's amendments of 2013 transfer the independent legal status of AERES to HCERES, and the following Decree of 2014 confirms this independence. The panel have noticed that the legal arrangements for Board's independence are clearly focused on distancing them from evaluated institutions. For instance, to avoid any conflict of interest among Board members, Art. 4 of the Decree stipulate the management positions in higher education institutions and research units they should not occupy. Article 12 requires to declare current and in the last 5 years interests. Board members are not allowed to participate in any sort of evaluation or deliberations concerning institutions where they are employed (SAR, D1). Other legal provisions for HCERES' structural independence include incompatibility of the Board member's position with a position in national representative policy and decision making bodies like the permanent committee of the French Universities Board, or a member of the French National Council for Higher Education and Research, or the French Strategic Council for Research. To avoid any political influence, Board members are not allowed to occupy positions for which they are appointed by the Council of Ministers. As a body with a remit to determine HCERES' internal organisational structure and methodology, as well as to set conditions for nomination and appointment of its expert panels, the membership of the Board is strictly separated from the evaluation expert position for HCERES. HCERES' financial independence is maintained through the mechanism of its direct funding through the parliamentary vote in the absence of a primary financial audit.

Alongside these legal provisions, HCERES has set up internal mechanisms, which allow it to operate as an independent body. All decisions for HCERES' operations are taken by the Board and the President, or the delegated heads of departments, according to their terms of office. Panels of experts are drawn from a pool of over 18 000 experts, proposed by institutions and other stakeholders. Before their appointment and upon institution's consent panel experts sign declaration for non-conflict of interest with the evaluated institution. The nomination, appointment, roles and responsibilities of experts are guided by an "Expert Status", where a specific section deals with the 'ethical rules' applicable to the expert's work. The integrity and consistency of panel evaluations and reports is ensured through the published "Evaluation Charter", evaluation standards and guides, the supervising role of the scientific delegate, attached to the panel, the fine-tuning of the reports by editorial committee, and the model

interview questions for the institutional site visits. Panel conclusions and decisions are taken independently by the panels, without influence from the Board, the accrediting Ministry or from a political body. There are three international experts from ENQA membership agencies in the Board, thus enhancing the independence and credibility of HCERES' governing body. Evaluation processes, standards and procedures are predefined for each type of evaluation and published on the agency official website. The schedule of evaluations is agreed with the institutions and their contracting authorities and published on the website as well.

The panel concluded from the review of agency's processes and practices, confirmed by the interviews with evaluations experts and staff, that HCERES' operational independence is demonstrated through its freedom to:

- select and appoint its expert staff, i.e. the scientific delegates (provided that their host institution is financially compensated);
- determine the principles and conditions for nomination and appointment of experts and compose the evaluation panels;
- determine its evaluation methodology;
- set its framework, objectives and main priorities in line with its remits;
- plan its own activities and take responsibility for them through the publication of its strategies, rules, methodologies and outcomes.

### **Analysis**

In light of this evidence, the panel is contented with the legal provisions for the structural and financial independence of HCERES, which allow the agency to establish itself as an autonomous legal entity. The panel appreciates HCERES' efforts to further develop tools and measures to prevent any external influence on its evaluation outcomes. Such measures include the development and publication of an Evaluation Charter, a protocol for the expert's work, documented in 'Expert Status', as well as the Declaration for the panel experts' interests in the previous period of 5 years. Impartial evaluation is one of the principles that guide the evaluation explicitly stated in the Evaluation Charter. Acceptance of the Charter is made a prerequisite to any evaluation assignment. In addition, the principles and standards for the evaluation expert status are promoted through the Pool of experts' application and the systematic briefing of the panels before the start of the evaluation process.

But it can also see that some further steps could strengthen HCERES' organisational independence. For example, the Declaration of interests could serve better the panels' independence if reinforced by a wholly developed non-conflict of interests procedure, based on clear and explicit definition of what constitutes a conflict of interest in HCERES' evaluations and a guidance to the would- be experts and institutions, or persons nominating them, how to detect and avoid different types of interests.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends HCERES 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.

### **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.

#### Evidence

SAR indicates that HCERES conducts analysis of its activities on an annual basis, which find place in the agency's annual activity reports. These reports provide information about the scope and size of evaluations that have taken place in the previous year, resources spent, together with any changes in evaluation methodologies, if and when applicable. Reports are published on the website and submitted to higher education institutions, the French Government, and the Parliament. One important aspect of the annual reports, which the review panel finds useful, is the section with an 'outlook' for the next period. It provides description of methodology used and the possible improvements that the agency intends to implement in the next evaluation exercise.

HCERES also conducts analyses of evaluation findings produced by a group of scientific delegates from the three evaluation departments in order to draw up regional summary reports. These reports are set to provide information about the outcomes of the three levels of evaluation, i.e. programme, institutional and at the level of research units. The first summary reports have been produced in 2012 and published on AERES' website. Following the legal changes in 2013, the methodology of these reports has been changed in order to support higher education institutions in developing their 'site' policies. The SAR signifies of the existence of 'site summary reports' covering study programmes, research units and institutions, but the review panel could not find these reports on HCERES website. The panel learned also from the SAR about the summary reports reflecting overall master's programmes offer in the period between group A evaluations (2009-2010) and group E evaluations (2013-2014). **The panel was informed that the approach to this type of summaries has changed in order to take into account the adjustments in the programme evaluation methodology with evaluations at the level of the study field.** But it was not clear, when these changes are going to take place and the summary analysis of study fields' evaluations can be expected. The panel learned about HCERES' plans to continue with the regular preparation and publication of summary reports based on evaluations of sites, using OST's data and know-how in the analyses. However, published reports of this kind are still not available due to the fact that just a few site reports are finalised and therefore available for reflection and analysis of information that they provide. Nor it could discover more information about their planned structure and connection to the programme and institutional level evaluation findings.

The panel learned about HCERES' contribution to a recent thematic report on quality assurance of cross-border higher education. The country report for France provides useful analysis of French cross-border provision, its legal basis and the quality assurance framework, together with examples of good practice.

#### Analysis

In the course of the review, the panel could identify three major forms through which the agency uses the outcomes of its activities to reflect upon the developments and trends in higher education and research and show areas of improvement. These include (a) annual activity reports, which enable HCERES to inform the public on its evaluation activities, the resources used for them and planned adjustments for improvement; (b) regular summary reports on higher education and research, which use analyses of evaluations' findings, statistical and performance data to produce a reliable and comprehensive overview of the trends in the French higher education sector; and (c) occasional thematic reports, reflecting on the state of the art in particular sector or aspect of quality assurance. The panel learned about the existing reports in all three forms, published in the period after the 2010

review, but could verify only the recent annual activity reports and thematic report regarding the quality assurance of CBHE.

The panel members recognised the useful experience that HCERES inherited from AERES in producing analytical summary reports at different levels of evaluation and appreciates its plans to continue the tradition of regular summary reports in line with its changed methodology. At the meeting with OST department the panel could confirm HCERES' plans to develop expertise for site's description and use site evaluation reports to produce broader summaries. However, due to the lack of such reports, the panel was unable to confirm whether site evaluation reports provide structured analyses of higher education and research across the regions. Considering the information gathered from meetings that the structure of site evaluations differs from the institutional and programme ones, the panel wished to see if the summaries of site reports preserved the focus on quality assurance of institutions and their programmes. It therefore expected to find a more substantial planning, including a draft structure of the future analytical reports. The panel thought that HCERES needs its significant information and analytical resources more rapidly utilised to communicate good practice as well as difficulties the higher education institutions experience, based on panels' reports and findings in the process of their evaluations.

#### **Panel recommendations**

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.

#### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 3.5 RESOURCES**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HCERES is a publicly funded agency which receives its funding from two state programmes: "Higher Education Programmes and Research" and "Multy-disciplinary Scientific and Technological Research". The law provides for direct funding through a state grant, debated and voted every year by the French Parliament. In addition to this state-sponsored funding channel, HCERES has some revenue from the evaluation of foreign higher education, but this channel was used to cover only the associated expenditures. Within this framework, HCERES receives a budget allowing it to carry out its work effectively.

Following the information provided in the SAR, the agency's current budget amounts to €17.5 million which enables it to meet the rising operating and payroll costs. Its total expenditures indicated significant increase in 2015 with €1,319,302. The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 shows that further growth is expected to meet the costs related to the development of resources for conducting integrated evaluations. HCERES carefully manages its finances through a business plan to ensure it has all the necessary resources to carry out its operations without disruptions.

In terms of human resources, HCERES employs 102 administrative staff members, most of them working full time. About 15% are contractual staff for a maximum period of 12 months, who are appointed to meet the periods of peak activity. The distribution of staff members across the departments is well balanced, with higher concentration of staff (33%) only in the institutional

evaluations' department. During the site visit the panel heard of problems with filling open positions in the agency. One example to this is the International department, where since 2013 there have been one member of staff and only recently a second person was appointed. The information collected from the panel during the site visit led to the conclusion that limited number of staff in this unit and the continuous difficulty to fill in open positions in it do not correspond to the reportedly high demand for accreditation of cross-border higher education. In their discussion on findings, the panel shared concern with the agency's management that this could be a serious challenge for HCERES in achieving the strategic goal to consolidate its international evaluation achievements, establish itself as a 'top French player internationally' and develop its 'evaluation and accreditation missions at both European and international level' (HCERES' Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.16).

HCERES also employs on a part-time basis 115 scientific delegates, responsible for the organisation of evaluations. For the recruitment and involvement of scientific delegates into its work HCERES pays financial compensations to their home institutions. Over 60% of the scientific delegates are located in the evaluation of research units' department. The majority of them are professors and researchers (73%), but there are also non-academic personnel, representatives of the civil society. In performing its evaluations and appointing its evaluation panels HCERES relies on a large pool of experts, which includes academics (95%), business world representatives, students and experts with administrative experience. The size of this pool of experts amounts to 18 185 (compared to 10 000 in 2010) and the agency put efforts to develop further its system for updating and managing their personal profiles. As a result of updated experts' data, the number of new experts involved in the Group A evaluations (2014-2015) increased in comparison to Group E evaluations (2013-2014) and a better gender balance was achieved.

The agency also recently moved to a new address, where it occupies modern premises, large enough to meet its needs. According to the SAR, it rents premises of over 4 000 square metres (compared to 3000 at its previous location) on a long-term 10-years' contract. This resulted in annual savings from rent of almost €1 million. The new location is in a modern building, surrounded by academic institutions, close to the national library and with an easy access to the public transport.

HCERES uses the IT and network resources of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research to support its work on a daily basis. It uses applications developed for the accounting and financial management purposes, and an HR management tool to help manage the information regarding the status of its administrative staff. Other applications support the management of the pool of experts and evaluation files. HCERES has considerable benefits from using the IT resources of the Ministry of Higher Education's network for its operations. Through this it can reduce its operating costs and allocate its own resources to improve the working conditions of the staff in the evaluation departments. For instance, HCERES managed to provide its staff from the institutional evaluations' department with new laptops so that they can travel and work more effectively outside the agency.

### **Analysis**

In the recent period HCERES' budget allocations are on rise, which is related to the rise of staff expenditures and the projected need for development of new services, like for example the integrated evaluations. The agency has additional sources of income through its evaluation services to foreign institutions, but this channel has been used only to cover the actual expenses.

Since its previous review in 2010, HCERES' administrative staff was increased by 30% and currently employs 102 members of staff who in their majority are directly involved in providing support for organising evaluations in the three evaluation departments. In addition, HCERES hires scientific delegates who are responsible for the organisation of evaluations and the work of expert panels in

particular. Currently, the number of scientific delegates, who are employed on a part-time basis, exceeds the number of permanent administrative staff. Moreover, at periods of highest activity the agency hires additional staff on a short term contract basis, which currently represents about 15% of all administrative staff. To perform its over 1000 evaluations per year, the agency hires between 3200 and 3800 external experts annually to form the expert evaluation panels. External experts are selected from a regularly updated and electronically managed pool of experts, which contain relevant data for the expert profile. The review panel was impressed by the significant growth of the pool size, which increased by 80% since the previous review in 2010.

The agency's huge amount of work related to nomination and appointment of experts and processing institutional documents between various departments and panels is supported by electronic system for document retrieval. The system enables institutions under review to submit huge amount of papers electronically. Additionally, it allows HCERES to support its evaluations with quantitative and qualitative data from the Ministry of Education to which the system is linked and, in return, to submit the evaluation reports and supporting documentary evidence to the Ministry for policy making and accreditation purposes.

The panel discussed the financial and human resource situation with HCERES' management and the staff in departments and was pleased to learn that no major issues exist in carrying on with their activities. The financial and human resources that the agency has ensured enable it to carry out its activities without problems. At the same time the panel identified a problem with the staffing of the International department and heard of occasional difficulties in recruiting external experts for the review of certain programmes, as well as in filling some positions in various agency departments. In addition, it came across the information that universities have recently required full compensation for the academic staff secondment to the agency. The panel could hardly believe that in exchange for free evaluation services offered to them by HCERES, they refuse to contribute through the part-time secondment of their academic staff and demand compensation of €22 000 per delegate. This generous, but rare practice from European perspective does not seem to have taken into account the various benefits (other than financial ones) that sending institutions can enjoy and therefore compensate for the human resources they invest into HCERES' activities. These include, for example, retaining well trained and experienced staff when preparing for HCERES' external reviews. At the meeting with agency's administrative department the panel could discuss the situation in greater detail, where it was clarified that the compensations amount to 40% of HCERES' budget. The agency strategic plan reflects on the persistency of the problem through HCERES' commitment to revise the existing business model and establish by 2017 a new one, which allows for compensation of secondments according to the payroll cost. The panel encourages the agency to further develop its business model in order to minimise the spending on financial compensations for hiring its scientific delegates.

From its meeting with the representatives from the ministries (of education, higher education and research; culture; and agriculture) the panel learned that HCERES receives additional support in recruiting its administrative expert staff from among the civil servants with experience. It also receives access to advanced IT resources and information management tools of the Ministry of higher education. Following its meetings with IT department and OST department the panel was interested to learn that the agency uses these resources effectively and contributes to their further development and improvement.

The panel learned about HCERES' ambitions to further develop its international activities related to the evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes, but the limited number of staff employed in the department responsible for European and International relations could be a challenge.

Overall, the review panel concluded that HCERES has a sound financial basis for its operations and appropriate resources to carry out its work effectively.

**Panel commendations:**

The panel commends the agency for their well-developed software that facilitates exchange of documents and improves the management and transparency of the review process.

**Panel recommendations:**

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

**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.

**Evidence**

In the period following the previous review in 2010, HCERES has developed and implemented a number of key measures to ensure the quality of its practices and, following the SAR (p. 45), documented these under Section 7 of HCERES' internal quality assurance. These measures include adherence of all those involved in the variety of evaluations to the code of ethics, which promotes the principles of integrity and due diligence in evaluations, confidentiality and respect to institutions under review, collegiality in the work of the panels. The principles and code of ethics guiding the evaluation process find place in an "Evaluation Charter", published on the agency website and used to inform the experts before each assignment. The panel observed that this document has been reviewed and revised recently. It is considered by HCERES as a key policy tool, ensuring the integrity and high professionalism in the agency's work. In it the agency defines expectations regarding the professional conduct of all HCERES staff. In addition, HCERES adopted a procedure for expert's accountability, directed by the "Expert Status" regulation. It determines the appointment of experts, their roles and responsibilities in the panel, the code of conduct, and the terms for their financial compensation. HCERES also applies a non-conflict of interests' procedure to ensure the independence of evaluation experts, as well as of the agency administrative and scientific staff involved in particular evaluations. It is currently based on the declaration of interests, which is signed by the expert and implies no financial or other interests with the evaluated institution in the last 5 years. But, as mentioned in the section dealing with ESG 3.3, the panel thought that it could be further developed to enable current and potential experts of the agency better understand what constitutes a conflict of interests in the context of HCERES' evaluations, where it could arise and how it can be avoided.

The "Evaluation Charter", "Expert Status" regulation and the Declaration of interests are published on the website. At the same time, the panel learned from the SAR about a single HCERES' internal quality standards' document, which however was not available on the agency website. These standards are in two groups: common and department-specific. The SAR points to common standards being used as a starting point for each department to develop its own quality tools. 'Common quality assurance tools' include: the Evaluation Charter, the Expert Status, the Scientific Delegate Status, the Declaration of interests, digital evaluation management tools, Electronic Data Management (EDM), a survey management application 'Sphinx' and archives management. Department specific quality tools include internal meetings, documented departmental service processes and procedures, and working groups dealing with risk analysis, upgrade of evaluation applications, etc.

The review panel observed that although the agency recognises the need for a broader and more enhanced policy tool to accommodate its evaluation processes into a robust internal quality system, its intention is not supported by relevant measures in HCERES' Strategic Plan.

HCERES' internal quality assurance processes are managed by the Executive Committee, which involves members of the Board as a body with leadership role in the internal quality assurance system. The Executive Committee work is supported by the Quality and training department, which is overseen by the Secretary General. Based on analyses of feedbacks, prepared by the quality and training department, the Executive committee discusses the findings and makes proposals to the Board for revision of methodology. The panel observed during the site visit that there is only one member of staff appointed in the Quality and training department. Nor it could find supporting documentation for the size and remit of the Executive committee.

The agency's continuous improvement of processes, policies and standards is based on regular feedbacks from internal experts and external stakeholders. Feedbacks are gathered through questionnaires, designed to collect the views of HCERES' expert panels, evaluated institutions, and students about its processes and outcomes. The feedbacks are collected after each 'wave' of evaluations and processed with the help of advanced software, specifically designed for the purpose. The panel had access to 'Sphinx' application for the management of surveys and collection of feedback during the site visit and was impressed by its high functionality and potential for cross-analysis. The panel could also see the good level of cooperation on this matter between the "Quality and training" department and IT department. The analyses of results are published on HCERES' website as well as in the annual activity reports. The panel received copies of annual activity reports and reviewed on the website more detailed analyses of internal and external feedback in relation to recent institutional evaluations. The feedback reports are well structured, outlining the aspects that need more attention in the future and those that received high level of satisfaction on the part of institutions and quality experts. The panel favoured the section about the usefulness of the agency evaluation reports for different stakeholder groups, including students. They clearly contribute to improvements in HCERES' work and prompted changes in methodology.

At the meeting with European and International department the panel checked whether HCERES established a process of communication with the agency under which jurisdiction was the evaluated institution/s and could confirm that this was the case.

Although the SAR provides comprehensive description of agency internal quality assurance policy and mechanisms, this is not published on the website.

### **Analysis**

Since the previous review, the agency has committed to further development and refinement of its internal quality assurance processes which enabled a reflective, improvement-oriented process to be put in place. Its 'continuous improvement' cycle involves the Board, Executive committee, departments, evaluation panels and individual experts, who work together to regularly review and reflect on their practices and continuously improve mainly through mechanism of internal and external feedbacks. The external feedback mechanism includes HEIs, supervising ministries, and student vice-presidents. In order to further increase the validity and reliability of collected feedback information, HCERES adopted and regularly updates a survey management application, called « Sphinx ». It also took steps to ensure fair and objective evaluations through the professional conduct and integrity of its evaluation experts, who are directed by the values and principles set in the revised Evaluation charter. HCERES also made it possible for each and every external expert to sign a Declaration for non-conflict of interest before receiving its assignment. In this the agency is supported by modern system for electronic management of data related to the experts called EDM. This is

particularly important given the large pool of experts and the complex evaluation framework the agency is dealing with. The panel considers that HCERES has made a number of positive steps in strengthening its internal quality by introducing robust procedures for experts selection and appointment, clear expectations to their integrity, accountability, transparency and professionalism and well managed cycle of continuous quality improvement based on feedback analysis. The panel identified throughout its various meetings significant support and approval of agency attempts to establish good communication with its counterparts and wanted to encourage HCERES to continue its efforts in seeking and listening to opinion from universities, students, ministries and other relevant stakeholders regarding different aspects of its work.

At the same time, the panel thought there is room for improvement in terms of streamlining of common and specific quality tools into a single comprehensive internal quality handbook, which can be easily accessible. While the panel recognised that the agency clearly demonstrated an ability to relate its critical self-reflection to the change and development of its practice, it shared concerns that frequent changes in methodology (reportedly taking place every year) may be counterproductive to the quality and credibility of agency activities. The panel also found a number of positive initiatives that address important aspects of agency's quality culture, but are not accomplished. This includes the development of a protocol for communication with agencies under which jurisdictions are the institutions evaluated abroad, the non-conflict of interest procedure. The panel encourages HCERES to follow its declared plans for introducing gender equality policy and develop a common foundational training in quality assurance for staff and experts.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel wants to commend HCERES for establishing a clear and robust quality 'cycle', starting with collection and analysis of reliable internal and external feedback, followed by critical reflection on its practices, which finds place in published reports, and ending up with further development and improvement.

#### **Panel recommendations**

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

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

#### **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.

#### **Evidence**

Evaluation Charter explicitly states that HCERES periodically undergoes external review. The SAR indicates that HCERES' main motivation to undergo the external review process has been continuous improvement. In the introduction to the standards for external evaluation of institutions HCERES discusses the need to follow international developments in quality assurance and to contribute to the development and exchange of good practices through the promotion of its own methodology. HCERES' validation standards also include reference to the ESG. The agency commitment to the ESG's was confirmed during the site visit meetings with the agency President and staff, who repeatedly expressed their interest in receiving external independent reflection on their activities. Other motives include the international recognition of evaluated institutions through membership of the agency in

ENQA and inclusion to EQAR's list. In addition, the panel learned that HCERES recently hosted a seminar on the quality of CBHE as part of a wider ENQA project, in which the agency participated.

Moreover, this is not the first time the agency undergoes external review for its compliance with the ESG. AERES, the agency succeeded by HCERES, underwent external review in 2010, which led to its membership to ENQA and in EQAR. The external review report, though generally positive, contained also recommendations for improvement. In 2012 AERES prepared and delivered to ENQA Board a progress report. The panel received this progress report from ENQA secretariat and decided that some recommendations have not been properly addressed at that time. The panel noted, that a few recommendations still remain not properly addressed, like the one dealing with setting up a follow-up procedure.

### Analysis

The above evidence demonstrates that the new management of HCERES considers periodic external review of its compliance to ENQA standards as an important vehicle to its development and improvement. The review panel agreed that the past history of the agency as a member of ENQA from the very beginning, the agency participation in ENQA projects, the meetings during the site visit and the references found in a number of official agency documents confirm HCERES' willingness to adhere to the principles safeguarded in the ESG.

### Panel recommendations

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

### 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 1 of the ESG.

**2010 review recommendation:** The AERES must continue its efforts to develop an evaluation culture within institutions by paying greater attention to the quality of self-evaluation and to the participation of professors, students and staff in producing it. (2010, p.36) Along the same lines, AERES should improve its evaluation guide by incorporating criteria focusing specifically on the quality assurance strategy of institutions or by making existing criteria more precise, and ensure that the means provided for in this strategy are put into practice. (2010, p. 37).

### Evidence

HCERES has legal responsibility to evaluate programmes and institutions, as well as the different forms of cross-border provision at programme and institutional level. HCERES also evaluates overseas programmes and institutions upon request. For each of its different types of evaluations the agency provides standards and guidelines to help institutions organise their self-evaluation process and prepare for external review. The panel observed that efforts were made to establish clear and robust structure of the standards. Thus, for institutional evaluations they are grouped under 6 **areas** or sectors of institutional activity; each major area is broken down to **fields**, describing the focus of activity; the 17 fields, in its turn, include 34 **standards**, describing the particular expectations to institutions. Guidelines are provided for each standard to ensure consistency of approach on the part of institutions and external review panels. For programme evaluations the standards are based on a set of objectives to be followed in four main fields: 1. Programme aim and

objectives; 2. Position of the programme in its environment; 3. Programme teaching structure; and 4. Management of the programme. In each of the four fields a number of standards is defined and supported by clarifications, which play the role of guidelines to the standards. Altogether, 22 standards addressing programmes' quality assurance are developed. For the evaluation of doctoral schools the standards are organised under three major areas (School organisation and scientific community; Supervision and training of PhD students; and Doctoral students tracking and employment) each sub-divided to clarify the expectations to the school's practices. For the evaluation of cross-border provision of French universities HCERES applies the same framework and therefore the same standards for institutional and programme evaluation, including doctoral schools, as described above. For the evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes, HCERES developed different sets of standards. At programme level, the standards are focused on five aspects, including the programme educational rationale ('project'), its place in the scientific and socio-economic environment, the students and their profile, graduate employment and the programme management. At institutional level, the standards are focused on seven areas and for each standard a number of sub-standards are provided. The areas include: institutional governance, mission and strategy; research and training; students; resources; internal quality assurance; international relations and transparency and social responsibility. Within these areas, seven standards in total are defined and each standard definition is followed by explanation clarifying how the standard should be interpreted, thus serving as guidelines to the standards. HCERES standards take into account, although to different extent, the institutions' internal quality assurance systems and consider the policies, designed for them.

The panel discussed with HCERES staff variances that the standards' documentation revealed and learned that efforts have been made to achieve consistency in the structure and the wording of the standards. At the same time, they represent the different departments' experience, values and understanding, as they contributed to their development.

The panel was informed that the standards designed for institutions and programmes are going to be used for the evaluation of cross-border provision and could see that to this end some adjustments and guidance have been provided in the revised version. The panel analysed the standards from the perspective of CBHE and found gaps in addressing specific issues concerning joint degrees, consumer protection policies and mechanisms, procedures ensuring that the degree qualification delivered abroad provides the same level and quality as at home institution, etc. The panel observed that external quality assurance arrangements for foreign institutions and programmes are at 'project' stage of development and are not published on the HCERES' website yet. As indicated in the SAR, their validation by the Board is due at the end of 2016. The guide to foreign programmes is better structured and focused more explicitly on the ESG standards in Part 1. In addition, HCERES' standards for quality assurance of doctoral schools revealed a number of limitations in an attempt to address quality assurance practices described in Part 1 of the ESG. **During the site visit, the panel heard of opinion that ESG are not designed to reflect doctoral studies.** However, the panel thinks that there are plenty of examples of good practice in addressing the quality of doctoral programmes according to the ESG Part 1.

Following the adoption of ESG 2015, HCERES worked on improving its external evaluation standards and guides, taking into account the 10 aspects of internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG. To this end, a comparison was made between ESG Part1 and the standards for five different types of external quality assurance processes (SAR, Fig. 6 on p. 52). The comparison illustrates the different extent to which HCERES' standards are cross-cutting the Part 1 of the ESG and therefore the different degree to which the 10 aspects of quality assurance are addressed by the agency.

Fig.6: Comparison between ESG Part 1 and HCERES' standards for evaluation (SAR, p. 52)

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

Since the introduction of revised ESG, HCERES undertook two evaluation campaigns: 2015/16 and 2016/17. The first results of the 2015/16 campaign have been prepared for publication and the panel was given access to a number of reports illustrating the implementation of HCERES' standards. During the site visit, the panel clarified that HCERES revised its standards and procedures after the 2015/16 campaign and released new documentation for the 2016/17 campaign. This new material, alongside the information gathered from the meetings with HCERES' staff, external experts, institutions and students laid the basis for panel's analysis of HCERES' external quality assurance. The report findings of the last campaign were still under preparation by the time of the site visit and, therefore, the review panel was not able to include them in its analysis.

## Analysis

In the following section the panel describes to what extent the standards used in HCERES' external quality assurance procedures assess the effectiveness of higher education institutions' internal quality assurance in relation to the standards described in Part 1 of the revised ESG.

### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

- *For evaluation of study programmes*

Standard 4.8 ('Self-evaluation procedures and follow-up') requires a formal structure to be put in place, e.g., Advisory Board or equivalent body to deal with the quality of the programmes. In addition, the standard requires that arrangements for collection and analysis of feedback from stakeholders are put in place in order to ensure continuous improvement of programmes. From the meetings with HCERES' staff, review experts, and institutions representatives the panel learned that advisory panels have been considered a key element of quality assurance policy at programme level, but proved to be a challenge for some institutions to establish them.

- *For evaluation of foreign programmes*

Under area 1, dealing with educational rationale/project of the programme, the standard requires the institution to describe what systems or structures has the institution set up to support the programme and particularly, what programme specific quality assurance system

was set up. Under area 5 (programme management) the internal quality assurance system is in focus and include a number of specific questions that need to be answered, concerning the programme evaluation strategy, student feedbacks arrangements, teachers' activity reports, allocation of responsibilities for quality and involvement of different partners (students, teachers, administrative staff, professional branches, graduates, etc.) in the internal quality assurance processes — including surveys on graduates and questions regarding employability. Plans and measures for programme evaluation are also targeted by the standards, together with any follow-up to ensure that the findings of these evaluations are taken on board by the programme.

- *For evaluation of institutions*

Under area 6 of HCERES' standards for institutional evaluation, the implementation of general quality assurance policy is in the focus of agency's panels. The institutions are expected to have their quality policy formally approved, published and shared by the staff. In addition, arrangements for monitoring of all activities need to be in place. Implementation of corrective actions is included as important element of an internal quality assurance system. From its meetings with agency staff, evaluated institutions and panels, the review panel learned that the formal organisation of quality assurance systems in universities and other higher education institutions has been at an early stage. The panel hopes that with the revised HCERES' standards, explicitly requiring from institutions to have formally approved quality assurance policies, this situation will start gradually changing. The panel believes there is an opportunity for HCERES to initiate discussion on possible incentives for good quality provision in order to find effective ways for encouraging institutions to systematically approach their internal quality.

- *For evaluation of foreign institutions*

HCERES' standard 5 is dealing with internal quality assurance policy, namely requires that institution has "a formally defined and established internal quality assurance system that ensures effective continuous improvement".

- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*

There is no specific requirement for internal quality assurance policy in general, although a policy regarding the use of students' feedback is required under the field of doctoral student supervision. Among the criteria under standard 1.1., dealing with the organisation of the doctoral school, several quality assurance aspects are addressed explicitly: The Doctoral school has visible and effective internal and external communication tools (from the recruitment of doctoral students to the employment of doctoral graduates). It undertakes regular self-evaluations and uses the analysis of results to improve its general operation.

## 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

- *For evaluation of study programmes*

A set of standards under field 3 (programme teaching structure) address this area by focusing the external quality assurance on programme components, mechanisms and tools which allow students to be more competitive on the labour market. Standards 3.4., 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 deal with programme intended learning outcomes and mechanisms for support of students' progress, transfer and completion, provide them with employability skills like foreign language and digital competences, etc. However, the panel could not find any explicit requirements for the use of learning outcomes approach in the design of programmes, nor for the involvement of students and other stakeholders in the design process. From its meetings with evaluated institutions, experts from the panels and agency staff, the review panel came to the conclusion that external quality assurance activities do not apply to programmes' formal internal approval processes at institutional level. Discussions with institutions about their criteria for programme approval are also missing.

- *For evaluation of foreign programmes*

One of the standards addresses the programme content description in connection with the skills that the students must acquire (learning outcomes) and the way the programme objectives are set in terms of learning outcomes, so that they can meet the requirements of the subject/discipline and, where necessary, the line of work. It also requires the institution to show how the structure, content and educational approach of the programme correspond to the objectives set in terms of learning outcomes.

- *For evaluation of institutions*

The SAR considers the standard dealing with the field of teaching policy to be the one addressing the design and approval of programmes. However, the panel's understanding is that the focus of the ESG standard is on the policies and procedures for design and approval of programmes at central level of the institution which ensure that all programmes should be referenced to the EHEA framework of qualifications, provide mechanisms for involvement of students and employers in the design of programmes, provide support and assistance to programme development teams in implementing learning outcomes approach when designing and updating the programmes, etc.

- *For evaluation of foreign institutions*

The guidelines 2.1 and 2.2. to the standard for teaching policy and strategies focus on the need for the alignment of programme design with the intended and achieved learning outcomes.

- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*

One of the sub-criteria under the standard 1.1. requires the doctoral school to have a policy in view of promoting the doctoral programme and improving the employment perspectives of doctoral graduates within a local, national and international perspective. Under field 2, dealing with the supervision of doctoral students, two components of standard 2.1. address the programme design: The school provides its doctoral students with theoretical and practical training to prepare them for integration into society; It develops a range of disciplinary/scientific and professional programmes in partnership with research units and the Doctoral College/Institute (or other local player) in addition to complementary actions (Doctoriales, Journées de l'ED conferences, etc.) with explicit procedures on their access and validation.

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

- *For evaluation of study programmes*

The part of the standard dealing with the implementation of student-centred learning and teaching is addressed by HCERES' standard 3.1 (programme adaptation to different learning pathways); 3.5 (the use of innovative methods and the role of digital technologies); 4.4. (Skills acquisition monitoring to help students record their new knowledge and skills). The attention to the institutions' procedures for dealing with students' complaints, however, is not properly addressed. The second part of the standard, related to the consideration of assessment processes, regulations and procedures is addressed by HCERES' standard 4.3. (Student assessment methods are appropriate and communicated to students).

- *For evaluation of institutions*

Several HCERES' standards address the implementation of student-centred learning. Standard 3.1.1 relates to institution's policies that respect diversity of students and provide tools for success, particularly for students with special needs. Standard 2.2.2 expects institutions to adopt teaching methods that are flexible and adjust to different audiences. Standard 3.1.2. requires institutions to ensure career guidance and employment opportunities for students. The SAR points to standard 3.2., where institutions are expected to recognise students' involvement in the teaching policy. However, no mention is made whether the institution « encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher ». The panel observation was that the assessment of

students is not considered and the panel suggest the agency to find appropriate way to integrate this component of the ESG 1.3 into its institutional evaluation methodology.

- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*

A number of standards and their components for external quality assurance of doctoral school are focused on student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. Standard 1.2 addresses the need for a thesis charter, which defines the mutual commitments/ responsibilities between doctoral students and thesis supervisors. Standard 2.1 requires from schools to implement procedures for monitoring the progress of doctoral students, taking account of the results/outputs from their research projects, e.g., publications, employment prospects, etc. The same standard requires also mechanisms to be put in place in order to prevent student drop out, such as scientific advisory committee, viva voce defence/s during the programme, appointment of tutors or advisors, appointment of mediator in the event of conflict. Standard 2.2 requires that explicit thesis defence criteria are established and communicated to doctoral students and their supervisors.

- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*

At institutional level, HCERES' criterion 2.2 'Testing acquired knowledge and learning outcomes' expects from institutions to have methods for testing acquired knowledge, which are implemented and made public; as well as to apply examination procedures. In addition, programmes, teaching methods and evaluation systems used should be relevant and meet the expected learning outcome objectives. Criterion 3.3 addresses student support services to assist in their learning and foster success in studies. At programme level, the evaluation checks how the assistance offered to students contributes to their achievement of intended learning outcomes (3.5) and takes account of the set criteria for assessment and marking of student achievement (4.1, 4.2). The evaluation guide asks institutions to provide clear specification of their assessment and validation rules and procedures and relate them to the programme objectives and planned learning outcomes (1.6). In addition, they have to demonstrate, how the structure, content and educational approach of the programme correspond to the objectives set in terms of learning outcomes.

#### *1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification*

- *For evaluation of study programmes*

HCERES' standards under area 3 address programme recruitment methods, refresher courses and systems, transfer opportunities and any other systems to support student careers guidance and success in the chosen pathway for study. Attention is paid to the programme arrangements for employability of graduates. The panel found that the scope of activities, covered by the standards in this area need further development in terms of the expectations to institutions to put in place mechanisms for consistent implementation of their access and admission policies, processes and criteria.

- *For evaluation of institutions*

Institutional regulations covering all phases of the student 'life cycle' are addressed by area 3 (Student success), standard 3.1.1 states that 'academic pathways from career guidance to employment are organised and adapted to students' needs in order to help them succeed'. HCERES' standard calls for consideration of institutions actions to help school leavers choose a programme for their study through providing them with presentation of the programmes, knowledge and skills and the careers targeted. The panel thinks that this arrangement does not send a clear and explicit message to institutions that they should have implemented admission procedures that are fit for purpose, and their access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and transparently (by providing induction to the institution and programme). Other components of the HCERES' standard, dealing with 'policy for welcoming', 'potential recruitment tools', 'recruitment policy in particular for foreign students', 'policies for detecting difficulties, providing tools for success and supporting various

types of students' are lacking clarity as to what the institutions are expected to demonstrate within this area. Therefore, the panel believes that the language of standard's description and the guidelines need re-wording in order to be more easily understood by institutions, their staff and students, as well as by other external stakeholders.

- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
Standard 1.2 considers whether doctoral student services enable the various students (French/foreign doctoral students, employed/non-salaried students, etc.) to integrate quickly and effectively into their school, research unit and institution. The employment of doctoral graduates is one of the main criteria for the evaluation of doctoral school. However, the panel finds this arrangement to be too general. In addition, many important aspects of doctoral student admission, recognition and certification are left outside the external quality assurance for doctoral schools.
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*  
At institutional level, the panel found several criteria through which the agency addresses institution's regulations regarding the student life-cycle. Student selection and admission mechanisms (3.2.) include consideration of (a) whether there exist criteria defining the admission profiles that correspond to programme requirements and the objectives for each programme; (b) Whether admissions' policy takes into account the initial stream and level of students and, if necessary, provides academic upgrading courses; (c) whether selection and admission criteria are clear and publicly available. Student assessment regulations are addressed by criterion 2.2., where testing methods are defined and made published together with the examination and grading system. At programme level, the evaluation checks what kind of admission system the institution applies, particularly with regard to international students (1.10), what are the admission criteria to the programme, how the students are selected and what kind of mechanism exist for validation of their prior learning (3.2).

### 1.5 Teaching staff

- *For evaluation of study programmes*  
HCERES' standards 4.1 (Teaching team) and part of 4.4 (teaching staff trained to help students maintain their skills portfolio) addresses the competence, role and responsibilities of the staff involved in the teaching of the programme. However, little attention is paid to arrangements for providing supportive environment to the teaching competence of staff, as well as to the regular appraisal of teaching staff. The panel learned from the meetings with HCERES' staff that appraisal of university professors is performed by an external centralised body and, therefore, were not considered.
- *For evaluation of institutions*  
HCERES evaluates staff recruitment policies of higher education institutions with a view to providing the link between teaching and research. Standard 2.3.2 addressed this aspect. Standards 6.1.3 and 6.3.1 point to the need for providing training opportunities to the teaching staff in the use of digital technologies. HCERES' evaluation of research units is also relevant for the quality assurance of teaching staff, but this activity is not included in the terms of reference for this review.
- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
External quality assurance activities for doctoral schools consider the need for implementation of ethical standards that would govern the relationships between students and supervisors, and require from institutions to define and communicate the responsibilities of supervisors in the process of doctoral training. However, the panel thinks that HCERES' standards do not explicitly address quality assurance of staff involved in the supervision of doctoral students.
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*

At institutional level staff recruitment policy is attended by criterion 2.4., where the link between teaching and research is considered. Human resource management criterion (4.1) considers whether the institution's selection and recruitment mechanisms meet the requirements for ensuring the quality of study programmes. At programme level, the panel could not identify any particular external quality assurance activities that address the teaching staff. According to the panel, the evaluation procedures aimed at foreign institutions and programmes fail to address processes that set conditions for recognising and supporting teaching competence.

#### *1.6 Learning resources and student support*

- *For evaluation of study programmes*  
HCERES' standards under area 2 (Position in its environment) and 3 (Programme structure and organisation) address systematically the external quality assurance of learning resources and student support.
- *For evaluation of institutions*  
HCERES evaluates learning resources and student support at institutional level through several standards. Standard 2.2.3 explicitly addresses effective organisation of student support services at all levels of the institution. It further determines that the human, material and financial resources are allocated in line with transparent criteria, which are consistent with the institution's strategy and the institution has means for monitoring this activity. HCERES addresses student support through policies for detecting difficulties, providing tools for success and supporting the various types of Students. Standard 3.1.1 covers this area and also requires that these policies need to be 'defined and implemented'.
- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
Standard 1.1 requires from doctoral schools to provide human and material resources relevant to their profile. Standard 1.2 addresses the services to doctoral students, which the school should provide to integrate them effectively into the school. Other support activities and facilities that the schools are expected to organise include access of doctoral students to the scientific community outside the school, as well as to the world of business.
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*  
Learning resources and student support are addressed at both institutional (standard 4) and programme level evaluation (3.4; 3.5 and 5.4).

#### *1.7 Information management*

- *For evaluation of study programmes*  
HCERES' standards 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7. address programme input and output data management, including the arrangements for graduate employment statistics.
- *For evaluation of institutions*  
HCERES' standard 6.3.3. deals with the information management system of the institution, which is regarded as 'a quality assurance policy tool'. The standard sets broad expectations to this system, which includes different types of applications, databases and indicators to meet its management needs.
- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
Standard 3.2. specifies the type of data doctoral schools are required to collect, analyse and disseminate for their proper management.
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*  
HCERES' standard 5.3. specifies the requirements to the institution's information system. This includes the collection and analysis of teacher, student, alumni, and employer feedback information. At programme level, HCERES checks the programme level information system (1.12) and looks into the information about the students and alumni.

### 1.8 Public information

- *For evaluation of study programmes*  
HCERES' programme standard 4.6 requires from institutions to regularly update and publish information about the programme performance, including the pass rates, proportion of graduates who continue their studies and graduate employment rates.
- *For evaluation of institutions*  
HCERES' standard 1.4 explicitly addresses institution's communication policy, which must provide students with information. Standard 2.2.4 explicitly requires that institution provide full, accurate and reliable information on programmes, which is published regularly.
- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
Standard 1.2 requires from the doctoral school to implement suitable communication tools to ensure that doctoral students are aware of and have access to administrative procedures (registration for the entrance exam, enrolment, first day of classes, etc.), research activities in the broad sense (integration in a research unit, knowledge of skills developed in other partner research organisations, etc.), scientific and/or professional events (Journées de l'ED, training programmes, lecture series, etc.).
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*  
HCERES' addresses foreign institution's policies on publishing information about their activities through the standard on 'social responsibility', which addresses also the obligation for making information about programmes and other related activities publicly available. The panel found the area of public information to be underdeveloped in external evaluation process designed for foreign programmes.

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

- *For evaluation of study programmes*  
This standard is addressed by HCERES' standard 4.8 (Self-evaluation procedures and follow-up), which requires institutions to set up a formal process of programme internal evaluation, with a formal structure, i.e. the Advisory board. The standard also expect students' and graduate' feedbacks to find place in the process.
- *For evaluation of institutions*  
Standard 6.2.1 explicitly requires from institutions to include monitoring as essential part of their internal quality assurance system. It further specifies that the institution should organise reliable and long-term monitoring of the results of its activities, including monitoring of the employment of graduates.
- *For evaluation of doctoral schools*  
Standard 2.1. requires from doctoral schools to have in place mechanisms for monitoring the progress of doctoral research (programme) and mechanisms are implemented to prevent student failure which may result in his/her dropping out of the doctoral programme.
- *For evaluation of foreign institutions and programmes*  
At institutional level, standard 5, dealing with internal QA systems addresses mechanisms for approval, control and periodic review of qualifications. At programme level, HCERES looks into arrangements for regular student feedback on their courses and the 'corrective actions' taken to address any issues.

### 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

HCERES' evaluation of programmes, doctoral schools and institutions takes place every five years and is a legal prerequisite for the supervising ministry accreditation of programmes and for the 5-years' contracts with higher education institutions. The 5-years' cycle of reviews is determined by law and HCERES' external quality assurance processes are designed to ensure that each institution shall undergo external review at programme and institution level.

### *Summary*

Following the standards and guides, published by HCERES, as well as the information gathered from panel experts, institutions and evaluation departments' staff, the panel came to conclusion that at programme and institutional level the external quality assurance activities address to large extent the Part 1 of the ESG. HCERES mapped its evaluation criteria against the 10 standards in ESG Part 1 and the panel was pleased to find out that the agency revised its evaluation frameworks as a result of the mapping exercise. In the revised standards a proper attention is provided to the development and implementation of HEI's internal quality assurance systems. Furthermore, HCERES made efforts to develop standards particularly addressing the employability of students, including doctoral students. The panel was impressed by the volume and speed of work being done in the relatively short period after the appointment of the new HCERES' Board and President to prepare a revised version of standards and guidelines for different processes. At the same time the panel thinks that there is a room for improvements. This particularly concerns the evaluation standards addressing institutional arrangements for student access and admission, which are not clear enough to orientate HEI's what is expected from them to demonstrate in this area. In addition, HCERES' standards for evaluation of foreign programmes and institutions failed to properly address the need for publicly available information on programmes and degrees for local students. Internal quality assurance activities aimed at quality assurance of teaching staff are found to be insufficient, or absent in the case of foreign institutions and programmes.

In addition, the panel was not able to consider how effective was the implementation of some of the positive changes that took place in the recent revision of HCERES' evaluation criteria, reflected in the evaluation documentation. This was due to the fact that report findings of the last evaluation campaign of 2016-2017 were still under preparation by the time of the site visit. Within this context, the Panel believes that in order to ensure consistent implementation of the 10 quality assurance standards in all its different evaluations HCERES needs to make standard's description and the guidelines more explicit and easily understood by institutions, their staff and students, as well as by other external stakeholders. The panel comments are intended to focus HCERES' attention to some points for improvement, but these are not meant to diminish the overall achievement of the agency in addressing the ESG Part 1 in its evaluations as a whole.

### **Panel recommendations**

HCERES should 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 1. 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 consider 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.

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

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

### Standard:

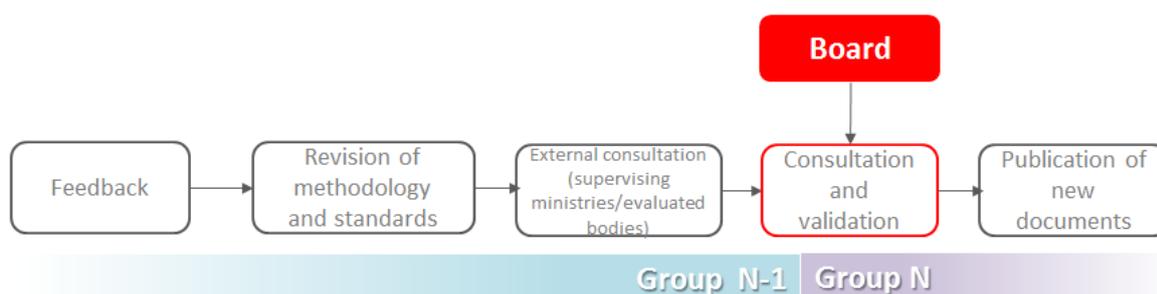
External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

**2010 review recommendation:** Procedures for evaluating Bachelor's and Master's degrees should be revised to bring them more in line with the ESG requirements (2010, p.37)

### Evidence

Following the SAR, HCERES designs and improves its methodologies through a process based on collection and analysis of internal and external feedbacks. After each evaluation campaign, a process of sending questionnaires, gathering and analysing feedback from expert panels, evaluated institutions and supervising ministries takes place. The findings from these feedbacks are used to identify any gaps and issues and revise the methodology and standards. In addition, the feedback provided by the institutions on the findings in the panel reports is also analysed in order to feed into the reflection on methodology. Proposed improvements are consulted with the stakeholders before being validated by HCERES' Board and published on the website.

Diagram illustrating the process, directly extracted from the SAR:



The panel identified numerous changes in the organisation of HCERES' external evaluation processes and standards which have taken place between the two recent campaigns, thus confirming the effectiveness of design and update processes used by the agency. For example, the evaluation of Bachelor, Master and Professional Bachelor programmes has been re-organised into a single procedure for the entire study field, which included site visit, thus addressing the recommendation of the 2010 panel review.

The objectives of different external evaluation procedures used by the agency are defined, together with the standards and guides to institutions and evaluation panels. As pointed in the SAR, through its regularly performed analyses of feedback, the agency ensures that its methodology for external quality assurance is fit for purpose of supporting institutions' development and improvement, while at the same time providing independent evaluation of the way they perform their missions to decision-making bodies and other stakeholders. However, the documentation related to different processes represents different level of guidance and support to institutions, due to the different level of elaboration of components and details. For some processes much greater attention is given to the definition of the standards and their interpretation, while for others the focus is on the organisation of the self-evaluation and external evaluation process. HCERES has developed specific standards and criteria addressing the institution's and programme's arrangements for improving the employability of students. The standards have been developed in comparison with the ESG Part 1, but further mapping against the 10 standards could help address properly the gaps and improve in quality assurance. Moreover, institutions are not obliged to take on board all the standards in their self-

evaluation and can decide which of them to address. The panel got the impression that agency approach to evaluation of individual entities is primarily concerned with evaluation of their policies in the context of evaluation of the larger grouping and the 'site' policy. Consequently, it has limited prospects to get beneath the surface and investigate into the detailed mechanisms driving the quality of teaching and learning opportunities, created for students. This was confirmed to some extent by the students at their meeting with the panel, where they reflected on the French quality assurance system as one geared more to research than teaching and expressed hopes that HCERES may be more concerned with teaching.

HCERES also organises forums for consultations with stakeholders before the start of every new evaluation campaign. Such forums provide opportunities to present the new developments and share experience and good practices among institutions. In addition, the agency sends out letters inviting ministries, business and students to comment on new proposals. From its meetings with the institutions', employers', students' and ministries' representatives the panel could confirm that they have had opportunity to meet and discuss with the agency the developments and issues of quality assurance processes, applied by HCERES. In addition, the agency invited feedback on its self-assessment report by sending letters to various stakeholders. HCERES received a strong support for its activities from all the parties.

### **Analysis**

HCERES established a robust process of collection and analysis of feedback on numerous evaluations it applies, which forms a powerful analytical basis for the design and regular update of its methodology. Through this way, the agency ensures that its external quality assurance procedures are developed to fit declared goals and objectives. It also organises forums and initiates consultations with stakeholders to further adjust its working methods and legitimize its evaluation procedures and standards. The format of these forums, however, needs to be carefully considered as the panel learned from some university representatives that they have been too crowded to enable constructive dialogue. Panel members also observed that HCERES did not keep records from its public consultations with stakeholders and when considering changes in its methodology mainly relies on its formal channels for feedback through the online questionnaires.

HCERES also made efforts to integrate its guides and standards and present them in coherent documentation. This, however, did not apply at the same extent to all of its evaluation processes. Furthermore, it streamlined its evaluation scheme at programme level and reduced the burden to institutions. The agency revised its standards with a view of strengthening the internal quality assurance systems and measures for improved employability of students, including PhD students.

During the site visit, the panel witnessed a broad support and appreciation of HCERES' efforts to improve its operations and methodology taking account of stakeholders' views. It explored various ways of interaction with stakeholders to inform its decisions for change and established fruitful collaboration with ministries and other agencies, employers' organisations, as well as institutions and students. The agency should take forward this broad support by actively involving different stakeholder groups in the process of development and improvement of its operations, thus enhancing their credibility and legitimacy.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends the agency effort to develop standards and criteria for institutional and programme evaluation addressing the employability of students, including doctoral students.

### Panel recommendations

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

### Panel conclusion: fully 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

**2010 review recommendation:** to set up follow-up procedures to enable the agency to assess the measures taken following its evaluations quickly.” (2010, p. 37); to revise its programme evaluations procedure and include site visits to improve reliability of judgements related to the quality and value of degrees (2010, p. 33).

### Evidence

HCERES applies a three-step process for its external quality assurance activities, which include self-evaluation report, external review with a site-visit, and publication of the evaluation report. HCERES’ external quality assurance processes are defined in a ‘repository’ of procedures, standards and guides, prepared for each type of evaluation as a separate set of documents and published on the website. They include the requirement for development and submission of self-evaluation report with attachments, which are standardised in the form of templates or questionnaires.

Upon submission of reports, HCERES nominates experts and appoints the panels, which produce an external evaluation report. Panels for institutional evaluations include a student member, while for **evaluation of programmes and doctoral schools students are not involved**. Though, a PhD graduate is involved in the panels for doctoral schools. The agency appoints one scientific delegate and one member of administrative staff of the relevant evaluation department to brief and support each panel and ensure the consistency of interpretation of the standards and procedures.

Panel’s evaluation process includes a site-visit, which until recently was not required as part of the programme evaluation. Institutional evaluation panels’ site visits are supported by interview guide, also included in the Handbook. The Handbook was not found on the agency website by the panel.

Before the publication of the final report on agency website, the institution concerned receives a draft and provides comments. Evaluation reports follow a template for programme evaluation panels and guidelines in the alleged expert’s Handbook for the institutional evaluation panels. It should be pointed out, however, that HCERES uses flexible approach to the self-evaluation reports, and therefore the reports of the experts’ panels, where not all standards may be included. Before publication, each report is edited by an editing unit, which ensures the consistency of structure and style of the evaluation reports. The analysis of feedbacks collected from panels through a standardised questionnaire provides ground for the agency to verify the usefulness of its processes and adjust its methodology.

The same processes described above apply for cross-border evaluation of institutions and programmes abroad.

The Review Panel studied copies of evaluation reports related to institutional and programme evaluations, both at home and abroad, where members could verify broadly the standard model followed by HCERES, as described above.

The panel observed that HCERES processes do not include a structured follow-up and discussed the issue with the agency and external experts during the site visit. It was clarified that due to prolonged evaluation process, which currently includes the evaluation of sites, institutions have a limited time-window of just two years before it starts the preparations for the next evaluation. The agency, upon discussion with stakeholder institutions, came to conclusion that it might be more relevant to include a progress report as a section in the next self-evaluation report, which together with a SWOT analysis could play the same role as a structured follow-up. The other reason for this decision had been the overburden of institutions with the external evaluation activities. Following the meetings with the staff and management of HCERES' evaluation departments and evaluated institutions, the panel could confirm their high workload as well as the prolonged process of succeeding evaluations at different levels. However, this view was not fully shared by external experts, who expressed a wish to know, what institutions do with their recommendations?

### **Analysis**

The panel found that recently HCERES made considerable efforts to strengthen its external evaluation processes by providing institutions and panels with more detailed, clear and documented information and guidance at each stage of the process. The agency follows uniform process of evaluation for all types, which includes self-evaluation, external evaluation and reporting phase. Through various instruments it achieved a good level of consistency of its reports and uses feedbacks from its review panels to improve all its processes, procedures and standards.

However, HCERES processes are incomplete, as they do not include structured follow-up to check how the institution responds to the findings and recommendations in panels' reports. Certain aspects of its processes need coherence and accuracy, evident from the different approach the agency applies to the development of different types of evaluations, where for institutional ones it carries site-visits, while not for programmes; includes students in the former, but not in the latter; develops expert's Handbook for institutional evaluation and interview guides, but not for other evaluation processes. In addition, HCERES' flexible approach to the use of standards by its expert panels for programme and institutional evaluations could compromise the consistency and comparability of reports. The panel should point out, however, that it could not investigate sufficient number of reports to make a firm conclusion due to the lack of copies available in English. The panel concluded that HCERES evaluation processes broadly meet the standard, but more work is needed to properly address issues of completeness and coherence. In the area of follow-up, it does not meet expectations.

### **Panel recommendations:**

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

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

### **Panel conclusion: partially 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).

### Evidence

For its evaluations, HCERES appoints panels of experts, selected from a pool consisting of a wide range of experts with different perspectives: academics, employers and practitioners, as well as students. 95 % of the pool of over 18 000 experts' profiles consist of institutions' representatives and academics. The SAR indicates that HCERES' President appoints the experts 'in line with criteria and procedures', approved by the Board. The panel could not find clear and explicit criteria for the nomination and appointment of experts, published on the website. But following the SAR and from its meetings with HCERES' staff from evaluation departments, experts from the panels and students it could figure out that the process usually starts with submission of a motivation letter and CV by the candidate, either upon invitation from HCERES or voluntarily. Either before, or after inclusion into the pool of experts, the applicant undergoes training or briefing. Then the scientific delegate, with the help of the administrative staff member from the relevant department are searching through the experts' profiles in HCERES' electronic database and propose to the Head of department potential candidates for the particular panel, which upon approval are appointed by the President. The President can delegate its power for the appointment of experts to the head of relevant evaluation department. HCERES pays attention to the selection of individual experts and ensures that their expert profile is relevant to the type of evaluation (institutional or programme), the profile of institution or subject and the area to be covered by the standards. The composition of the panels and their chairs is discussed beforehand with the institution undergoing the evaluation, which is able to report any conflict of interest.

The panels are created ad-hoc for each evaluation and are made up of independent from the evaluated institution experts, selected from the agency pool of experts. HCERES selects its experts in line with a published Evaluation Charter (SAR, D3), which has been recently renewed. The panel chair and the experts in the panel are appointed by the head of evaluation department concerned. Their roles and obligations are regulated by internal protocol, the "Expert Status" (SAR, D5). Remuneration of experts' work conforms to a government decree. Panels of experts carry out evaluations of programmes, research units and institutions, based on analysis of information collected and factual arguments. The composition of a review panel varies, depending on the type of evaluation: usually two experts are involved in evaluation of individual bachelor, professional bachelor and master programmes, five – in the evaluation of doctoral schools, where one member of the panel is a young doctoral graduate, and 6-8 experts form the institutional evaluation panel, including a student. Following the replacement of programme-by-programme evaluation with the evaluation of disciplinary 'field' with all programmes at different levels in it, the size of the programme evaluation panel depends on the number of programmes in the field, offered by the particular institution.

Regarding the involvement of students as experts, the panel discussed at a meeting with panel experts the lack of student's representative in programme evaluations. The panel review members were told that it was very hard to recruit students due to their need for extra time to carry out evaluation alongside their studies. However, the review team could not understand why students can be involved in the work of the Board of HCERES, where they can take part in decisions concerning methodology, but are not equally trusted to take part in all the evaluation panels. In addition, their involvement in the institutional evaluation panel is rather shallow, since the student participates in discussions only. After discussing its concerns over this issue during meetings with HCERES' staff and management, the panel was pleased to hear that students' active involvement is going to take place in the near future

and that the agency plans to form a separate pool of student experts, which is going to be frequently updated.

The panel learned from its meetings during the site visit that HCERES involves international experts in the panels, particularly for its reviews of research units and doctoral schools. The SAR indicates that in institutional evaluation panels there is a provision to include a member from abroad (SAR, p. 23), but the panel could not find documentary evidence for a consistent approach to the involvement of international experts in all types of evaluations. For reviews across the border, the agency does not have a rule to include experts from various national origins, but the panel was given a few examples (e.g., a recent review in Armenia) where the panel included international experts. The panel got the impression that this opportunity is rarely used in practice and attributed the shortage of international experts in the agency work to the absence of a formal procedure for their recruitment and appointment. Members of the panel learned about the plans for development of a formal process for recruitment of experts and scientific delegates and organisation of recruitment campaigns on an annual basis. These plans are also included in the agency strategic plan for the next period.

HCERES ensures that evaluation experts receive appropriate briefing before each assignment. In addition, there are plans for development and implementation of appropriate training for scientific delegates and support staff, based on exchange of good practices with other evaluation institutions at home and abroad. These plans are included as a priority in the strategic plan.

The role and responsibilities of experts, their code of conduct and the organisation of their work are regulated by the Evaluation Charter and the Expert Status. HCERES pays close attention to avoid conflicts of interest of experts, based on a procedure for declaration of interests signed by every expert. The panel considered the declaration of interests for the last 5 years as important but insufficient mechanism for ensuring the independence of experts. HCERES could strengthen the procedure by providing explicit definition of what constitutes a conflict of interest in HCERES' evaluations and a guidance, how to detect and avoid different types of interests. Such a procedure should apply to all members of the evaluation panel, including student.

### **Analysis**

HCERES established a large pool of experts with different profiles, from which it selects and composes its panels. The experts' pool includes predominantly academics, while the students and employer representatives are limited, which reduces the agency's ability to recruit them in the panels. Through its evaluation policy, developed and published in the Evaluation Charter, the agency ensures that its experts are evaluating institutions and programmes following the principles of integrity, impartiality, equal treatment and respect of the entities under review. The roles and responsibilities of Panel chairs and experts are defined and documented in a statute for Experts, namely Expert Status, and each expert is familiarised with it before being assigned to a specific evaluation. Panels are always briefed before the start of the external evaluation process.

Although the composition of expert panels may vary, HCERES established a common pattern for selection and composition of experts, which includes their briefing, their going through the non-conflict of interest procedure and consent of the institution under review. However, the review panel found that HCERES' panels of experts do not include students, except for institutional evaluations. Panels' briefings take place before the evaluation process and are focused on explanation of agency's standards and procedures and guidance on drafting the panel's report. Although relevant, they are not enough to explore in greater detail evaluation practices, reflect on lessons learned from previous panels' reviews and, therefore, to provide appropriate skills and competences of the experts to perform their duties, especially for student experts.

HCERES procedure for non-conflict of interest is based on a formal declaration of interests for the last 5 years. The panel already discussed under ESG 3.3, how the agency could further develop and improve its non-conflict of interest's procedure (see p. 23) to ensure effective identification of potential conflict. In addition, the panel believes the agency's process for recruitment of experts would benefit from involving international experts in all of its reviews, particularly for evaluations abroad.

#### **Panel recommendations**

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.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially 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.

#### **Evidence**

HCERES' self-assessment report established that the criteria for evaluation judgements are explicitly stated in the methodologies for different type of evaluations and published on the website. The different evaluation protocols are developed and updated by the relevant evaluation departments before every evaluation campaign, discussed with institutions and other stakeholders. Following their approval by the Board, they are published on the website before the start of campaign. Consequently, each evaluation department produces different set of standards, sub-standards, criteria and sub-criteria, together with description of their process and procedures.

The panel reviewed the protocols following the indication in the SAR that the criteria for outcomes are provided below each standard. The outcomes criteria for institutional evaluation, published in "Standards for evaluation of institutions" are set in two groups: general and supplementary criteria. The general criteria include: consistency, effectiveness and efficiency, comprehensibility, and relevance. The complementary criteria include: efficacy, participation and tenability. The panels are expected to apply these criteria in the context of the standard, which is considered, implying that the panel experts should decide whether for a particular standard the 'consistency' criterion should apply as most appropriate, or a different one/s. The panel considered the freedom, which enjoys the panel to make such decisions leaves a room for interpretations and undermines the consistent application of criteria by different panels. The criteria for judging the programmes are addressed in the Programme Evaluation Form, which supplements the standards and guides for programme evaluation. The form provides clear guidance to the panel experts on how each standard should be interpreted. In the final part of the evaluation form, the panel is asked to provide information on the programme strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement. The protocol for the doctoral school evaluation provides criteria for interpretation under each standard, but actually these are not criteria

for the judgements to which the panel arrives upon consideration of the standards, which is the requirement of this ESG.

For evaluation of foreign institutions, the panel could not identify explicit criteria for decisions in the standards for evaluation of foreign institutions. Concerning the evaluation of foreign programmes, the outcomes criteria include: programme is well structured; the programme has been (or will be- in the case of ex-ante evaluation) correctly run; the learning outcomes correspond to the final qualification. The protocol also defines the types of accreditation proposals which the panel has to formulate (e.g., for full accreditation, conditional accreditation, or no accreditation), but these are not explicitly related to the three criteria mentioned. During the site visit, the panel found an example in which the Agency accepted to «accredit » a foreign programme itself, which disagreed with the protocol, suggesting the agency can only send its proposals for accreditation. In the discussion with the department for European and International affairs, the panel pointed to the fact that the accreditation decision was taken without specifying under which standards that « decision » was made. Moreover, as it was confirmed by the Ministry of Education representatives at the meeting with the panel, HCERES does not have accreditation powers. It was clear for the panel, that this accreditation decision may have encouraged foreign students and publics to believe that the programme concerned is in fact fully accredited in France, which was not the case. The use of the term “accreditation” is normally understood as an official recognition by the entity that took the decision, under the legal framework applicable to this entity; if that is not the case, the decision itself, since it will be published, should clarify the meaning of “accreditation” if this term is kept, e.g., by reference to the standards that were applied.

### **Analysis**

Based on the evidence from different evaluation protocols, the panel came to conclusion that they provide limited information, which is insufficient to form a strong basis for consistent application of outcomes criteria by different panels and by the self-evaluation teams from institutions. Prompted by the information during the site visit, that the Ministry closed down one doctoral school based on HCERES’ evaluation report, the panel reviewed the protocol for doctoral schools and was particularly interested to find out, how the experts’ team arrives at a conclusion leading to the action of the Ministry. **Based on the description of the standards and the criteria clarifying how the standards should be interpreted, and the examples provided in the SAR, the panel could not justify, how the agency’s evaluating team arrives to its conclusion about the quality of the doctoral school concerned:** is it an overall judgment, or is it based on calculation of how many standards are satisfied? Considering the transition from programme- by- programme evaluation to subject level evaluation, which HCERES just started to implement, the review panel would like to point to the need for development of criteria for the outcomes of subject level evaluations. The panel also considered the protocol for evaluation of foreign programmes as presenting fragmented information about the outcomes criteria believes that there is a need to explicitly link the three outcomes criteria with the standards for programme evaluation. In addition, the “accreditation” status given to foreign programmes and institutions was misleading and should be avoided by HCERES. At the same time, the standards under which the process took place should be clearly stated (and published by the foreign institution, at HCERES’ explicit request), in order to avoid any misinterpretation.

With a view of these issues, the panel concluded, that HCERES needs to put more efforts to refine its criteria for outcomes or judgements in programme (study field) evaluation, doctoral schools’ evaluation and evaluation of foreign institutions, so that different panels and different evaluated entities could implement them consistently.

**Panel recommendations:**

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

**Panel conclusion: partially 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**

Following the SAR, the panel established that the 2010 review proposal on the possible inclusion of institution's feedback to the report has been addressed by including an additional step in the process of evaluation report's production. This possibility now applies to all the procedures. At present, the evaluated institution can react to any factual error in the report, before it is finalised. Moreover, the agency provides also institutions with opportunity to provide written comments on the final draft, which the agency includes in a separate section of the final report. All reports, related to external quality assurance activities of HCERES at home and abroad are published in full on the website, which the panel could confirm by reviewing reports from programme and institutional evaluations. HCERES' website allows for easy access to the reports via three different methods: by search engine, by selecting from lists of evaluated institutions (at home, French institutions abroad and foreign institutions); and with the help of interactive map. For the purposes of this review, the panel checked three reports: one for institutional evaluation, one for programme evaluation and one for evaluation of foreign institution. Only the last one was available in English.

HCERES established clear report structure for different kinds of its evaluation reports, which cover a common core with introduction to the profile of the institution or programme, followed by the analysis of achievements against each standard and concluding with an outline of strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvements. Evaluation reports of programmes and institutions abroad follow a similar pattern, to provide consistency. The panel considered that, in general, the reports are well structured, with clearly identifiable sections of description of evidence, analysis by the panel of experts, and conclusions and recommendations for improvement. The relevant evaluation department provides guidance to the panels on the report drafting and supports them with report templates. The panel observed, however, that the report template for programme evaluation panels is still based on the former set of 10 standards and needs to be updated.

At the panel interviews with experts, it was clarified they were involved with specific assignments in the production of the reports and also had opportunity to discuss and agree on the final draft. The panel appreciated the strong commitment of HCERES' evaluation departments to ensure the analytical approach of the panels to the report writing through the guidelines they provide in the evaluation Handbook and the programme evaluation forms with comments specifying the structure of each report and the content required for each section. For each panel the relevant evaluation department appoints two members of expert staff to provide practical assistance and facilitation throughout the report- writing process and ensure the quality of reports. In addition, the process of production of the report includes an editorial committee, whose role is to check the style and language of reports and whether the judgments made by the panel have been properly substantiated.

During interviews with higher education institutions, they indicated the importance of the reports for their development, particularly the section dealing with the strengths and weaknesses, and

appreciated the objectivity of the reports. The panel received also very positive accounts on the clarity and usefulness of HCERES' reports from the supervising ministries.

### **Analysis**

HCERES improved the precision of its reports by involving institutions' response to the first draft for comments on factual accuracy.

All reports are fully published on the website, where the agency provides multiple ways for access to the reports. The structure of the reports was further improved by providing each report with a summary of the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement. The clarity and consistency of reports was additionally promoted by the assistance and guidance of a committed expert staff from the evaluation departments, as well as by the report templates provided for different evaluation procedures. However, not all of the report templates are properly updated with the new standards, as is the case with the programme report's template. The panel was satisfied with the analytical nature of the reports, their clarity and consistency and could see that they are well accepted by the institutions and the supervising ministries.

### **Panel conclusion: fully 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.

### **Evidence**

In the 2010 review report, AERES was advised to "look into the prospect of setting up a proper appeal's procedure or bestowing decision-making on the Disputes Committee". Subsequently, efforts have been made to strengthen the complaints policy by drafting a 'complaints system' document, which outlines the complaints' procedure, 'Investigation Procedure', 'Complaints Committee'- an agency's body dealing with complaints, and the way the agency handles the different types of complaints. In addition to this one-page document, the rules for Complaints Committee's operation were developed. Following the complaints' policy and regulations for the committee, the panel established that HCERES handles with two types of complaints: one is dealing with the way the evaluation process was carried out, while the other, associated with the findings in the report and, before the abolishment of the grading system, with grades. An institution can file a written complaint to the President within two months of the publication of the evaluation report. Upon registration of complaint, the institution is notified. Then the complaint is submitted to the committee Chair, who upon investigation considers the resolution of the case with the members. The investigation is guided by 'Investigation Procedure', which describes the main steps to be followed. The Chair may be supported by a secretary to the committee. The committee's opinion is presented to the President, who informs the claimant within two months after the registration of complaint.

According to the SAR, by the end of 2015 a total of 70 complaints have been filed since the establishment of AERES, which represents less than 1% of the evaluations. The membership of the complaints committee includes six members of the Board, one of which chairs the committee, all appointed by the President. The review panel understood during the site visit that the membership of the committee is going to be changed by December, 2016 following the change of the Board in late 2015. The panel, therefore, was not able to test this otherwise well described system of complaints. Concerning the appeals system, the panel got the impression that HCERES is hesitant to establish itself an appeals system due to the fact that the accreditation decisions, as well as decisions for contracting institutions on the basis of HCERES institutional evaluation reports are taken by the supervising

Ministry. Nonetheless, the panel considered the possibility for HCERES to establish a formal contact with the supervising Ministries for discussing various possibilities for linking the agency's complaints procedure with a formal appeals mechanism in order to safeguard the rights of evaluated institutions. At the same time, the panel wishes to point out, that HCERES has additional mechanisms for protecting the interests of those under review, including the possibility to contest the panel members on the grounds of their conflict of interests, or lack of professionalism; or through the possibility for institution to check the report before its final draft, as well as to provide the institution's response to the report findings, which is published in the final report.

### **Analysis**

HCERES has developed and implemented numerous regulations for protecting the interests of institutions undergoing external reviews. It established a complaint procedure, a system for registration of complaints, which allows taking account of them and analyse carefully the information they provide, and a body to deal with complaints. In addition, the agency provides evaluated institutions with opportunity to challenge the panel before its appointment, to check the draft panel report for factual inconsistencies, and to provide written comment on the reports' findings, which are published as part of the report. Through these, HCERES has various channels to systematically check the competence of its experts and adequacy of its activities and decisions. From its meetings with institutions the panel was convinced that every institution under evaluation is able to file a complaint to the agency, either by post or electronically.

However, due to the transition between AERES and HCERES, the panel was not able to test the effectiveness of the complaints procedure. The panel also finds alarming the fact that there has been no proper communication between the supervising ministries and the agency on the matter of complaints and appeals, which leaves the institutions puzzled over whether to file an internal complaint to HCERES, or raise a legal appeal directly with the ministry.

### **Panel recommendations:**

The panel recommends HCERES to coordinate its complaints procedure with accrediting and contracting ministries, in order to promote coherent approach to complaints and appeals.

The panel recommends HCERES 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.

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

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.5

The panel commends the agency for their well-developed software that facilitates exchange of documents and improves the management and transparency of the review process.

### ESG 3.6.

The panel wants to commend HCERES for establishing a clear and robust quality 'cycle', starting with collection and analysis of reliable internal and external feedback, followed by critical reflection on its practices, which finds place in published reports, and ending up with further development and improvement.

### ESG 2.2

The panel commends the agency effort to develop standards and criteria for institutional and programme evaluation addressing the employability of students, including doctoral students.

## OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.3

The panel recommends HCERES 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

HCERES should 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 1. 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

The panel encourages HCERES 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

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

HCERES should 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

The panel recommends HCERES to coordinate its complaints procedure with accrediting and contracting ministries, in order to promote coherent approach to complaints and appeals;

The panel recommends HCERES 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.

### **OVERALL CONCLUSION**

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

The ESG where full compliance have not been achieved are:

2.1; 2.3; 2.4; 2.5; 2.7; 3.4; 3.6

and the agency is recommended to take appropriate action to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to make some general and more detailed suggestions, extending beyond strictly interpreted ESG and/or linking several ESG, which HCERES may wish to consider while reflecting on its further development. Some of them have already been signalled in the previous sections.

Evident from its SAR and this report, HCERES has made a noticeable progress in developing and refining its external quality assurance operations. HCERES staff demonstrated commitment and professionalism in preparing for this review and for the site visit, which have contributed to the development of the agency.

It is clear for the panel, that HCERES operates in a highly regulated framework, where the recent legal changes added more activities to the already complex and busy schedule of work. This sets clear challenges to the overall organisation in terms of agency ability to perform manifold evaluations at multiple sites for a limited time. A clear illustration of these difficulties is the protracted cycle of evaluation works within the format of 'site', which takes almost two years. This is linked to the long line of evaluations that need to be accomplished at different institutions before the final 'site' evaluation get ready. The present legal and regulatory framework puts also certain limitations to the streamlining of quality assurance and public policy evaluations in the context of 'sites'. A noticeable aspect of this is the disproportions between the standards and criteria determining the quality of higher education and research and those aimed at evaluating the various institutional policies. This may promote the fragmentation of quality assurance constituent in the upcoming 'integrated approach' to evaluation of sites and groupings, rather than strenghtening of agency external quality assurance.

The panel was impressed by the significant support HCERES receives not only from its key stakeholders, but also from the Ministry of education and the other supervising ministries, which have recently trusted to the agency their auditing functions.

The panel noted in this review the general issue of the follow-up of HCERES' reviews in relation to the expectations the ESG set for agencies. The lengthy review process may lead the agency to consider alternative ways to resolve the issue, like including a section on follow-up of the previous review recommendations as a requirement to the self-evaluation reports. A follow-up would provide useful information on the operation of the internal quality assurance system and help institutions to meet the new challenges linked to the quality of higher education.

Finally, the review panel wishes to highlight **three areas** where it believed HCERES' approach to quality assurance was commendable:

- The well-developed software that facilitates exchange of documents and improves the management and transparency of the review process.
- The establishment of a clear and robust quality 'cycle', starting with collection and analysis of reliable internal and external feedback, followed by critical reflection on its practices, which finds place in published reports, and ending up with further development and improvement.
- The development of standards and criteria related to the employability of students, including doctoral students.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

| 10.07.2016   |   |  |   |                                    |
|--------------|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| 17.00-19.30  | Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I- Park Suite Hotel, Lobby | Panel, ENQA coordinating secretary   | Consolidate the lines of inquiry and translate these into interview questions for various meetings  | Jean-Marc Rapp, Chair of the Panel |
| 20.00- 22.30 | Dinner for the Panel  |  |   |                                    |
| 11.07.2016   |   |  |   |                                    |
| TIMING       | TOPIC   | PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW  | ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED  | LEAD PANEL MEMBER                  |
| 9.00-9.30    | Review panel's private meeting. Meeting with HCERES liaison Person,                 | Francois Pernot  | Welcome and brief orientation into practicalities by Francois Pernot  | Patricia Georgieva                 |
| 9.30-10.00   | Presentation about the higher education system in which the agency operates         | President- Michel Cosnard  | Introduction to HCERES, any changes after the transformation of AERES and main steps ahead  | Jean-Marc Rapp                     |
| 10.00- 10.45 | Meeting with the President and the Board  | Michel Cosnard, President and Chair of the Board; Denise Pumain, Member; Gilberte Chambaud, Member; Eliane Kotler, Member  | Devison of responsibilities among Board members; Strategic planning and priorities; The role of PMs in the Board; Staff policy; Cross-border HE evaluation; Validation of other agencies; The role of stakeholders. | Jean-Marc Rapp                     |
| 15 minutes   | Review panel's private discussion   |  |   |                                    |
| 11.00- 11.45 | Meeting with representatives from the Senior Management Team                        | Executive Committee- CODIR: Michel Cosnard; J. Marc Geib; Nadine Lavignotte; Pierre Glaudes; Francois Pernot; Ghislaine Filliatreau; Laurence Pinson; Nelly Dupin. | Roles and responsibilities of Executive committee; linkages to the Board, Secretariat and Departments; Transition to integrated evaluations and sites and consequences for QA                                       | Jean-Marc Rapp                     |
| 15 minutes   | Review panel's private discussion   |  |   |                                    |
| 12.00- 12.45 | Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report     | Laurence Pinson, Secretary General<br>Julien Lecocq, Head of Internal Quality Assurance  | The process of drafting the SAR; internal and external consultation.  | Maiki Udam                         |
| 12.45- 13.45 | Lunch (panel only)  |  |   |                                    |
| 13.45- 14.15 | Meeting with Head of the Institutional Evaluation Department                        | Nadine Lavignotte- Director of Department, University of Clermont-Ferrand; Daniele Kerneis- HCERES, Administrative Delegate  | The role of site's evaluation for individual institutions and QA. Benefits for institutions and students from the evaluation of sites and groupings   | Maiki Udam                         |

|                   |   |   |   |                          |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| 14.15- 14.45      | Meeting with Staff of the Institutional evaluation department     | Robert Fouquet- HCERES/University of Saint Etienne; Laurent Daudeville- HCERES/Univ. of Grenoble; Marie Salaun- HCERES-Project Officer; Michelle Houpe- HCERES, Project Officer.  | The role of scientific delegates in the institutional evaluation process; The involvement of stakeholders; HCERES' evaluation of the quality of teaching staff; how the programme design and approval is addressed by HCERES' standards | Maiki Udam               |
| 15 minutes        | Review panel's private discussion                                 |   |   |                          |
| 15.00- 15.45      | Meeting with the Head of the evaluation of programmes department  | J.Marc Geib, Director of Department, University of Lille; Chantal Meilhac, Administrative Delegate  | The process of transition from programme-by-programme evaluations to subject field evaluations; student involvement   | Patricia Georgieva       |
| 15.45- 16.30      | Meeting with the staff of the evaluation of programmes department | Jacqueline Vauzeilles- Scientific Delegate/ University Paris XIII; Thierry Cachot- Scientific Delegate/ University of Nancy; Pierrick Gandolfo- Scientific Delegate, University of Rouen; Pierre Courtellemont- Scientific Delegate, Univ. of La Rochelle; Martin Lebeau- Scientific Delegate, Univ. of Rouen | The expectations from Advisory committees; major changes with the new subject field evaluations, the role of accreditation; the QA focus of reviews, how the agency evaluates the monitoring of programmes.                             | Patricia Georgieva       |
| 15 minutes        | Review panel's private discussion                                 |   |   |                          |
| 16.45- 17.30      | Meeting with the Head of the evaluation of research department    | Pierre Glaudes, Director of Department<br>Nathalie Dospital, Administrative Delegate  | Main responsibilities and link to the integrated report; Interaction with other departments   | Jean-Marc Rapp           |
| 15 minutes        | Review panel's private discussion                                 |   |   |                          |
| 17.45- 18.30      | Meeting with the European and International department            | François Pernot, Director of Department<br>Solange Pisarz, Project Officer  | Main activities; involvement in the CBHE evaluations; marketing strategy, followed; cooperation with local agencies; deviations between CBHE evaluations of home institutions and foreign ones.   | Jean-Marc Rapp           |
| 18.30- 19.15      | Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II   |   | Summary of the day with main findings; outline any remaining issues for day 2; distribution of roles in leading the interviews.   |                          |
|                   | Dinner (panel only)   |   |   |                          |
| <b>12.07.2016</b> |   |   |   |                          |
| <b>TIMING</b>     | <b>TOPIC</b>  | <b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>  | <b>ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED</b>   | <b>LEAD PANEL MEMBER</b> |
| 9.00 - 9.30       | Review panel private meeting                                      |   |   |                          |

|               |  |  |   |                   |
|---------------|--|--|---|-------------------|
| 9.30 – 10.30  | Meeting with ministry representatives (where relevant)                       | Simone Bonnafous, Thierry Bergeonneau; Elizabeth Verges, MENESR; Valerie Baduel (Agriculture ministry) Christopher Miles (Culture ministry); Meryline Laplace (Culture ministry)   | Relationships of supervising ministries to HCERES; recent changes in the nature of their interactions. Feedbacks from institutions regarding HCERES' methodology. | Jean-Marc         |
| 10 minutes    | Review panel's private discussion  |  |   |                   |
| 10.40 – 11.40 | Meeting with heads of HEIs   | Gilles Roussel (UParis Est)<br>Pascal Olivard (UBretagne)<br>Francois Cansell (polytech Bordx)<br>Christine Clerici (U.Paris Diderot)  | Consultation process regarding HCERES' new methodology; Implementation of internal quality assurance strategies; staff development and its assessment.            | Jean-Marc         |
| 10 minutes    | Review panel's private discussion  |  |   |                   |
| 11.50- 12.35  | Meeting with employer representatives  | Sandrine Javelaud, MEDEF (Union of Employers), Director of Prior Learning Dept.; Gilles Rubinsten, M2i Life Sciences (Farmaceuthical Union)  | Stakeholder involvement in HCERES evaluations; HCERES' standards.   | Maiki Udam        |
| 12.35- 13.20  | Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool- institutional reviews | Daniel Martina-retired; Nathalie Fournier- Univ.of Lyon; Dieter Weichert- RWTH Aachen University; Romain Pierronet (student)<br>Luc Ziegler- retired   | Evaluation methodology at institutional level   | Maiki Udam        |
| 13.20- 14.15  | Lunch (panel only)   |  |   |                   |
| 14.15- 15.00  | Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool- programme reviews     | Christiane Heitz, University of Strasbourg; Laurence Denooz- University of Lorraine; Patricia Partyka- Univ.of Avignon; Jean-Marie Madec, Min. of Agriculture; Julien Malizard, IHEDN; Sylvie Hennion, retired           | Evaluation methodology at the level of programmes, study fields, doctoral schools   | Maiki Udam        |
| 15 minutes    | Review panel's private discussion  |  |   |                   |
| 15.15- 16.00  | Meeting with student representatives   | Alexane Riou, Vice-President (FAGE-student union); Julien Robert-Grandjean (FAGE); Antoine Martin, President (CEVPU- Conference of students university Vice-presidents); Quentin Panissod, President (PDE-student union) | Student involvement in the work of HCERES; HCERES' standards  | Blazhe Todorovski |
| 10 minutes    | Review panel's private discussion  |  |   |                   |

|                   |   |  |  |                          |
|-------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------|
| 16.10- 17.00      | Meeting with CTI  | Laurent Mahieu, President<br>Maurice Pinkus (Vice President)<br>Anne-marie Jolly (Vice President)<br>Marie-jo Godert (Director)                      | Procedures' Validation by HCERES; overlapping activities.  | Jean-Marc                |
| 10 minutes        | Review panel's private discussion   |  |  |                          |
| 17.10- 17.55      | Meeting with the Head of Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST)  | Ghislaine Filliatreau- Director<br>Christine Musselin- Member of the Scientific Council  | Main role and responsibilities; Relationships with other departments; main challenges with the transition to the new approach; any added value for QA. | Jean-Marc                |
| 10 minutes        | Review panel's private discussion   |  |  |                          |
| 18.05- 18.50      | Meeting with Administrative department (IT; Quality and Training;)  | Jean-Christophe Martin, IT manager<br>Corinne Mouradian, IT manager<br>Julien Lecocq- Head of Internal Quality<br>Laurence Pinson- Secretary General | The role of administrative support for HCERES' operations; the organisation of thematic analysis; analysis of feedback                                 | Maiki Udam               |
| 18.50- 19.30      | Private discussion and Wrap-up. Preparations for the next day.  |  |  |                          |
|                   | Dinner (panel only)   |  |  |                          |
| <b>13.07.2016</b> |   |  |  |                          |
| <b>TIMING</b>     | <b>TOPIC</b>  | <b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>   | <b>ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED</b>  | <b>LEAD PANEL MEMBER</b> |
| 9.00- 10.00       | Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify   |  | To highlight remaining issues and formulate final questions for their clarification  | Jean-Marc Rapp           |
| 10.00 – 10.45     | Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues  | Michel Cosnard, Laurence Pinson  | Clarification of remaining issues  | Jean-Marc Rapp           |
| 10.45 – 12.15     | Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings   |  | To agree on the main findings. To agree on the outline of oral feedback to the agency  | Jean-Marc Rapp           |
| 12.15 – 13.15     | Lunch (panel only)  |  |  |                          |
| 13.15 – 14.00     | Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings | Michel Cosnard, Laurence Pinson, Heads of the departments.   | To inform about the panel preliminary findings and timeline of the report drafting and decision making process.  | Jean-Marc Rapp           |

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

### Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

February 2016

#### 1. Background and Context

The High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), created by the Law No. 2013-660 of July 22nd, 2013 relative to higher education and research, has replaced the AERES as from November 17th, 2014 (after publication of the decree No.2014-1365 of November 14th, 2014).

HCERES has independent administrative authority status and is directly funded by Parliamentary vote and is not financially monitored: only the French Court of Auditors is authorised to keep a tab on HCERES' expenses once they have been made.

The law tasks the HCERES with the following missions:

- evaluating higher education institutions and groupings, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency, or, where applicable, overseeing the quality of evaluations carried out by other bodies;
- evaluating research units on request from the overseeing institution, in the absence of validation of evaluation procedures or in the absence of a decision by the overseeing institution to use another evaluation body, or, where applicable, validating evaluation procedures carried out by other bodies. If a unit is overseen by more than one institution, only one evaluation shall be carried out. If the institutions jointly decide to use another evaluation body, HCERES shall validate 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 are not validated, HCERES shall evaluate the research unit;
- evaluating the programmes and degrees offered by higher education institutions or, where applicable, validating evaluation procedures developed by other bodies;
- ensuring that all missions defined by law and the specific status of higher education and research personnel is taken into account in their evaluations;
- ensuring that activities relating to the dissemination of scientific, technical and industrial culture are properly taken into account in the career progression of higher education and research personnel;
- conducting a posteriori evaluation of investment programmes and private bodies receiving public funding intended for research or higher education.
- HCERES may take part in evaluating foreign or international research and higher education organisations.
- HCERES also includes an Observatory of Science and Technologies (OST) responsible for strategic research and analysis.

HCERES has been a full member of ENQA since 2000 (at the time under the name of the National Council for Evaluation of Universities (CNÉ) and from 2007 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 EQAR since 2011 and is applying for renewal.

#### 2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent HCERES fulfils 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.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

### **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 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 regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

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

- Evaluation of programmes and degrees;
- Evaluation of French higher education institutions;
- Evaluation of foreign programmes or institutions;
- Evaluation of research units. These evaluations might be within the scope of the ESG as far as they concern **learning and teaching provided by research units** (e.g. doctoral programmes). HCERES' self-assessment report and the external review report should thus address whether that is the case and, if so, analyse compliance with the ESG in those evaluations.

### **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews and in line with the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by HCERES including the preparation 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;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

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

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, 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. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations 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 with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards 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 II and III) addressed individually. 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 and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 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 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € 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**

HCERES will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes 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 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 by HCERES in arriving in Paris, France.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and HCERES.

### **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 with regards to each 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 within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If HCERES chooses to provide a 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, finalise the document and submit it to HCERES and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will 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*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

HCERES is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation 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 discussed along with the final evaluation report.

#### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

HCERES will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. HCERES commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. 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 will be complemented by a small-scale 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 as of particular importance or challenge by HCERES. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or 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 Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether HCERES has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to HCERES and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by HCERES, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. HCERES may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

## 6. Budget

HCERES shall pay the following review related fees:

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Fee of the Chair                                | 4,500 EUR                  |
| Fee of the Secretary                            | 4,500 EUR                  |
| Fee of the 2 other panel members                | 4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each) |
| Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit      | 1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)   |
| Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat    | 7,000 EUR                  |
| Experts Training fund                           | 1,400 EUR                  |
| Approximate travel and subsistence expenses     | 6,000 EUR                  |
| Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit | 1,600 EUR                  |

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, HCERES will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to HCERES if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

## 7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Agreement on terms of reference  | January/February 2016     |
| Appointment of review panel members  | February/March 2016       |
| Self-assessment completed  | By the 15th of April 2016 |
| Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator   | April/May 2016            |
| Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable                        | May 2016                  |
| Briefing of review panel members   | June 2016                 |
| Review panel site visit  | July 2016                 |
| Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening | September 2016            |
| Draft of evaluation report to HCERES   | September 2016            |
| Statement of HCERES to review panel if necessary                                   | Early October 2016        |
| Submission of final report to ENQA   | Mid October 2016          |
| Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of HCERES                   | November 2016             |
| Publication of the report  | November/December 2016    |

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>AERES</b>   | <i>French Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education</i>                          |
| <b>ANECA</b>   | <i>Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación</i>                                |
| <b>CCN-IUT</b> | <i>French National Advisory Commission for University Institutes of Technology</i>                |
| <b>CEAIE</b>   | <i>China Education Association for International Exchange</i>                                     |
| <b>CEFDG</b>   | <i>French Evaluation Commission for Management Programmes and Degrees</i>                         |
| <b>CEQUINT</b> | <i>Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation</i>  |
| <b>CHU</b>     | <i>University Hospital</i>  |
| <b>CIC</b>     | <i>Clinical Investigation Centre</i>  |
| <b>CIEP</b>    | <i>International centre for education research</i>  |
| <b>CNE</b>     | <i>French National Committee for Evaluation</i>   |
| <b>CNER</b>    | <i>French National Research Evaluation Council</i>  |
| <b>CNIL</b>    | <i>French Data Protection Agency</i>  |
| <b>CNRS</b>    | <i>French National Centre for Scientific Research</i>   |
| <b>COMEGAL</b> | <i>Committee for Equality in Higher Education and Research</i>                                    |
| <b>COMUE</b>   | <i>Community of Universities and Institutions</i>   |
| <b>CONEAU</b>  | <i>Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria</i>                               |
| <b>COS</b>     | <i>Scientific Steering Committee</i>  |
| <b>CPGE</b>    | <i>Preparatory classes for Grandes Écoles</i>   |
| <b>CPU</b>     | <i>Conference of University Presidents</i>  |
| <b>CTI</b>     | <i>French Engineering Accreditation Body</i>  |
| <b>EDM</b>     | <i>Electronic Document Management</i>   |
| <b>ENQA</b>    | <i>European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education</i>                             |
| <b>ESG</b>     | <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i> |
| <b>HCERES</b>  | <i>French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education</i>                        |
| <b>HE</b>      | <i>higher education</i>   |
| <b>HEI</b>     | <i>higher education institution</i>   |
| <b>HR</b>      | <i>Human Resources</i>  |
| <b>L</b>       | <i>Bachelor's</i>   |
| <b>LMD</b>     | <i>Bachelor's-Master's-Doctorate</i>  |
| <b>LP</b>      | <i>Vocational Bachelor's</i>  |
| <b>LRU</b>     | <i>French Law on university freedoms and responsibilities</i>                                     |
| <b>MEI</b>     | <i>Europe and International Mission</i>   |
| <b>MENESR</b>  | <i>French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research</i>                                |
| <b>NP</b>      | <i>Natural person</i>   |
| <b>NIAD-UE</b> | <i>National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation</i>                        |
| <b>OST</b>     | <i>Observatory of Science and Technologies</i>  |
| <b>QA</b>      | <i>quality assurance</i>  |
| <b>QACHE</b>   | <i>Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education</i>   |
| <b>SAR</b>     | <i>self-assessment report</i>   |

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

| No.  | Document title   | Language | Source | Date Received  | On the Web | ESG      |
|--|--|----------|--------|----------------|------------|----------|
| 1.   | <b>HCERES Self-assessment report (SAR)</b>   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | All      |
| 2.   | Decree no. 2014-1365 of 14 November 2014 pertaining to the organisation and operation of the French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 3.1; 3.2 |
| 3.   | Excerpts from the French Research Code, as amended by Act no. 2013-60 of 22 July 2013.   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | Yes        | 3.1; 3.2 |
| 4.   | Internal quality Package (Evaluation Charter; Scientific Delegate Status; Expert Status)   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 3.3.     |
| 5.   | Declaration of Interests   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 3.3.     |
| 6.   | Standards for evaluation of institutions   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 2.1.     |
| 7.   | Standards for evaluation of study programmes (Bachelor; Master)  | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 2.1.     |
| 8.   | Standards for evaluation of doctoral schools   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 2.1.     |
| 9.   | Programme evaluation form  | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | yes        | 2.1.     |
| 10.  | HCERES Cross-border evaluation guide (programme level)   | English  | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | no         | 2.1.     |
| 11.  | Cross-border evaluation standards (institutional level)  | French   | HCERES | 24 May, 2016   | no         | 2.1.     |
| 12.  | Agency Activity Report for 2014  | English  | HCERES | May, 2016      | Yes        | 3.1.     |
| 13.  | HCERES Evaluation Charter- amended version   | English  | HCERES | June, 14, 2016 |            | 3.3.     |
| <b>Documents requested by the Review Panel before the visit:</b> |  |          |        |                |            |          |
| 14.  | Cross-border evaluation standards (institutional level)  | English  | HCERES | 27.06. 2016    |            | 3.1; 2.1 |
| 15.  | HCERES Activity Report for 2015  | English  | HCERES | 27.06. 2016    |            | All      |
| 16.  | HCERES Validation Procedure for evaluations undertaken by other bodies   | English  | HCERES | 27.06.         |            | 3.1      |
| 17.  | HCERES complaints and appeals procedure  | English  | HCERES | 28.06          |            | 2.7      |
| 18.  | Visit Schedule   | English  | HCERES | 08.07          | n.a        |          |
| <b>Documentation Provided by ENQA</b>                            |  |          |        |                |            |          |
| 19.  | Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA  | English  | ENQA   | May, 2016      |            |          |
| 20.  | ENQA Code of conduct for review experts  | English  | ENQA   | May, 2016      |            |          |

|   |   |         |                 |               |  |                         |
|---|---|---------|-----------------|---------------|--|-------------------------|
| 21.   | Panel CVs   | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 22.   | Terms of Reference for the Review of HCERES   | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 23.   | 2010 Evaluation of AERES by ENQA  | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 24.   | AERES Progress Report 2012  | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 25.   | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)- 2015  | English | ENQA            |               |  |                         |
| 26.   | ENQA Competences Framework  | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 27.   | Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). June, 2015.   | English | ENQA            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 28.   | EQAR Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for HCERES Renewal of Registration Application no. A38 of 18/01/2016  | English | EQAR            | May, 2016     |  |                         |
| 29.   | Summary of the Telebriefing for the Panel   | English | ENQA            | 09 June, 2016 |  |                         |
| Documents further investigated by the panel |   |         |                 |               |  |                         |
| 30.   | Rapport synthétique des retours d'expériences des experts et des établissements de la vague A (2014-2015)   | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 31.   | Rapport d'Evaluation. Licence Economie. Université d'Auvergne.  | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 32.   | Rapport d'Evaluation. Licence Professionnelle Notariat. Université d'Auvergne.  | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 33.   | Rapport du champ de formation. "Droit, Economie, Gestion". Université d'Auvergne.   | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 34.   | Rapport d'Evaluation. Rcole Doctorale N. 554. Environnements Sante. Université Bourgogne Franche- Comte.  | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 35.   | Rapport d'Evaluation de Université Guyane   | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |
| 36.   | Rapports d'Evaluation des universités Joseph Fourier, Grenoble 1, Pierre-Mendez- France- Grenoble 2, Stendhal- Grenoble 3, et de leur processus de fusion | French  | HCERES' website | August, 2016  |  | 3.1; 2.1; 2.2; 2.5; 2.6 |



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) undertaken in 2016.

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HCERES  
Haut conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche  
et de l'enseignement supérieur

**2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**