

Principles for HCERES validation of the procedures for evaluations carried out by other bodies

1. Legislative framework

Under article L.114-3-1 of the French Research Code (Act no.2013-660 dated 22 July 2013), HCERES “may perform evaluations directly or verify the quality of evaluations performed by other bodies by validating the procedures used”.

This external evaluation procedure is open to higher education institutions and their groupings, research units and study programmes.

For research units attached to several institutions, it is required that “institutions jointly decide to use another body” for the external evaluation procedure to be validated by HCERES.

Under the French Research Code and the Decree of November 2014, the procedures of other bodies do not need to be identical to HCERES procedures in order to be validated.

2. Conditions

The procedures of other bodies need to fulfil certain conditions, taking into account:

- the ethical and methodological “principles” that govern how HCERES conducts its evaluation missions: objectivity, transparency, independence of the evaluation body from the evaluated entities and equality of treatment between the organisations evaluated, in reference to the European Standards and Guidelines;
- “the national and territorial aspects of higher education and research”;
- “the relationships between training and research”.

In validating the evaluation procedures of other bodies, HCERES shall ensure that they fulfil the conditions stated above and, to this end, has specified general and specific expectations for study programmes, research units, institutions and territorial coordinations (see Appendix).

It requests that institutions wishing to have their procedure for evaluation by another body approved indicate their intention to do so (see point 3).

The body concerned must refer to the Appendix, and present a file stating its ethical and methodological principles, which must include:

- a presentation of the evaluation body for the purposes of checking its independence from the evaluated entities. Said body may be an institution already recognised for its evaluation competencies, or an *ad hoc* body created for the specific situation;
- rules regarding the selection of experts and the composition of panels which ensure there are no links or conflicts of interest, state the means by which said experts will be remunerated and how they will be supported (information, training, etc.);
- an external evaluation standards document, stating the evaluation scope, standards and criteria;
- an evaluation process stating the various phases, including the production of a self-evaluation file prior to evaluation, an on-site visit (if applicable) and the production of an external evaluation report;
- expectations of the self-evaluation file and the external evaluation report;
- publication methods for the external evaluation report, including a response phase.

In order for HCERES to be able to fulfil its mission of evaluating study programmes, research units, institutions and territorial coordinations as part of an integrated evaluation, some additional conditions need to be fulfilled by institutions which request validation for an evaluation procedure from another body than HCERES:

- the request must cover a coherent set of entities to be evaluated;

- the evaluation report for each entity evaluated according to an external procedure must be sent to HCERES in a timeframe compatible with the integrated evaluation schedule.

3. Validation procedure

The evaluation of study programmes, research units, institutions or territorial coordinations by another body than HCERES must follow the evaluation campaign calendar (by groups) which precedes contract negotiation each year.

For this reason, procedures cannot be implemented unless they take into account a minimum assessment time and leave evaluated entities the time to complete their self-evaluation file prior to evaluation.

This is why HCERES sends a letter to the relevant institutions asking them if they wish to use an evaluation body other than HCERES during the preparation phase for each evaluation campaign.

For each evaluation group, the request should be submitted to HCERES at least twelve months before the launch date of the relevant evaluation campaign, together with the validation application file. This file shall be assessed within four months.

HCERES validation shall involve three phases:

- Phase 1: the relevant department shall study the file in which the body commissioned by the applicant institution presents the procedure to be validated; the file shall be checked against the specifications published by HCERES; and then, this department shall write an analysis note for the *ad hoc* committee (see below).
- Phase 2: assessment of the validation application file and its analysis note. Assessment shall be performed by a committee chaired by the HCERES President containing an equal balance of members of the HCERES Board and members appointed by HCERES. The committee shall make a decision.
- Phase 3: the decision shall be sent to the commissioned body and the applicant institution; there are four possibilities: validation, validation with recommendations, refusal with requests for modification, refusal; a substantiated opinion is attached to the decision.

For institutions whose application has not been validated, the evaluation body selected by these institutions may submit another file taking into account HCERES modification requests within three months, in accordance with the procedure defined above.

An appeals procedure has been determined.

The validation decision and expectations shall be published.

In the event that an appeal is made against the validation decision, the decision shall be published once the appeal has been assessed.

4. Verifying implementation of the evaluation procedure

An HCERES scientific delegate shall be appointed as the reference person for the evaluation based on the validated procedure.

When the HCERES validation committee deems it necessary, the reference scientific delegate shall be invited to attend the visit planned in the evaluation process as an observer, and shall subsequently write a report of his/her observations.

The body responsible for implementing the procedure validated by HCERES shall issue it with a report presenting the evaluations conducted.

5. Updating the procedure of a body validated by HCERES

Where the body whose procedure is an institution with recognised evaluation competencies, its procedure shall be validated for a period of five years.

HCERES must be informed of any major change to a validated procedure during the five-year period, and shall decide if the modification requires a reassessment of the procedure, with a view to validation.

6. Updating the HCERES validation procedure

As with all HCERES procedures, this procedure shall be subject to periodic revision, with a view to its continuous improvement. A revision shall therefore be considered each year, as part of preparation for the new evaluation campaign. Any modifications made shall be subject to the approval of the HCERES Board.

HCERES shall report annually to the Board on its procedure validation activity.

Appendix: Expectations of applications for procedure validation

The principles for validation of procedures are set out below. The first part covers expectations for external evaluation common to all evaluations, and the second part sets out specific requirements for the three types of evaluation: study programmes, research units and higher education and research institutions.

General expectations

1. Independence

- The body shall define its evaluation methodology and ensure its implementation;
- The body shall ensure that its staff act independently of evaluated entities;
- The body shall ensure that no staff sourced from the evaluated entity are responsible for supporting its evaluation.

2. Recruitment and training of experts

- The process for recruiting experts shall be subject to an explicitly defined procedure;
- This process shall ensure that experts are independent of the evaluated entity and that there are no links or conflicts of interest;
- A system shall be implemented to support the panel of experts, including a training phase, in order to ensure compliance with the methodology;
- The way in which the expert missions are paid for and how experts are remunerated shall be explicitly stated.

3. External evaluation standards

- The external evaluation standards shall ensure equal treatment of the evaluated entities and contribute to the objectivity and impartiality of the experts;
- The standards shall include: the scope of evaluated areas and activities, the expectations expressed (standards) for these various activities and the general criteria to be used by the experts in assessing the responses and results of evaluation entities with regard to these expectations;
- The standards shall be written in consultation with the evaluated entities and published.

4. External evaluation processes

- External evaluation shall follow a self-evaluation process performed by the entity;
- External evaluation shall involve a number of phases, including a dialogue phase with the evaluated entities, an information and training phase for experts and a phase for the panel to assess the self-evaluation file, which may be supplemented by an on-site visit phase.

5. The self-evaluation file and external evaluation report

- Self-evaluation shall be organised by the evaluated entity, and the system implemented for this operation shall be described in the file submitted;
- Self-evaluation shall involve critical analysis of how the evaluated entity operates and its results for the reference period;
- The external evaluation report shall include the evaluative judgments of the panel of experts. These judgments shall always be supported by description, analysis of the relevant activity and evidence, and the report shall contain non-binding recommendations.

6. Response phase and report publication

- A response phase shall be planned prior to publication of the report. The evaluated entity's response shall be attached to the report;
- The evaluation body shall be responsible for publishing the report.

Specific expectations

1. For study programmes

Evaluation of study programmes shall cover a coherent set of programmes from the institution(s) concerned. The principles behind the grouping of programmes to be evaluated must be explicitly stated, and the evaluation shall take into account:

- the national framework of study programmes (French Order of 22 January 2014 for Bachelor's and Master's degrees, French Order of 25 May 2016 for doctoral schools) and other texts governing higher education programmes;
- the European dimension of evaluation of study programmes, and in particular the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG);
- the relationships between the main missions of higher education institutions: training, research and integration of graduates into the job market;
- the territorial aspects of higher education.

2. For research units

Evaluation of research units shall cover a coherent set of entities. The principles behind the grouping of units to be evaluated must be explicitly stated.

The scope of the evaluation shall be limited to research organisations and their governance, activities and results. At no point should the evaluation be confused with an evaluation of individuals or an evaluation of supervising bodies.

The evaluation shall cover the reference period and plans for the forthcoming period.

3. For higher education and research institutions

Evaluation shall take into account all processes for developing the institution's strategy, its operational implementation, the resources and systems used, the results obtained and continuous improvement mechanisms. It shall cover all bodies and governance and management systems and take into account the territorial, national and international positioning of the institution. It shall include an on-site visit.

For higher education activities, the panel shall include at least one student.