



Department of Evaluation of Higher
Education and Research Institutions

STANDARDS FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF RESEARCH BODIES

—
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GROUP E

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INTRODUCTION

This document presents the standards implemented by HCÉRES for the external evaluation of research bodies.

I. Legislative framework

Article L. 114-3-1 of the French Research Code gives HCÉRES the mission “of evaluating higher education institutions and their groupings, as defined in Article L. 718-3 of the French Education Code, research bodies, scientific cooperation foundations and the French National Research Agency, or, where applicable, overseeing the quality of evaluations carried out by other bodies.”

This same article also defines the methodological foundations for external evaluation by the following information:

“HCÉRES shall seek to follow best international practice in the performance of its missions. With regard to evaluation criteria, its methods shall be based on the principles of objectivity, transparency and equal treatment for all organisations assessed, and, with regard to the selection of the individuals responsible for evaluations, on world-class scientific expertise, neutrality and balance in the representation of themes and opinions. It shall seek to prevent conflicts of interests in the composition of the expert committees responsible for carrying out evaluations.”

These general rules are stated in the evaluation charter published by HCÉRES that is the framework for the missions of each expert working for HCÉRES.

II. Objectives and methodological principles of external evaluations implemented by HCÉRES

The external evaluation of research bodies implemented by HCÉRES concerns the overall governance of a body and all its activities in accordance with its status and missions. The issue is therefore assessing the capacity of the research body to develop its strategy, to implement it by means of a suitable organisation, to have tools for steering and monitoring its activities and to readjust its strategy if necessary.

The external evaluation is relative to the most recent operating years of the body (*ex post* evaluation); this period will be considered by the panel of experts as the reference period for their analyses. The external evaluation is intended to respect the policy choices of the body. It focuses on analysing the trajectory taken by the body during the reference period, and especially the implementation of development policies for activities and the associated cycles of continual improvement, with regard to the strategy deployed during this period. It leads to the identification by the evaluation committee of the body's strengths and weaknesses and to the formulation of non-prescriptive recommendations, taking into account the future strategic priorities of the research body.

These standards for the external evaluation of research bodies are the major methodological document. It aims at guaranteeing transparency, impartiality and equal treatment of evaluations. This document defines the scope of institutional evaluation, the main expectations associated with the body's strategy and the criteria used to assess the level and quality of compliance with these expectations.

The external evaluation is based on the self-evaluation report produced by the research body. No constraints are imposed on the organisation of this self-evaluation. However, a document entitled “Reference points for self-evaluation of research bodies” (“Repères pour l'autoévaluation”, only in French) explains the challenges of a self-evaluation process, international best practices for self-evaluation and what is expected from a self-evaluation report.

III. Specificities of the standards for external evaluation of research bodies

These standards are structured into 3 main areas, subdivided into 7 sub-areas. 11 standards are defined, each of them associated with a set of criteria.

The first area includes both institutional dimensions - the positioning and the associated strategy, with the objective of clearly identifying the development trajectory taken by the research body during the period under review, in the national and international landscape of higher education, research and innovation, as well as its future policies for the next period. The trajectory is planned by the research body based on an analysis of roles played by its partners and by the other stakeholders in its community.

Institutional positioning:

It is defined at the beginning of the reference period and is broken down into:

- the positioning identified by the body at the beginning of the reference period and for each of its missions;
- the positioning targeted by the body which reflects its ambition for the end of the reference period.

The definition of positioning (identified and targeted) implies an internal strategic analysis (strengths and weaknesses) and external analysis (opportunities and threats), combined with a comparative analysis approach for each of the body's missions.

Institutional strategy:

For the reference period, it consists of the objectives set and means (resources and skills) used by the research body to achieve its targeted positioning. The strategy includes the body's various areas of activity, supported by prospective analyses.

The second area groups together the body's internal structure and governance for development and achievement of the strategy, and the management tools used for operational implementation of the strategy.

Structure:

It corresponds to the organisational choices of internal structure made by the research body to carry out its missions and implement its strategy.

Governance:

It includes all the measures, rules, authorities and decision-making processes to support the development and implementation of the body's strategy. The body's governance ensures good coordination between political and administrative organisations and it is supported by a quality policy.

Management:

It consists of the management methods and tools used by the research body for the operational implementation of its strategy. This includes the information system used to monitor activities and to support management, the multi-year use of resources and skills to support the strategy in all fields of activity.

The third area provides a generic description of the monitoring of the body's activities and the analysis of their results for all the missions and skills of the research body.

The appendix defines various components of the standards.

AREA 1 : INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING AND INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

Sub-area 1: Analysis of institutional positioning

Standard 1: the research body defines its positioning and its research body model in the light of its missions in the national and international landscape of higher education, research and innovation and defines their future developments

- Within the framework defined by its supervising ministries, the body has a clear statement of its missions and commitments to the State and society, which are related to its values, history and articles of foundation.
- The body defines its model (organisational structure, territory, partnerships), alongside its role (operator, funding agency, mixed model, other) and the activities that it intends to carry out (research, transfer, expertise, support to public policies, etc.).
- The body bases the definition of its positioning on a shared analysis, in particular by drawing on comparisons with international counterparts.
- The body's positioning is consistent with its missions; it is comprehensible and clearly linked to public policies.
- The body's positioning accounts for the territorial coordinations of higher education, research and innovation in which the body is involved in France.

Sub-area 2: Institutional strategy

Standard 2: the research body defines an institutional strategy in relation to its missions and skills in the national landscape of higher education, research and innovation

- The body defines its strategic areas of activity using scientific prospective work and identification of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The strategy is formally written down and comprehensible for the period of reference, in particular with regard to the various supervising ministries (multi-year agreements, engagement letters, etc.).
- The objectives, projects and actions defined in the strategy are explained as well as the expected results.
- The strategy of the body is consistent with its positioning; it is linked to the French national research strategy and major projects of national, European or international interest.
- The strategy defined by the body accounts for the inherent risk in scientific research.
- The strategy defined by the body accounts for the issues of social responsibility, particularly ethics, gender equality and sustainable development in environmental management.
- Sources of funding and their development are based on a clearly defined business model.
- The future strategic policies are defined for the coming period and consistent with all missions.

Standard 3: the research body has a strategy of alliances and partnerships on a local, national and international level

- Alliances and national and international partnerships contribute to the body's strategy in an effective and consistent way.
- Actions by the body carried out on the territory are aligned with those of other stakeholders, especially in the framework of territorial coordinations.

AREA 2 : GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Sub-area 1: Internal structure of the institution

Standard 4: the research body defines a functional and geographical structure for the implementation of its activities in support of its missions and strategy

- The geographical structure on a national and possibly international level is suited to the activities and strategy.
- The structure within operational entities is consistent and in line with strategy.
- The support and assistance services are relevant and efficient.

Sub-area 2: Governance to support the development and implementation of the strategy

Standard 5: the governance of the research body is based on authorities and decision-making processes consistent with the strategy and chosen modes of action

- Governing authorities and players have defined remits and roles; the body's main partners are associated with them.
- Decision-making processes are clearly stated and enable efficient performance of both internal and partnership actions.
- Operations of governing authorities and governing processes encourage all staff categories to offer feedback and to take part.
- Operations of governing authorities and governing processes are consistent with the body's commitments in the areas of social responsibility, particularly ethics, gender equality and sustainable development in environmental management.

Standard 6: the research body has implemented an overall quality policy which takes into account the monitoring of all activities and results, and the implementation of corrective actions

- The body implements a continual improvement policy for its operation and activities.
- A quality policy is defined and supported by the management team; it is clearly stated and disclosed to players within the body.
- The body has an information system and tools for monitoring activities and measuring results in a reliable and long-term way. These tools help identify the trajectories taken by the body during the reference period and the management indicators required for governance.
- The body identifies, assesses and controls the risks associated with decision-making processes and activities.
- The quality policy implemented by the body contributes to its commitments to the fields of social responsibility, particularly ethics, gender equality and sustainable development in environmental management.
- The quality policy implemented by the institution includes, where appropriate, the follow-up of recommendations of the previous evaluation by HCÉRES (or other bodies).

Standard 7: the research body develops a communication policy

- The external communication policy promotes understanding of the body's missions and activities and promotes its results.
- The internal communication policy helps staff adhere to the strategy.

Sub-area 3: Management to support the operational implementation of strategy

Standard 8: the research body manages multi-annual implementation of its strategy by using prospective analysis tools

- The body has multi-year prospective analysis of its requirements and resources in line with its strategy.
- The body develops the forward-looking management of jobs and skills in line with its strategy and social balance sheet.
- The business model of reference for the various areas of activity has been defined and is sustainable. It is subject to a discussion with the supervising ministries.
- Prospective analyses are carried out with a view to diversifying financial resources.

Standard 9: the research body structures its management processes and relies on a suitable set of support and assistance services

- The budget organisation of the body and its budgetary arbitration tools are clearly stated and consistent with its activities and its strategy. They rely on an internal dialogue for management.
- The human resources management policy, in particular recruitment and staff training processes, is suited to the body's strategy and activity development policies.
- Logistics and property management are organised in an appropriate and efficient manner. The body has a property master plan that is part of its strategy and relevant to its locations, needs and resources.
- The body has an information system to meet its management needs, at both the central level and the internal entities level.
- The organisation and services provided by the assistance services are consistent with the body's activities and locations.

AREA 3 : ACTIVITIES OF THE RESEARCH BODY

Meaning:

This area has a generic formulation, independent of the kind of activities carried out by the research body (research, transfer, expertise, support to public policies, etc.) and its organisational model. The standards in this area therefore need to be considered and applied to all body activities.

Sub-area 1: Steering and monitoring of the body's activities

Standard 10: the research body demonstrates its ability to monitor, analyse and qualify the results of its various activities

- The body has an integrated vision of its activities based on consolidated monitoring of the various actions performed, whatever the methods used.
- Steering tools and the resources used are identified for each activity.
- Tools and resources are used by the body for the internationalization of its activities.
- The body is equipped with data and reliable, long-term indicators.
- The body can quantify the added value of its activities.
- The body develops methods and tools for assessing the impacts of its activities on its social, cultural and economic environment.
- The body has a scientific integrity policy for its staff, including measures to raise awareness, to prevent, to detect and to deal with professional misconduct observed.

Sub-area 2: Research body's trajectory

Standard 11: the body is in control of its development trajectory

- The activities and results are in line with the strategy defined for the reference period.
- The trajectory taken is identified for each activity.
- The body's stakeholders have a clear view of the trajectory.
- Any changes in the body's strategy for each activity are subject to regular discussion and political validations.
- Any changes to the trajectory of each activity are clearly stated and scheduled in approved and published strategic documents.

APPENDIX: COMPONENTS OF THE STANDARDS

Areas and sub-areas

Areas and sub-areas define the overall scope of the evaluation.

The document "Standards for external evaluation of research bodies" includes 3 areas. The first two areas broadly cover issues related to the body's central governance. The third area provides a generic framework for the analysis of body's missions and activities.

Each area is subdivided into different sub-areas which define the main aspects that fall under the scope of the evaluation. Each sub-area includes one or more standards.

Standards

A standard expresses the expectations (main objectives, commitments, values) which will be evaluated to estimate the level of achievement. These expectations are based on the missions of research bodies as well as the main policies and the practices that characterise research. They are expressed by a practical action testing the body.

Criteria

A set of criteria is linked to each standard. The criteria state the way in which compliance with the standard will be assessed by the reviewers. Without being exhaustive or exclusive, the criteria define the main points of analysis used during the evaluation to assess the extent to which the research body meets the expectations expressed by the standard to which they are linked.

The criteria are not listed in order of priority so that the standards may be adapted to the wide variety of research bodies. The reviewers are responsible for prioritising these criteria according to the situations they encounter.



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