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EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL  
DEPARTMENT

# EVALUATION OF FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMMES

## HCERES ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

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# INTRODUCTION

The French High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), created by French Act no. 2013-660 dated 22 July 2013 pertaining to higher education and research, replaced AERES on 17 November 2014. Its organisational structure and operation are governed by Decree no 2014-1365 dated 14 November 2014. The experience of HCERES both in France and abroad is therefore built on the experience accumulated over the years by AERES.

In addition to defining the mandate of HCERES within France, the Act dated 22 July 2013 states that HCERES “may also take part in evaluating foreign or international research and higher education organisations, under European or international cooperation programmes or at the request of the competent authorities”. This legal mandate, and the fact that it is a full member of ENQA and registered on EQAR, the European register of higher education evaluation and quality assurance agencies, means that HCERES regularly receives requests from foreign institutions to evaluate and accredit both study programmes and institutions.

HCERES performs evaluation and accreditation activities for foreign study programmes, in compliance with international procedures in the field. It is important to underline that accreditation is understood as the issue of an “HCERES accreditation label”, which certifies the quality of a study programme or institution. It does not infer equivalence with a French qualification. Decision-making power concerning recognition of qualifications is conferred only to the French Ministry. A methodology, standards and evaluation and accreditation criteria in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and based both on HCERES procedures for evaluating study programmes and institutions and best practices gathered from a number of European agencies have therefore been produced and used by HCERES for evaluating and accrediting foreign institutions and study programmes in foreign universities.

The methodology for evaluating both institutions and study programmes is divided into five phases:

1. An exploratory on-site visit. This provides an opportunity for the members of the exploratory mission to inform the institution if they are not yet ready for the accreditation process.
2. A self-evaluation phase prior to evaluation.
3. An evaluation phase with an on-site visit and publication of an evaluation report.
4. Accreditation proposal by the panel of experts.
5. A fifth key stage – the accreditation phase – only occurs at the request of the institution once the evaluation phase has been completed and the final evaluation report for the institution or study programme has been published.



## OBJECTIVES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is different from evaluation. It entails HCERES recognising an institution or study programme's competency in performing its missions after evaluation. Just like evaluation, accreditation is based on a set of standards that define specific quality system and technical competency requirements. Based on the results of the prior evaluation and the extent to which actual conditions observed at a given time differ from the standard requirements, HCERES decides whether or not to accredit the institution or study programme, in line with or against the opinion of the evaluation panel of experts, and provides the reasons for its decision.

HCERES has an accreditation commission for conducting its foreign institution and programme accreditation activities. Its work begins as soon as the evaluation phase has been completed with the publication of the final report. Evaluation and accreditation are two fully distinct phases that are carried out by different teams using separate yet related standards. The accreditation commission bases its decisions on accreditation criteria which take into account the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and quality criteria identified by HCERES.

## THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The work of the accreditation commission should be distinguished from the work of the evaluation panel experts. The evaluation panel uses a self-evaluation report prepared by the evaluated entity to draw up its analysis thereof, stating its strengths, weakness, and recommendations. The accreditation commission assesses the competency of an institution or study programme to perform its missions based on the evaluation report, ultimately leading to recognition of its competency by HCERES.

The accreditation process checks compliance with accreditation criteria in the following areas:

- Aims of the study programme
- Position of the study programme
- Study programme teaching structure
- Study programme teaching management

The accreditation commission examines each criterion and issues its opinion with reasons. The decision was made to keep just one criterion per area in the accreditation standards in order to better identify the fundamental expectations for institutions or study programmes. The accreditation commission is a standing committee made up of representatives from HCERES, the HCERES Board, and qualified figures. The members of the commission are appointed by the President of HCERES for a four-year renewable term.

The commission meets at least 3 times a year. Its work is governed by the same principles of professionalism, independence and ethical standards as all other HCERES work, in accordance with the HCERES evaluation charter. In the event of a conflict of interest between a member of the commission and the evaluated entity, the member in question is replaced.

Each evaluation file is presented to the accreditation commission by a rapporteur, the member of HCERES who coordinated the evaluation.

## THE ACCREDITATION DECISION

The accreditation commission examines the final evaluation report and the opinion of the panel of experts against the accreditation criteria. The rapporteur brings the self-evaluation file of the evaluated entity to answer any questions from members of the commission. Once it has completed its work, the accreditation commission issues a decision. It always provides the reasons for its decision, which may differ from the proposal of the panel of experts. This decision can take one of the following forms:

- a five-year unreserved accreditation decision
- an accreditation decision, with two conditions:
  - the prescriptive recommendations identified in the evaluation report must be taken into account;
  - a follow-up visit must be organised after two years of operation to check implementation of the prescriptive recommendations. Following this visit, the accreditation commission shall issue a decision on whether to extend accreditation for a further three years and provide the reasons for its decision.
- An accreditation refusal.

There is an appeals procedure for accreditation decisions made by HCERES.

The evaluation report and final accreditation decision are published by HCERES.

# HCERES CRITERIA FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF FOREIGN BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S DEGREE STUDY PROGRAMMES

## **AREA 1: AIMS OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME**

### **ACCREDITATION CRITERION**

The objectives of the study programme with regard to knowledge and skills to be acquired are clearly defined and communicated.

Students and other stakeholders are aware of outcomes in terms of job opportunities and further studies.

## **AREA 2: POSITION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME**

### **ACCREDITATION CRITERION**

The study programme has set a comprehensive positioning suited to its objectives and including a clear link with research, scholarly partnerships and/or with the economic and social world, national and/or international partnerships.

## **AREA 3: STUDY PROGRAMME TEACHING STRUCTURE**

### **ACCREDITATION CRITERION**

The study programme includes a set of teaching units that are coherent, gradual and adapted to all kind of students. The study programme allows students to acquire additional skills that are useful for employment or further study.

Internships and projects are included in the study programme curriculum. So are TICE and education innovations.

The study programme prepares students for the international environment.

## **AREA 4: STUDY PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT**

### **ACCREDITATION CRITERION**

The study programme is implemented by a formally identified and operational teaching team including stakeholder and student participation.

It is carried out by an educational team which benefits from clear and up-to-date data.

Methods for checking knowledge are explicitly stated and communicated to students.

Teaching and practical professional units are expressed in terms of skills.

Anti-fraud measures have been implemented.

# APPENDICES

## HCERES and ESG correlation table

ESG	Evaluation of study programmes	Evaluation of institutions
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	4-6	5-1, 5-2, 1-1-3
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1-1, 1-2, 3-1 3-2	2.2.1, 2.2.2,
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3-1, 3-4, 3-6, 3-7, 4-2, 4-3	2.2.2, 3-1, 3.2, 3-3, 2-2-4
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4-2, 4-3, 4-4	3.1. 2-2-4
1.5 Teaching staff	4-1, 2-2	6-2, 2-3
1.6 Learning resources and student support	3-6, 3-5, 3-1	2.2.3, 2.2.2, 2.4 2-2-2, 3-2, 3-3
1.7 Information management	4-4, 4-5	6.3. 2-2-5, 3-1
1.8 - Public information	4-4, 4-5	1-3, 2-2-5, 3-1
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	4-6	2-2-5, 5-1
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	4-6	5-1