

Follow-up report on the external review of Hcéres by ENQA

April 2024

Calendar

June 2021

Hcéres self-evaluation report

September 2021

ENQA site visit to Hcéres

April 2022

Hcéres external evaluation report

April 2024

Hcéres follow-up report

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Foreword

Written as a follow-up to the external review report of Hcéres (High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education) by ENQA in 2022, this report only takes into account the following activities of the High Council, which fall under the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG):

- evaluation of study programmes (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) in France;
- evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in France;
- evaluation of study programmes and HEIs abroad, as part of Hcéres' cross-border quality assurance activities.

Introduction - context and purpose of the ENQA review

The external review of Hcéres by ENQA took place between September 2021 (meetings with the review panel) and April 2022 (renewal of Hcéres' membership of ENQA). It had been prepared beforehand, between January and June 2021, through a collective self-evaluation exercise, the continuation of which forms the basis of this follow-up report.

As part of its commitment to simplification, coordination and openness, Hcéres must constantly review its methodology and its implementation, its transparency and its compliance with European requirements for quality assurance in higher education.

In addition to consulting with stakeholders and considering their feedback and observations, Hcéres consulted its staff on the optimal methods for developing evaluations and published reports.

As a result, the so-called "integrated evaluation process", prepared from the end of 2020, was completed in 2022-2023 (evaluation round C)¹. The data required from the entities evaluated for programmes and research units has been reduced in round C (2022-2023) and D (2023-2024) respectively. The evaluation guidelines have been clarified and adapted to the specific nature of the evaluated entities (art and design schools, architecture schools). The Departments for the evaluation of HEIs, of study programmes and of research units now work in a coordinated manner. In addition to addressing issues of scientific integrity, sustainable development, and social responsibility, efforts have been made to enhance the evaluative capacity of reports and amplify their impact.

In this sense, Hcéres has taken steps and is contributing, in the field of evaluation, to the so-called "simplification" that the President of the Republic called for in his speech on French research on 7 December 2023.

The departure of Hcéres President Thierry Coulhon on 26 September 2023 and his replacement by Secretary General Stéphane Le Boulter, who has become Acting President in accordance with Articles R. 114-8, R. 114-10 and R. 114-11 of the Research Code², have not changed Hcéres' objectives and policy, which remain unchanged: to maintain the same high standards and to define strategic directions for further progress, particularly in terms of the readability and publicity of reports, the systematic use of feedback and the production of thematic analyses, for which the evaluation of ENQA is a valuable lever.

Reminder of legislative developments since the external review by ENQA

The Research Programming Law of 24 December 2020 for the years 2021 to 2030, which contains various provisions on research and higher education, provided that Hcéres would become an independent public authority (API) on 1 January 2022. Prior to this date and at the time of the previous review by ENQA, Hcéres was an independent administrative authority.

As of 1 January 2022, the activities of Hcéres remained unchanged, but the agency's status underwent a transformation with the acquisition of legal personality. Hcéres is now responsible for managing a budget duly established and adopted by the college, the agency's decision-making body, and has an

¹ The evaluation cycle for French research units, programmes and HEIs lasts five years, according to a timetable compatible with the requirements of the government's contract policy, which has divided the HEIs into five geographical zones known as rounds A, B, C, D and E. On the other hand, the evaluations of experimental public institutions, the evaluations of national research organisations and those carried out at international level are organised outside the five-year cycle.

² The four decrees concerning the Hcéres (three - no. 2021-1536, no. 2021-1537 and no. 20226225 - on its organisation, operation and missions and one - no. 2021-1572 - on its role in terms of scientific integrity) have been codified in the Research Code in articles R. 114-1 to R. 114-23 and article D. 211-2.

accounting officer. It has also become an employer, handling its own staff payments and has the ability to take legal action in its own name. These changes were prepared in advance and discussed with staff representatives. They have made Hcéres' day-to-day operations smoother and strengthened its independence from the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, with which it continues to work very closely. This cooperation will be further enhanced to ensure that the conclusions of the evaluation reports can be used by the Ministry to prepare objective, resource, and performance contracts, as well as the multi-year contracts signed with the evaluated entities.

In accordance with article D. 114-2 of the Research Code, Hcéres coordinates the national evaluation bodies, namely the Commission for the Evaluation of Training and Degrees in Management (CEFDG) and the Commission for Engineering Qualifications (CTI). This coordination role involves ensuring consistency between evaluation standards, timetables and procedures for conducting evaluations, information and data-sharing policy, and European and international action.

Methodology

This follow-up report has been prepared in a collegial manner. The Head of the cooperation unit in the Europe and International Department, together with the General Affairs Officer of the General Secretariat, prepared an outline of the report. They compiled both the information directly available to them and the one collected from various Hcéres staff concerned. This preliminary outline was then discussed by the Hcéres board of directors, allowing each department to provide inputs and comments. A working version in French was presented to the Hcéres college on 6 March 2024. The document was finalised, incorporating the comments received, translated into English and published in both languages on the Hcéres website.

Analysis and follow-up of the recommendations of the external evaluation of ENQA in 2022

Summary of Hcéres' alignment with the ESG when assessed by ENQA in 2022

Reference	Suitability
ESG 3.1 - Quality assurance activities, policies and procedures	Substantially compliant
ESG 3.2 - Official status	Fully compliant
ESG 3.3 - Independence	Fully compliant
ESG 3.4 - Thematic analysis	Partially compliant
ESG 3.5 - Resources	Fully compliant
ESG 3.6 - Internal quality assurance and professional attitude	Substantially compliant
ESG 3.7 - Periodic external evaluation of agencies	Fully compliant
ESG 2.1 - Consideration of internal quality assurance	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.2 - Designing appropriate methodologies	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.3 - Implementation of procedures	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.4 - Peer review	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.5 - Criteria determining results	Fully compliant
ESG 2.6 - Reports	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.7 - Complaints and appeals	Fully compliant

Follow-up of ENQA recommendations on references whose adequacy was "largely compliant" and "partially compliant".

ESG 3.1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

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.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

A strategic plan/strategic directions 2021-2025 need to be developed in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, while taking into serious consideration the reinforced autonomy and coordinating responsibilities of the agency.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ This recommendation addresses one of Hcéres' concerns, which has been extensively discussed and highlights one of its weaknesses. Hcéres has since taken steps to address the issue.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ In accordance with article R. 114-3 of the Research Code, the Hcéres college must deliberate on the agency's multiannual evaluation programme. This programme must meet the requirements of the government's contract policy: five-year contracts and contracts of objectives, resources and performance for HEIs, and contracts of objectives and performance for research organisations. Presented to the college at its meeting on 4 December 2023, it was unanimously approved by the 24 members present (out of 29 members in office). The multiannual evaluation programme, which lists the evaluations that Hcéres plans to carry out over the next five years (2024-2028), focuses on:
- integrated evaluation campaigns conducted by the Departments responsible for evaluating HEIs, study programmes and research units - over a five-year cycle, 275 HEIs, 2,600 research units and 7,050 study programmes throughout France;
 - and the evaluations carried out by the Department for the Evaluation of Research Organisations – a total of 17 national research organisations.

As for the specific evaluation activities of Hcéres, they remain ad hoc and difficult to plan beyond two years:

- evaluation of the University Hospital Institutes (IHU) resulting from the "Investment for the future" programme (French government investment programme to support higher education and research), and entrusted to Hcéres in 2023 by the Ministry of Health and Prevention, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and the General Secretariat for Investment (SGPI);
- evaluations requested by private entities: one HEI, two research units and 50 study programmes in 2024, and three research units and around 50 study programmes in 2025.

As the international evaluation and accreditation activities implemented by the Europe and International Department are not suitable for multiannual programming, they are considered on an annual basis according to the geographical areas of intervention. For 2024, this corresponds to five geographical areas, 10 HEIs, and 35 study programmes, as follows: three institutions and 31 study programmes in Africa (Benin, Djibouti, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde), 1 HEI in Central America (Honduras), 4 HEIs in Asia (Vietnam), 2 HEI in Europe (Romania, Armenia), and 4 study programmes in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia).

This multiannual programming of evaluation is also linked to two other documents. First, it is related to the multiannual trajectories in terms of human resources, budget, and digital investment set out in the Hcéres' annual activity report. Second, it is also based on analyses that comprise the Social Report, a human resources document drawn up each year from 2022 onwards, discussed with staff representatives, and used to determine the multiannual strategy for steering human resources (predictive management of staff numbers, jobs and skills, diversity, combating discrimination, professional integration).

ESG 3.4. Thematic analysis

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

=> Partially compliant

Recommendation.

In order to inform the public about the progress and challenges in higher education, a system for analysing and publishing general findings of different evaluations needs to be developed.

The agency should clarify who will take the responsibility of thematical analysis and who will define what issues and themes should be tackled in that analytical effort.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ This recommendation was discussed by the Hcéres' college, which questioned the complexity of the notion of thematic analysis. As a "mature" agency that has already been reviewed three times by ENQA, Hcéres has been working since 2022 to position itself to conduct such analyses.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ On 9 November 2022, the Department for the evaluation of research units published a National Disciplinary and Foresight Synthesis on Mathematics, which provides a diagnosis of French research in mathematics, its functioning, its successes, and its weaknesses.
- ⇒ The Department for the evaluation of HEIs has carried out a study on the National Schools of Architecture (published in May 2023).
- ⇒ The Hcéres also has an Office of Research Integrity (Ofis) which, as part of its role as an observatory, will produce a summary of developments in the policies pursued by HEIs in this area every two years from 2024 onwards. This will be based in particular on the biennial reports on compliance with the requirements and values of research integrity that HEIs must submit to the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the Ofis, in accordance with article L.211-2 of the Research Code.
- ⇒ The Hcéres has also been given a new mission in 2022, which is to "evaluate the implementation of measures to promote equality between women and men in HEIs contributing to the public higher education service and the public research service" (article L.114-3-1 of the Research Code). Under these conditions, Hcéres has already strengthened the criteria devoted to the issues of parity, inclusion, and the reduction of discrimination. In addition, under the provisions of Article 21 of the Law of 20 January 2017, Hcéres is preparing to include, in its annual activity report, a summary of all the reports from the HEIs on the implementation of their multiannual action plan on gender equality. These reports are collected in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. The material collected may also be used for targeted thematic studies.

Hcéres has been setting up a Higher Education Observatory (OES) since 2023, aiming to coordinate and synthesise data in response to challenges facing higher education and its development. This includes adding other sources from the higher education ecosystem, vocational education, and local authorities. The launch of the mapping of study programme provision in 2023, is a major project, aiming to document the regional and academic distribution of study programmes, as well as the development and status of educational providers. Contacts established with various partners (sub-directorate of information systems and statistical studies of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research - SIES, Conference of the rectors of French *Grandes Ecoles* - CGE, Conference of the rectors of engineering schools - Cdefi, Court of Audit, etc.) have enabled us to specify the objectives of this project. The goal is to better understand the distribution and development of educational provision in France, identify gaps and opportunities in the educational landscape, support public authority decisions, and provide a database for Hcéres' future institutional and programme evaluations.

- ⇒ Finally, the use of text mining by the Hcéres Digital and Data Department strengthens the potential for exploiting and analysing the corpus of evaluation reports as part of the various studies that have been carried out since 2023 and that will be conducted in the future.

ESG 3.6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

The collection of feedback from reviewers and evaluated institutions needs to be systematised and implemented in a coherent way

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ This recommendation highlights a weakness of Hcéres, which does not have a committee or person responsible for internal quality assurance. However, the agency does establish specific procedures to guarantee the quality of its activities. Internal quality assurance at Hcéres includes the application of legislative and regulatory texts, implemented through internal agency procedures, which are subject to self-assessment. Depending on the prerogative concerned, these procedures are presented to the college, either for discussion or for information.

Internal quality assurance at Hcéres is therefore carried out by various bodies:

- For the quality assurance of its own evaluation practices, Hcéres has opted for a coordinated approach, involving three departments (Departments for the evaluation of HEIs, study programmes and research units) as part of the integrated evaluation process.
- With regard to ensuring the quality assurance of administrative and human resources practices, staff representatives conducted a first annual satisfaction survey among Hcéres staff in 2022. This survey enabled the staff representatives to identify their priorities within the framework of the activities of the Administrative Social Committee (CSA), a body that brings together staff representatives and the Hcéres administration. As a result of this social dialogue, Hcéres has made progress on several points (flexibility of teleworking, protocol for recovery after work trips, and reorganisation of a department). In addition, in accordance with national legislation, the referents appointed in the spring of 2023 will contribute, as part of their daily work, to improving the smooth running of Hcéres' activities. In particular, they will
 - The equality referent contributes to the inventory and diagnosis of the professional equality policy and oversees the drawing up and monitoring of Hcéres professional equality plan between women and men;
 - the access to administrative documents referent is the correspondent of the Commission for access to administrative documents (CADA) for the communication of documents to the public. CADA is an independent administrative authority responsible for ensuring freedom of access to administrative documents and public archives, as well as the re-use of public information;
 - The ethics referent advises and assists Hcéres staff and experts, as well as to its management, in complying with the rules of professional ethics;
 - The whistleblowing referent is there to listen to officers who have information (e.g. about a crime, misdemeanour, threat or other reprehensible event), to ensure that it remains confidential and, if necessary, to take action.

All the referents have volunteered to take on an additional role on top of their regular work at Hcéres, for which they are supported by the administration.

Some actions are therefore in place. However, the Hcéres recognises that they should be better coordinated at agency level, set out in a quality manual and framed by a quality policy.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ In the Department for the evaluation of HEIs, a questionnaire is sent to HEIs after each round of evaluation to collect feedback and improve practices from one year to the next. Efforts are

being made to systematise this feedback as part of the integrated evaluation process and to harmonise practices between departments.

- ⇒ The Department for the evaluation of study programmes collects feedback from HEIs and experts through discussions with the chair and vice-chair of the expert panel to prepare for the next round of evaluation and make necessary adaptations.
- ⇒ Internal Hcéres seminars have been held annually since 2021, with around 60 participants per session. These seminars focus on evaluation reports and allow departments to revise their format to enhance relevance and impact. Significant changes have been made to institutional evaluation reports, including the addition of an expert panel conclusion on the first page highlighting "main strengths", "weaknesses requiring particular attention", and "recommendations". Key data on the HEI are presented clearly, along with follow-up of the recommendations from the previous evaluation ("not followed up", "partially followed up", "followed up"). Another addition is a paragraph ("Self-evaluation report and visit to the institution") on the quality of the documents provided by the institutions and the working conditions of the panel.
- ⇒ A "consultation day" has been organised in June, at the end of each round of evaluation, since 2021 in order to gather feedback from Hcéres stakeholders (more details in 2.2).
- ⇒ The evaluation charter, which outlines measures to ensure the quality, transparency, and publicity of evaluation procedures, is currently under revision. A working group comprising representatives from all Hcéres departments is discussing it. The charter was also discussed at the meeting of the college on 6 March 2024, where several members expressed interest in participating in the working group meetings scheduled for spring 2024 to contribute to finalising the charter. A vote on the charter is scheduled for the college meeting on 18 September 2024.

ESG 2.1. Consideration for internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

Hcéres should revise the programme accreditation standards to bring them into line with the ESG Part 1. Hcéres is recommended to consider further simplification and harmonisation of its standards.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ The simplification of standards has been carried out alongside the development of the integrated evaluation process, but it remains an ambivalent issue. Indeed, Hcéres' missions, as outlined in article L.114-3-1 of the Research Code, require a broad scope of evaluation (evaluation of the implementation of measures to promote gender equality, consideration of research integrity in its evaluations, evaluation of activities to disseminate scientific, technical and industrial culture, as well as scientific expertise activities, etc.). This necessitates dense evaluation standards, although Hcéres is working on simplifying them. The challenge for Hcéres is to show flexibility in order to overcome the contradiction between a synthetic vision and a detailed analytical one. Thus, the guidelines provide a framework that can be adapted to the nature of the entities to be evaluated and their specific needs: the strategic meetings held before the evaluation process begins make it possible to define a roadmap with each HEI, the evaluation criteria can be adapted and specific documents (terms of reference) can be drawn up if needed.
- ⇒ This recommendation could have considered the French context more effectively (lack of fitness for purpose).

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ The accreditation criteria for foreign study programmes have been revised, following the update of the national standards for study programmes, and are now aligned with the ESG.

- ⇒ The institutional evaluation framework has been aligned with the ESG. It is structured on three levels:
 - the evaluation domains (strategic and operational management; research, innovation and inclusion of science in society; education, student and campus life policy).
 - the summary statement of the standard, which expresses general expectations.
 - and the criteria, which are neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and specify each standard by defining the subjects that will be analysed to verify the HEI's compliance with the expectations expressed by the standard to which they are associated.

The relationship between the summary statement of the standard and the criteria that define it is based on the structure of the ESG, which specifies the content of quality assurance at these two levels (*standards* and *guidelines*).

- ⇒ The guidelines for the evaluation of study programmes have also been simplified. Since round C (2022-2023), they have been reduced in number from eight to three and now cover programmes of 1st and 2nd general cycles, 1st and 2nd cycles in arts and architecture, and 3^e cycle. The number of criteria for each of these evaluation frameworks has also been reduced.
- ⇒ Hcéres is simplifying evaluation at the national level through coordinated work with stakeholders. Its standards have been aligned with the Ministry of Labour's national quality framework for continuous education (Qualiopi). As a result, Hcéres evaluations can also be used to certify the quality of the HEIs evaluated, without them having to undergo another certification process. These evaluations enable HEIs to benefit from public funds for lifelong learning and the Qualiopi label.

ESG 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

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.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

The panel recommends that Hcéres be more systematic and proactive in involving stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions and students, in the development of evaluation objectives and methodologies.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ In compliance with the law, Hcéres already includes representatives from HEIs and students in its college, which validates its methodological procedures (evaluation frameworks). It also has 124 academic advisors from academic and socio-economic backgrounds (25% of them). However, Hcéres recognises that these stakeholders could be more involved in discussions on its evaluation activities, both for college members before its meetings and for Hcéres staff during seminars and feedback sessions.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ As mentioned above, as part of the simplification of its standards, Hcéres has aligned them with the Qualiopi standards. This resulted from discussions with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour and its operators, and the CTI during an annual conference on the quality of continuing education, co-organised by the Hcéres' Department for the evaluation of study programmes.
- ⇒ Since 2021, Hcéres has organised annual meetings with its stakeholders, known as "concertation days" (15 June 2021, 29 June 2022, 20 June 2023) to present the procedure, discuss the feedback from the previous round of evaluation, and gather their expectations.

These opportunities for exchange and debate have enabled Hcéres to better understand the needs of various stakeholders (supervising ministries, rectors' conferences, national research organisations, other national evaluation bodies and, since 2023, funding agencies, student

representatives and professional branches). They have emphasised the usefulness of Hcéres evaluations as a steering tool and a lever for change. On the other hand, these consultation days provide an opportunity to offer a more relevant, simpler, and adaptable integrated evaluation process for the diversity of the entities evaluated, with more flexible standards and criteria, data interoperability, and adaptation of different evaluation schedules.

- ⇒ The Health Unit of the Department for the evaluation of HEIs also organised more specific consultations during the development of standards for the University Hospital Centres (CHU) and University Hospital Institutes (IHU).
- ⇒ Hcéres has also arranged for the Acting President and the directors of the departments concerned to meet the heads of French local authorities. These meetings began in February 2024. They have shown the interest of the heads of local authorities both in the results of the Hcéres' evaluations, particularly in the field of research and innovation, and in the possibility of organising exchanges before the launch of the rounds of evaluation.

ESG 2.3. Implementing processes

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.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

Hcéres should find a follow-up method that is appropriate and useful for all involved parties and apply it consistently to all evaluations.

Stakeholders should be adequately informed about the follow-up process.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ The recommendation is relevant and has been applied in the case of the Department for the evaluation of HEIs. The challenge is to find a format that suits HEIs, which already find cyclical evaluations (every 5 years) to be time-consuming and complain of *quality assurance fatigue*.
- ⇒ In the case of the Department for the evaluation of study programmes, since evaluations are linked to accreditation by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research for a period of five years, mid-term monitoring does not seem appropriate, except in the case of accreditations granted with conditions by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.
- ⇒ In addition to the follow-up evaluation reports, Hcéres looks at the follow-up (overall strategy of the HEI, education policy, research policy) through a strategic dialogue initiated with the HEI evaluated before the start of the evaluation. The aim is to take stock of what has been achieved since the previous evaluation and to place the next evaluation in a relevant framework, taking into account the needs and objectives of the HEI being evaluated and comparing them with the five-year contract that it will sign with its supervising ministry.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ The Department for the evaluation of HEIs has introduced follow-up evaluations in 2022 (2 years after the evaluation), which are also used as part of the integrated evaluation process. The format remains flexible so as not to overburden HEIs and to avoid *quality assurance fatigue*.
- ⇒ The ordinance of 12 December 2018 allowed French HEIs that wished to do so, to experiment new forms of cooperation between themselves and with national research organisations for a maximum period of ten years. The ordinance led to the creation of experimental public institutions, which must undergo an *ad hoc* evaluation by the Hcéres at the end of their

experimental period. The first of these evaluations took place in 2022. This specific evaluation is coordinated with the mandatory five-year institutional evaluation cycle in order to simplify the evaluation procedure and avoid duplicating the information required, particularly in terms of governance and management. In addition, in the case of a positive evaluation with recommendations, these will be specifically followed up through a dialogue between Hcéres, the institution and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

ESG 2.4. Peer review experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

Hcéres is recommended to make every effort to expand their reviewers pool with current students and socio-economic experts in order to include them systematically.

The systematic involvement of international experts, at least in institutional and international evaluations, could provide significant added value and is therefore highly recommended.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ Hcéres cares deeply about the student experience and the link between higher education, research, and the labour market, emphasising these aspects in its standards. To ensure these dimensions are considered, experts from both the student and socio-economic sectors are included in its pool. Student experts, mainly master's and doctoral students, need to be regularly renewed, while socio-economic experts are predominantly involved in study programmes evaluations.
- ⇒ At the international level, evaluations are conducted based on a *fitness-for-purpose* approach. Foreign HEIs seek a French experience leading to the award of a French label. They therefore do not necessarily want a 'local' expert to be on the expert panel. As a result, the Europe and International Department accommodates these preferences, except when the Ministry or national agency of the country in which the evaluation is taking place wishes a local expert to sit on the panel. In such cases, Hcéres cooperates with the relevant authorities to engage competent local experts through agreement with the Ministry or agency of the country (e.g. Central America - CCA; Senegal - ANAQ-SUP) in order to benefit from their expertise and to be put in contact with a competent local expert.

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ Hcéres has established a regular call for experts to diversify its pool, including student experts and those from the socio-economic sector. This campaign is promoted on the Hcéres website, social media, and ENQA's platform to attract international experts. Previous experts are also contacted to gauge their interest in remaining in the pool.
- ⇒ The Hcéres Communication Unit has created a short YouTube video in French and English explaining the tasks of an expert and the evaluation process to attract more experts.
- ⇒ The Europe and International Department's Cooperation unit is fostering partnerships with counterpart agencies, particularly in French-speaking countries, with an "exchange of experts" component to increase the number of French-speaking international experts. Successful examples include ANAQ-SUP in Senegal. The unit has also shared the call for experts within the French-speaking network of quality assurance agencies (Fraq-Sup).

ESG 2.6. Reporting

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.

=> Mostly compliant

Recommendation.

In order to facilitate the comparability of the reports, the development of a reporting template in line with the standards of the Protocol is recommended to be considered also in the programme evaluation.

Hcéres should make greater efforts in promoting the accessibility and readability of the reports.

Analysis of the recommendation

- ⇒ The recommendation is relevant, and the first steps to revise the self-evaluation and evaluation report templates were taken in 2021 with the preparation of the integrated evaluation process. The standards and templates for institutional evaluations have been revised to better align with this process, avoiding redundancies. Now, the standards for higher education institutions are structured around three domains, in line with the ESG (see 2.1 pages 5 and 6): (1) strategic and operational management, (2) Policy on research, innovation and the inclusion of science in society, and (3) education policy, student and campus life policy. Domain 2 refers directly to the standards for the evaluation of research units, while domain 3 refers to the standards for the evaluation of study programmes. This ensures that the institutional evaluation report incorporates syntheses of research unit evaluations and summaries of evaluation reports per cycle and per HEI (1st, 2nd, and 3rd cycle).

Follow-up since 2022

- ⇒ Since 2022, Hcéres has been finalising the redesign of its website to make it more *user-friendly*. This includes improving the search engine for easier access to evaluation reports produced by Hcéres: <https://www.hceres.fr/fr/rechercher-une-publication>. The Communication Unit and the Digital and Data Department are working on specifications to optimise the search engine and display reports from the same institution in an 'integrated evaluation version' (comprising the work of the Departments for the Evaluation of HEIs, of study programmes and of research units). Currently, the priority is ensuring correct metadata, but a solution allowing direct search within the text may be implemented later depending on budgetary resources.

New developments at Hcéres

Follow-up to suggestions from ENQA experts

The experts commissioned by ENQA to review Hcéres in 2022 made a number of suggestions for the development and improvement of the agency, which have also been taken into account over the past two years.

Suggestion for further development

In order to reduce the workload of HEIs, the required indicators could be harmonized with all relevant bodies. (ESG 2.2)

- ⇒ In order to reduce the number of indicators requested, Hcéres now partly relies on the publication data deposited by the research units evaluated in HAL, the French national online archiving platform for sharing research results in open access. The Department for the evaluation of study programmes has also simplified data collection by using, whenever possible, the same data that the Ministry of Higher Education and Research requests from institutions:
- at doctoral level (SIREDO surveys on the careers of doctoral students and the "IPdoc survey" on students' post-graduation trajectories);
 - the 1st and 2nd cycles (student numbers, recruitment of students in the 1st year of the 1st cycle, professional integration surveys, etc.).
- ⇒ As part of its role in coordinating national evaluation bodies, Hcéres has:
- set up working groups with the CTI to harmonise evaluation schedules, and with the CEFDG to test a system for evaluating four private HEIs with a public service mission (EESPIG) in 2024. This involved pooling schedules, documents and participants in evaluation meetings and panels. Hcéres also plans to harmonise the evaluation criteria

for bachelor's degrees and to introduce a common data collection platform with the CEFDG in the coming years, in order to simplify the procedure for HEIs;

- o drawn up a reference document, approved by the college at its meeting on 20 September 2023, specifying the "Hcéres' validation process for the evaluation procedures implemented by other specialised evaluation bodies with a national scope of intervention (study programmes and degrees)". This document ensures that the bodies carrying out evaluations in France use a common set of indicators and the ESG.

Suggestion for further development

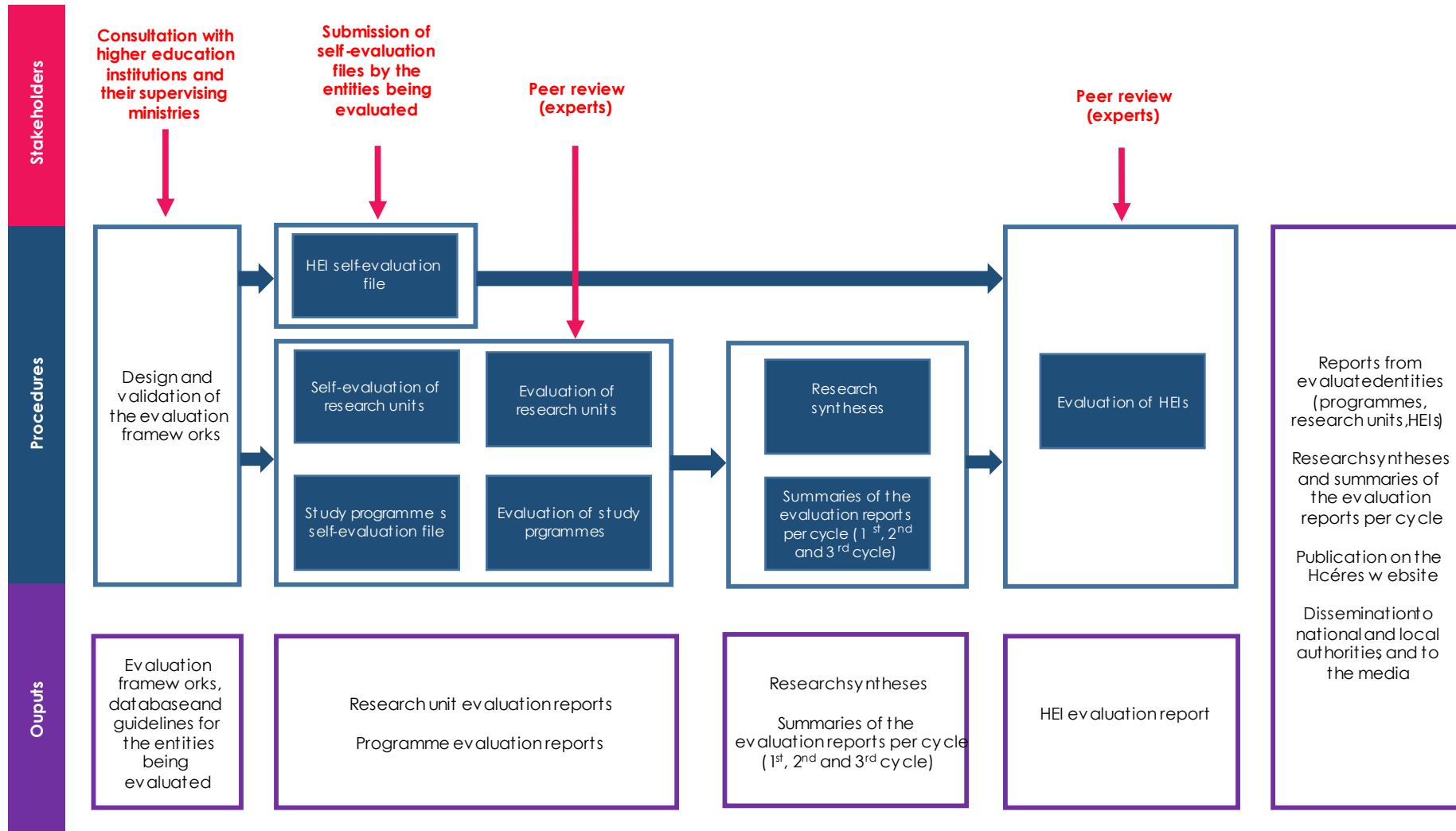
Hcéres could consider, together with the relevant ministries, improving the information provided both higher education institutions and the public on the impact of evaluation results on accreditation decisions. (ESG 2.6)

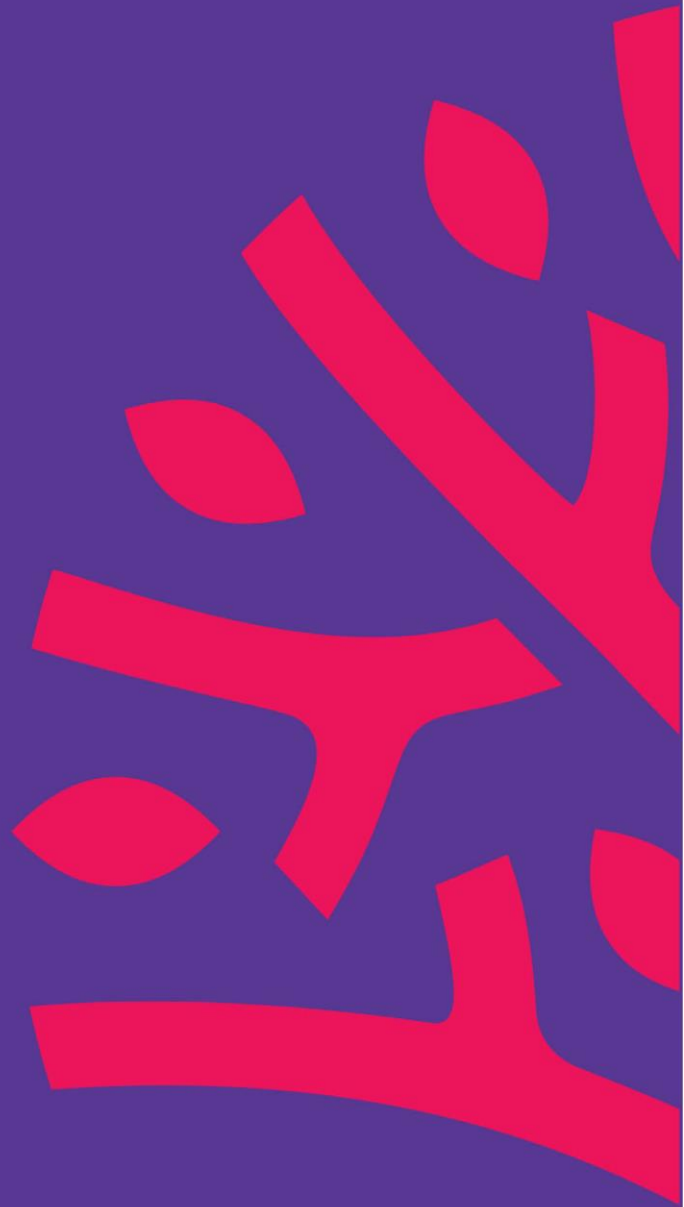
- ⇒ With regard to the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, the Hcéres Europe and International Department, in collaboration with the Diploma Quality and Recognition Department of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, have drafted a note explaining how Hcéres joint programme evaluations, conducted according to methodology and standards of the *European Approach*, align with the Ministry's accreditation decisions. The note has been published on the [Hcéres website](#).

Development of Hcéres' activities

In addition to these suggestions for development and improvement, **Hcéres has taken a number of important steps to develop its activities since the last ENQA review**, starting with the already mentioned introduction of an integrated evaluation process, the methodology of which is detailed in the figure below. The aim was to simplify the evaluation process and make it more holistic and coherent. Under this approach, an HEI is now evaluated on the basis of the results of evaluations of its study programmes and research units. The Departments for the evaluation of HEIs, study programmes, and research units now collaborate closely, and are supported by the Hcéres Science and Technology Observatory, which provides bibliometric indicators for the entities being evaluated.

Figure 1: Hcéres integrated assessment process





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