

*The High Council for evaluation of research
and higher education in France*

***El Consejo Superior de la evaluación de la
investigación y la educación superior en
Francia***

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1. Status and organisation

The HCERES is an independent administrative authority, created by the 22nd July 2013 Higher Education and Research act (HER), replacing the previous AERES, created in 2006. It has kept the same status, rights and obligations as AERES and its independence is still guaranteed by the fact it is directly funded by Parliamentary vote.

The HCERES is governed by a Board of 30 members, representing all stakeholders and including two students, appointed for a 4-year renewable term. The Board is responsible for the quality of the work performed by HCERES and “shall define the measures required for ensuring the quality, transparency and publication of its evaluation procedures”.

The President of HCERES is a member of the Board he chairs.

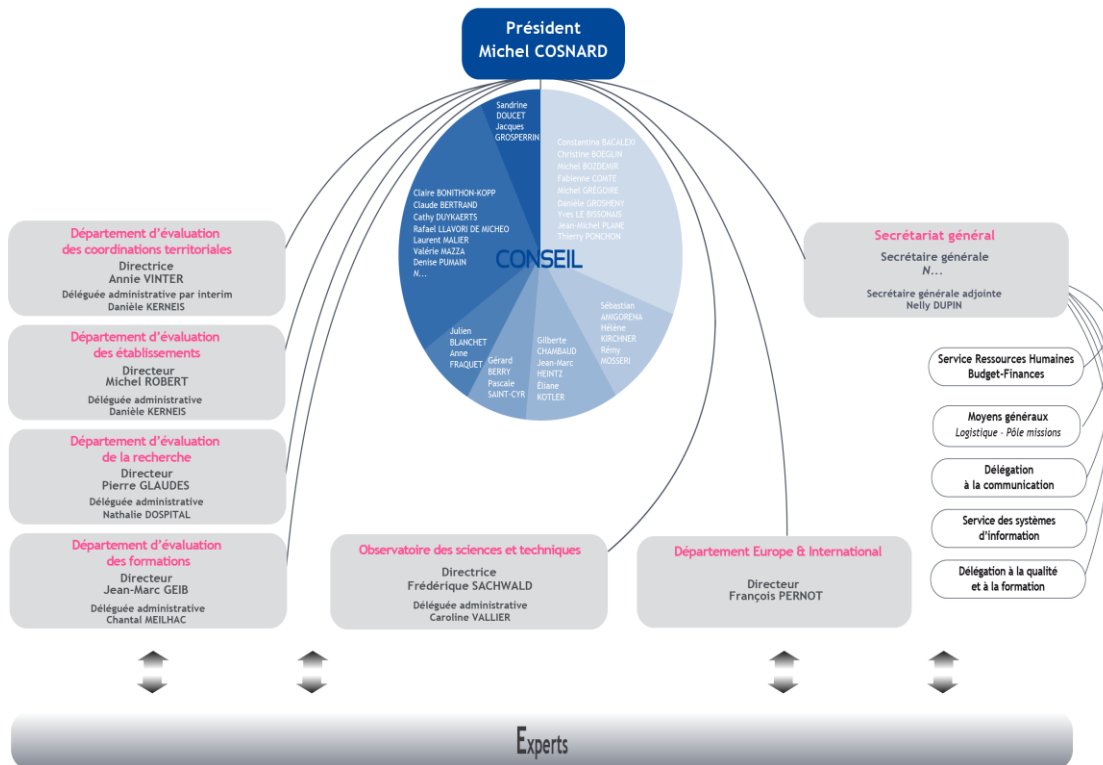
HCERES is organised into 4 evaluation departments dedicated to:

- Institutions and research bodies
- Research units
- Study programmes and degrees
- Territorial cluster policies

A fifth department is responsible for developing activities on European and International level. Eventually, a department called the “Observatory of Science and Technologies” is dedicated to studies and statistical analysis.

The General Secretariat oversees support activities such as financial and human resources, the IT system as well as communication and the quality unit.

Its scientific organisation relies on 115 part-time scientific delegates (professors and researchers) for a 4-year period and 4,500 experts called every year, including 20% foreign experts. 102 full-time administrative and technical staff ensure a smooth and efficient functioning of the operations. For 2016 its budget amounts to 18.2 millions €.



2. Missions and objectives

2.1 HCERES core mission

The HCERES core mission is to develop and implement external quality assurance of:

- French Higher Education and Research institutions such as universities, schools and research bodies, taking into account all their missions and activities on a strategic level, and their own characteristics
- The research activity performed in such institutions' labs and units on their request or, where applicable, validating only their own research unit evaluation procedures according to the principle of subsidiarity as stated by the 2013 HER law
- Study programmes and degrees offered by such institutions at Bachelor, Master and Phd levels
- New territorial coordination groupings, emerging from the progressive restructuring of the HER system, enforced by the 2013 act and to develop international activities.

By offering these services, HCERES assists the evaluated entities in the continuous improvement of their practices, delivers analysis and findings about HER in France and provides clarification for decision-makers such as:

- the State which allows funding, recognition of qualifications and final accreditation of the HEI
- Research bodies which rely on the HCERES reports to base the internal certification of their labs,
- as well as local authorities, companies, families, secondary schools graduates and more generally all stakeholders.

The scope of work is extensive and is rapidly expanding. The core perimeter of activities encompasses every French HEI which signs a funding contract with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research every 5 years. But more and more sectors are willing to take part into this evaluation cycle, such as architecture, art, agriculture schools, as well as health programmes. HCERES is also facing a growing request for evaluation and accreditation from international environment.

2.2 International activities

They are divided into 4 strategic areas:

- Evaluate foreign institutions or study programmes:
 - simple evaluation
 - or evaluation for accreditation purposes, and then delivery of HCERES label
- Evaluate the activities carried out abroad by French institutions and research organisations (including cross border education and joint degrees)
- Provide expertise to foreign agencies in creation or development
- Actively participate in European and international networks (ENQA, INQAAHE, G8 research, EUA) and develop a network of cooperation with equivalent foreign agencies (Spain, Italy, Japan, China, Colombia, Argentina, Andin countries, Québec, Vietnam...)
- Provide our quality assurance with a European and international benchmarking in the field of higher education and research, including internationalisation processes, and learn to improve French practices.

3. Founding principles

Our founding principles comply with the 2015 European Standard and Guidelines.

1. Independence

Its status as an independent administrative authority enables HCERES to carry out its missions without coming under pressure from:

- government authorities
- entities evaluated
- or any other stakeholders

HCERES does its utmost to guarantee compliance with the rules of ethics, in particular those concerning conflicts of interests.

2. Professionalism of experts and transparency of procedures

The quality of evaluation rests on:

- the experts' skills, the correct matching of their profile with the entity evaluated and their previous training
- a methodology and procedures guaranteeing equality of treatment for each evaluated entity
- the HCERES quality management system

The transparency of evaluation rests on (website) publication of:

- criteria for and methods of evaluation
- the list of experts and their positions
- all evaluation reports

4. Methodological principles

Given the wide scope of work and the diversity of our portfolio, the criteria defined and procedures implemented by the High Council take into account:

- the diversity of the natures and missions of the evaluated entities
- along with the diversity of disciplinary fields
- while respecting the principle of equality of treatment for each entity.

The HCERES evaluation is oriented towards improvement of the organisation evaluated, in the context of a territorial positioning. Assessments aim to identify strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for the improvement of Higher Education and Research.

Each evaluation is based on a self-evaluation prior to the assessment of the entity by the HCERES (institution, research body or unit and study programme) in a global process of “integrated evaluation”.

All assessments are peer-review system (including students) for qualitative evaluation (impact, size, risk-taking, etc.) completed by analysis of quantitative data and use of indicators (warning signals) with an on-site visit for research units, doctoral schools and institutions.

Each entity is evaluated every 5 years. All reports are made public.

5. Recognition at European level

Here are the key milestones of HCERES recognition at European level:

- September 2010: AERES obtained full membership of the ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- May 2011: AERES was listed in EQAR, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.
- March 2015: ENQA and EQAR transferred AERES’s European recognition to HCERES.
- July 2016: HCERES undergoes a new external evaluation by ENQA.

6. Scope of work: some figures

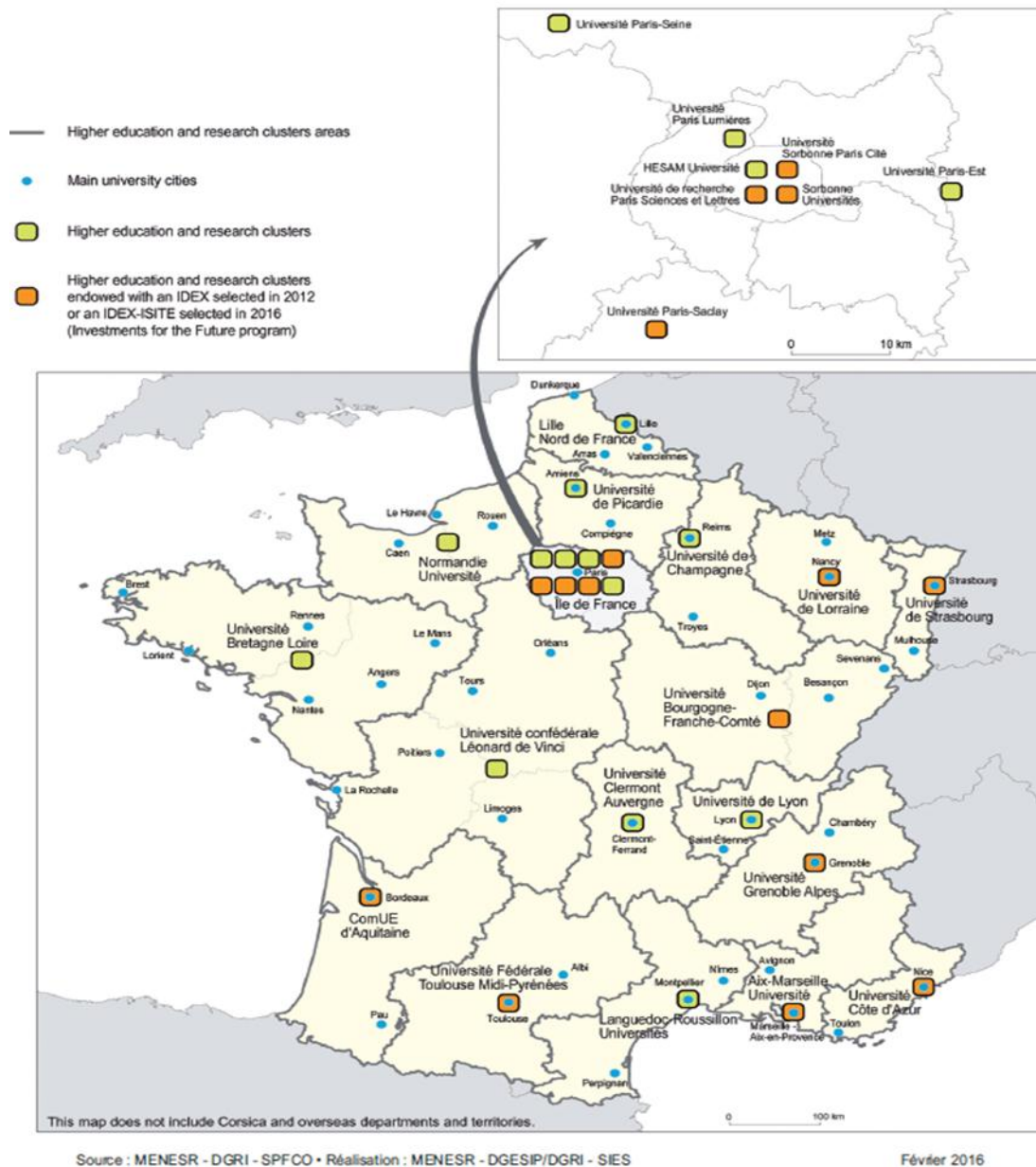
The following table provides details on the number of reviews and evaluations performed by HCERES on the last 5 years:

	Total	Average per year
Public and private HEI and research bodies	310	60
Research units	2,873	575
Study programmes (Bachelor, Vocational bachelor, Master, art and health programmes)	5,293	1,000
Doctoral schools	262	50
Territorial coordination policies (cluster of HEIs and research bodies)	25	5-6

Since the 2013 Act, the concept of territorial coordination, on a site basis, has been launched and the Ministry of Higher Education now signs contracts with groupings of institutions in the same way as it did for individual institutions. These new bodies (25 associations, federations or merging of HEIs and Research bodies in continental France) are in charge of the strategic coordination in their own geographic site. From an academic point of view, they do not directly provide teaching but ensure that programmes offered by its members are well coordinated.

They often compete to the PIA calls for projects (Investments for the Future Program: IDEX, Labex, Idefi,...) and, when successful, are endowed with significant fundings.

Higher education and research clusters in France (2016)



7. International activities

1. Hceres is tasked with evaluation and accreditation foreign institutions and programmes:

HCERES mainly deals with Francophonie partners and countries with longlasting partnership like Armenia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Vietnam,

- For example in Armenia: institutional evaluation of UNACA (Université nationale d'architecture et de construction d'Arménie) et UNPA (Université Nationale Polytechnique d'Arménie) together with Aneca (Spanish Evaluation & Accreditation Agency) and ANQA (local Quality Agency).

2. HCERES also provides technical assistance for setting up Quality assurance agencies:

- Sénégal: ANAQ-SUP (Autorité nationale d'Assurance Qualité de l'Enseignement supérieur)
- Angola: INAARES (Institut national pour l'évaluation, l'accréditation et la reconnaissance des études de l'enseignement supérieur)
- Mali: AMAQ-Sup (Agence malienne d'assurance qualité)

3. HCERES participates to workshops, forums and working groups of the different international networks and organisations:

- ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)
- ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education)
- INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)
- EQAF (European Quality Assurance forum)
- EUA (European University Association)

4. HCERES participates to the European projects:

- Tempus Liban TLQAA (Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency)
- TLQAA+ Liban (developing the culture of programmes' evaluation and matching against national qualifications framework)
- CEQUINT (Certificat for the Quality of Internationalisation)
- QACHE (Quality Assurance of Cross-border higher Education)
- 3CQA (PhD Quality Assurance in Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan,...).

8. HCERES challenges

HCERES plays its role against a backdrop of significant transformations in Higher Education and Research in France.

- The French acts of 2007 and 2013 significantly increased the autonomy of the HEIs, resulting in a more strategic positioning and sounder management practices on the long run.
- The new concept of territorial coordination clusters has resulted in more complex and elaborated strategies on a territorial basis to be taken into account on the national level.

The integrated evaluation (programmes, research units and institutions evaluated each one in turn), the HCERES original trademark, has evolved to include the site dimension, in a top down process. It has raised a number of questions in particular concerning the scale and depth of evaluations and the internal organisational structure of HCERES.

Facing this constant changing situation, HCERES has confirmed its ability to plan and conduct a very high number of evaluations each year, engaging in constructive dialogue with the evaluated entities and the stakeholders. But even if HCERES has capitalized on extensive know-how in external evaluations, it still needs to strengthen internal quality assurance policy to face its challenges.