External review report of the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education

(AERES)

with regard to the Standards and Guidelines
for Quality Assurance
in the European Higher Education Area

May 2010

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Summary

This report looks at the extent to which the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES) conforms to the standards of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). It has been drawn up following a review conducted at the AERES' request. The procedure taken involved a self-evaluation and then a visit by an expert panel. ENQA tasked the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación in Spain (ANECA) with carrying out the whole of this review. Six people made up the expert panel which visited the AERES on 12, 13 and 14 April 2010.

The AERES was set up in 2007 as part of a major overhaul of relations between the State and higher education and research institutions. It has a very broad mandate, encompassing the evaluation of bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral schools, research units and higher education and research institutions. It plays a key role in the French higher education system – with the findings of its evaluations being used by institutions and the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research to negotiate the contracts binding them. For this reason, it must bring the frequency with which its evaluations are conducted into line with the four-year contract terms.

To carry out its mandate, the AERES has developed an original procedure which it calls "*integrated evaluation*". When it takes on the evaluation of an institution, it begins by evaluating its research units, then its training programmes (bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral schools) and finally the institution as a whole. Each stage is independent and gives rise to one or more evaluation reports, used as information sources for the following stages. The AERES has already evaluated almost all French higher education and research institutions in this way.

The evaluations are conducted according to the indications of a guide published on the AERES website. Institutions must carry out a self-evaluation for each training programme, research unit and institution. The AERES has built up a pool of 10,000 experts to which it delivers the required training. The significant resources and staff at its disposal have enabled it to successfully complete an impressive number of evaluations.

The expert panel closely examined the numerous documents provided by the AERES. After this examination and the meetings during the site visit, the panel concluded that the AERES conformed to most of ENQA's standards, particularly when evaluating research units, doctoral schools and institutions. For evaluations of bachelor's degrees and master's degrees, the fact that there is no site visit weakens the reliability of the evaluation.

The panel made a certain number of suggestions to the AERES with a view to helping it to strengthen its evaluation process. Although not everything is perfect, the panel believes that the progress made since the AERES was set up fully justifies that it be granted the status of full ENQA member for a five-year period.

Introduction

This document is the external review report of the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES). This evaluation was conducted in April 2010 in Paris with a view to determining whether or not the AERES meets the required criteria for being a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The first section of the report presents the members of the expert panel, the schedule for carrying out the evaluation and information about how the site visit to the AERES was conducted.

The second section gives information about the French higher education system.

The third section describes the AERES, the legal and political context in which it operates and the way in which it is organized.

In the fourth section, each of the ENQA criteria is reviewed such as to determine the extent to which the AERES meets them.

In the fifth section, the panel draws its conclusions regarding the AERES' strengths and points where improvement would be preferable.

The report includes three annexes:

- Terms of reference for the AERES external review;
- Site visit schedule;
- Guidelines for the expert panel.

1. The evaluation

1.1 Members of the expert panel

The review was conducted in accordance with the procedure described in the Guidelines for National Reviews of ENQA Member Agencies and schedule provided for in the terms of reference (Annex 1 of the Report). It was coordinated by the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA) in Spain.

The expert panel was composed as follows:

- Prof. Francisco Marcellán – Chairman, Professor of Applied Mathematics, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid; former Director of ANECA;
- Prof. Guy Aelterman – Member, Vice-Chancellor, Artesis University College, Antwerp, Belgium, external expert of the ECA;
- Prof. Françoise Bevalot – Member, Professor of Pharmacy at the Université de Franche-Comté, institution adviser to the Ministry of Higher Education and Research;
- M^{rs} Marta-Norah Sanz – Member, Doctoral Student in the Department of Earth Sciences and Condensed Matter Physics, Universidad de Cantabria;
- Prof. Michel Zink – Member, Professor of French mediaeval literature, Collège de France;

- Prof. Jacques L'Écuyer – Secretary, Higher Education Consultant for various international organizations.

The experts were put forward by ANECA, appointed by ENQA and accepted by the AERES.

1.2 Preparing the evaluation

The AERES produced a self-evaluation report that the panel used to prepare for the visit and reach its conclusions. The experts received an electronic copy of the Self-Evaluation Report on 26 February 2010. AERES then sent a paper copy of the Self-Evaluation Report and some important documents, along with an electronic copy of the other documents mentioned in the Self-Evaluation Report.

The expert panel then put forward a schedule indicating the groups it wanted to meet. After some discussions, this was accepted by the AERES on 29 March 2010.

A panel bringing together the AERES President, the Secretary-General, the heads of department, the advisers and the quality assurance unit managed this self-evaluation. The quality unit had been set up in order to coordinate it. Six working groups were formed to analyze conformity to the ENQA criteria. The report is of a high standard and presents all necessary information with regard to each of ENQA's standards. Various documents were supplied to back up the conclusions reached by the AERES. The panel recognizes the value and interest of the self-evaluation document.

The panel prepared for the visit by meeting the day before the planned date. The experts used this meeting to share their opinions on the Self-Evaluation Report and the main questions to expand on during the visit. This resulted in a list of questions to bring up with the groups with whom the panel was expected to meet.

1.3 Evaluation schedule

13 January 2010	The expert panel members are approved by the AERES and ANECA.
28 January 2010	The expert panel members are approved by ENQA.
18 February 2010	The expert panel members receive their appointment and an invitation from the Director of ANECA.
25 February 2010	The terms of reference for the expert panel are handed out to the members
26 February 2010	The AERES finishes its self-evaluation report, which is sent to the expert panel members.
9 March 2010	A visit schedule proposal is handed out to expert panel members and sent to the AERES.
15 March 2010	The general framework of the visit is approved by the AERES.

29 March 2010	The visit schedule with confirmation from the meeting participants is approved.
11-14 April 2010	The panel holds a preparatory meeting in Paris on 11 April. The visit takes place on 12, 13 and 14 April.
30 April 2010	The Panel Secretary submits an initial version of the Evaluation Report. This is sent to the panel members on 1 May.
5 May 2010	The Panel Secretary receives all of the panel members' comments.

1.4 The visit

The panel visit took place on the AERES' premises. It began on 12 April at 8.30am and continued until 1pm on 14 April. The detailed schedule of the visit and people encountered can be found in Annex 2 of this Report.

The visit was well organized by the AERES in accordance with the ENQA recommendations for this type of visit. The AERES even supplied the list of all those who would be met beforehand – with some information about each person's job and a photo.

Moreover, the experts had access to all the necessary documents and were able to use the AERES' Internet system.

In general, interviews were held in a cordial atmosphere. In response to the experts' questions, the interviewees gave useful clarifications that enabled the panel members to get a good grasp of what the AERES really does.

The Evaluation Report was drawn up on the basis of the AERES' Self-Evaluation Report, the discussions that took place during the visit and the analyses performed afterwards.

The expert panel would like to thank the AERES for preparing for the visit and allowing it to take place without a hitch. It would also like to thank those who willingly held frank discussions with the panel members.

2. Higher education in France

2.1 Presentation

Before describing the AERES, a few words need to be said about the French higher education system. This is a complex system where education is delivered in a variety of public and private institutions. The main ones are universities, which teach almost two-thirds of students, and *grandes écoles* which – even if they teach fewer students – are institutions that deliver more applied training programmes to selected students. Other public and private institutions round off the range of higher education institutions. In total, 2,231,745 students attended such institutions in 2008-2009.

Number of higher education structures and institutions in 2008-2009

Institutions attached to universities	
Universities	79
University technology institutes	115
Engineering schools attached to universities	59
Teacher training university institutes (IUFMs)*	30
Institutions independent from universities	
Skilled technician diploma (BTS) classes	2182
Preparatory classes for admission to *grandes écoles*	422
Engineering schools independent from universities	172
Business, management and accounting schools	206
Other institutions	1421

*Three IUFMs are not attached to universities.

Access to higher education is guaranteed to all those who pass their *baccalauréat*. Universities do not select their students – except for some training programs in the health sector. However, access to *grandes écoles* is obtained by sitting a competitive entrance examination. Funding is provided for the most part by the State which, in 2005, devoted 1.3% of the country's GDP to it.

As a result of France's participation in the Bologna Process, it has split its higher education system into three cycles, giving rise to the build-up of credits under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The bachelor's degree corresponds to the first cycle of higher education. It lasts six semesters and enables 180 ECTS credits to be obtained. Some secondary education institutions also deliver two-year post-*baccalauréat* courses (skilled technician diplomas/BTS, preparatory classes for admission to *grandes écoles*) giving students up to 120 ECTS credits applicable to bachelor's degrees.

The second cycle leads to a master's degree being awarded after four semesters of study. Lastly, the third cycle lasts three years and leads to a doctorate. This is worked towards in a doctoral school. All of the degrees – bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctorates – are State degrees that must be evaluated by the AERES and State accredited every four years.

Another specific feature of the French system is the two-tier organization of public research, which is partly carried out in universities and partly in research organizations (French National Centre for Scientific Research/CNRS, French National Institute for Agricultural Research/INRA, French National Institute of Health and Medical Research/INSERM, etc.). Research units may belong to universities, research organizations or be mixed units belonging to both of these groups. There is increasing inter-penetration of the two groups and multiplication of mixed units contributing to the training of doctoral students. Research units are accredited by research organizations or the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research for four years.

2.2 Recent developments

Over the last few decades, higher education in France has seen the State's relationship with higher education and research institutions change. Prior to this period, all higher education was highly centralised, with the State monitoring the budget, the operation of institutions and the implementation of the objectives that it had set for the latter. In the early 1990s, the State undertook a movement of gradually transferring this remit to institutions, with regulation being ensured through a contract. Universities have thus been granted more independence. This movement was secured in the French Law on the Freedoms and Responsibilities of Universities (LRU), adopted in 2007.

This Law significantly amends the way in which higher education institutions are run, and relate to the State. The main provisions include:

- A new mission entrusted to universities: providing guidance and integration of students into the job market;

- Renewed governance of universities, with clarification of the remit of the different bodies, particularly that of the executive board and rector, which has been considerably stepped up;

- Reinforcement of the State-University partnership, through a multi-annual contract defining the strategic policies of the university. This has become a management tool increasing the independence of universities thanks to the globalization of resources and transfer of the total wage bill to institutions.

With the adoption of the LRU, the State is playing the role of strategist rather than direct manager of higher education. That said, since the law has recently been passed, all of its effects have yet to be gauged. It is in this transitional context that the AERES was founded and began its activities.

3. The French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education

3.1 Legal framework

The AERES was founded by French Law no. 2006-450 in 2006. The first provision of this Law states that "*The Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education is an independent administrative authority*."

It then specifies the AERES' mission which is:

"*1° To evaluate research organizations and institutions, research and higher education institutions, scientific cooperation foundations and institutions and the French National Research Agency as regards all of their missions and activities;*

2° To evaluate the research activities conducted by the research units of the aforementioned institutions and organizations; it performs said evaluations either directly or by calling on institutions and organizations whose procedures it has validated;

3° To evaluate the programs and degrees of higher education institutions;

4° To validate the procedures for evaluating the staff of the aforementioned institutions and organizations and passing judgment on the conditions under which said procedures are carried out;

As part of European or international cooperation programs or at the request of the competent authorities, it may also take part in reviews of foreign or international research and higher education organizations.

Documents drawn up by private bodies on the use of public research grants are sent to the AERES."

The Law adds that *"the Agency is administered by a Council"*, which is composed of twenty-five French, European or international members, including the Chairman, i.e. nine qualified members, fourteen members who work as researchers, engineers or professors, and two MPs. These members are appointed by decree at the recommendations of various higher education and research bodies.

The powers of the Council are stipulated in French Decree no. 2006-1334, consolidated version of 19 December 2008:

"*The Council makes sure that the evaluation procedures implemented in the AERES departments are consistent, by specifying the framework, objectives, criteria and arrangements for carrying out the procedure for each department.*

It checks that the criteria and procedures it applies take account of the diverse statuses and missions of organizations and training programmes that are evaluated, as well as the diverse disciplines pursuant to articles L. 112-1, L. 114-1 and L. 114-

3-2 of the French Research Code and to Chapter III of Book I of the French Education Code.

It also lays down the conditions under which the evaluations are conducted at the request of the French Ministries of Research and Higher Education."

This Decree also lays down the diverse points on which the Council deliberates, the firsts of which are of particular interest for this evaluation. Thus, the Council deliberates, amongst other things, on:

"*1° the evaluation charter defining the appropriate measures for guaranteeing the quality, transparency and publicity of the evaluation and scoring processes;*

2° European and international cooperation policy;

3° the appointment of the departments heads, as recommended by the President of the AERES;

4° a multiannual evaluation program in keeping with the deadlines of the institutions' contractual procedures with the State;

5° the validation of department judgements and summary reports drawn up in light of the evaluation reports."

The Decree also stipulates the President's powers. It says that he directs the Agency and guarantees the impartiality, reliability and transparency of evaluations. On the administrative front, he has authority over the Agency's staff, is responsible for its budget and authorizes expenses and receipts.

Lastly, the Decree provides that the Agency comprise three departments – responsible for evaluating institutions, research and training programs respectively. Each department is directed by a head of department, who is responsible for carrying out the evaluations.

3.2 Mission and objectives

The AERES' mission is that defined by the Law, i.e. the evaluation of higher education and research organizations and institutions, research activities and the programs and degrees of higher education institutions. Its mandate encompasses all universities and *grandes écoles*, at least for the evaluation of institutions and research. The AERES' mandate does not include the evaluation of preparatory classes for admission to *grandes écoles* or that of skilled technician diplomas (BTS).

The AERES is also tasked with validating the evaluation procedures of higher education and research institution staff. This mission has not been put into practice yet, since the reform of the French Universities Board (CNU) – competent in the evaluation of professors – only took place under the French Decree of 23 April 2009; as a result its implementation is still not complete.

The AERES has set itself the following objectives:

1° implementing the European commitments made by France (Bologna Process, standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, or “ESG”);

2° assisting the institutions evaluated as regards their whole activity with a view to improving their governance, research and range of programs, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and suggesting ways in which they can improve;

3° providing the State with an impartial tool for making strategic decisions;

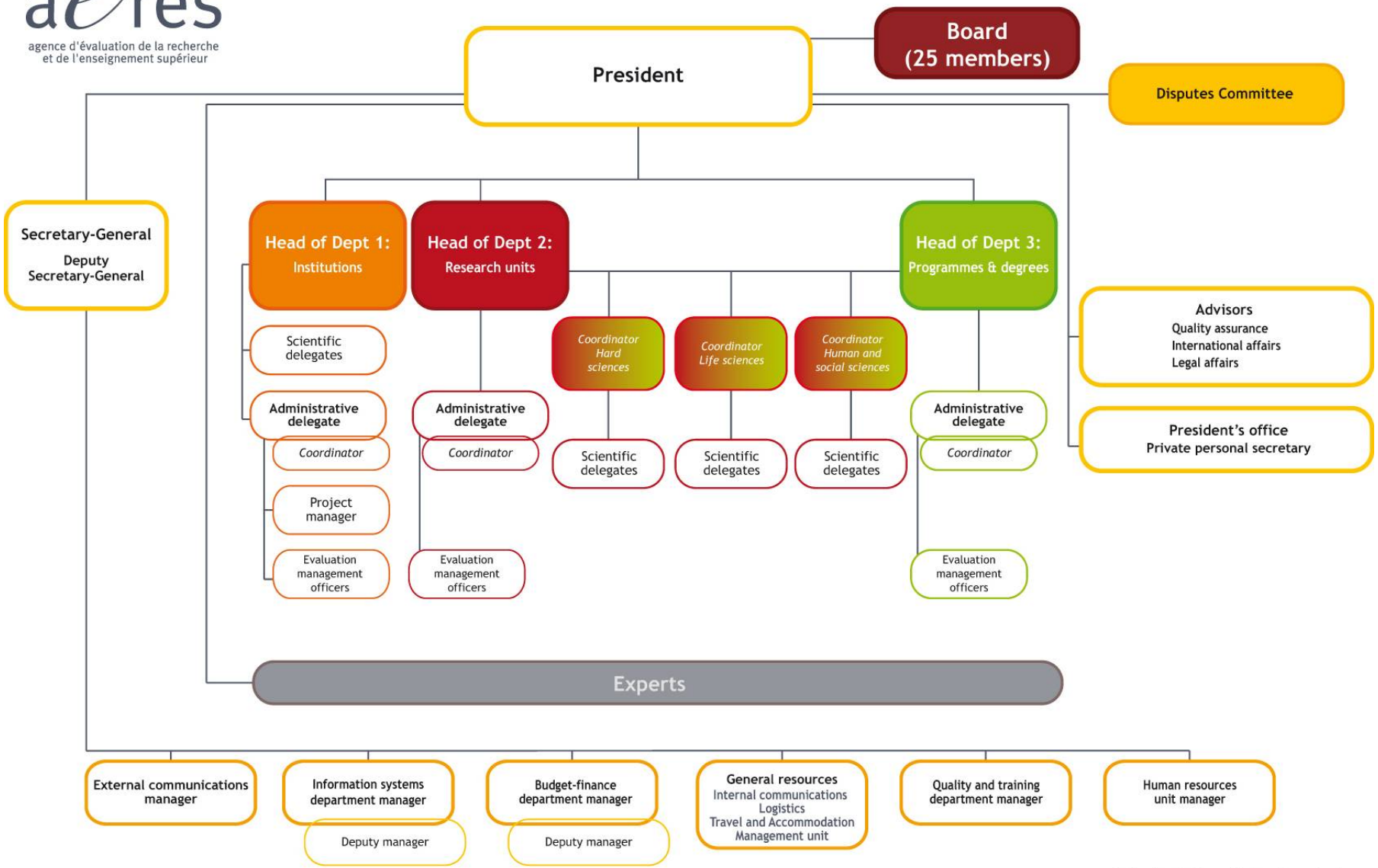
4° giving students useful information to help them to choose their learning pathways in terms of research and training.

3.3 Organization

To conduct its mission and achieve its objectives, the AERES’ in-house staff comprises 70 full-time administrative members and 106 scientific delegates – researchers or professors working part-time and tasked with the scientific organization of the evaluations. These scientific delegates work with the heads of department to organize the expert panels and monitor evaluations under their authority. In addition to this staff, the AERES has also built up a pool of some 10,000 experts on which it calls to carry out its evaluations. The figure on the next page presents the AERES organization chart.

aeres
agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur

ORGANISATION CHART



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The AERES is mainly funded by the State. Its appropriations are debated and voted each year by the French Parliament. The table below gives the budget available over the last three years – or since the AERES was set up.

	2007	2008	2009
Appropriations voted	7,998,433	12,656,000	15,165,060
Appropriations available	5,112,580	13,024,420	14,415,155
Appropriations spent	4,684,618	12,959,881	14,376,318
Own resources**			79,000

* Appropriations paid by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication for the evaluation of art *grandes écoles*.

The AERES produces annual statements on the use of the funds it is allocated and is subject to subsequent inspection by the French Court of Auditors.

3.4 The AERES' evaluation process

The AERES has chosen to integrate the first three aspects of its mission – i.e. the evaluation of institutions, of research activities and of programmes and degrees. As such, it intends to give one opinion of the research activities of an institution, a second on the training programmes offered by the same institution and a final one on the institution as a whole – all over the same period. To this end, it organizes the evaluation of an institution in three successive stages: starting with research units, moving on to training programmes (bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctoral schools) and ending with the institution itself as a whole. Whilst each stage constitutes an independent evaluation, the information gathered during one stage is taken into account in the next stage. The quality of research assessed during the first stage therefore becomes information for appraising the scientific base of master's degrees. Likewise, the information gathered during the evaluation of research units and programmes and degrees becomes important for the overall evaluation of institutions. All of the evaluations are conducted in the same way: preparation, review, feedback and writing the report. All institutions are evaluated in four successive campaigns or groups, within a four-year cycle. The AERES then sends out an evaluation report for each of an institution's research units, a report for bachelor's degrees, one for master's degrees and one for its doctoral schools and, finally, one which focuses on the institution itself. The reports on bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctoral schools include an assessment of each of the programmes evaluated.

Preparations for evaluations are made under the responsibility of the scientific delegates and involve meetings so as to present the AERES' method as well as the main principles of the review to the experts. Applications are examined for the first time at these meetings too. The review is conducted on the site of the evaluated institution, except in the case of bachelor's degrees and master's degrees, for which it is conducted on the basis of the application submitted. The report is written by the expert panel chairman. This is proofread by an ad hoc committee run by a scientific delegate and approved by the head of department. This proofreading enables the

different reports to be harmonized. The report is then sent to the directors of the evaluated institutions to give them the chance to highlight factual errors and make comments. Once the factual errors have been corrected, the directors' comments are appended to the report and form an integral part thereof. For training programs and research units, the AERES attributes a score: A+, A, B or C. The reports including these scores and comments are then sent to the directors of the evaluated institutions and stakeholders concerned. They are published on the AERES website.

3.5 The AERES' evaluation criteria

The AERES has drawn up guides for carrying out each type of evaluation. The guide currently in use is entitled "*Évaluation des établissements, des unités de recherche et des formations de la vague A* (*2011-2014)"*, and was adopted in April 2009. It contains a specific guide for each type of evaluation: institutions, federated research organizations and units, doctoral schools, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.

The guide for the evaluation of research organizations and units specifies which information needs to be provided about the past (review) and future (forecasts) scientific activity. The unit is asked to analyse its review and clarify its objectives with regard to its missions, size and organization, with account taken of the way in which previous objectives have been achieved. The guide gives few details about the evaluation criteria. These are described on the AERES website and explain that research organizations and units are evaluated and graded according to four criteria: 1) *Scientific quality and production* aimed at assessing the relevance and interest of the research carried out, the quality of the findings and their originality, scientific progress and its international impact and risk-taking; 2) *Influence and appeal, integration in the environment* which takes account of the reputation, visibility and appeal of the unit and its members; 3) *Strategy, governance and laboratory life* where the organization, consistency and vitality of the unit are assessed; 4) *Assessment of the plan* which asks the experts to assess the reality of a plan at 4 years, its quality, relevance and consistency in relation to resources and its feasibility. A general score is attributed by the AERES.

Specific guides have also been developed to evaluate bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctoral schools. These give a list of the items to be examined with a few comments to guide the experts. The guide states that "the exam pass rate, chosen continuation of studies or integration into the job market are the key words and, consequently, the basis for the evaluation" for bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. It goes on to say that "because we still do not know the full extent of student integration in each sector – or of their continuation of studies –, an evaluation is also necessary of the techniques applied to ensure the passing of exams and integration". With regard to doctoral schools, "the evaluation should primarily be based on the findings depending on what becomes of doctors". On this point the guide also adds that "because we still do not know what exactly becomes of doctors, an evaluation is also necessary of the techniques applied for the life of the doctoral school, the recruitment of doctoral students, their additional training, supervision of their thesis, the quality of supervision and so on".

The guide for the evaluation of institutions is the most comprehensive and detailed. An initial version of the criteria was adopted in May 2008 in the form of an expert's guide for the second evaluation group. This has been updated for the third group and now forms part of the guide for the evaluation of fourth-group institutions which is currently under way.

The table below lists the questions that the guide asks experts to broach when evaluating institutions.

1 Research strategy
- Objective 1.1: The institution's research potential
- Objective 1.2: The institution's research strategy
- Objective 1.3: Implementation and follow-up of the research strategy

2 Promotion strategy
- Objective 2.1: Development of a strategy for exploiting research findings

3 Training strategy
- Objective 3.1: Managing the range of programmes
- Objective 3.2: Legibility and visibility of the range of programmes
- Objective 3.3: Student support initiatives: from arrival at the university to assistance with integration in the job market
- Objective 3.4: The institution provides the student with a work environment in keeping with the requirements of university training
- Objective 3.5: The teaching quality system

4 Student life strategy
- Objective 4.1: The student is involved in the life of the institution
- Objective 4.2: The initiatives and practices enabling students to enjoy a real quality of life

5 External relations strategy
- Objective 5.1: Development of inter-institution relations (universities, *grandes écoles*)
- Objective 5.2: Relations with public science and technology institutions (EPST) and public industrial and commercial institutions (EPIC)
- Objective 5.3: Relations with local authorities
- Objective 5.4: Relations with socio-economic environments

6 International relations strategy
- Objective 6.1: International activity in terms of research and training

7 Governance
- Objective 7.1: The institution's organization and management system
- Objective 7.2: Managing and development of information and communication technologies for the benefit of training, research, administration and all staff and users
- Objective 7.3: The human resources management policy at the service of the institution's objectives
- Objective 7.4: Organization and management of the budgetary and financial policy at the service of the institution plan
- Objective 7.5: Real estate policy: management, maintenance and development of all assets

Objective 7.6: Development of the self-evaluation capacity at the service of more effective activity
Objective 7.7: Quality assurance
Objective 7.8: Health and safety

8 Relations with hospitals and universities
Objective 8.1: Development of relations between universities, health departments and hospitals

9 Affirmation of the institution's identity through a communication policy
Objective 9.1: Development of a sense of belonging.

With regard to each of these objectives, the guide contains a paragraph entitled "*Interpretation system and evaluation criteria"*. This contains a certain number of questions about the objective. In addition, there is a list of points for examination under each objective. Except in the case of certain objectives – for example objective 3.4 – the criteria are not presented in the form of positive statements in relation to which the experts would gauge the institution's situation.

In addition to the guides mentioned above, in December 2009 the AERES drew up Quality Standards in line with the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Education Area (ESG). The first part is given over to quality assurance at the AERES and the second to the evaluation of institutional quality by the AERES – to which all of the characteristics of quality assurance in institutions (to be taken into account) are appended. Unlike the evaluation guide, the criteria in the Quality Standards are presented in a very precise manner by the AERES.

4. Review of the AERES with regard to the ENQA standards

4.1 Preliminary remarks

Before broaching the detailed review of the AERES, it should be noted that the Agency has only recently been created. Although it has replaced the French National Committee of Evaluation (CNE), it has drawn little from the experience acquired for various reasons. As a result, when evaluating the first group, the evaluations were carried out under different conditions from those recommended by ENQA. For example, the experts were not given any training or standards for evaluating institutions.

This situation was swiftly rectified so that, today, the AERES has defined criteria and procedures. It has developed the necessary tools for conducting the high number of evaluations for which it is responsible. Its achievements are, incidentally, very impressive, as it has already evaluated most French universities, their training programmes and their research activities – totalling 30 institutions for the first group, 33 for the second, 58 for the third and 79 for the one currently under way.

It should nevertheless be noted that some developments are very recent. Accordingly, as already mentioned, the AERES Quality Standards were not adopted

until late 2008. Even the evaluation guides were not introduced until 2008, although they have been used for evaluation during the last three groups with very few amendments between each group. Only one objective concerning quality assurance (7.7) has been added for the last group. It is this last guide that will be used for the following conformity analysis. Reference will also be made – depending on the context – to the AERES Quality Standards.

4.2 The AERES' satisfaction of the ENQA standards

ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education.

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG.

Before passing judgement with regard to this standard, we need to examine whether the AERES conforms to the standards of Part 2 of the ESG.

- **ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures.**

  External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance procedures described in Part 1 of the ESG.

  Checking the conformity to this standard ensures that the AERES' criteria make it possible to verify the effectiveness of the procedures described in the seven standards of Part 1 of the ESG.

  - **ESG 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance**

    Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognizes the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

    The AERES' guide for the evaluation of institutions deals with this question in objective 7.7 on quality assurance. Reviewers must ensure that quality assurance takes account of the ESG, that the objectives of a policy are approved by the institution's bodies and that the steering procedure is described. Implementation of the quality management system must apply for all of the institution's activities. A process for the

continuous improvement of the quality management system comprising a self-evaluation approach, follow-up of indicators, identification of anomalies and development and follow-up of an action plan must have been put together.

The guide also addresses this question in objective 3.5 on the teaching quality system. The reviewers must evaluate the management of evaluation procedures of courses and training programmes, the quality of evaluation of students and degrees delivered, the consideration of students' characteristics, the role of teaching teams and vocational integration surveys.

The questions covered by ESG 1.1 are therefore clearly broached in the AERES' guide. However, it is unclear upon reading the guide that the evaluation goes much further than the observation that policies and procedures are in place. Is the effectiveness of such policies and procedures really assessed? This is not certain. Objective 7.7, for example, is very general and does not put forward an approach that might guide experts in evaluating effectiveness. Objective 3.5 is more explicit, but again does not really go beyond observation that procedures exist. For example, regarding the evaluation of training programmes, why would the guide not ask for the institution to demonstrate how it conducts and follows up its self-evaluations through a few case studies?

The Quality Standards address the same criterion by specifying the key points to be examined: "*Existence of a policy guaranteeing the quality of programmes and degrees and divided up into operational procedures; definition and implementation of a quality continuous improvement strategy; publication of the policy, strategy and procedures; actual role of students and stakeholders in the quality management system.*" Eight specific criteria follow, covering all of this standard's points, for example the institution "*has implemented quality assurance and assesses and analyses its effectiveness (achievement of objectives).*" This type of criterion goes further than those found in the guide. It would be in the AERES' interests to draw on this when producing its next guides.

To sum up, the AERES complies substantially with this standard, but could improve its services through more precise and binding criteria.

- **ESG 1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and degrees**

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

The guide addresses this question in objective 3.5 on the teaching quality system. The experts should dwell on the central management of procedures for evaluating teaching staff and training programmes. The

quality of student and degree evaluations must be examined along with the conformity of training programmes.

The Quality Standards, with regard to ESG 1.2, indicate that the key point for the AERES to evaluate is the existence of a process describing the design, implementation and revision of programmes and degrees, distributed, implemented and evaluated. Precise criteria have once again been provided here.

The same comments as for the previous point apply. The AERES conforms to this standard but could improve the precision of its criteria.

- **ESG 1.3 Assessment of students**

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

The evaluation guide goes suitably into this question in objective 3.5 on the teaching quality system. The quality of student evaluation must be examined from the point of view of examinations designed as a pedagogical procedure, updated evaluation criteria and procedures based on pedagogical knowledge, the existence of clear rules and criteria, etc. However, the institution's role in checking that procedures are applied and criteria are followed is not mentioned.

On this point, in its Quality Standards the AERES states that the following should be evaluated: 1° the existence of the student evaluation criteria and procedures, which are described, made publicly available and regularly evaluated by the institution; 2° the verification by the institution of the consistent application of procedures and compliance with criteria.

- **ESG 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff**

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students is qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

The evaluation guide gives criteria on the quality of teaching staff in the context of the teaching quality system (objective 3.5) and the human resources management policy (objective 7.3). The evaluation of teaching is covered in part of objective 3.5. It is requested that the evaluation procedures be examined and that it be ensured that they are used on a regular basis. The role of students in the evaluation is taken into account. The management of teachers' and professors' jobs, recruitment and use of resources are brought up in objective 7.3. However, nothing is said about improvement measures.

According to the AERES Quality Standards, the key point to be evaluated is that there is a described, implemented and evaluated process guaranteeing the quality and competence of the teaching staff. The criteria highlighted in the Quality Standards include evaluation of the disciplinary and teaching skills of professors when they are recruited, evaluation of the quality of teaching activities by students, evaluation of the training needs of professors and development and implementation of training plans.

- **ESG 1.5 Learning resources and student support**

  Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

  These questions are clearly dealt with in the evaluation guide under the student support initiatives (objective 3.3) and the work environment provided to students (objective 3.4). This concerns management of welcome, guidance and support initiatives, consideration of the success objectives of students through advance predictions and support initiatives and assistance tools (3.3). It also concerns documentary policies, access to WI-FI and traditional documentary resources.

  The Quality Standards highlight the following criterion with regard to ESG 1.5: “A process for managing teaching and student support resources is described and encompasses: identification of student requirements; tailoring of resources to the requirements expressed; regular evaluation of the adequacy of teaching resources and the effectiveness of support activities and their improvement”.

- **ESG 1.6 Information systems**

  Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

  The guide mentions this question in the context of managing and developing information and communication technologies (objective 7.2) and of developing self-evaluation capacity (objective 7.6). Objective 7.2 addresses this question through the development and management of information systems, while objective 7.6 focuses on information analysis and processing. In particular, the latter concerns the quality of the information system, accessibility to databases, the extent of their use, the quality of information provided and how this is used.

  The Quality Standards, meanwhile, specify that evaluation is necessary as to whether a management process is in place to evaluate the effectiveness of training programmes and other activities, including data

collection (indicators and follow-up management charts), results analysis and implementation of improvement actions.

- **ESG 1.7 Public information**

  Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

  This question is well developed in the evaluation guide in objective 3.2 on the legibility and visibility of the range of programmes. Four themes are touched on: legibility of the architecture of the range of programmes, management and harmonization of the communications policy, communication tailored to students and communication tailored to the socioeconomic world.

  According to the Quality Standards, an evaluation must be conducted to ensure there is a described, applied and evaluated external communication process (concerning programmes and degrees), as well as of the contents and accessibility of public information.

To sum up, the AERES' evaluation criteria take on board all of the standards of Part 1 of the ESG. In this regard, the AERES is in line with standard 2.1 of the ESG.

However, its criteria are described in much more detail in the Quality Standards it adopted in December 2008 than in its evaluation guide. At present, the criteria of the evaluation guide are expressed in question form, which might raise interpretation difficulties. The experts' work would be facilitated by a text that is more precise and more in line with international practices. The expert panel asks the AERES to improve its evaluation guides by looking to the ones it developed itself in its Quality Standards.

Moreover, in several cases, whilst the criteria seek to ensure the existence of policies, regulations or procedures, they do not actually state any measures to check that these are effective. This is the case, for example, in objective 7.7 on quality assurance, objective 3.3 on student support initiatives and objective 3.5 on the teaching quality system. This does not mean that the reviewers cannot check the effectiveness of these policies, regulations and procedures – but the guide does not prompt them explicitly to do so. Here again, the Quality Standards go further and could be used as a starting point for making improvements.

- **ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes**

  The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible

(including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

The objectives that the AERES has set for its evaluations are clearly indicated on its website and are as follows:

1. *give higher education and/or research institutions information for developing their future strategy in terms of both training and research;*
2. *give teaching and research teams comparative elements with a view to improving the quality of service provided;*
3. *provide the supervising ministries with the information they need to make decisions (allocating funds and human resources, accrediting programmes or research units, etc.);*
4. *give students the information they need for choosing the right studies;*
5. *meet the information requirements of businesses on the quality of programmes and degrees and on graduates' skills;*
6. *provide civil society with reliable and transparent information about the activities of higher education and research institutions.*

The AERES mentions part of these objectives in its evaluation guide by listing them from a slightly different viewpoint. In this case, it says that it "*puts the institution at the heart of the evaluation process, the purpose of which is to help the latter to undertake a continuous improvement policy with a view to carrying out its strategy for developing its independence more effectively. Evaluation is intended to help institutions to better position themselves with regard to the objectives they have set themselves at national and international level."*

To date, the AERES has carried out four evaluation groups. During the first group, which only concerned institutions and training programmes, the AERES had no explicit criteria for evaluating institutions. The experts therefore had to draw on their own experience to assess the value of institutions and their activities. The AERES subsequently began to develop tools presenting its evaluation objectives and method. Thus, the document "*Evaluation of institutions, research units and training programmes in group A"*, dated April 2009, is being used during the current evaluation of group A institutions. It contains a brief presentation of the AERES' missions, its founding principles, the objectives and method of integrated evaluation, the evaluation stages and the provisional schedule. A guide for evaluating institutions, research units, doctoral schools, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees follows.

The self-evaluation report indicates that the evaluation process was defined in consultation with the stakeholders. In fact, liaison meetings took place with various participants: university rectors, ministries and research organizations, vice-chairmen of *conseils des études et de la vie étudiante* (advisory boards for student life and studies), the *Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs* (Committee for master's degrees in engineering science), students, etc. Some of the people interviewed during the visit nevertheless

pointed out that there should preferably have been greater consultation on the evaluation criteria. However, the AERES' efforts in disseminating the evaluation concepts and method should be commended. For example, before evaluating each group it organizes meetings with the institution heads, their executive teams and the directors of research units.

The Committee considers that the AERES now conforms sufficiently to standard 2.2 of the ESG. Its objectives are explicit. Consultation is extensive. The guide contains all the required information.

- **ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions**

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

The AERES is an evaluation agency. In this regard, it does not make any formal decisions in the same way as an accreditation agency does. That said, it passes judgement and grades research units and training programmes. As far as research units are concerned, these scores are based on four criteria: scientific production, influence and appeal, strategy, governance, laboratory life and the laboratory research plan. Regarding training programmes, they are based on several criteria – without their relative weighting being explicit in the AERES' documents. All of its criteria – both those used for institutional evaluations and those used for evaluating research units and training programmes – are published and put on the AERES website.

In all cases, the AERES is working hard to ensure that the criteria are consistently applied. For example, after each series of evaluations, there are post-evaluation meetings during which the evaluations are compared so that the judgements passed are as consistent as possible.

The Panel considers that the AERES complies adequately with standard 2.3 of the ESG in terms of evaluations of institutions and research units. Improvements could be made regarding the evaluation of training programmes to make the decision procedure more explicit. The expert panel will come back to the subject of evaluating training programmes in the context of analysing conformity to ESG 3.7.

- **ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose**

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

The AERES implements an original form of evaluation it calls "*Integrated evaluation*". As already mentioned, this integrated evaluation comprises three stages: firstly the evaluation of research units, then the evaluation of training programmes and, finally, the evaluation of institutions as a whole. Each evaluation is conducted in the same way: the institution submits an

application containing the self-evaluation report, experts chosen by the AERES conduct the review, a draft report is drawn up, proofread collectively and then validated, and sent to the institution for its comments to be appended to the final report which is then published.

The evaluations of each of these three stages are independent and require their own experts. This method of operating obviously calls for a great many experts – to which end the AERES has built up a pool of some 10,000 potential experts from which it chooses its evaluation teams. 6,000 experts have already taken part in evaluations: put forward by the AERES' Council, the heads of its departments, the institutions evaluated and even by other evaluation bodies. They are chosen on the basis of their competence for the type of evaluation to be carried out and of their previous experience as a reviewer.

For the evaluation of institutions, the AERES calls on French or foreign professors or researchers to act as experts – with experience in the management sector, as well as students and company managers. For the evaluation of research units, it calls on professors or researchers with recognized disciplinary skills and experience of research management. For the evaluation of training programmes, it calls on professors or researchers who have taught or held positions of teaching responsibility in higher education.

Experts are trained on a regular basis through documentation and classroom-based training sessions. For the evaluation of an institution, they attend a two-day training session. The expert panel chairmen also receive additional, specifically tailored training. For the evaluation of training programmes and degrees, training sessions last half a day. Because the evaluation of research units involves a method that is fairly widely applied worldwide, the AERES does not offer special training – rather, it ensures that the experts are familiar with this method through preliminary exchanges.

During the site visit, several people stressed the importance of calling on more international experts. The AERES is in fact already appointing international experts on a regular basis to its panels for evaluating institutions and research organizations. The previous comments nevertheless imply that the AERES could step up recourse to this type of experts and extend it to its other types of evaluation.

The AERES calls on students for the evaluation of institutions, who are generally tasked with examining questions concerning student life. During the site visit, several students said they would be interested in also taking part in other aspects of institutional evaluation. According to the AERES, the development of a specific training session for students will make this possible.

Some aspects of the integrated evaluation process are particularly commendable – in particular, the process for evaluating institutions. There is

no doubt that the application submitted to experts is a wholly positive contribution – since it contains the findings of the evaluations of research units and training programmes, in addition to the self-evaluation report. Likewise, evaluations of research units and doctoral schools are effectively carried out. The evaluation of master's degrees and bachelor's degrees is based on a detailed information folder presenting the various aspects of the programme, as well as a self-evaluation report drawn up by a committee of the institution's *Conseil des études et de la vie étudiante*. It is conducted by two experts in the case of master's degrees and one expert in the case of bachelor's degrees. This evaluation method is not as thorough as the previous methods, for there is no site visit and a few key elements are missing. This question will be expanded upon in the analysis of conformity to ESG 3.7.

The AERES' evaluation process could be improved as regards the evaluation of institutions' quality assurance strategies. This question is covered in the institutions' evaluation guide but, as already mentioned, nothing has been planned during the site visit to enable a close check of the implementation of institutions' quality assurance mechanisms. As such, the AERES could, for example, take advantage of this visit to ensure that the institution performs a serious evaluation of its training programmes by asking to see some self-evaluation reports of these and the resulting action plans.

Overall, the AERES is in line with this standard when taking purely evaluations of institutions, research units and doctoral schools into consideration. But the Panel has reservations over the evaluation of the quality of bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.

- **ESG 2.5 Reporting**

Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

AERES' reports are published in extenso, together with the institution's comments, on its website. They are written for the attention of the directors of the units evaluated (institutions, research units or training programmes) and their direct supervising bodies according to an identical template and end with a list of strengths and weaknesses, recommendations and the score in the case of research units and training programmes. The AERES acknowledges that these are not easy documents for the general public – particularly students – to read. It recently revised its website and has provided a section for students which, it hopes, will make it easier for them to consult the findings of its evaluations. The panel commends the AERES' efforts in making its evaluation reports accessible.

The panel was somewhat intrigued by the attribution of scores for training programmes and research units. It seems that this has been practised in

France for a number of years now and is relatively well accepted. Nevertheless, some of the people interviewed during the site visit expressed reservations over grading, and particularly the use that is made, by external stakeholders, of the scores attributed. It is not the panel's place to contribute to the discussion on this matter. That said, the panel points out that the publication of a score – especially when it is unfavourable, risks oversimplifying the evaluation findings of the research unit or training programme. Above all, maintaining this score for four years risks unfairly qualifying the unit or programme once it has made the recommended improvements. The expert panel suggests that the AERES re-examine this publication practice.

The AERES fully conforms to this standard.

- **ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures**

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

The AERES' evaluation process does not feature a follow-up mechanism. The AERES indicates that its reports are used by the Ministry when negotiating the four-year contracts between it and each of the institutions which – in its view – is already an initial follow-up. It adds that, since each institution is evaluated every four years, it is able to check how its evaluations have been followed up four years later.

The expert panel, for its part, considers that the AERES could ask institutions to inform it about the measures they take to correct the weaknesses identified and meet the recommendations made to them, within a much shorter timeframe, for example the following year. This does not mean simply registering the intentions of evaluated units – which may have been sent by the director in the comments appended to the evaluation report – rather, knowing what actual measures have already been taken to improve the situation.

In short, the expert panel considers that the AERES meets this standard – given its specific context – but that it could make its evaluations more effective by finding out what has been done subsequent to its recommendations.

- **ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews**

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

The AERES conducts its evaluations according to a four-year cycle. This cycle is connected to that of drawing up contracts between institutions and the

French Ministry of Higher Education and Research – which uses the findings of the AERES' evaluations when discussing contracts with each of the institutions. French Decree no. 2006-1334, referred to in paragraph 3.1, states that the multiannual evaluation programme must be "*compatible with the procedural deadlines for drawing up contracts between institutions and the State".*

The expert panel notes that this frequency places a considerable workload on the AERES which might tire out its staff and make it more difficult to recruit the scientific delegates and experts it needs. Moreover, such a short cycle does not enable the improvements made since the last evaluation to be assessed in many cases. For example, efforts to reinforce a research unit or improve a training programme may take a few years and bear fruit even later. Lastly, international experience shows that evaluations that are repeated too often take their toll on the staff of the units evaluated and make the evaluation procedure itself less effective. There is a big risk that the evaluation is reduced to a mere bureaucratic operation.

The AERES fully conforms to this standard. However, for the reasons mentioned above, the expert panel strongly recommends that the AERES and its partners look into the possibility of extending the frequency with which evaluations are carried out.

- **ESG 2.8 System-wide analyses**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

The AERES regularly publishes summaries of its evaluations. After evaluating each group, each department (research units, programmes and degrees and institutions) writes an analysis of the findings. These are published after validation by the AERES Council and form an important part of the annual activity reports submitted to the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research which then passes them on to the French Parliament and *Haut Conseil de la Science et de la Technologie* (French High Council of Science and Technology). This activity report is made publicly available on the AERES website.

Specific studies are also conducted, for example on faculties of medicine.

The AERES therefore conforms most satisfactorily to this standard.

To conclude with regard to Part 2 of the ENQA standards, the expert panel considers that the AERES generally conforms to each of them. It has made a few comments and suggestions that could help the AERES to improve its performances, but is satisfied with the progress thus far and the efforts that the AERES is making to conform as closely as possible to the standards.

ESG 3.3 Activities

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

This question has already been discussed in point ESG 2.7.

ESG 3.2 Official status

Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

As has been discussed in Part 3.1 of this report, the AERES was set up by the French Parliament (Law no. 2006-450), which gave it the official status of independent administrative authority. Its organization and operation are governed by a French Council of State decree (Decree no. 2006-1334, consolidated version as of 9 February 2009).

The AERES fully conforms to this standard.

ESG 3.4 Resources

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

The AERES' resources have been described in paragraph 3.3 of this report.

Financial resources are on the rise – increasing from 5.1 million Euros in 2007 to 14.4 million in 2009. Salaries for permanent staff and payments for reviews account for almost a half (46.85%), and travel expenses for 25.21%. The rest is spent on premises and equipment. They are adequate and cover the AERES' requirements well.

Human resources appear to be sufficient and of a high standard. Administrative staff – which currently stands at 70 – can be increased to 75. Almost half of these employees have a bachelor's degree or higher degree. A little over half hold permanent positions within the Agency, the rest are employed on a contractual basis. Regarding scientific staff, this comprises 29 researchers and 64 professors – the former being employed part-time for 1 year renewable and the latter delegated within the AERES for 2 years renewable. The table below presents the annual trends in scientific staff numbers.

	2007		2008		2009	
	NP	RE	NP	RE	NP	RE
Delegated professors	55	29	58	31.1	64	33.3

						5
Researchers employed part-time	22	6.1	34	9.1	29	7.6
Other*	4	-	8	-	13	-
Total	**81**	**35.1**	**100**	**40.2**	**106**	**40.5**

NP = natural person
RE = reduction in teaching load equivalent
* In order to round off the range of skills from which it may draw, the AERES also calls on a few professionals from other sectors.

The AERES organizes training sessions for its staff – particularly for newcomers. It has also chosen suitable programmes for training its staff from the training plan set up by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Lastly, it holds an annual evaluation interview with each staff member.

As previously mentioned, the AERES has a pool of 10,000 experts. Each expert is included in the list for a period of four years. The pool is renewed continually from proposals made by stakeholders. During the site visit, students stressed that it would be important to renew the "student" section of the pool more frequently. They pointed out that if too long a period goes by before the student experts in the pool are called on, they may well have finished their studies and left university in the interim. The panel agrees that the AERES would do well to check the quality of its pool more often.

Given the sheer amount of information processed by the AERES, it is important that it equip itself with an information system providing its staff, experts and stakeholders with the means for fluid exchanges and to access the necessary data for carrying out their mission. And this system has been developed. It comprises electronic document management associated with the expert pool management tool for gathering information from the evaluated parties; organization of reviews and evaluations; knowledge of the expert pool and exploitation of information from evaluations and evaluation reports. It also includes programs for accounts management and for everyday running.

The Panel considers that the AERES properly conforms to this standard.

ESG 3.5 Mission statement

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

The AERES' mission is clearly described in the Law that founded it. As indicated in paragraph 3.1, this mainly entails evaluating higher education and research institutions by taking account of all their missions and activities; evaluating the research activities conducted in higher education and research institutions; evaluating the programmes and degrees of higher education institutions; validating the procedures for evaluating the staff of the aforementioned institutions and research organizations and giving its opinion as regards the conditions in which they are implemented.

The AERES has successfully taken on the first three aspects of its mission. To date, it has evaluated 121 institutions and their training programmes and 1,378 research units. Only the last aspect remains to be worked on, for this mission has, until now, been the remit of the French Universities Board. Discussions are ongoing to clarify the respective responsibilities of the AERES and the Board on this matter.

The AERES has also set itself objectives that are presented in different ways in its various documents. These may be summarised as follows: implement the European commitments made by France through the Bologna Process; assist the evaluated institutions so as to improve their governance, research and range of programmes; provide the State with an impartial tool for making its strategic decisions and provide students and other stakeholders with useful information.

Similar objectives can be found in most national agencies and, generally, they give precedence to the assistance they can give to institutions. In its evaluation guide, the AERES also indicates that it "*puts the institution at the heart of the evaluation process, the purpose of which is to help the latter to undertake a continuous improvement policy."* Nevertheless, because the AERES' mission is tied in with the contract establishment process, the objective of providing the State with an impartial tool stands particularly out – such that, for some of the people interviewed during the site visit, this objective is considered to be the most important. Were this opinion to become the norm, there is a danger that the relationship of assistance that the AERES wishes to forge with universities would lose much of its effectiveness. Whilst fully aware that the AERES must comply with the terms of its founding Decree, the panel believes that the AERES should take care as regards this possibility.

The AERE has developed a strategic plan for 2010-2014. This is based on the conclusions of the first AERES "Assises" conference on research on 20th January 2009. The plan lays down its strategic objectives for the years ahead. The AERES has defined three main strategies and, for each one, a series of strategic and operational objectives. These are presented below:

Strategy 1: guarantee high-quality evaluations and review their aims and methods;

- define an appropriate method for each evaluated institution, by making good use of the three evaluation stages;
- ensure the quality of expert committees;
- incorporate the AERES' activity in its quality management system.

Strategy 2: help to develop research and higher education;

- find a balance between the independence of institutions and the requirements of ministries;
- guide and assist the evaluated institutions;
- provide food for thought with all stakeholders;
- validate the staff evaluation procedures.

Strategy 3: conduct all of its actions with the international context in mind.

- develop international competences and deliberations within the AERES;

- increase the international visibility of the AERES.

The panel recognizes the relevance of these strategies and objectives that do, indeed, touch on the points that the AERES would do well to improve. It notes the AERES' commitment to improve its evaluation processes continuously and to make them more effective. It also notes that the AERES is looking into the issue of balance between institutions and the ministries. This refers back to the previous comment on this question. Finally, the last strategy on the international dimension is apt, since the AERES has not made much of an appearance on the international stage until now. It must be hoped that – in continuing the objectives listed for this strategy – all members of staff will become aware of and take part in international activities, particularly European ones, as planned by one of the operational objectives.

The strategic plan comprises targets for each of the strategic objectives, listed in the form of Vision 2014. However, it does not give precise indications about the means to implement to meet these targets or the people responsible for taking the necessary measures. Neither are there pre-defined progress indicators. Such means, managers and indicators will probably be defined in the AERES' annual action plans.

To sum up, the panel considers that the AERES complies adequately with this standard, but could improve the construction of its strategic plan.

ESG 3.6 Independence

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

The AERES' independence is guaranteed by its founding law, which stipulates that "*the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education is an independent administrative authority".* This status is characterised by:

- the absence of supervisory power from the government or any other public or private authority;
- the members of the AERES Council which reflect the diversity of the evaluation stakeholders:
  - 14 members are researchers, engineers or professors and are put forward by the evaluated institutions and bodies which evaluate the staff of said institutions;
  - 9 qualified members, at least a third of whom are from the private research sector;
  - 2 MPs from the *Office parlementaire d'évaluation des choix scientifiques et technologiques* (Parliamentary Office for Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Options);
- appointment of the Council members, and therefore its President, for four years by decree, without it being possible to terminate this term before the four years are up;

- the direct attribution of appropriations by Parliamentary vote and the absence of a priory financial monitoring: only the French Court of Auditors is authorised to keep a tab on the AERES' expenses once they have been made;
- the AERES' ability, pursuant to the remit bestowed upon it by the law, to define its work programme, evaluation processes and methods for selecting and training experts;
- the AERES' freedom to recruit its administrative and scientific staff members.

These legal provisions are sufficient to guarantee the AERES' independence. However, it should be noted that the AERES' ability to define its work programme is limited by the requirement laid down in its founding Decree to adopt a multiannual evaluation programme that is "*compatible with the procedural deadlines for drawing up contracts between institutions and the State"*. As such, the AERES is not completely free to develop its work programme, as has already been mentioned. Incidentally, it is this requirement that has led the AERES to organize its evaluation programme according to a four-year cycle, even if, by its own admission, this cycle places a workload on it that is difficult to keep up in the medium term. This is a constraint it must abide by, but it cannot be said that it calls the AERES' independence into question. The AERES has chosen its procedures, criteria and regulations itself. Neither does this constraint affect its ability to make its own choices of experts.

For its part, the AERES has laid down regulations and procedures to guarantee the independence of its evaluation teams. As a result, the experts are chosen from a 10,000-strong pool which has been formed from suggestions made to the AERES by the institutions evaluated, evaluation bodies, the Council and the department heads. After participating in an initial evaluation, the expert is included in the list of registered experts if his/her service was satisfactory. The expert panels are then composed by the scientific delegates under the authority of the department head, and it is the latter who then appoint the Chairman and consult the evaluated institution to gather its comments on any conflicts of interest.

During the site visit, the question of the AERES' independence was brought up with all interviewees who, in all cases without exception, recognized the AERES' independence in its judgements. No one questioned this independence. For its part, the expert panel considers that the independent status is clearly defined by its founding Law. It also holds that the AERES has taken all necessary precautions to make sure its judgements are not subservient to the stakeholders. **As a result, it considers that the AERES is suitably in line with this criterion.**

ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*

- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;*
- *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*
- *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.*

The method adopted by the AERES for evaluating institutions, research units and doctoral schools complies with the basic principles of external quality assurance laid down in the aforementioned standard – except partly as regards the question of follow-up.

There is clearly call for a self-evaluation by institutions or the evaluated units. The guide put forward to help institutions conduct their self-evaluation – the list of criteria for which has been presented above (paragraph 3.5) – is very thorough and the panel could even remark on the quality that the self-evaluation reports of the most recent groups could reach. According to the AERES, this quality has steadily improved. Some experts interviewed stressed that there was still room for progress in this direction, however.

The site visit is conducted by experts chosen by the scientific delegates and department head. This choice is based on the desired skills depending on the type of institution or research unit. As mentioned previously, the experts are given training. Moreover, the evaluated institution must, pursuant to article 14 of the AERES Organization Decree, inform the AERES of any actual or potential conflict of interests. The expert panel therefore considers that precautions have been taken to ensure that site visits are as productive and transparent as possible. At the very most, we should add that a diversification of the expert pool – to include more international experts and, perhaps, more experts from the business world – would be worthwhile, making the AERES' process even more effective.

The expert committee report is written by the committee chairman. The writing and proofreading procedures ensure that these reports are harmonized and objective. The final reports are drawn up under the responsibility of the AERES President and department heads. They are then sent to the evaluated institutions who can share their comments, which are then appended to the final report. Although this procedure is commendable, the expert panel notes that institutions are unable to react to the report before it is finalised. It would be worth the AERES submitting its reports to the evaluated institutions sooner, as the latter could then report any interpretation errors. All evaluation reports are published in full on the AERES website. These are well presented and easily identifiable on the website.

As mentioned previously, the AERES does not have a procedure for following up its recommendations. It would be in the AERES' interest to develop a procedure through which it could swiftly check that suitable responses have been found to its recommendations.

The situation is different as regards the evaluation of bachelor's and master's degrees. In this case, the evaluation is based on applications for each bachelor speciality and master speciality and subspecialty, compiled by the institution under the responsibility of the *Conseil des études et de la vie étudiante*. This application has two sections:
1) the programme file which goes into the main aspects of the programme to be evaluated in detail, giving a detailed insight of it: importance of the programme in the teaching policy, organization and content of classes, quality of the teaching team, skills acquired, links with the socioeconomic world and integration into the job market, examination procedure, etc.
2) the self-evaluation report, mentioned above.

Once the whole application has been received, it is evaluated by experts: one for bachelor's degrees and two for master's degrees. These experts are chosen, as for institutions and research units, on the basis of their competence in the scientific fields of the programmes. They analyse the programme file and self-evaluation report and send their report to the AERES. There is no site visit.

An external review sheet is drawn up following the evaluation. For bachelor's degrees, this sheet is broken down into four sections: management of the bachelor's degree, teaching plan, support tools for success and vocational integration and continuation of chosen studies. The sheet for master's degrees comprises eight sections: objectives, context, overall organization of the speciality, operation report, application quality, overall evaluation of the speciality, evaluation of a subspecialty, overall evaluation of the subspecialty. The external review sheets list a certain number of questions in each of these sections that must be examined. Some explanations are attached to these questions to help the institution with its self-evaluation and the experts with analysing the whole of the application.

Based on this external review sheet, the AERES disciplinary committee draws up the evaluation report, including recommendations and score, for each bachelor speciality, master speciality and subspecialty. The procedure followed is the same as for the evaluation reports of institutions, research units and doctoral schools.

The absence of site visit is a problem for bachelor and master evaluations. The panel understands that the AERES cannot carry out a visit to evaluate each of these programmes. It recognizes the conscientious work carried out by the experts, which provides an invaluable source of information for the evaluation of institutions. But this work is based on data that is too incomplete to form an effective evaluation of the quality of programmes. Teachers and students are not encountered and exams and other methods of assessing achievement of the training goals are not checked. Moreover, with no site visit, the programme file and self-evaluation report are not validated. It is obviously possible to identify problems and suggest improvements. But in these conditions of no specific site visit for training programmes, the evaluations do not constitute as reliable judgements of the quality and value of these degrees.

For all these reasons, the panel recommends that the AERES review its evaluation process for bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. Several possibilities may be

considered, for example, a close validation of the evaluation reports produced by the programmes and degrees department, before they are published. This could be done during the institutional evaluation, even if it means extending the timeframe set for this. Another possibility is to take it in turns to evaluate the different programmes by complying with the requirements of the standard above. In any case, irrespective of the solutions adopted, the AERES must, for its own sake and that of institutions, look for means to determine the quality of the programmes and degrees they deliver as accurately as possible.

To sum up, the Panel considers that the AERES conforms to the requirements of this standard in terms of the evaluation of institutions, research units and doctoral schools. It should develop its evaluation procedures for bachelor's degrees and master's degrees to bring them more into line with ENQA's requirements.

ESG 3.8 Accountability procedures

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

The AERES has developed a system of quality assurance that encompasses all of its activities, by implementing a process approach (operational processes: evaluation process, support process and management process). In April 2008 it set up a quality unit comprising a quality adviser, a quality delegate and a quality manager, as well as a quality steering committee. The quality management system was launched by the AERES President and has been explained to all staff members. The process approach was implemented from June to September 2008. Quality Standards were drawn up in December 2008 – when they were also approved by the Council. They were updated in December 2009 and can be found on the AERES website.

These Standards take account of the principles of quality assurance as defined in the ISO 9000 standards and in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. They are split into two parts: Part 1 gathers together the characteristics of quality assurance at the AERES and lists the standards in the third part of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) point-by-point. Part 2 presents the criteria used when the AERES evaluates quality assurance within institutions and lists the standards in the second part of the ESG. Lastly, an annexe presents the characteristics of quality assurance within the institutions that will be evaluated by the AERES according to the standards in Part 1 of the ESG. The Quality Standards and documents drawn up as part of the process approach in accordance with the ISO 9000 standards are proof of the attention the AERES pays to the quality of its activities.

In its self-evaluation report, the AERES presents various mechanisms by which it can gradually improve its services. Of these, we note that the department heads annually write summary reports of their evaluations, describing the method, findings, problems arisen and solutions put forward. These summary reports are submitted for the approval of the AERES Council. Likewise, at the end of each campaign, feedback meetings attended by the evaluated institutions and experts called on are organized. The stakeholders' analyses are taken on board. The annual

activity report compiles a certain amount of information about what the AERES is doing to improve its activities. The AERES also reports on a certain number of improvements it intends to make in the short-term. Accordingly, it announces that "*the stakeholders' satisfaction survey will be drawn up in 2010"* and also intends to round off its system of quality assurance by implementing an internal quality audit process in 2011.

The expert panel considers that the AERES adequately complies with standard ESG 3.8 concerning accountability procedures. At the most, according to some of the people interviewed, it could formalize its procedures for gathering the opinion of stakeholders further.

ENQA criterion 8, Miscellaneous

The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgements are formed by different groups.

If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.

The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Concerning the first part of the standard, the panel notes the lengths to which the AERES is going to ensure the professionalism and consistency of its judgements. It calls on experts whom it trains and whose work is supervised by AERES permanent staff and scientific delegates. Particularly for the evaluation of institutions, it has written detailed guides to help experts form their judgements effectively. Following the evaluations, it proofreads and harmonizes the reports. Relatively few complaints have been lodged as a result. This leads the expert panel to conclude that the AERES fully conforms to the first part of this standard.

Regardless of what it says on the matter, the AERES draws conclusions that can have significant formal consequences insofar as they are then used for the negotiation of contracts between institutions and their supervisory authorities. It does not have a fully-fledged appeal procedure. That said, the AERES has set up a Disputes Committee that handles complaints it receives from the evaluated institutions. This Committee is made up of three Council members and the AERES legal affairs adviser acts as its secretary. The Committee advises the AERES President. To date, the AERES has received 33 complaints, 2 of which have required the evaluation to be carried out again. Given the high volume of evaluations carried out by the AERES, this equates to relatively few complaints. However, in view of the impact of its judgements, the AERES should look into the prospect of setting up a

proper appeal procedure or bestowing decision-making powers on the Disputes Committee.

The AERES has become involved in European cooperation activities as regards quality assurance. One of its members has also chaired ENQA and another has been a member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). But its contribution could be even greater and the expert panel is satisfied to note the written commitment in the AERES strategic plan to develop international competences and deliberations within the agency and to increase its international visibility. Moreover, it is important to highlight the AERES' efforts in raising the awareness of French institutions to the requirements of the Bologna Process and ESG standards. The panel therefore considers that the AERES is sufficiently in line with the third part of this standard.

To sum up, the panel considers that the AERES substantially conforms to this standard.

5. Conclusion: the AERES' conformity to the ESG

5.1 Summary of the AERES' main strengths

- The AERES has a legal form which guarantees its independence in relation to stakeholders.
- The AERES' mission is clearly defined in its founding Law.
- The AERES has significant human and material resources for undertaking large-scale projects and conducting an impressive number of evaluations within a limited timeframe.
- The AERES has developed Quality Standards enabling it both to regulate its international operations and its external activities.
- The AERES has a very complete institutional evaluation guide that is likely to provide an effective framework for the self-evaluations of institutions and the work of its experts.
- In the first three years since it was set up, the AERES has shown its ability to learn from its experiences for the sake of continuously improving its evaluation processes.
- The AERES has been able to evaluate – in a professional manner – almost all French higher education institutions, thereby demonstrating its competence and the devotion of its staff.
- The AERES has helped to develop a quality culture within institutions that comes through in the self-evaluation reports some institutions now produce.
- The AERES has set up a remarkable information system that is not at odds with its ability to successfully complete a large number of evaluations.

5.2 Summary of the main points to improve

- The AERES must continue its efforts to develop an evaluation culture within institutions by paying greater attention to the quality of the self-evaluation provided by institutions and to the participation of professors, students and staff in producing it.

- Along the same lines, the AERES should improve its evaluation guide by incorporating criteria focusing specifically on the quality assurance strategy of institutions or by making existing criteria more precise, and ensure that the means provided for in this strategy are put into practice.
- The AERES' procedures for evaluating bachelor's degrees and master's degrees should be revised to bring them more into line with the ESG requirements.
- The AERES' strategic plan has its positive points, but could be improved by the agency specifying the means it intends to implement to achieve its objectives, the persons responsible for this and the timeframes.
- In its strategic plan, the AERES wants to add a greater international dimension to its activities. The panel encourages it to do so, amongst other things by calling more systematically on international experts to carry out its evaluations.
- With the current evaluation cycle, there is a risk that evaluations become routine and ineffective. The panel suggests that the AERES look into the possibility of extending the current cycle.
- Alongside its Council, the members of which are stipulated by Law, it could be in the AERES' interests to set up an advisory committee with members from various sectors – particularly students and international specialists.
- The AERES has excellent Quality Standards. It would be worth linking these explicitly in with its evaluation guide.
- With this in mind, the panel suggests that the AERES make the criteria in its evaluation guide more precise and ensure that they concern both the effectiveness and existence of quality assurance procedures and policies.
- The AERES' procedures are promising. They could be improved from several aspects:
    - The AERES could send the preliminary version of its evaluation report to institutions to obtain their comments before writing the final report. This stage should not, for all that, change the procedure in place of integrating the institution's reactions to the final report.
    - The AERES could also send the final version of the report to the experts before it is put on its website.
    - The question of scores and their publication raised several comments during the site visit. The AERES should perhaps discuss this issue with the main stakeholders – particularly in the research sector. It would also do well to consider the possibility of revising the score when clear improvements have been made.
    - The AERES would gain from annually updating its pool of student experts.
- The AERES should set up follow-up procedures to enable it to assess the measures taken following its evaluations quickly.

5.3 Final position

To sum up, following this evaluation, the expert panel concludes that the AERES substantially conforms to the ENQA standards as regards almost all of its criteria. As

a result, the panel recommends that the AERES be included as a full member and listed in the ENQA register for a period of five years.

ANNEXES

ANNEXE 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE (TORS) FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

The sole purpose of the review is to establish the extent to which the Agence d´Evaluation de la Recherche et de l´Enseignement Supérieur de la République Francaise (AERES) complies with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The aim of review is to fulfil the requirements for membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Regarding the above the review will be Type A.

In fulfilling this purpose the review should observe the following schedule, as agreed with ANECA (the appointed coordinator of the review by ENQA):

1. Nomination and appointment of a panel of reviewers – by January 2010 (to be approved by ENQA).
2. Production of a self-evaluation report by AERES – by February 2010.
3. Site visit of the panel of reviewers – in the period of 12-14 April 2010 (to be approved ENQA/ANECA).
4. Review panel's report after the site visit – May 2010.
5. Consideration of the review report and final decision by ENQA – September/October 2010.

These Terms of references has been approved by the AERES Council and by the Board of ENQA (February 2010).

According to the ToRs, ANECA has defined the following external review procedure.

1. The Review Process

The process will be designed in the light of the ENQA policy on "ENQA-organized external reviews of member agencies" (www.enqa.eu). ENQA delegated this aspect on ANECA.

The evaluation process will consist of the following steps:

1. Definition of the Terms of Reference (ToR) by AERES and ANECA.
2. Approval the ToR by the Board of ENQA.
3. Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ANECA after the approval by the Board of ENQA.
4. Self-evaluation by ANECA including the preparation of a self-evaluation report by AERES.
5. A site visit by the panel of reviewers to ANECA.
6. Preparation and completion of the external report by the external panel.
7. Final decision by the Board of ENQA.
8. Publication of the reports.

2. The Review Panel

A review panel will consist of six members: 2 representatives of French higher education institutions, 3 quality assurance experts and a student member. The reviewers will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AERES review.

ANECA has contacted with:

1. Prof. Francisco Marcellán – Chair. Full Professor, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Ex director of ANECA.
2. Prof. Guy Aelterman – Member. Vice Chancellor Artesis University College Antwerp, Belgium. External expert ECA.
3. Prof. Francoise Bevalot – Member. Adviser to academic institutions for the French Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research.
4. Prof. Michel Zink – Member. Chair of Literatures of Medieval France at Collège de France.
5. Mrs Marta- Norah Sanz – Member. PhD student at the University of Cantabria, Spain..
6. Prof. Jacques L´Ecuyer – Secretary. Consultant on Higher Education for several international organizations.

   Mrs. Vanessa Duclos, as a member of the technical staff of the unity of international and institutional relations of ANECA, will support the review panel during the period of its activity.

3. Self-evaluation Report

The AERES is responsible for the execution and organization of its own self-evaluation process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-evaluation is organized as a project with a clearly defined schedule.
- The self-evaluation report should contain: background and description of the current situation of the Agency, analysis and appraisal of the current situation, a summary of the French university system, a description of the self-evaluation process, proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses.

4. A site visit

The review panel will draw up and publish a schedule of the site visit. AERES shall be given at least one month´s notice of the site visit schedule in order to properly organize the requested interviews. The schedule will include an indicate timetable of the meetings.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the main findings of the evaluation.

5. Preparation and completion of the evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel´s findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the expert panel. Once the Review Report is completed,

the Secretary of the panel will issue it to AERES in an electronic format in 30 days after the site visit for comments and suggestions on the content, if necessary. In case of agreement, the Secretary of the panel should send the Review Report to ENQA.

6. Final decision by the Board of ENQA

The Board of ENQA analyses the final report and take a decision with about the evaluation of the Agency.

ENQA will communicate the decision to the AERES and make it public on its website.

7. Publication of the Report

The review report and the follow-up plans agreed upon will be published on AERES Website.

8. Budget

AERES shall pay the following related fees:

- Chair 5.000 €.
- Review Secretary 5.000 €.
- Other panel members 3.000 € (4 members).
- Administrative overhead 5.000 €.

This gives a total indicate cost of 27.000 € for the review. This amount has been transferred by AERES to ANECA. The allowances for travel and subsistence expenses are charged directly by AERES.

ANNEXE 2. SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

Day 1: 12 April – All meetings took place at the AERES headquarters

8.30 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.	Management at the AERES	The AERES Management and President	J.F. Dhainaut, President A. Picard, Secretary-General M. Cormier, Head of Department 1 P. Glorieux, Head of Department 2 A. Menand, Head of Department 3 C. Cassagne, E. Froment, G. Knaub, Advisers
9.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m.	Evaluation professions	Purpose of evaluation	G.M. Geib, Coordinating scientific delegate C. Genre, Scientific delegate, dept. 3 H. Baissart, Scientific delegate, dept. 1 C. Meilhac, Administrative delegate, dept. 3 C. Alfonsi, Project manager, dept. 1 A. Ahouanmenou, Coordinator, dept. 2 L. Fausel, Management officer, dept. 3
11.30 a.m. to 11.40 a.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
11.40 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.	The AERES Council (except the President) and Disputes Committee	Members of the AERES Council, Secretary of the Disputes Committee	E. de Turckheim, M.C. Maurel , C. Branlant, C. Blondel, J. Bricall, C. Schmid, Council members P. Thibault, Council member, Chairman of the Disputes Committee C. Schwartz, D. Menjot, Members of the Council and Committee G. Knaub, Secretary of the Disputes Committee
12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m.	The administrative professions of evaluations	The role of support staff for evaluations	N. Dupin, Deputy Secretary-General B. Nadjar, Director of the Finance-Budget Department J.C. Martin, Deputy Director of the Information Systems Department A. Leblond, Manager of the Mission Unit M. Roux, Multimedia Manager B. Lathuillière, Quality Assistant B. Roiseux-Labidoire, Secretary of dept. 2 R. Decaix, Site Manager
2.45 p.m. to 2.55 p.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
2.55 p.m. to 4.10 p.m.	The AERES experts and Head of the	Panel of experts who have conducted evaluations of	A. Menand, Head of Department 3 S. Denot-Ledunois, Lecturer in life sciences and health

	Department for the evaluation of programmes and degrees	programmes and degrees for the AERES	M. Fougereau, Professor of molecular immunology Charles Giry-Deloison, Professor of modern history
4.10 p.m. to 4.20 p.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
4.20 p.m. to 5.35 p.m.	The AERES experts and Head of the Department for the evaluation of Institutions and Research Units	Panel of experts who have conducted evaluations of Institutions and Research Units for the AERES	Michel Cormier, Head of Department 1 Pierre Glorieux, Head of Department 2 J. Keiger, Professor of international history P. de Maret, Professor of anthropology and archaeology F. Mouret, Professor of general and comparative literature J. Delplancq, Deputy Director to IBM France Managing Director A. Touboul, Regional Director of Research and Technology for the Aquitaine region J. Cuguen, Professor of physiology and biology of organisms and populations S. Barles, Professor of town planning

Day 2: 13 April

8.30 a.m. to 9 a.m.	Meeting of the review panel		
9 a.m. to 10 a.m.	Stakeholders representing the ministries	Directors-General of the Ministries involved	P. Hetzel, Director of the DGESIP R. Stephan, Director of the DGRI P. Viné, Cabinet Director for the French Ministry of Nutrition, Agriculture and Fisheries J.P. Simon, Director of Plastic Arts, French Ministry of Culture and Communication
10 a.m. to 10.15 a.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
10.15 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.	Stakeholders: Institutional associations	*Conférence des présidents d'université* (CPU)*, Conférence des directeurs d'écoles françaises d'ingénieurs* (CDEFI)*, Conférence*	L. Collet, President of the CPU C. Lerminiaux, 1st Vice-President of the CDEFI P. Tapie, President of the CGE

		des grandes écoles (CGE)	
11.15 a.m. to 11.30 a.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
11.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.	Stakeholders Research organizations	CNRS, INSERM, CEA, INRA	A. Fuchs, Managing Director of the CNRS T. Damerval, Deputy Director-General for strategy within INSERM M. Guillou, Managing Director of INRA J.C. Petit, Programmes Director of the CEA
2 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.	Stakeholders	Students	S. Comparot, Special adviser to the Rector of Burgundy University F. Laurin, Former President of the Association of Student University Vice-Rectors R. Mas, Student Vice-Rector of Paris Descartes University N. Aubry, President of the *Bureau national des élèves ingénieurs* T. Le Cras, Vice-President of the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* C. Guichet, President of the *Fédération des associations générales étudiantes* G. Joyeux, President of *Promotion et défense des étudiants* C.H. Loyez, President of the *Association nationale des étudiants en médecine de France*
3.30 p.m. to 3.45 p.m.	Review panel	Exchange of opinions	
3.45 p.m. to 5.15 p.m.	Heads of the institutions evaluated	University rectors Directors of *grandes écoles*, Directors of research organizations, Directors of research units	J.P. Finance, Rector of Nancy 1 University Y. Berland, Rector of Marseille 2 University N. Lavignotte, President of Clermont-Ferrand 2 University A. Bravo, Director of SUPELEC (*École supérieure d'électricité*) A. Petit, Director of the INRIA Paris-Rocquencourt Research Centre Y. Agid, Director of the *Institut du cerveau et de la moëlle épinière* T. Michot, Manager of the *Réseau des Vice présidents-Conseil des études et de la vie universitaire*
5.15 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.	Sectorial representation	Representatives of groups of excellence of scientists and	C. Amatore, Research Director at the CNRS and *École normale supérieure* B. Gazier, Professor of economic

		professors	sciences G. Gauvard, Professor of Western mediaeval history

Day 3: 14 April

8.30 a.m. to 9 a.m.	Meeting of the review panel		
9 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.	Questions of the review panel	The AERES President	The AERES President
9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.	Review panel	Work session for the members of the review panel	
12.30 p.m. to 1 p.m.	Final meeting	President and executive committee of the AERES	J.F. Dhainaut, President A. Picard, Secretary-General M. Cormier, Head of Department 1 P. Glorieux, Head of Department 2 A. Menand, Head of Department 3 C. Cassagne, E. Froment, G. Knaub, Advisers

ANNEXE 3. PROPOSAL OF GUIDELINES FOR THE EXPERT PANEL

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6. Annex: Expert Tool

7. Summary of the individual evaluation

1. Introduction

The document presented below is a proposed indicative outline for the process of the external evaluation against standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education area.

This guide represents a tool for the expert panel for carrying out the review of the agency.

1.1. Terms of References for the AERES external review (ToRs)

The sole purpose of the review is to establish the extent to which AERES complies with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The aim of review is to fulfill the requirements for

membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Regarding the above the review will be Type B.

In fulfilling this purpose the review should observe the following schedule, as agreed with ANECA (the appointed coordinator of the review by ENQA):

6. Nomination and appointment of a panel of reviewers – by January 2010 (approved by ENQA).
7. Production of a self-evaluation report by AERES – by February 2010.
8. On-site visit of the panel of reviewers – April 12-14 2010.
9. Review panel's report after the site visit – June 2010.
10. Consideration of the review report and final decision by ENQA – September/October 2010.

These Terms of Reference have been approved by AERES and by the Board of ENQA.

2. The external Review and the expert panel

The external review is the phase following that of Self-assessment. The fundamental objective of this phase is the performance, by an External panel, of a diagnosis of the agency (based on the Self-assessment Report and the external visit), in which are identified its strengths and weaknesses as well as the proposals for improvement.

The external review process becomes a means of establishing mechanisms to facilitate continual improvement and bring transparency and independence to the assessment system.

These guidelines provided by ANECA, have the primary objective that the experts familiarize themselves with the standards and guidelines, the concepts and the process to use during the External Review phase.

The actions of the experts will be ruled by the indications established in this document. The experts shall keep in mind the confidentiality of the information with which they are working, being prohibited from making public any information or data related to the visited agency.

The tasks of the *expert panel* are:

- Analyse the content of the self-evaluation report
- Carry out a comparison of the content of the self-evaluation report to determine the steps to take during the visit.
- Carry out the proposed agenda for the visit to the agency and the date to carry out the visit.
- Establish a work plan.
- Carry out the visit to the agency.
- Contrast the content of the Self-evaluation report with the information obtained during the visit (study of evidence, information obtained in the interviews held and observation made during the visit).
- Provide the members of the agency with the adequate feedback so that they may reflect and even clarify any aspect that was not clear enough during the visit.
- Reflect on the information obtained and the reality of the agency and on the strengths and weaknesses detected.
- Write an objective External Review Report agreed to by the members of the panel.

The tasks of the *chair* of the panel are:

- If any are produced, review the allegations made by the agency to the External Review Report and include the necessary modifications if considered appropriate.
- Act as liaison between the expert panel and the Agency.
- Preside over and direct the review process.
- Solve possible conflicts that may come up during the process.
- Carry out the exposition of the preliminary oral report.

The tasks of the *secretary* are:

- Coordinate the members of the panel
- Contact with the agency under review

Preparation of the review

2.1. Receipt and study of the self-evaluation report

Once ANECA determines that the self-evaluation report of the agency complies with the set requirements, a copy of it will be sent, by e-mail, to each of the members of the expert panel.

The members of the expert panel will analyse the self-evaluation report individually. This study will also consider:

- Significant lack of documents or evidence to justify the evaluations made by the agency or of the aspects that it has missed.
- "Contradictory" points of the Self-evaluation Report by the agency that must be clarified in the visit by the expert panel.
- Complementary information that the expert panel wishes to consult in the external visit.
- The information of the basic elements, which from its point of view must orient the content of the visit with the various interviews.

To facilitate the work to be performed by the external panel, in the study of the Self-evaluation Report as well as during the performance of the visit, ANECA provides “The expert tool” (Annex). This tool is intended as a handbook to facilitate the noting and classification of the most relevant aspects of the visit, and allows the notes to be organised by standard.

2.2. Analysis of the Self-evaluation report

Once individual studies have been done, the members of the external panel will combine the primary conclusions of the analysis carried out, as well as their first impressions of the document by e-mail. After study together the self evaluation report, the expert panel must analyse the collection of tasks to be performed during the visit, as well as distributing responsibilities among its members.

The chair of the experts, before asking the rest of the members of the panel, will establish the work plan, with the goal of providing the necessary personnel and resources for the visit. The work plan will specify the interviews or working meetings of the experts during the visit, as well as the time expected for each of them and the material necessary for their execution.

The agenda should be sent by e-mail to the agency one month before the site-visit in order for the agency to prepare the following:

- Select the persons of the various groups involved and organise the meetings.
- Place at the disposition of the expert panel a room, suitably prepared, in which it could be carried out the scheduled interviews as well as its own internal meetings for combining the information collected.
- Facilitate transportation of the External Assessment Committee when necessary.

To elaborate the agenda the following principles should be considered:

- Generally, no person may attend more than one interview.
- No group should be more than 8 people unless it has been agreed.
- While recognizing that some people may have more than one area of responsibility, it is better to see people no more than once.
- The agency is invited to select the people according to the instructions given in the program.
- The panel works as one group unless it is indicated.

The site-visit

On the planned date, the visit will be made to the agency. ANECA will facilitate the transportation and lodging of the members of expert panel for the performance of the visit.

The visit will have duration of two and a half day and will include at least the following phases:

2.3. Reception of the Expert panel

A person of the agency will be in charge of receiving the expert panel with the purpose of welcoming them and organising everything necessary to facilitate its action.

2.4. Interviews with the stakeholders

The purpose of the interviews with the various groups is to obtain the testimony and sufficient evidence that allow the Expert panel to contrast the information on the self-evaluation process.

The Expert panel will orient the interviews with the stakeholders to the aspects that previously were considered object of analysis, either because of being confused, contradictory, important or without sufficient evidence.

The chair may make a brief presentation, no more than 10 minutes, to introduce the members of the panel and the work they are carrying out.

2.5. Meetings of the expert panel

During the visit, the expert panel will carry out work meetings in which the impressions received will be contrasted and all of the aspects evaluated during the assessment will agree to.

2.6. Analysis of the information and evidence

The Expert panel shall contrast and expand the information it considers important during the visit in order to be able to issue a judgment on the agency. These judgments must be based on the evidence that was collected; that is, on the evidence demonstrating the veracity of the statements and evaluations made by the agency.

The evidence collected by the experts may be based on interviews with the stakeholders, personal observation, or the analysis of additional documentation, but always must be combined to be agreed by the entire expert panel.

2.7. Formulation of value judgments

Once the expert panel has contrasted the pertinent information, through the various sources, shall proceed with the formulation of value judgments based on the evidence found.

This function of contrasting information must be carried out in a dual dimension: between the various sources and between the different informants of a single source. Therefore, in addition to the variety of information collected, its internal coherence must be analysed, analysing whether the evaluations and conclusions they contain are shared by the majority of the stakeholders and/or are supported by facts and evidence.

2.8. Final meeting: preliminary oral report

Before the presentation of the preliminary oral report, the panel shall combine their conclusions.

The panel will establish a final meeting with the agency in which the primary conclusions will be made, by the chair of the panel, in the assessment derived from the visit and the study of the Self-evaluation Report.

Drafting of the Review report

The Review report should include:

- Composition of the Expert panel.
- Work Plan carried out.
- Description of the situation of the agency.
- Description of the strengths and weaknesses.
- Recommendations for improvement.

In order for the content of the Review Report to be understandable, the following steps are recommended:

- Be based on evidence.
- Be concise and complete, centred in the elements of analysis indicated.

All the members, after 15 days of the visit, should send by e-mail to the secretary of the panel an individual report. The secretary will collect all the information and will draft the Review report.

The secretary will send the report to all the members who shall study it and make their observations.

Once the Review Report is completed, the secretary of the panel shall issue it in an electronic format to the agency in 30 days after the site-visit.

The agency shall analyse the report to make suggestions on the content, if necessary. In case of agreement, the secretary of the panel should send the Review Report to ENQA.

Annex: Expert Tool

This tool is the analysis of the Part 3 of the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. In this section the expert panel analyses the requirements that AERES must fulfil as an external quality assurance institution, institutional Standards.

There is one evaluation form for each standard, which shall be fulfilled by each and every member of the external panel.

How to fill out an evaluation form

Evaluation forms contain the following parts:

Fixed segment: elements staying the same, which are:

- Standard: ENQA standard.
- Assessed aspect: description of the standard.
- Questions to consider: thinking about the questions proposed favour better understanding of the Standard.

Variable segment: elements that complete fulfilment as evaluation progress, which are:

- Evidence: standards should be based on recorded evidence to support the conclusion reached. Examples: minutes of meetings, etc.
- Department in charge: department responsible for storing and updating the evidence.
- Valuation: according to the analysis of the corresponding standard and the related evidence, its judgment could be:
    - Insufficient: the standard is not fulfilled; there is no evidence of that or it is not appropriate.
    - Susceptible to improvement: the standard is not completely fulfilled; there is only little evidence of that.
    - Acceptable: the standard is fulfilled systematically; there is clear and systematic evidence of that, but not complete.
    - Optimum: the standard is thoroughly fulfilled; there is convincing evidence of that.
- Strengths: aspects of AERES that give it an advantage regarding that standard.
- Aspects for improvement: aspects of the standard that AERES does not fulfil, or at least not thoroughly.
- Commentary: any aspect that it is considered for observation, explanation or discussion within the assessed standard.

Standard 3.1	Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
Assessed aspect	The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.
Questions to consider	Are the aims and objectives of quality assurance processes of AERES determined by all those responsible before the processes themselves are developed? Are they published with a description of the procedures to be used? (cf.: 2.2 of ESG) Are the formal decisions of AERES made as a result of an external quality assurance activity based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently? (cf.: 2.3 of ESG) Are the external quality assurance processes designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them? (cf.: 2.4 of ESG) Are reports published and written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership? Are the decisions or recommendations contained in the reports easy for a reader to find? (cf.: 2.5 of ESG) Do the Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently? (cf.: 2.6 of ESG) Is external quality assurance of institutions undertaken on a cyclical basis? Are the length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used clearly defined and published in advance? (cf.: 2.7 of ESG) Does AERES produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc?

Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	

Valuation

Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum

Strengths	•
Aspects for improvement	•
Commentary	•

Standard 3.2	Official status		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.		
Questions to consider	Which authorities recognise AERES, at a national and European level, as an agency with authority over the entire nation? Is there any French law that officially recognises AERES legal status? Which legal requirements affect the Agency? Which ones does it fulfil? Where is it recorded that the Agency is authorised to develop external quality assurance activities?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.3	Activities		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.		
Questions to consider	Where do activities under the competence of the Agency officially appear? Which activities related to evaluation, review, audit, accreditation or other quality assurance activities does AERES develop? What are the core activities of the Agency? Where are these activities defined and documented?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.4	Resources		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process (es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.		
Questions to consider	Is there an established, approved and updated organization chart? Are there defined profiles for each job position? Are the profiles appropriate enough for the efficient and effective development of external quality assurance procedures? Does the staff suits with these predefined profiles? Is the progressive adaptation of the staff to these predefined profiles encouraged? Is there a global budget? Is this budget broken down into programmes and its corresponding activities? Is there a systematic procedure to follow-up these budgets? Is there any procedure for budget implementation? Does the implemented budget encourage the efficient and effective development of external quality assurance procedures?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.5	Mission statement		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.		
Questions to consider	What is the mission of AERES? Where is it stated? Is there any document where its mission, goals and aims are stated? Do these documents reflect specifically any policy or management plan? How will other higher education stakeholders contribute to the achievement of these goals? Does this mission show that AERES' main axes of the activity are external quality assurance procedures? Does the mission show which are AERES' assessment processes aims and objectives? Is there any methodical approach to achieve this aims? Is this information publicly available?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.6	Independence		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.		
Questions to consider	Does the prevailing legislation recognize AERES' independence as an autonomous institution? Is AERES' independence of action documented? Do AERES' decisions have to be endorsed by any institution or body? How are evaluation processes defined? How are external experts nominated and appointed? How are process results precise? Are these decisions made autonomously or independently? Is there any mechanism to avoid clash of interests with external experts? Is there any mechanism to assure that independence is maintained by the external experts? Does AERES determine autonomously and independently the results coming out from external evaluation?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.7	External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies		
Assessed aspect	The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include: • a self-evaluation or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process; • an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; • publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; • a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.		
Questions to consider	Are the review processes and standards clearly defined and published? Where? Do these processes include: self-evaluation, external assessment, publication of a report and follow-up procedure to review actions? Is the information about these processes and standards published and publicly available? Where? Is it possible to appeal against AERES' decisions? How? Is this system of appeal pre-defined and published in advance? Is it publicly available?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

Standard 3.8	Accountability procedures		
Assessed aspect	Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.		
Questions to consider	Is there a published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself? Do the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance? Is there enforced any mechanism to avoid conflict of interests mechanism in the work of its external experts? Does the agency have reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors? (External experts, advisors, IT companies, etc.)? Are they public and documented? Does the agency have in place internal feedback or internal reflection mechanisms such as: means to react to recommendations for improvement coming from the staff, the Executive board, external experts, etc? Could you describe its valuation and implementation? Are these mechanisms public and published?		
Evidence (Name, medium and type)		Department in charge	
Valuation			
Insufficient	Susceptible to improvement	Acceptable	Optimum
Strengths	•		
Aspects for improvement	•		
Commentary	•		

1. Summary of the individual evaluation

This table collects the conclusions of each expert and it should be the key to develop the working plan and the review for the site-visit.

The standard that has obtained an "I" or "SI" should be analyzed in more detail in the site-visit.

Draft of proposed standards' valuation	**I**	**SI**	**A**	**O**
3.2 Official status				
3.3 Activities				
3.4 Resources				
3.5 Mission statement				
3.6 Independence				
3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies				
3.8 Accountability procedures				
Part 3				