

Quality Handbook

of the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education

GENERAL PRESENTATION

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March 2010

Purpose and management of the Quality Handbook

The purpose of the Quality Handbook is to describe the Quality Management System (QMS) in force within the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education in order to:

- Guarantee that its evaluation procedures comply with the missions that have been assigned by French law and with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance within the European Higher Education Area (ESG)
- Guarantee the satisfaction of stakeholders through the efficiency of its operations and its continuous improvement policy.

It is intended for distribution to AERES staff, experts and stakeholders of the agency.

The AERES management has approved this handbook.

The AERES management undertakes to bring this Quality Handbook to the attention of AERES staff, experts and interested parties. The AERES management shall ensure that the requirements set out in this handbook are known and understood.

The following management rules apply to the Quality Handbook:

- Drafting and approval. The Quality Handbook is approved by the management upon proposal of the AERES Quality Unit.
- Distribution. The Quality Unit shall organise the distribution of the Quality Handbook. It shall be made public on the AERES website and archived by the Quality Unit.
- Reviews and updates. The Quality Handbook shall be reviewed by the Quality Unit at least once a year following the management review. It shall also be updated according to amendments to the QMS. The modifications shall be drafted by the Quality Unit and then submitted to the AERES management for approval. The recipients shall automatically receive updates.

AERES Quality policy declaration

The AERES develops its actions in compliance with its founding law and the decrees organising it, in accordance with principles of scientific and technical competence, independence and transparency.

The AERES has the following missions:

- Evaluation of research organisations and institutions, research and higher education institutions and scientific cooperation foundations and institutions as regards all of their missions and activities
- Evaluation of the research activities conducted by the research units of the aforementioned institutions and organisations
- Evaluation of the programmes and degrees of higher education institutions
- Validation of the procedures for evaluating the staff of the aforementioned institutions and organisations and giving an opinion on the conditions under which said procedures are carried out.

The **fundamental principles** intended to guarantee the quality of the evaluation of higher education and research are defined in the **AERES Evaluation Charter**, i.e.:

- Principles of an impartial and objective evaluation based upon the reviewers' skills, the collegiality of the evaluations, the avoidance of divergent or convergent interests between reviewers and evaluated institutions
- Ethical principles concerning the respect for people and institutions, based upon the maintenance of a dialogue and transparency
- Principle of efficiency based upon consistent procedures, the adaptation of methods to the objectives and to the specificities of its different fields of intervention and on the periodic evaluation.

This charter is made publicly available.

The AERES considers the quality of its evaluations to be essential to ensuring its credibility and earning the confidence of higher education institutions, bodies, public authorities, students and any interested parties.

The AERES applies the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" adopted in Bergen in 2005 by the Ministers of Higher Education in the member countries of the Bologna process.

In this framework, the AERES undertakes to:

- Implement quality assurance according to a process-based approach, which is adapted to the purposes of the AERES' actions throughout its organisational structure and its activities
- Allocate the necessary resources to this system
- Provide a durable framework in order to set and review its quality objectives, to evaluate their adequacy in relation to the needs of the different stakeholders on a regular basis, and to implement the required changes and improvements
- Continuously improve the efficiency of its methods and procedures.

This **Quality Policy** declaration has been issued to the AERES Board by the management and made publicly available.

The Quality Policy desired by the management has also been sent to its entire staff. The entire community's adherence to this process is a key part of the AERES quality management system.



Jean-François Dhainaut, *President of the AERES*, 23 October 2009

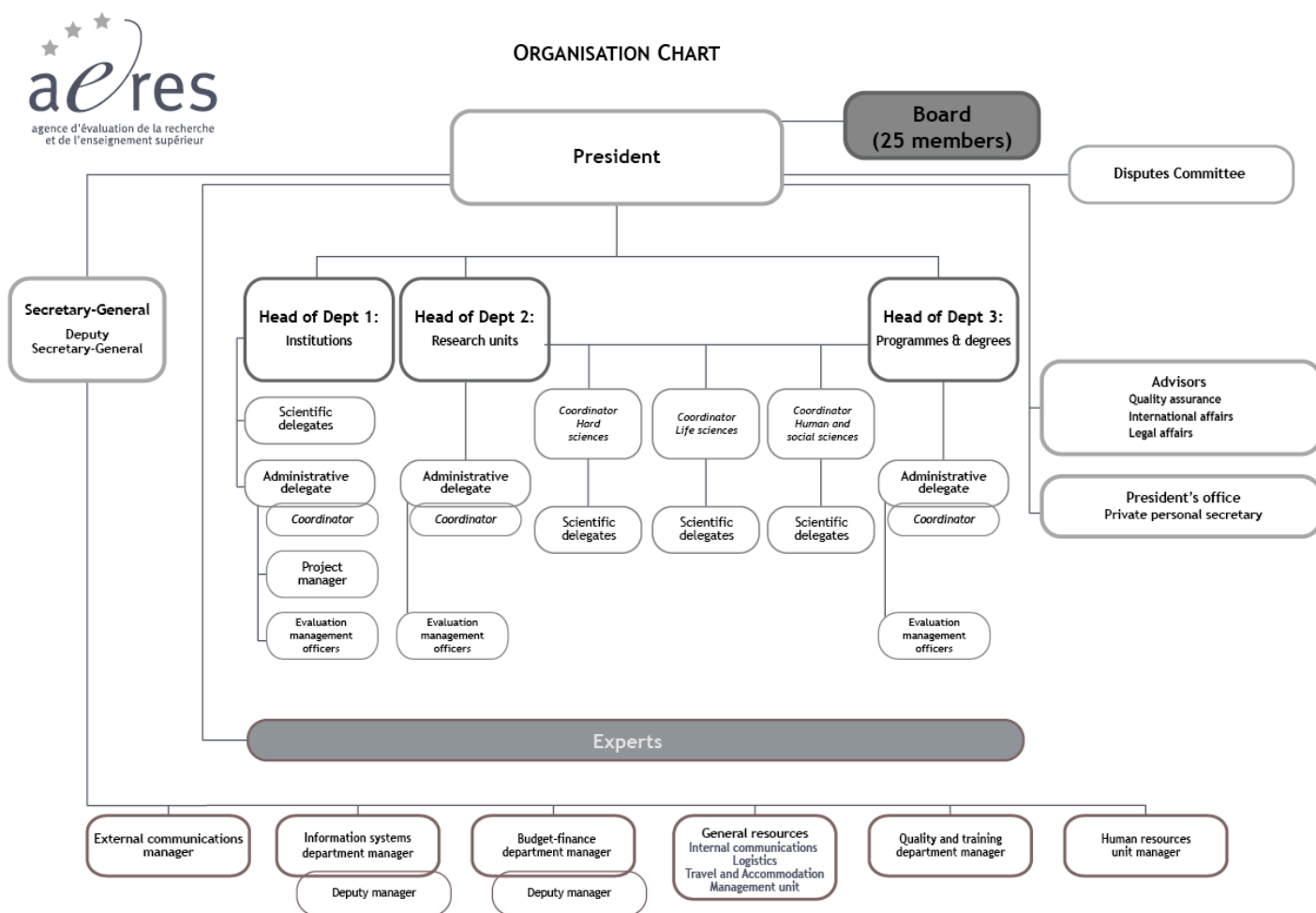
Organisational structure and responsibilities of the AERES

The main elements of the AERES' organisational structure are set out in the Law of 18 April 2006 and in its amended implementing decree of 3 November 2006. Both of these texts specify the roles of:

- The AERES Board consisting of 25 members, including the President, appointed for a four-year period (renewable once)
- The President
- The three departments and their heads (appointed for a four-year period, renewable once)
- The Secretary-General

In the framework of its Rules of Procedure, the AERES has added the following bodies to its organisational structure:

- Executive Committee
- A committee for handling conflicts of interest and complaints concerning the evaluations carried out by the AERES.



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Fundamental texts of the AERES

The AERES was created by the French Programme Law for research of 18 April 2006, which endowed it with the status of an independent administrative authority. It has created a series of texts defining its principles, charter and operating procedures, which have been incorporated into the global framework of its quality management system.

- Law no. 2006-450 of 18 April 2006 (article L 114-3-1 to L 114-3-7 of the French Research Code)
- Decree no. 2006-1334 of 3 November 2006, amended
- Evaluation Charter
- Rules of Procedure
- Status of experts
- Status of scientific delegates
- Selection of experts
- Declaration of the AERES Quality Policy
- AERES Quality Standards

▶▶ AERES Quality Management System

The AERES has created a Quality Management System in order to guarantee the efficiency of its evaluation procedures. This process, in operation since March 2008, has allowed the AERES to improve the methods and procedures that it uses to report on the performance of its missions.

▶ Steering Committee

The Steering Committee consists of the President, Departments Heads, the Secretary-General and the advisors to the President and Quality Unit. It coordinates the quality management system.

▶ Quality unit

The responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and improvement of the Quality System has been delegated to a Quality Unit. It consists of a Quality and Training Delegate and a Quality Assistant. Its activities are coordinated by an advisor to the President. It is responsible for drafting quality documents. It supervises the drafting of process sheets with the department heads and the departments of the AERES. It also carries out process reviews and prepares for the management review. It is responsible for the collection and recording of evidence gathered by the entire agency.

▶ AERES Quality Standards

The AERES has developed its own Quality Assurance Standards, which incorporate the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area".

▶ Process approach

The Quality Management System implemented by the AERES is a process-based approach that covers all of its activities.

As shown by the following mapping, the operational, management and support processes have been identified, described and placed under the responsibility of a supervisor.

■ Operational processes

Operational processes describe the AERES' core business activity - evaluations carried out by the three departments - and activities that relate directly to it: management of experts and delivery of evaluation training for experts and staff (scientific delegates and project managers). They primarily include: evaluation of research units (Department 2); evaluation of programmes (Department 3); evaluation of institutions and research organisations (Department 1), based on the analyses of Departments 2 and 3 as part of an integrated evaluation process; summary of the evaluation data for each campaign.

Operational processes:

Scheduling of the campaign.

Choice and monitoring of scientific delegates; internal training of scientific delegates and project managers; management of experts; training of experts.

Preparation; creation of an expert committee.

On-site visit; logistical support for the on-site visit.

Reporting; bachelor's degrees; vocational bachelor's degrees; master's degrees; doctoral schools; production of reports, scoring and distribution; production of analyses and reports for each institution or site based on the evaluations; summaries of the three departments' findings.

Development of practices and methods; validation of staff evaluation procedures; monitoring of institutions and programmes in the framework of the four-year evaluation; performance of studies, intelligence and research.

■ Support processes

Support processes describe the activities of the general secretariat, human resources, the budget and finance department, legal research, the travel and accommodation management unit, the information systems department and the general services department.

Support processes:

Human resources: Job forecasting and monitoring; recruitment and mobility of staff; monitoring of administrative and training staff.

Budget and finance: Budgetary forecasts and financial monitoring; processing of travel and accommodation expenses, allowances, invoices and conventions; purchasing and monitoring of public procurement contracts.

Logistics: Building security and maintenance; reception; mail; transport; management of rooms; planning and reorganisation of areas: computer-assisted publication; travel and accommodation management unit.

Information systems: Application management; IT technical support; application and monitoring of the service contract; management of Web publications; management of the information systems project.

Legal follow-up and research.

■ Management processes

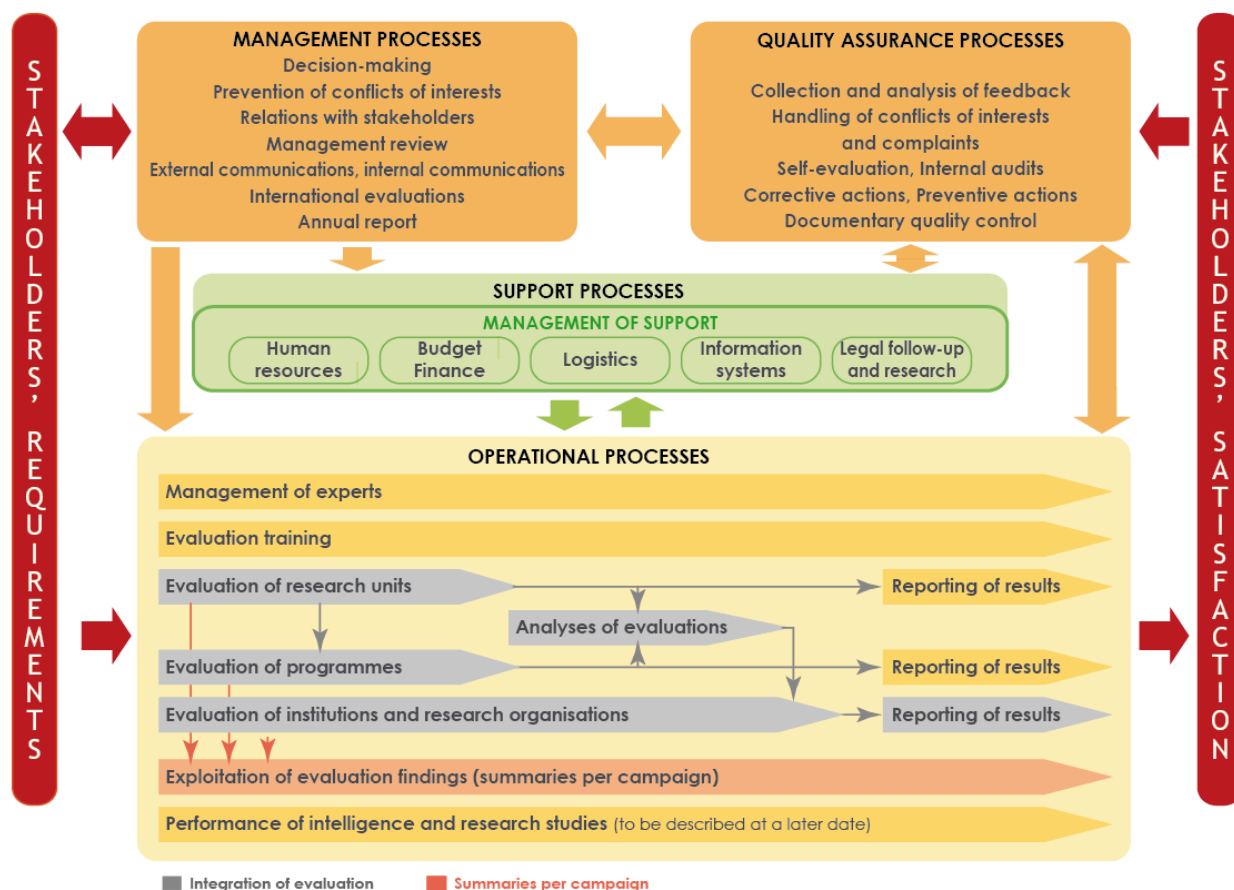
Management processes are divided into decision-making and management of activities processes by the management and continuous quality improvement processes.

Management processes

Decision-making; prevention of conflicts of interest; management review; relations with stakeholders; external communication; internal information and communication; processing of international evaluation requests; annual report.

Satisfaction of stakeholders; internal performance: indicators and operating reports; corrective and preventive actions; internal audits; self-evaluation; handling of conflicts of interest and complaints; documentary quality control.

Mapping of AERES processes (V02 February 2010)



Documentation, records and archiving

Quality documentation is managed by the Quality Unit, which archives all dated versions of the process sheets and associated documents. Documents relating to the Quality Management System may be presented on paper or in electronic format.

Records relating to the Quality System are legible; they are stored and archived in an appropriate manner in order to prevent their deterioration or loss. Operational documents and records specific to each department and service are dated and archived by the department in question.

Provision of resources

The Management determines the human and material resources required for implementing and maintaining the Quality Management System.

During the management review, the adequacy of the resources allocated to the Quality Management System is examined.

Management review

The "Quality" policy and objectives established by the AERES, feedback concerning the satisfaction of stakeholders, the review of the conformity and effectiveness of processes, the status of corrective and preventive actions, complaints, changes liable to affect the QMS and opportunities for the continuous improvement of the quality system are all dealt with at the annual management review. At the request of the management of the AERES, the steering committee for the quality management system and all managers of processes and sub-processes participate in this review.

The improvement actions identified during these reviews are compiled in a management review report. The Quality Unit monitors their implementation.

► 2010 Improvement Plan

In line with its quality management system, the AERES undertakes to carry out the following improvement actions in 2010:

- Assess and increase the satisfaction of stakeholders
- Describe the “Validation of evaluation procedures for the staff of higher education institutions and research bodies” process
- Prepare for the implementation of the “AERES internal audit” process with a view to its application in 2011
- Define and implement the “Performance of studies, monitoring and research concerning evaluation” process.

► Schedule for 2010-2014

The schedule for the continuous improvement actions concerning the AERES’ activities is set out in the three main areas of the strategic plan which can be consulted on the AERES website.



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