

Selection of the AERES experts

The missions the AERES has been tasked by the legislator require a great many experts to be called on from different academic, cultural and geographical backgrounds. This diversity is a source of wealth for the Agency which, in return, requires the consistency of evaluation procedures and equal treatment of the evaluated institutions to be ensured.

These demands led the AERES to specify the nature of the expected capacities, the process for appointing experts and their role. This approach has been accompanied by a thought about their training.

1 - The expected capacities of experts

The AERES expects its experts to work on the basis of common standards. The profiles of the experts selected vary depending on the evaluated institution. In all cases, the AERES' evaluation draws on collectively accountable, complementary skills.

1.1. Characteristics common to all the Agency's experts

The AERES makes sure that the experts have certain characteristics in common, namely:

- or professor and researcher peers, who are by far the main participants in the evaluation, they are required to have :
 - recognised disciplinary skills
 - current or previous responsibilities in higher education, research or exploitation of research findings
 - experience abroad
- for “non-academic” experts, the AERES requires them to have proven competence in the review field in question (at least 5 years' experience in this field)
- for students, the AERES requires them to have sound experience in research and higher education, to have held elective or associative responsibilities in their universities or enrolled in a master's level degree at the very least.

Consideration of these criteria for the choice of expert varies depending on the specific nature of what is being evaluated.

1.2. Specific competencies of experts in the department for the evaluation of institutions

The evaluation of an institution or research organisation requires a very large variety of experts to be called on so that all the fields of evaluation are covered, from governance to research.

Experts must meet one or more of the following criteria to be able to evaluate a higher education and research institution (universities, grandes écoles and grands établissements):

Experience in managing higher education and research

- Directing an institution
- Assuming sector-based responsibilities in the management team (vice-president for research, programmes, information system, resources, etc.)
- One of these experts should be foreign if possible.

A disciplinary skill: the scientific discipline must correlate with one of the disciplinary sectors of the evaluated institution. For evaluations on the institution's training and research strategy, a total disciplinary match is not required.

An administrative skill: staff management, public accounting, asset management (regional education authority secretaries-general, accountants, etc.).

A business competence: director of human resources, manager, manager in relation with higher education and research within businesses, etc.

A competence in student life matters: current or former student vice-president, head of the Students' Union (or equivalent), etc.

Experts tasked with evaluating research organisations (public science and technology institutions and public industrial and commercial institutions) must meet the same criteria overall, but the committees comprise more foreign researchers and professors as well as French and foreign high-level representatives of the business world.

1.3. *Specific competencies for the department for the evaluation of research units*

Experts must have a broad range of skills encompassing several disciplinary or organisational aspects of the life of a research unit.

Disciplinary competencies

The expert must justify recognised skills in the field of the evaluated unit's speciality.

Research knowledge and management

- The expert must carry out a research activity either within a higher education institution, a research organisation or a research and development facility in the private sector. He or she must have proof of at least 5 years' experience in this field.
- The expert must justify a managerial research responsibility and have at least headed up a team or a platform for example.

Experience abroad

20% of the experts the department calls on mainly carry out their research duties abroad.

1.4. *Specific competencies for the department for the evaluation of programmes and degrees*

Experts must be aware of the issues surrounding training and vocational integration.

Experts in the academic field must have carried out significant teaching activities in higher education. They must also have held a position of teaching responsibility (sector manager, vice-Rectors of the CEVU (Advisory Board for University Life and Studies), etc.).

Experts from a "professional background" must have taken part in classes as a professor, course director or member of the conseil de perfectionnement (programme enhancement board).

For doctoral schools, the committee members must have proven experience in the field of doctoral training.

2 - Process for appointing experts

The AERES has defined and implements a procedure for selecting experts so as to provide it with a wide range of skills for fulfilling its missions. This procedure involves drawing up a list of experts on whom the AERES has already called. In accordance with the AERES' transparency principle, this list, to which the experts' CVs are appended, is published on the AERES website and adds further credibility to evaluations by giving everyone the possibility of assessing the quality of



experts called on.

2.1. Forming the pool of potential experts

The texts stipulate that the Agency hear proposals of experts from:

- 1° members of the Board and department heads
- 2° presidents or directors of institutions and research organisations, higher education and research institutions, scientific cooperation foundations and institutions as well as the French National Research Agency
- 3° presidents of evaluation bodies whose procedures the Agency is tasked with validating.

Since it was set up in 2007, the Agency has consulted all of the stakeholders concerned to note down their proposals. The department heads and the proposal bodies and institutions that are called on periodically constantly ensure that this pool is kept up-to-date.

In order to open this pool up to a wider section of experts, particularly from abroad, the AERES calls on foreign evaluation agencies and, in 2010, has given experts the chance to apply for reviews on its website.

To date the AERES has a pool of a little over 10,000 potential experts.

2.2 Criteria for inclusion on the list of experts

After participating in an initial evaluation, an expert is included in "the list of registered experts". This procedure is not automatic, however. At the end of each evaluation campaign, the departments review the contributions of newly called-on experts and suggest to the Agency President that they be included on the list of experts for four years, except those who have not abided by:

- the Agency's ethical rules, and particularly those concerning:
 - respect for people
 - conflict or proximity of interests
 - confidentiality of the evaluation.
- the procedures set up by the AERES, particularly on:
 - attendance at the different committee meetings
 - the procedure for writing reports
 - the quality of the arguments in and content of the draft report (or of the contributions to the draft report)
 - submission of the draft report (and contribution to the draft report) on time
 - use of the Agency's group tools
 - the Agency's applicable administrative regulations.

The departments' proposals are harmonised by the inclusion committee (President, department heads, secretary-general and advisor to the president for legal affairs) and validated by the President in the last resort.

Inclusion in the list is valid for 4 years. However, in the event of a breach of the aforementioned rules during this timeframe, the same procedure may be applied to remove an expert from the list.

2.3. Procedure for appointing members to an expert committee

The AERES pays careful attention that its committees are formed in keeping with the principles of independence, fair handling of the evaluated institutions and collective responsibility. Under the authority of the department head, the scientific delegates appoint a balanced panel of experts to each committee, including the chairman, and ask the evaluated institution if it has observed any conflicts of interests.

The size and makeup of the expert committee vary depending on the type of evaluation:

- 6 to 10 for an institutional evaluation; the committee systematically comprises one student if the evaluation concerns a training institution
- 8 on average for the department for the evaluation of research units. For this department, the regulations provide that each expert committee comprises one representative put forward by the staff evaluation body of each institution to which the evaluated unit is attached (CNU, CoNRS, INSERM specialized committees, etc.)
- 4 on average for doctoral schools
- for bachelor's degrees, the committee gathers together all the experts evaluating the range of programmes offered by the same geographical site, at a proportion of one expert per training field
- for master's degrees, four committees are formed per geographical site: sciences and technologies, life, health and ecology sciences, social sciences and humanities and law/economy/management, at a proportion of two experts per master's speciality.

The committee members are indicated in each evaluation report. For the evaluation of bachelors and masters, the list of experts is presented per campaign for all committees combined.

3 - The expert's role

During the evaluation, organised by a scientific delegate and, for the department 1 (evaluation of institutions), a project manager, the expert is expected to:

- read all of the documentation handed out by the AERES
- take part in the on-site visit for reviewing institutions, research units and doctoral schools, as well as the Agency's committee meetings for evaluating bachelor's and master's degrees
- take part in all preparatory and post-evaluation meetings for the review
- contribute to the draft evaluation report.

In addition to his or her responsibilities as an expert, the committee chairman must also:

- run and coordinate the committee's work by checking that the Agency's procedures are implemented
- write the draft report on the basis of the experts' contributions
- take part in the scoring meetings for the department for the evaluation of research units.

The expert's contributions are governed by the Agency's evaluation charter and ethical rules.

The expert must carry out an impartial and objective review. By accepting this mission, he or she particularly undertakes to comply strictly with the regulations concerning confidentiality and professional secrecy, and above all to:

- use the information he or she receives only in the context and for the requirements of the review
- report to the Agency, upon his or her appointment as an expert, any information, fact or right likely to bring about a proximity, community or conflict of interests.

In accordance with the principle of transparency, he or she accepts that his or her curriculum vitae be made publicly available on the AERES website.

4 - Experts' training

The Agency calls on experts from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds. They are trained on a regular basis in the AERES' methods and objectives.

4.1. Documentation

When an expert is appointed for a specific evaluation, methodological guides presented depending on the entity evaluated are handed out to him or her.

4.2. Classroom-based training

In addition to this documentation, the Agency has also set up information and training sessions within each of its departments:

- Department for the evaluation of institutions: Experts attend a two-day training programme before the evaluation campaign is launched. This programme covers both the general principles adopted by the AERES and specifically how an evaluation is carried out. It is taught by AERES staff members, experienced experts, representatives of the evaluated institutions and the decision-makers who will be using the evaluations. Since 2009, expert committee chairmen have been given additional training to learn how best to run committees.

- Department for the evaluation of research units: The AERES evaluates research units using methods that have long been put into practice in France and abroad. The department nevertheless makes sure all of the experts are familiar with these, as well as the AERES' own procedures and methodologies.

Because of the large number of experts called on in this instance, they are trained by the scientific delegate during discussions prior to the evaluation and then during the on-site visit. This visit systematically begins with a committee meeting in camera during which the scientific delegate checks that all of the experts have clearly understood the process.

- Department for the evaluation of programmes and degrees: This organises half-day training sessions before the meeting of each evaluation committee according to the same principle as applied by the department for the evaluation of institutions. For doctoral schools, these sessions are organised by the scientific delegates according to the same method as for research units.

4.3. Prospects for changing the way experts are trained

With a view to making the training sessions more relevant on the one hand and developing their content on the other - especially for experts working for the department for the evaluation of research units - the AERES is thinking about the opportunity of setting up additional initiatives to those already in place:

- distance learning via the Internet
- relocated classroom-based training on the geographical sites that regularly provide a large number of experts.

Feedback received at the end of a campaign is analysed to adjust the training sessions in line with the requirements indicated in terms of implementation in the field.

To learn more about this :

- Evaluation charter
- Expert status
- Scientific delegate status
- List of registered experts.