



Department for the evaluation of research units

Guidelines for research units

This document is intended for the expert committee members.
It presents a brief overview of the evaluation process.

Group B version

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Research unit guidelines

I **ROLE OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE**

II **MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE**

III **ON-SITE VISIT**

I - Role of the expert committee

By consulting the documents supplied and carrying out an on-site visit, the expert committee evaluates every aspect of the activities conducted by the research units of the institutions and organisations concerned on the basis of the unit's contractual application. The evaluations must take account of each team's project and report as well as the unit's overall project and report.

The evaluations provide the various research and higher education supervising levels and stakeholders with objective information for evaluating the quality of the activity conducted in the research units. The State or institutions concerned remain fully responsible for the decisions regarding recognition and allocation of human and financial resources.

They involve:

- for a unit applying for renewal, examining the activity reports of the past four years as well as the project (objectives and strategy) and identifying the strengths and areas for improvement overall and on a team-by-team basis.
- for a unit that is new or undergoing a change in staff, examining the project and analysing the prospective study as well as the objectives and strategy defined for the next four years overall and on a team-by-team basis.

II - Members of the expert committee

The expert committee is made up of six members on average, including a chairman and a representative of each staff evaluation body of each institution to which the evaluated unit belongs, as proposed by this body (CoNRS¹, CNU², specialised scientific commissions of INSERM³, etc.). The list of experts is made publicly available. However, for small units the committee size may be reduced.

These experts can be researchers, professors, engineers and technicians from the academic or industrial research community in France or abroad.

The chairmen or directors of organisations or their representatives attend meetings with the unit director or with the teams and provide contextual explanations or clarifications about the strategy of organisations at the request of the expert committee chairman.

During the visit, the expert committee is accompanied by a scientific delegate who represents the AERES and makes sure the evaluation process is carried out correctly and in accordance with procedures. The AERES representative is not a member of the expert committee.

III - On-site visit

The expert committee members analyse the unit's evaluation application and prepare the interviews that will be held by adopting the analytical grid supplied in the template suggested for the evaluation report.

The on-site visit begins with a meeting between the experts to work out the details of the visit and determine the role of each participant. The expert committee chairman makes sure that the visit takes place correctly according to the schedule in liaison/after consulting with the unit director and oversees all discussions.

A visit schedule typically entails:

- An open-session meeting with the unit director, attended by some or all of his/her management team. The presentation of the unit's activity should not last more than an hour. Instead of painting an exhaustive picture, it shall highlight the most striking scientific facts and/or significant developments in the unit's positioning (changes in thematic direction, etc.).
- Confirmation of the number of researchers and professors "productive in terms of research and results' exploitation".
- An on-site meeting with the research teams. If justified by the number of teams, the expert committee may split up in order to devote enough time to each team.
- A meeting with the technical teams when justified by their role.
- A meeting with the unit board and/or staff representatives and with doctoral students (these meetings are held behind closed doors with the committee).

¹ French National Committee of Scientific Research

² French Universities Board.

³ French National Institute of Health and Medical Research.

- The expert committee may interview anyone it deems useful and asks the opinion of the supervising ministries present. The individual interviews must be time-limited and last no more than 15 minutes. These will only be held under exceptional circumstances.
- A discussion in camera between the expert committee members. The AERES representative attends the closed-door session without participating in the core evaluations; the supervising ministry representatives do not attend. The committee draws up an evaluation summary forming a rough outline for the report. This outline is not presented orally to the unit.

At the end of the visit, the expert committee chairman organises the writing of the report, the first draft of which is immediately entered into the AERES' electronic document management software (GED). The report reflects the collective view of the committee members.

The chairman is entitled to amend this first draft in liaison with the experts during a period not exceeding two weeks following the unit visit. At the end of this period, the report is approved initially by the scientific delegate. The committee's opinion takes on board different criteria to be considered depending on the type of research (basic, applied, targeted) conducted by the unit (see the appendix describing these criteria).

The written report must not be longer than 2 pages for a single-team unit and (n+1) pages for a unit with n teams (this length does not take account of the file formatting by the AERES style sheet). The report shall be produced in the same format as the template supplied by the AERES.

The following pitfalls should be avoided when writing the report:

- a descriptive report of the unit's activities without any real analysis of its strengths and weaknesses,
- an allusive report that does not shed light on the unit's situation,
- a report that is toned down in its form and inconsistent with the final score.

Appendices (available on <http://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/> under the tab "evaluation of research units" then "evaluation process"):

- Preparation process for evaluating research units;
- Process for writing the report and scoring in the evaluation of research units;
- Criteria for identifying researchers and professors "productive in terms of research and results' exploitation";
- Report template.