



Department for the evaluation of research units

Guidelines for federated research organisations

Group B version

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Federated research organisation guidelines

I ROLE OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE

II MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE

III EVALUATION PROCESS

I - Role of the expert committee

By consulting the documents supplied and, if justified, carrying out an on-site visit, the expert committee evaluates every aspect of the activities conducted by the research federations of the institutions and organisations concerned on the basis of the federation's contractual application requested by the supervising ministry. The evaluations must take account of the federation'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 federations. The State or institutions concerned remain fully responsible for the decisions regarding recognition and allocation of human and financial resources.

They shall involve:

- for a federation seeking renewal, examining the activity reports of the past four years, the project, objectives and strategy defined for the next four years and identifying the strengths and areas for improvement.
- for a federation 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.

The actual evaluation relates to the federated organisation and not to each of its constituent units, which have been or will be subject to a separate evaluation (e.g. a UMR CNRS [mixed research unit of the French National Centre for Scientific Research], Unit of the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research [INSERM]... members of the federated organisation).

The aim is to assess the added value brought by the federated organisation - particularly the scientific findings that cannot be attributed to a specific unit, but are a direct result of the work of the federated organisation.

The committee shall evaluate the way the federation operates, the extent of resource pooling and how it complements other federated organisations on the site.

II - Members of the expert committee

The expert committee comprises at least six experts, including one chairman. It may consist entirely or partially of expert committees inspecting the research units belonging to the federation.

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 federation director or with its members 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 - Evaluation process

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

The expert committee chairman makes sure that the interviews are held correctly according to the schedule in liaison/after consulting with the federation director and oversees all discussions.

The evaluation typically entails:

- A meeting with the federation director.
- And when justified:
 - An on-site meeting with the research teams involved in the federation.
 - A meeting with the technical teams.
 - A meeting with the federation board and/or staff representatives (these meetings are held behind closed doors with the committee).
- The expert committee may interview anyone it deems useful and will ask the opinion of the supervising ministries present. These interviews are open.

A discussion behind closed doors between the expert committee members concludes the interviews. The AERES representative attends the closed-door session without participating in the core evaluations; the supervising ministry representatives do not attend. During this, 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 federation visit. At the end of this period, the report is approved 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 federation.

The written report should not be longer than 3 pages for a federation (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 federation's activities without any real analysis of its strengths and weaknesses,
- an allusive report that does not shed light on the federation's situation,
- a report that is toned down in its form.