



Section des unités de recherche

Guidelines for research units

This document is for members of expert committees.
It provides a succinct presentation of the entire evaluation process.

Group C

— October 2011 —

I - Role of the expert committee

Through examination of documents supplied and visits to the sites themselves, the expert committee evaluates all aspects of the activities carried out by the research units belonging to the institutions and bodies concerned. Evaluations must take full account of each team's audit and project, and the unit's overall audit and project.

Evaluations provide actors in research, in particular the various management teams of institutions and bodies, and at the Ministry for Research and Higher Education, with objective data on the quality of activities carried out by research units. Any decisions based on evaluations, and which bear on recognition or allocation of human and financial resources, remain entirely within the competence of the State or of the institutions concerned.

It is a matter of:

- for a unit undertaking a new project, studying the audit of the previous four years' activity, studying the project, and pinpointing strengths and weaknesses, both overall and team by team;
- for a new or newly reconstituted unit, studying the project and analysing the prospective area of study, as well as the objectives and strategy defined for the next four years, overall and team by team.

II - Composition of the expert committee

The expert committee is made up of an average of six experts, including the Chair, along with a representative of the authority responsible for evaluation of staff at the institution to which the unit under evaluation belongs, and who has been put forward by such authority (CoNRS, CNU¹, specialised scientific committees from INSERM², etc.). The list of experts is published. The size of the committee may be reduced, however, in the case of small units.

The Chair must ensure that committee members have no conflicts of interest with the unit under evaluation.

The experts may be researchers, professors, or engineers or technicians in the field of industrial or academic research, either French or foreign.

The Presidents or Directors of institutions or their representatives take part in meetings held with the unit director or with teams, and, upon the request of the Chair of the expert committee, supply contextual information or details of the institution's strategy.

During the visit, the expert committee is accompanied by a scientific delegate (DS) representing AERES, who ensures that the evaluation is properly conducted and that procedures are complied with. The AERES representative is not a member of the expert committee.

III - Conduct of the evaluation

Before the visit:

The members of the expert committee analyse the unit's evaluation application form and prepare the hearings that will take place during the visit.

The DS in charge of the evaluation pre-completes the report form with information supplied to him by the unit director: name of the committee Chair, names of the experts, names of teams and managers, etc. This document (version 0) is then sent to the Director of the organisation, who, in collaboration with team leaders, fills out the tables detailing unit / team / project workforces. The Director must return the completed form (version 1) to the DS and committee Chair at least one week before the evaluation, so that tables can be matched to those submitted to the Pelican platform.

Reminder: the reference dates for the above-mentioned tables are 30 June 2011 and 1 January 2013.

During the visit:

The site visit begins with a meeting of the expert committee to fix details and specify the role to be played by each member. The Chair of the expert committee is responsible for the proper conduct of the visit in compliance with the programme planned in collaboration with the unit director. He will direct all discussions.

¹ Conseil National des Universités.

² Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale.

Typically a visit programme comprises:

- A meeting in open session with the unit director and all or part of his management team. Presentation of the unit's activity should take no longer than an hour. Rather than being an exhaustive inventory, it should highlight the most striking scientific results and any significant developments in its positioning (new thematic directions, etc.). The Director will present and commentate on the number of the unit's "producers".
- *In situ* meetings with research teams. If the number of teams requires it, the expert committee may split up in order to devote sufficient time to each team.
- Meeting with technical teams, if their role justifies it.
- Meetings with the unit's board, staff representatives, and doctoral students (such meetings are held with the committee behind closed doors).
- The expert committee may interview anybody it deems useful and collect opinions from any representatives of supervising bodies present. Individual interviews should not exceed 15 minutes each, and will only be conducted when in-house tensions or conflicts necessitate interviewing a member of the laboratory on specific cases.
- A discussion between expert committee members, held behind closed doors. The scientific delegate attends the meeting, but does not participate in formulation of basic appreciations. Representatives of the unit's supervisory bodies do not attend the meeting. The committee drafts a synthesis of the evaluation, constituting an outline of the final report. Such outline is not communicated verbally to the unit.

The visiting committee must not anticipate later scoring meetings by awarding one or more scores, but may compare the same unit's various teams amongst themselves.

At the end of the visit, the Chair of the expert committee organises the drawing up of the report, a first version of which is immediately deposited in the GED (AERES' electronic document management application). The report reflects the committee members' collective position.

After the visit:

The Chair is free to amend the initial document, following discussion with the other expert committee members, within two weeks following the visit to the unit. At the end of such period, the report is validated by the scientific delegate. The committee's opinion takes into account various criteria to be considered according to the nature of the research (basic, applied or finalised) carried out by the unit (see the annexed document detailing these criteria).

The written report should be no longer than 2 pages for a single-team unit and (n+1) pages for a unit composed of n teams (these lengths do not take account of AERES' style of by-the-page document formatting). The report must be in the same format as the model supplied by AERES (see annexed document).

Pitfalls to be avoided when drawing up the file are:

- a report describing the unit's activities with no real analysis of strengths and weaknesses,
- an allusive report that does not enable any true understanding of the unit's situation,
- a watered-down report that does not match final scoring.

Reminder on logistics:

The unit must take care of all expert committee members' travel arrangements from their arrival at the railway station or airport until their departure therefrom. In some cases, agreements may need to be reached between different institutions in order to enable a committee visiting one of them in the morning to be transported to another during the course of the same day.

The unit will organise meals for experts during the midday break, while taking care to comply with the programme planned for. These may take the form of tray meals, which would facilitate committee proceedings behind closed doors, or a buffet.

Organisations under evaluation must not invite experts to dinner during the visit.

If an evening meal is planned for, it must take place without parties under evaluation being present. Observers from supervisory bodies may be present, but the subject of the evaluation underway should not be brought up.

IV - Post-evaluation and scoring meetings

Following completion of all visits, post-evaluation and scoring meetings are held at AERES, by disciplinary panel. Each meeting includes the chairs of the expert committees of the panel's units (or their representatives if the chair person is unavailable), along with the AERES' scientific delegates concerned. Each meeting is chaired by the corresponding coordinating scientific delegate or his representative. All evaluation grids and evaluation reports on the panel's units are available during such meetings.

Final scoring is carried out in compliance with the instructions in the annexed document, "Post-evaluation and scoring procedure".

When, for whatever reason, scoring cannot be completed following the above procedure, it will be organised by the coordinating delegate in collaboration with the scientific delegates, following the "Procedure for unscheduled scoring of evaluated research units", of October 2011. Such cases must, however, be exceptions to the rule.

Annexed documents:

- Post-evaluation and scoring procedure, including scoring criteria:
<http://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/Publications/Analyse-des-evaluations-etudes/Notation-des-unites-de-recherche>
- "Procedure for unscheduled scoring of evaluated research units";
- Criteria for identification of "producers":
<http://www.aeres-evaluation.fr/Evaluation/Evaluation-des-unites-de-recherche/Principes-d-evaluation>
- Model report form.