



Agence pour l'Évaluation de
la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Strategic plan

2021-2025

This strategic plan is the second produced by the *Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (AEQES) [Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education]. Drafted by a working group, discussed and approved by the Steering Committee in November 2020, it follows the 2016-2020 plan and aims to identify the priorities that AEQES will pursue in the years 2021-2025.

The strategic plan is complemented by annual action plans adopted by the Agency's Board to chart the actions and expected results that will meet and, where necessary, adjust the priorities of the strategic plan.

THE ENDURING AEQES MISSIONS

Created in 2008, AEQES is an autonomous public service agency which carries out independently a formative evaluation of higher education programmes organised in the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* (FWB) [Wallonia-Brussels Federation]. It reports on the quality of higher education and endeavours for its constant improvement.

To that end, it aims to encourage the development of a quality culture in institutions, disseminate good practices and promote the establishment of synergies by and among higher education stakeholders.

Indeed, since its creation and during the period covering the strategic plan 2016-2020, AEQES has maintained its support for higher education institutions in the development of their quality approach and has constantly sought to improve its evaluation practices for that purpose. These methodological developments are continuing with the current implementation of a pilot phase of institutional evaluations.

AEQES has developed its information activities towards higher education stakeholders in FWB, notably by conducting studies and analyses and organising annual study days.

The Agency is part of a European process by integrating the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) in its evaluations, working together with other

external agencies or organisations, and raising awareness of European developments in higher education.

Finally, the Agency works to consolidate its international visibility through its involvement in international networks and its frequent participation in events dedicated to quality assurance in higher education.

AEQES, A COMPANION AND DRIVER OF CHANGE

The second decade of the 21st century presents the citizens of the world - and to a certain extent those of FWB - with multiple challenges in many areas: the climate, the economic crisis, the digital divide, the political crisis, and so on. Higher education actors have a role to play in addressing these societal challenges: they are expected to participate in solving these problems and to contribute to greater social justice. They use multiple levers to that end: the contribution to the growth of knowledge and the development of innovation; the development of critical thinking and support for the cultural and intellectual development of students; the consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals; the implementation of socially inclusive education; the combination of excellence and inclusion; the commitment to lifelong learning; the defence of the fundamental values of higher education (academic freedom, institutional autonomy, increased student participation in the governance of institutions); the engagement in cooperation arrangements, etc.

AEQES's strategic plan was developed in this context. An in-depth methodological reflection initiated in 2015 with the Agency's stakeholders led to the design of a pilot phase of institutional evaluation and the Government entrusted the Agency with its implementation. Institutions from the four forms of higher education are participating. The successful completion of this pilot phase will make it possible to attain the three priorities identified: an Agency that is more effective, higher education institutions with adequate quality systems that are embedded in a recognised and shared quality culture, and a clear and explicit quality policy at the FWB level.

Therefore, in the spirit of co-construction which has been its driving force from the outset, AEQES is committed to pursuing, with confidence and determination, all the phases of the pilot project; namely to carry out experimental institutional evaluations of the 17 volunteer institutions, draw lessons from this exercise, share them widely with all the stakeholders, and define the outlines of the future methodology, which will be at the centre of a future legal framework.

In conclusion, the actions set out under the three priorities of the strategic plan constitute essential levers and the concrete means for achieving the ambitious objective of "putting external evaluation fully at the service of the quality of higher education."

Vision

The AEQES pursues its actions geared to making a tangible impact on the quality of higher education and takes part in the collective effort to develop a better and fairer society so as to ensure the emancipation and well-being of its inhabitants and respect for the environment. It encourages the development of robust and sustainable management systems for the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education in FWB through the dissemination of its knowledge, the professionalism of its evaluations and its cooperation with stakeholders. It confirms its status as one of the key actors in quality at the regional, national and international level.

Mission

The mission of AEQES comprises four objectives pursued through a formative approach to evaluation, namely to:

- *promote the strengthening of continuous quality improvement processes in higher education in FWB in cooperation with higher education institutions and stakeholders;*
- *ensure the sustainability of the systems put in place for all actors involved in this process;*
- *promote innovation in external quality evaluation and support innovative approaches to internal quality assurance;*
- *encourage the networking of quality actors, including at the international level.*

Values

Dialogue and co-construction	The Agency operates on the basis of dialogue and co-construction practices with/among all stakeholders.
Independence	AEQES is an autonomous public service agency that carries out independently a formative evaluation of higher education programmes in FWB. It is responsible for the way it operates. It guarantees the impartiality of the evaluation results, without external influence.
Fairness	The Agency treats all institutions with consistency, professionalism, objectivity and integrity, while respecting the diversity of the many components of higher education.
Transparency	The Agency's operating rules, evaluation procedures and the results thereof are public.
Respect for diversity	The Agency respects the diversity of the higher education institutions' projects and curricular objectives, within the overall aims of higher education and quality.
Reflexivity and continuous improvement	The Agency is in a posture to question the needs of higher education; it monitors international practices, is open to continuous improvement and is a source of proposals to that end.

Three priorities

In order to encourage and stimulate improvement in the quality of higher education in FWB and to meet its overall missions, the Agency has set the following three strategic priorities, namely to:

1

Improve its effectiveness by strengthening its organisational independence, its operational independence and the independence of evaluation results and by ensuring stakeholder involvement.

2

Support institutions of higher education to develop an adequate and efficient quality system, embedded in a meaningful quality culture of their own.

3

Participate, alongside the other quality actors in FWB, in the definition of a comprehensive and transparent quality policy, where the respective roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and synergies possible.

Each of these priorities comprises several lines of action and is accompanied by indicators to measure their impact, namely to:

Improve its effectiveness by strengthening its organisational independence, its operational independence and the independence of evaluation results and by ensuring stakeholder involvement.

- *AEQES analyses how its governance structure functions and proposes reforms to the legislator.*
- *AEQES ensures that the Executive Unit's human resources and the Agency's budget are adequate for its activities.*
- *AEQES develops its targeted communication strategy. It designs and implements an appropriate and relevant communication plan.*
- *AEQES consolidates its internal quality assurance system and professional attitude.*

Support institutions of higher education to develop an adequate and efficient quality system, embedded in a meaningful quality culture of their own.

- *AEQES supports the development of the institutional dimension of quality assurance in higher education institutions and continues to adapt its methodology to ensure the proper articulation between programmatic and institutional evaluation.*
- *AEQES encourages training in quality methods, endeavours for the recognition of the professional character of quality management in higher education and supports the adequate consideration of the workload involved. AEQES raises awareness of the importance of using data and indicators to monitor the quality of programmes.*
- *AEQES ensures that all higher education actors are treated fairly, while being attentive to their specific needs.*
- *AEQES develops its expertise in research on quality and its evaluation.*

Participate, alongside the other quality actors in FWB, in the definition of a comprehensive and transparent quality policy, where the respective roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and synergies possible.

- *AEQES informs the public about its activities through communications at quality events and various publications. It is strengthening its role as a contributor of expertise and knowledge in quality assurance.*
- *AEQES continues its involvement in the work and events of its Belgian, European and international partners. In so doing, it shares and enriches its experience and expertise and consolidates its reputation at the national and international levels.*
- *Together with ARES, AEQES is pursuing a reflection in FWB on identifying and specifying a quality policy, and clarifying the respective roles and responsibilities of all actors in matters of quality and quality assurance (AEQES, ARES, higher education institutions - including students - the minister for higher education, the administration, academic centres, the adult education inspectorate, the controlling authorities, etc). The common objective is to make these known to all.*
- *AEQES participates in the drafting of a new decree on the quality and quality assurance mechanisms of higher education in FWB. It ensures that it is consistent with its values and vision.*

www.aeqes.be

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