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RELIER: a network to work together and promote quality within French universities

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University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Working together to take quality forward

Paper proposal form

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Proposal

Title: *RELIER*: a network to work together and promote quality within French universities



Abstract (150 words max):

The purpose of this communication is to present a very recent initiative lead by the French higher education and research institutions (*ESR*) : the creation of a network of quality referents named Higher Education and Research Quality Network : RELIER (for *RE*seau *qua*LIté pour l'*En*seignement supérieur et la *Re*cherche) which aims to connect (*relier* in French) universities, institutes, colleges and engineering schools.

Established by and for higher education and research institutions in order to support organizational, management, evaluation and improvement initiatives, this network gathers the people in charge of quality assessment within their institutions on both a political and an operational level. A 15-people steering committee was introduced in January 2013. Gathering every six weeks this committee's main objective is to reinforce a quality culture within the ESR, share good practices, promote and favor the appropriation of the reference tables and the standards of quality for a better management of the institutions.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

The purpose of this communication is to present a very recent initiative lead by the French higher education and research institutions (*ESR*) : the creation of a network of quality referents named Higher Education and Research Quality Network : RELIER (for *RE*seau *qua*LIté pour l'*En*seignement supérieur et la *Re*cherche) which aims to connect (*relier* in French) universities, institutes, colleges and engineering schools.

Established by and for higher education and research institutions in order to support organizational, management, evaluation and improvement initiatives, this network gathers the people in charge of quality assessment within their institutions on both a political and an operational level. A 17-people steering committee was introduced in January 2013. Gathering every six weeks this committee's main objective is to reinforce a quality culture within the ESR, share good practices, promote and favor the appropriation of the reference tables and the standards of quality for a better management of the institutions.

RELIER currently has over 150 members who either have participated to past events or have shown their interest in the project (see the map below, figure 1).

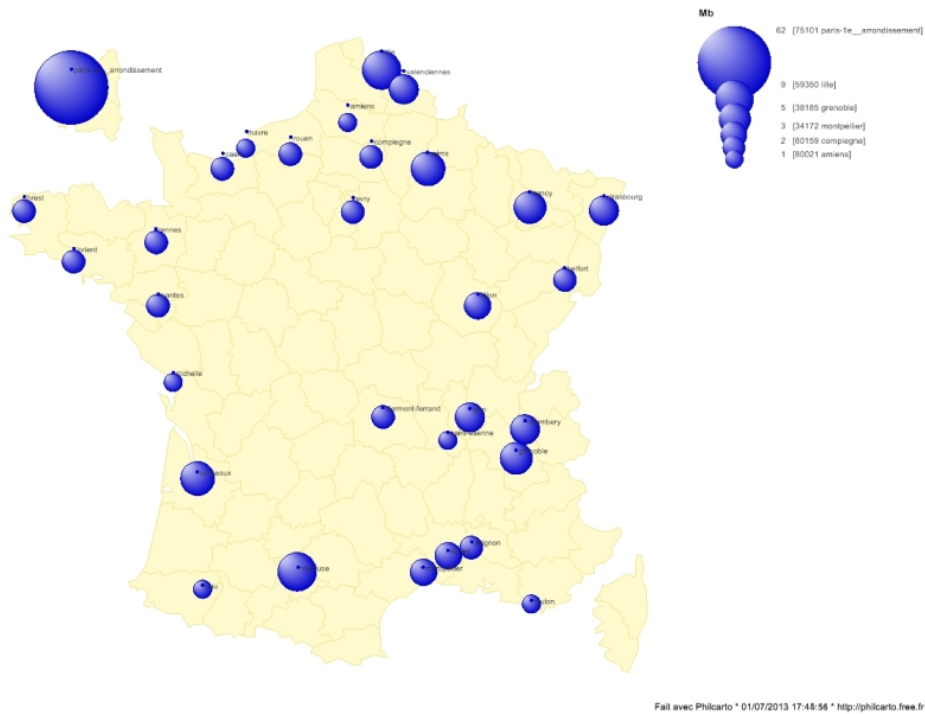


Figure 1 : Geographical distribution of the participants of the seminars and conferences of RELIER network

The steering committee is made of 17 people spread across the country (see the map below, figure 2) and is representative of the different Higher Education institutions (universities, Engineering schools, IUT, laboratories...) and of the different managing positions within the universities (political governance, management, support teams...).

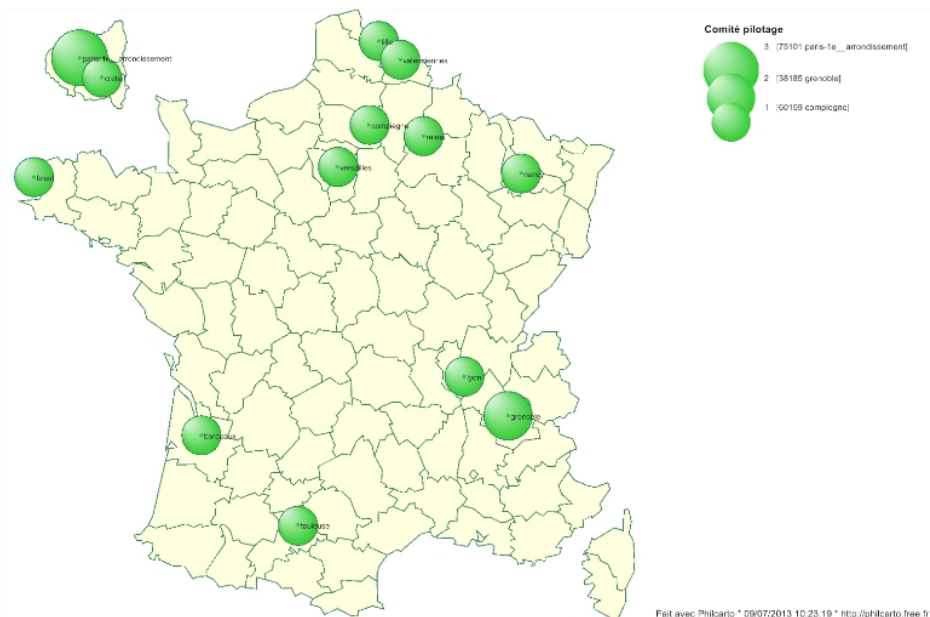


Figure 2 : Geographical distribution of the members of the steering committee



This steering committee meets every 6 weeks in order to define and organize the network's activities such as:

-Plenary conferences organized with the support of the Quality committee of the Conference of University Presidents (CPU). We aim to gather twice or thrice a year national and international personalities involved in the management, governance and strategy settings of their institutions. Those conferences allow the sharing of good practices and favor a quality culture within French universities.

- Theme sessions are organized between each plenary conference and offer more specialized workshops during which participants can interact and work through dramatization in order to exchange and explore ideas on a more operational level. Those sessions offer practical solutions to the needs of the universities (quality initiative and insertion observatory, quality and information systems, quality and management, documentary management, risk and change management...).

- Three training sessions will be organized and led by members of the network (introduction, implementation of a quality initiative, evaluation/audit) with the support of AMUE (Higher Education and Institutions Mutualization Agency).

- Participation to symposia, conferences and web conferences.

- The network is innovating regarding methodological contribution in the management and in the decision-making support and publishes and defends their publication during national and international conferences.

All those activities also aim to support the CPU and their Quality Committee by providing the skills and full expertise of the RELIER network in the fields of quality and management. Today, the network already provides solutions to national demands regarding: watch and alert, creation of a quality initiatives guide, writing of press releases...

Those initiatives should eventually allow to capitalize and to share our experiences. The point is to encourage French higher education and research institutions to take part in quality activities and to promote the implementation of internal evaluation. This, in turn, will support the autonomy and the empowerment of the institutions and their actors.

Why has quality become important in our institutions?

- because of the autonomy brought by the 2007 university reformation that made ESR institutions responsible for their management on every level. It has also given priority to management and governance with an external assessment of the institutions
- because the implementation of the Bologna Process has had major impact in France with the LMD and ECTS reformations. The recommendation linked to quality and implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines has been a slower process. However, the requirements now met by the evaluation agencies (AERES and CTI) also served as a support for the implementation of quality initiatives and tools within the universities and other higher education institutions. The context has now changed and the period is convenient for this work

The competitive setting and the dual purpose of university (teaching and research) must be taken into account in order to:

- attract students by offering attractive and high-standard training because they meet expectations from the job market and develop the students' skills
- promote research results and publication by supporting an innovative and oriented scientific policy
- facilitate the international positioning of our researchers
- support research activities and training for the technical staff who, by their work, guarantee the organization, quality services and necessary support to researchers



- ensure that the whole staff achieve a high level of service with every party involved

We can therefore ask ourselves some questions:

- How do institutions running on a secular mode of operation adapt to those required changes?
- How do universities face those changes while remaining with the institutions that matter on the national but also European level?
- How do we deal with those changes?
- How do we deal with these new responsibilities?

A single reformation of the French University system affects the equilibriums of said institution.

Managing and governing institutions require taking into account all those changes. We therefore must implement structuring devices in order to maintain a relative stability while accompanying change. The implementation of a quality initiative aiming to insure an efficient, dynamic and permanent operation during such a change finds here its legitimacy and meaning to operate.

The RELIER network aims to accompany ESR institutions in the implementation of a quality initiative. The RELIER's steering committee meets every 6 weeks. Its role is to:

- promote the gains of a quality process for service improvements for users and every party involved (staff, partners...) by supporting governance, management and organization of the institutions
- promote and develop risk assessment in the management of the institutions by the implementation of a quality initiative
- support the strategies led by the political governance and councils by a methodological contribution and decision-making initiatives
- broadcast a culture of quality, share and mutualize good practices
- listen as a group to the institutions' needs in order to offer oriented solutions
- promote self-evaluation within the institutions in coherence with external evaluations tools and process
- make known and promote national and international quality standards and tools (risk management, quality management system)
- work on research themes such as: what is quality? What are the tools? What is management? What is self-evaluation?
- maintain a documentary and strategy watch on themes relating to evaluation, quality, management initiatives on both a national and international level
- Develop connections with professional networks in the field of quality as well as higher education and research networks in order to enhance the inputs and consistency of the initiatives

Both political teams and quality operational staff are the main target of the RELIER network. We work to provide a common thought and a better acknowledgment and understanding of the issues relating to quality to insure a closer and better service to the governance and management of our universities.

How does the network work?

As we stated previously, we aim to capitalize and provide good ideas, practices, experiences, research and tools to all because only together can we grow and contribute to the acculturation of our institutions. We must now change perspectives, accept the transparency of our practices, share the cultures that support quality



initiatives. In order to achieve efficiency, we must not try to reinvent what others have already developed in the field but capitalize and share relevant devices.

The network implemented several tools to allow for a better communication between its members: on one hand, regular meetings of the steering committee (either in person or by videoconference) and on the other hand, communication and valorization tools (either electronic or hard copy):

- a communication flyer summarizing our activities
- an electronic newsletter accessible to every member of the network: an important source of information with a regular watch on our main themes, meeting, formation and seminar dates
- a website www.relier-univ.fr with online resources: bibliography tools, documentary support for the seminars but also communications from our members about that particular mission...
- an intranet for the steering committee: an important tool as the members are scattered across the country while operating within different universities
- creation of a database dedicated to our themes

All those tools are developed on an interactive platform using cloud computing. This new technology meets several requirements necessary for our activities:

- information sharing
- data exchange between members of a same team
- simultaneous and distant work on a single document
- shared calendar and contacts
- finally, it allows to create interactive websites

Besides, this technology guarantees several quality requirements:

- intellectual property by the tagging of the documents
- uniqueness, sharing and storage of the information
- work traceability
- securing of the information
- coding of the communications and data transfers
- ease of use

Finally, the approach suggested by RELIER is systematic and seeks to make the governance, management and support teams work together by developing estimation and risk-assessment approaches in the management of universities with a quality initiative. Actually the coming norm "ISO 9001v2015" will take this unique dimension into account: a decision taken while being perfectly aware of the potential risks involved. Considering the current evolving environment our institutions are being subjected to, risk management with the appropriate quality tools seems to be a promising approach to the sustainability of our institutions. Aware of the difficulty to sustain the activities of this new network, the first of its kind in France on the theme of governance, management and quality related to the CPU, the steering committee is organizing itself to ensure the development of a quality culture within ESR structures in France and intends to promote and help the implementation of national repository and European Standards and Guidelines as soon as the next version is available.

References :

www.relier-univ.fr



Questions for discussion:

- How can a network of quality actors and referents can promote quality initiative within universities?
- What do you think of the current devices implemented to support the development of quality initiatives in France?
- There was no policy supported by university presidents aiming to develop quality, can the creation of a network such as RELIER support this issue?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 2 August 2013 to Ivana Juraga (Ivana.Juraga@eua.be). Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.