

# Legal Framework and organizational structure of the French Office for Research Integrity

## Governance of Research Integrity Offices in Europe

French Office for Research Integrity (Ofis)

Dr Carole Chapin, project manager

October, 7th, 2022. Online Event – Lithuania



# Legal Framework and organizational structure of the French Office for Research

1. ● Introduction : what is the French Office for Research Integrity (Ofis)
2. ● Overview of the new French Legal Framework
3. ● Analysis of the Framework and its implementation : assets and challenges



# I. The French Office for Research Integrity (Ofis)

Operating as a department of the High Council for Evaluation of Higher Education and Research (Hcéres, independent administrative authority) since 2017.

Contributes to the definition of the national research integrity policy and supports all the actors who contribute to it.

Works with an advisory board which guides and supervises its work.

## ➤ 3 MAIN MISSIONS

- Observatory

implementation of RI policies, national coordination of scientific integrity officers, biennial report on the progress of institutional policies, surveys

- Resources

sharing good practice, tools, research, training, and study results

- Animation & Prospective studies

thematic working groups, symposiums, newsletter

## ➤ International cooperation



## II. Overview of the French legal framework for RI since 2020

- The French System at a glance

- Each research organization is responsible of its own research integrity policy, raising awareness at its own level, training its employees, investigate misconduct cases and decide on sanctions if necessary.
- To support these actions, each research organization **has to nominate** at least one research integrity officer
- National research integrity policy and legal framework are decided **at the national level**. The French Office for Research Integrity is participating to these actions and coordinating the network of RI officers. It manages a **deferral procedure**.

- From « good practices » to a common legal framework

- Deontological concepts → legal concepts

“Research work, in particular all public research activities (...) shall respect the requirements of scientific integrity aimed at guaranteeing its honest and scientifically rigorous nature and consolidating the bond of trust with society” (art. L211-2 Research Code)

- Many of these practices were already in place but are now enshrined in law, making them common to all research infrastructure (especially the nomination of a RI officer)



## II. Overview of the French legal framework for RI since 2020

- **Obligations for institutions**

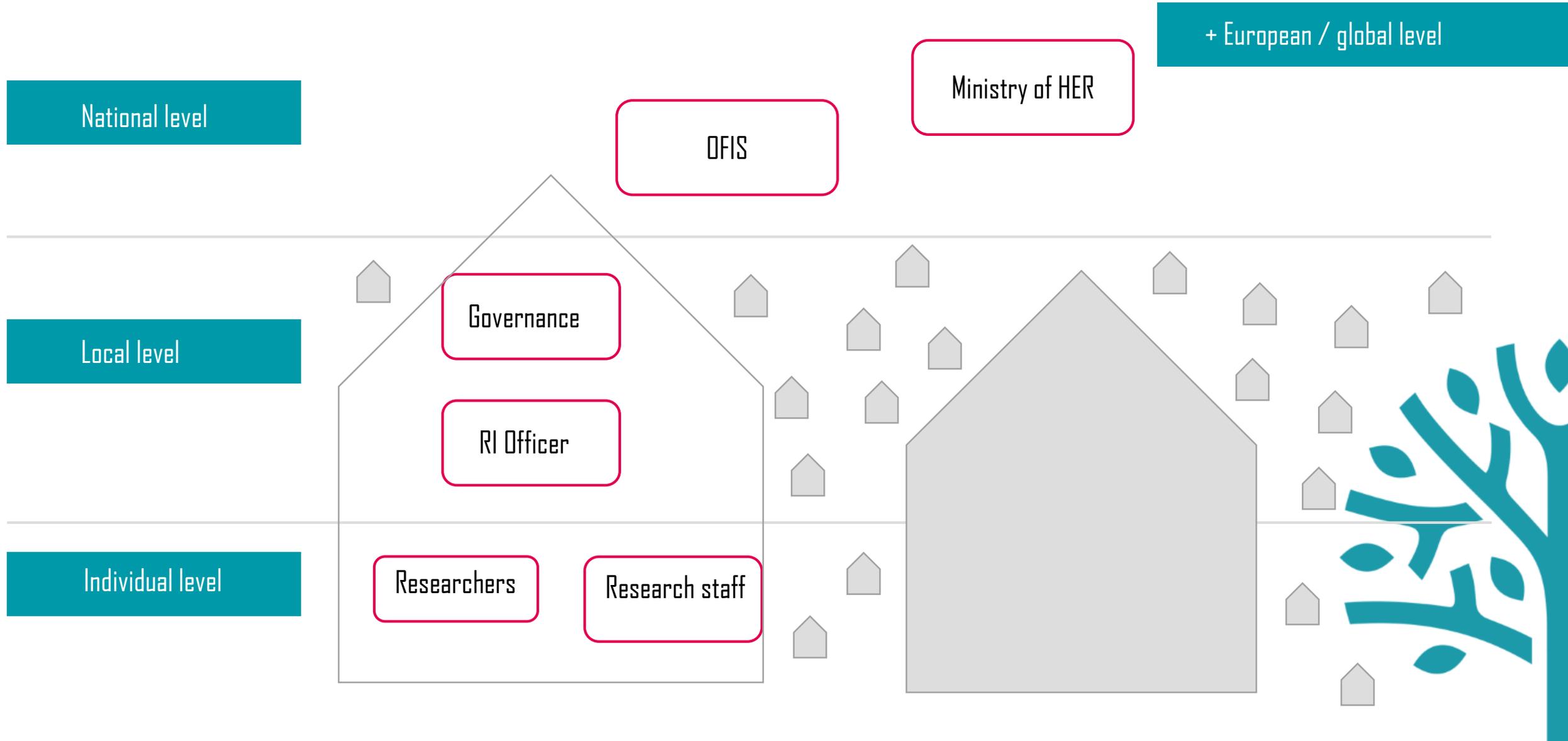
- providing the conditions for compliance with the requirements of scientific integrity : mechanisms to promote the values of scientific integrity, storage of the raw results of the scientific work,
- **appointing a research integrity officer** and providing them with the necessary means : defining the content and methods of exercise, in particular that of investigating questions and reports relating to misconducts
- every two years, **submitting a report to the French Office for RI (OFIS) on the actions taken.**

- **Role of the French Office for Research Integrity**

- by an institution's request, propose the appointment of a research integrity officer,
- **manages the process of deferral for some specific cases or context of investigations,**
- helps to implement policy on scientific integrity with regards to training, raising awareness, answering questions, sharing practical tools, clarifying legal implications, etc.
- is responsible for promoting scientific integrity and ensuring that it is taken into account in evaluations
- may be consulted by research infrastructures on any question relating to the conditions of compliance with the requirements of research integrity,
- **develops a National Observatory of Research Integrity** : surveys and reports, research programs, scientific watch, **data on research integrity activities** (misconduct cases, training programs, etc.)



# II. Overview of the French legal framework for RI since 2020



# III. Analysis of the legal framework and its implementation

## • Strengths

- Research Integrity Officers
- National network
- Research Integrity Policy
- Coordination & support by Ofis

## • Challenges

- Balance between autonomy and equality between research institutions
- Data & indicators on the RI ecosystem and investigations in RI misconducts
- Self-regulatory system & no national appeal system

## • Opportunities

- Observatory within the OFIS : the reports will provide more data on research integrity
- Deferral system

## • Pending issues

- Research collaborations
- the supranational framework



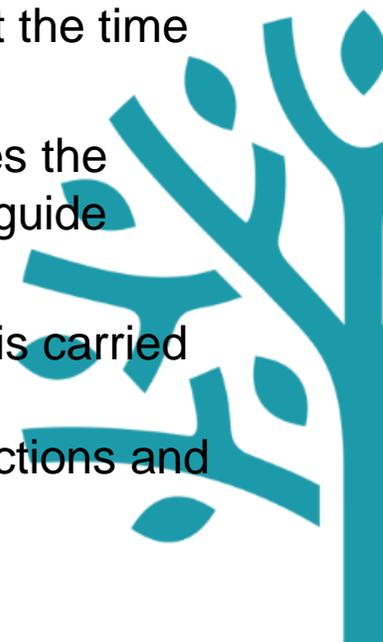
# Strengths

- A common framework
  - At least 1 RI officer in every public research institution (mandatory)
    - A national network of RI officers
    - RI understand their own local context
  - RI policy designed and implemented in every public research institution
    - Mandatory
    - Can be adapted to the research institution strategic goals and specific needs
  - The French Office for Research Integrity : a national and state-funded agency **dedicated to supporting actors** in their diversity and specific needs.



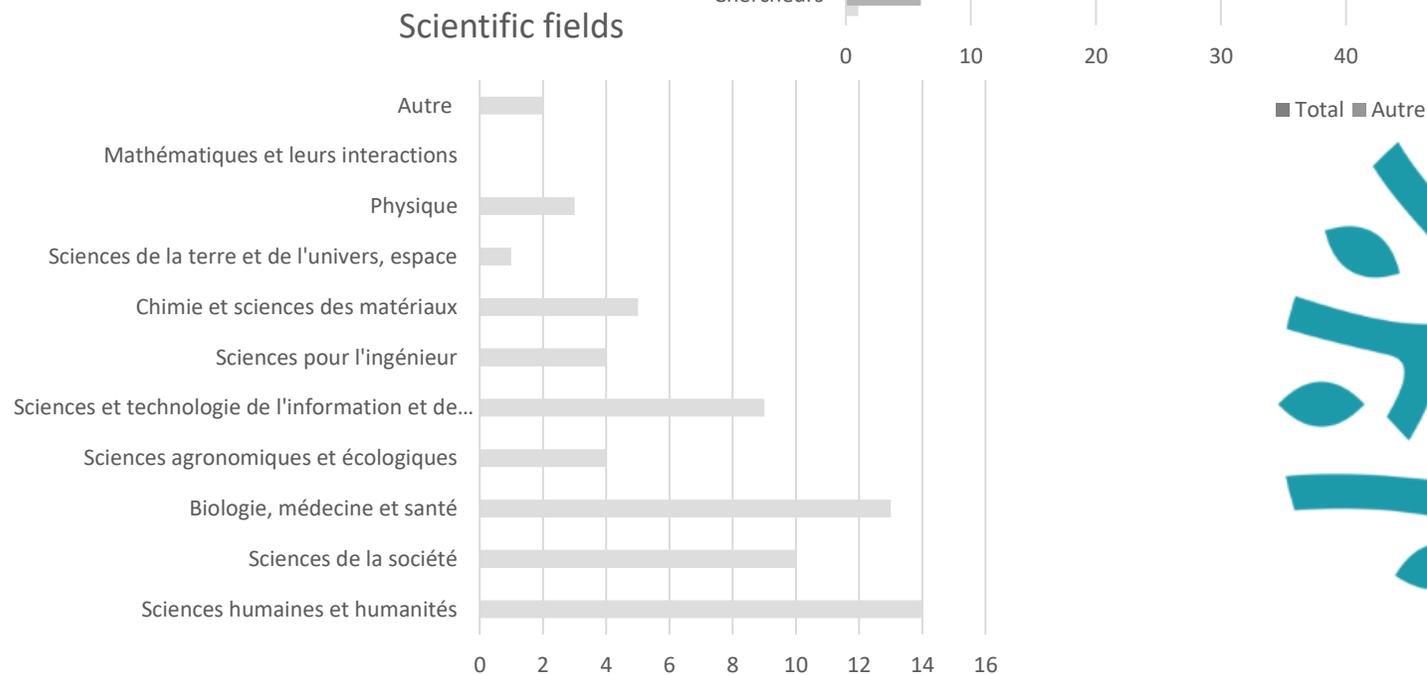
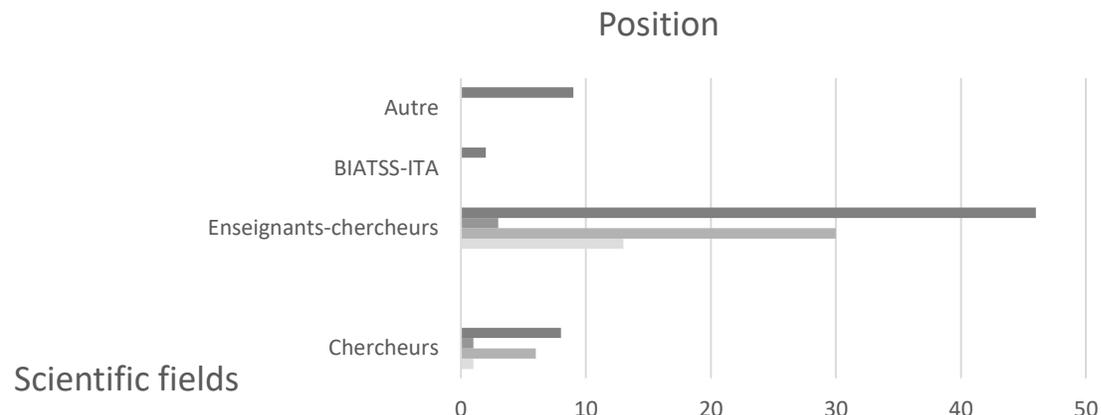
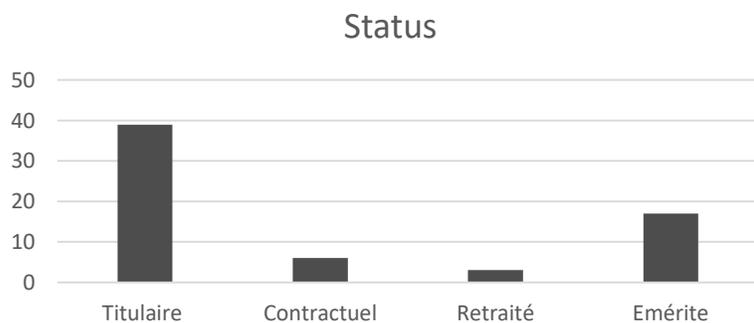
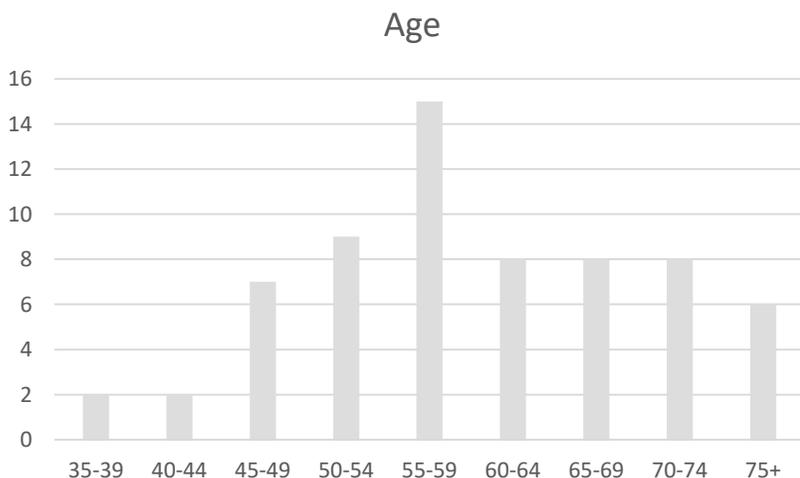
# Focus on : research integrity officers

- **Missions :**
  - Participate in the definition of institutional policies
  - Anticipate :
    - answering questions about the rules of research integrity
    - participate in training and implementation of good research practices
    - play a mediation/conciliation role to resolve conflicts between scientists
  - Investigate : investigate reports of possible research integrity misconducts
- **Referral :** can be made by any employee or any person who works or was working in a structure at the time of the events.
- **Investigation :** is conducted under the strictest conditions of impartiality and confidentiality. It applies the recommendations of a procedural guide developed in 2018 and adopted by most institutions. The guide recommends working in collaboration with counterparts in the institutions concerned.
- **In the event of a serious suspicion of misconduct :** a formal investigation, based on expert advice, is carried out by the reference persons. The RIO or delegation submits to the institution's management the investigation report drawn up jointly by the referees, together with proposals for actions (e.g. corrections and retractions of articles)
- **Decisions concerning employees are the responsibility of the employer.**



# Focus on : research integrity officers

- Appointed by universities / research organizations : no rules except general framework of deontological rules (absence of conflict of interests)
- Typical profile :



## II. Analysis of the legal framework and its implementation

- **Strengths**

- Research Integrity Officers
- National network
- Research Integrity Policy
- Coordination & support by the OFIS

- **Challenges**

- Balance between autonomy and equality between research institutions
- Data & indicators on the RI ecosystem and investigations in RI misconducts
- Self-regulatory system & no national appeal system

- **Opportunities**

- Observatory within the OFIS : the reports will provide more data on research integrity
- Deferral system

- **Pending issues**

- Research collaborations
- the supranational framework



# Challenges

- Common system but different resources
  - Means, resources and skills differ among research institutions

Research organization with a whole team dedicated to RI, full time RI officer(s), training offer for employees, etc.

smaller structures with less resources, one RI officer recently appointed and working part-time without a specific team.

- A need for more data and indicators :
  - To avoid a “one size fits all” policy
  - Evidence-based understanding of specific needs
- A self-regulatory system : the responsibility of investigating misconduct cases lays on research infrastructure (through the RI Officer)
  - No external appeal system



## II. Analysis of the legal framework and its implementation

- Strengths

- Research Integrity Officers
- National network
- Research Integrity Policy
- Coordination & support by the OFIS

- Challenges

- Balance between autonomy and equality between research institutions
- Data & indicators on the RI ecosystem and investigations in RI misconducts
- Self-regulatory system & no national appeal system

- Opportunities

- Observatory within the OFIS : the reports will provide more data on research integrity
- Deferral system

- Pending issues

- Research collaborations
- the supranational framework



# Opportunities

- Missions of the OFIS
  - National observatory within the OFIS : the reports will provide data on research integrity and the ecosystem
  - Deferral system
    - when the RI officer considers that he or she is not in a position to investigate a question or a report in an independent, impartial or objective manner,
    - where the matter or report is likely to involve the governing bodies of the institution,
    - if the President or Director considers that he or she is in a conflict of interest,
    - The President or the Director has the opportunity to ask the OFIS to propose one or more names of officers or experts to establish an *ad hoc* committee, which will conduct the investigation in accordance with the provisions applicable in the institution where the alert was initially made.
    - a matter of trust on the capacity of the system to guarantee honest and scientifically rigorous research



## II. Analysis of the legal framework and its implementation

- Strengths

- Research Integrity Officers
- National network
- Research Integrity Policy
- Coordination & support by the OFIS

- Challenges

- Balance between autonomy and equality between research institutions
- Data & indicators on the RI ecosystem and investigations in RI misconducts
- Self-regulatory system & no national appeal system

- Opportunities

- Observatory within the OFIS : the reports will provide more data on research integrity
- Deferral system

- Pending issues

- Research collaborations
- the supranational framework



# Pending issues

- **Research collaborations**
  - Misconduct case in the context of a collaboration : bilateral work between research integrity officers and research infrastructure (or deferral)
  - An official supranational framework could be useful for international collaborations
  - The specificity of the French system (self-regulatory) can be a constraint in certain circumstances
    - Disagreement between 2 institutions
    - Agreement on the conclusions of the investigation but not on the remediation to apply
    - When one of the parties is no longer employed by the same institution
  - International partners (research organisations) might not have the same level of regulation (national / local)
  - Make sure that the absence of an appeal system at a national level won't be detrimental to the partner institution or to the individual researcher



Thank you for your attention

[dir.ofis@hceres.fr](mailto:dir.ofis@hceres.fr)  
<https://www.hceres.fr/en/ofis>

