

Quality Enhancement Committee Annual Report

May 2020-April 2021

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1. Preamble

1.1 Composition of the Quality Enhancement Committee

The Quality Enhancement Committee (PQ) of the IMT School was established on February 21, 2019, with the Director's Decree no. 0984(52).21.02.19. The composition of the PQ was subsequently amended by subsequent Director's Decrees no. 4160(105).06.04.20 and 1288(7).16.02.21.

The members in office at the time of drafting this report are:

- Prof. Ennio Bilancini, Full Professor as President;
- Prof. Gustavo Cevolani, Associate Professor;
- Prof. Emanuele Pellegrini, Associate Professor;
- Prof. Mirco Tribastone, Full Professor;
- Dr. Mario Zanon, Fixed-Term Researcher;
- Ms. Serenella Valiani, XXXV cycle PhD student;
- Dr. Valentina Calvi, Technical Administrative Staff;
- Ms. Caterina Tangheroni, Technical Administrative Staff.

1.2 Purpose of the annual report

This report has the dual objective of providing an account of the activities carried out by the School's PQ in the period between May 2020 and April 2021 and disclosing the main issues that the PQ has planned to address until the end of its mandate within the School's Quality Assurance (QA) system.

2. Quality Assurance of Education

2.1 Covid-19 Emergency

Since March 2020, the School's Administration has handled the Covid-19 epidemiological emergency, in conjunction with the Administrative Offices, the Head and the Officer of the Prevention and Protection Service, and the constant support of the Working Groups and ad-hoc Committees - in particular, the Working Group for Phase 2 and 3 responsible for defining, organizing, coordinating, and monitoring all the activities of the IMT School necessary for the management of phases 2 and 3 of the emergency, the Space Investigation Committee, and the IT Committee.

In this context, the PQ, in addition to its regular activities, monitored the effects on education and student services caused by the numerous changes introduced by the School in response to the health emergency.

To provide a timely response to students' needs and requests, decisive was the constant dialogue between the PQ and the Joint Students and Teachers Board, whose reports were immediately forwarded to the Administration and the abovementioned Committees to arrive at solutions quickly.

2.2 Student opinion survey

According to what is reported in the "System for surveying students' opinions and their satisfaction," the questionnaires for surveying the student opinions allow students to express the degree of satisfaction with education, structures, and services offered by the School, at the same time reporting any critical issues.

In this context, in July 2020, the PQ examined the questionnaires currently administered to students and started reviewing them to also reduce their length without compromising their information content.

The PQ also noted the need to monitor student opinions concerning elements such as the relationship with their Advisor, research training, and mobility. This need was met by designing a survey to administer to students not in their first year, at the end of each academic year.

Finally, to ensure a correct process, the PQ acknowledged the need to define the structure of the summary documents of the survey results to be published in the Quality@IMT section of the institutional website and responsibilities and deadlines for their sharing and publication.

2.2.1 Questionnaires in use

The system for surveying the students' opinions currently in place on education at the IMT School provides for the administration of two types of questionnaires: those relating to individual courses (Teaching Evaluation Questionnaires, TEQ) and those for evaluating the overall PhD program.

a. *Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire - TEQ*

The TEQ is a questionnaire administered for each course upon reaching 2/3 of the lessons and can be filled in anonymously on the SurveyMonkey platform via a link sent by the PhD and Higher Education Office. The questionnaire is sent to all students who have included the specific course in their study plan. Students are required to answer a total of 14 questions:

- 6 questions with answers on a 1-5 scale for the evaluation of the course;
- 4 questions with answers on a 1-5 scale for the evaluation of the lecturer;
- 4 open-ended questions.

The results about the individual course are returned confidentially to the lecturer responsible for the course and the PhD Program Coordinator, and are made available in an analytical form to the Delegate for Didactics, the PQ, the Joint Students and Teachers Board (CPDS), and the Assessment Board (NdV). The analysis of the results is an integral part of the CPDS's annual report.

Furthermore, in pursuit of the principles of transparency and QA, the PQ hopes that a summary report with the analysis of individual courses for each academic year will be published on the School website, in the section dedicated to the QA system. These good practices must naturally be considered in light of the protection of privacy and anonymity given the context characterized by minimal numbers of students attending each course.

b. PhD Program evaluation questionnaire

The PhD program evaluation questionnaire can be filled in anonymously on the SurveyMonkey platform via a link sent by the PhD and Higher Education Office to students after they submit the Thesis Defense Request form.

A total of 47 questions are presented to students, as follows:

- 10 questions for the evaluation of the PhD Program;
- 5 questions for the evaluation of the Curriculum;
- 6 questions for the evaluation of the Advisor and thesis Supervisor;
- 3 questions for the evaluation of the Thesis Supervisor;
- 5 questions to evaluate the support received;
- 4 questions for overall evaluation;
- 7 questions for overall evaluation (hindering factors);
- 7 requests for additional information with text boxes.

The survey results are returned in a confidential form to the PhD Program Coordinator, the Delegate for Didactics, the PQ, the CPDS, and the NdV. The analysis of the results is an integral part of the annual reports of the CPDS and the NdV. The report on the progress of the PhD Program will be published on the School website in the section dedicated to the QA system.

c. Critical issues

The detailed analysis of the questionnaires by the PQ had highlighted the need for a general revision of the texts to resolve some inconsistencies (e.g., requesting an opinion on the examination methodology before taking the exam) and standardize the terminology used (e.g., Advisor and thesis supervisor¹). After prioritizing the design of a new questionnaire, referred to in the next paragraph, the PQ has decided to postpone reviewing the contents of the questionnaires already in use, considering the need to introduce monitoring of other educational activities that the School is planning to offer.

2.2.2 Design of the annual questionnaire

The design of the annual questionnaire was preceded by a review of the areas under examination (relationship with the Advisor, research activities, participation in doctoral schools and conferences, off-site mobility experiences, drafting of the thesis) and the best time for the administration.

The PQ also explored the opportunity to integrate the annual questionnaire with specific questions on the courses held online, with reference to the questionnaire on teaching developed by the CRUI.

¹ According to the PhD Regulations, the Advisor:

- Advises the student in the definition of the study plan according to their individual needs in relation to research interests and background;
- Guides the student in preparing the thesis, assessing their conduct and assuring the scholarly relevance of research topics.

The PQ members discussed the proposal for an annual questionnaire in November 2020. In February, the proposal was shared with the members of the CPDS, who raised concerns regarding the protection of the respondents' anonymity and the possible closeness of some questions to those included in the Customer Satisfaction survey of the Good Practice Project. Following a discussion with the CPDS, the PQ removed the questions that most endangered students' anonymity and reduced the number of questions, deeming it more appropriate to administer the questionnaire only starting from the second year of the PhD program. The PQ approved the final text of the annual questionnaire in May 2021 and, consequently, sent it to the PhD and Higher Education Office for implementation. In anticipation of the first administration, scheduled for June, the PQ has also tested the proper functioning of the online form.

2.2.3 Focus groups

One of the objectives of the PQ for the year 2020 was the design of Customer Satisfaction surveys through focus groups to be employed in parallel with the questionnaires for surveying student opinions. Unfortunately, the emergency situation and the measures to contain the infection made it impossible to implement them as in-person student participation was necessary as well as the availability of the professionals hired to perform them. Therefore, the inception of the focus group-based surveys is probably postponed to 2022, when, following the determination of the additional academic offer, they will be applied to different types of programs.

2.3 Future Outlook

At the time of drafting this document, the School is involved in a revision of the "Regulations on the rights and duties of IMT School faculty and researchers," issued in 2016. This revision, which became necessary following the 'evolution of the regulatory context as well as the development of the School's activities, may lead to significant changes to the operation of the educational initiatives, which will require review and monitoring by the PQ.

Given the revision of the Regulations mentioned above and the expansion of the School's academic offer, the PQ deems it necessary to postpone the revision of the questionnaires currently used to the second semester of 2021 also to introduce questionnaires specifically designed to respond to the educational needs of different types of students.

Furthermore, considering the small number of students that each lecturer supervises, the problem of ensuring anonymity when administering the questionnaires to very small groups is once again preponderant. In this regard, the PQ emphasizes the importance of introducing focus groups as a complementary tool for measuring Customer Satisfaction.

Finally, considering the introduction of the annual questionnaire, the PQ proposes to update the document "Student Opinions and Satisfaction Survey System."

3. Quality Assurance of Research and Third Mission

The discussion, initiated by the PQ during 2019 and aimed at the Research and Third Mission QA system's design to identify a practical application of the relevant Quality Policies, continued throughout 2020. In particular, the activities of the PQ focused on a review of other Italian universities' websites to identify some successful experiences in the field of research monitoring, from which to take inspiration for the beginning of the activities.

On account of the findings from the review, the PQ launched, in early 2021, a survey of all the indicators related to Research and Third Mission that are already monitored by the IMT School's administrative offices, paying particular attention to those that impact ordinary and performance-based FFO. This survey is also part of the project to define a management dashboard proposed by the Planning, Control, and Quality Unit, as part of the Administration's goals for the three years 2021-2023.

The launch in 2019 of the research evaluation activity of Italian universities, promoted by ANVUR, VQR 2015-2019 (Ministerial Decrees 1110/2019 and 444/2020), has significantly engaged the PQ throughout 2020. In fact, the Committee was appointed, together with the Research Delegate, to assist the Administration in selecting research outputs to be submitted for evaluation, as described in the following paragraphs.

3.1 VQR 2015-2019: Research

In October 2020, the analysis on the 2015-2019 VQR began, and, in particular, the documents published by ANVUR were discussed:

- Ministerial Decree 1110/2019 "Guidelines for research quality evaluation (VQR) 2015-2019";
- Ministerial Decree 444/2020 "Integration of the Guidelines for research quality evaluation (VQR) 2015-2019";
- VQR 2015-2019 announcement of September 25, 2020.

On this occasion, the PQ members were informed of the proposal of the IMT School's Director to entrust the PQ, supported by the Delegate for Research, with the organization of the data collection and research outcome evaluation activities to be sent to ANVUR.

Therefore, the PQ and the Delegate for Research, supported by the Planning, Control, and Quality Unit, proceeded with the launch of a simulation throughout the School. For this purpose, all the subjects participating in the VQR (I and II level professors and fixed-term researchers) were required to send at least six research outputs that could be deemed excellent, according to the criteria of the previous edition (VQR 2011-2014), pending the publication of the new criteria by the Evaluation Expert Groups (GEV) of the various areas. The simulation, joined by all the contacted faculty and researchers, had a dual purpose: raising awareness among the participating subjects towards the VQR and correct use of the IRIS institutional archive for the deposit of publications and gaining an overview of the progress of the publications produced by the School's faculty and researchers.

The PQ also decided to manage the collection and submission of research results through the IRIS portal. The choice of IRIS as a tool for managing the outcome submission process made it possible to use a single environment for viewing, updating, and selecting publications by researchers. It also facilitated better management at the School level thanks to the possibility of customizing the control and verification process

and providing greater support as the IRIS archive has already been in use at the School since 2017. The IRIS archive was also supported by introducing the dashboard to support the evaluation of scientific production promoted by the CRUI and the University of Basilicata, which allowed a better display of bibliometric indicators.

The resulting organization of managing the different phases of selection, verification, and approval of research products, as well as choosing the number of products to be submitted for evaluation, was characterized by a constant dialogue between the Administration, the PQ, the Delegate for Research, the Academic Senate and the administrative offices, through the Planning, Control, and Quality Unit.

The PQ has, in fact, entrusted the Planning, Control, and Quality Unit with managing the different phases of product selection by the researchers and supporting them as regards the use of the VQR module within the IRIS platform and the Support System for the evaluation of scientific production, as well as the use of bibliometric indicators provided by the GEVs.

The results of each phase were subsequently shared with all those involved and discussed in the Academic Senate's sessions.

The Administration instructed the latter to comment on the PQ's proposal on the number and list of research outputs for evaluation.

Therefore, the output designation procedure ended in April 2021 by the set deadline with the presentation of 99 products chosen from the 136 submitted by the 39 participants.

3.2 VQR 2015-2019: Third Mission

The third VQR period, relating to the 2015-2019 interval, addressed the evaluation not only the results of research but also those of the Third Mission, with reference to specific case studies (proposed by the individual institutions in a number equal to half the number of its Departments) whose consequence occurred during the period under consideration. The School, having a single-structure organization, was required to submit one case study.

Following the publication of the Ministerial Decree 1110/2019 Guidelines for research quality evaluation (VQR) 2015-2019 by ANVUR and a preliminary meeting with the School's Director and Administrative Director, the Planning, Control and Quality Unit, in collaboration with the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office and the Communication and Events Office, has launched a survey of all the Third Mission activities carried out by the School in the 2015-2019 period. In order to collect the data necessary for the preliminary study, the Planning, Control, and Quality Unit provided the other offices involved with a form proposal designed based on the one proposed by ANVUR in the VQR announcement.

Considering the complexity and importance of choosing and describing the activity to be adopted as a case study, together with the survey effort, in October 2020, the PQ suggested the Director appoint an advisory committee to select the Third Mission case study to be submitted for evaluation.

The committee, called the VQR-TM Committee, consisted of four professors from the School: the Delegate for Accreditation, the Coordinator of the PhD Program in Cognitive and Cultural Systems, the Delegate for Research and the Delegate for Didactics, Higher Education, and IT Services.

After receiving the survey implemented by the administrative offices, the VQR-TM Committee has launched its own survey of the Third Mission activities carried out by the School's faculty and researchers based on

the information available from the VQR 2015-2019 call of September 25, 2020, and the guide for the compilation of the Third Mission Annual Form (SUA-TM/IS) for Universities.

Based on an in-depth assessment of each proposal's strengths and weaknesses, considering the declarations and evaluation criteria for the social, economic, and impact dimensions, the relevance to the reference framework, the added value for the beneficiaries, and the contribution of the School, also taking into account its scientific impact, the VQR-TM Committee unanimously resolved to propose the submission of the "Neuroscience Lab" case study as part of the 2015-2019 VQR period for the evaluation of Third Mission activities.

3.3 Future Outlook

The 2015-2019 VQR period was an excellent testing ground for developing a monitoring system for both research and Third Mission activities and the related QA system. In particular, the PQ notes the following development possibilities functional to the construction of the system:

- Expansion of the monitoring of research results to all staff, not only employees, thus including profiles such as research fellows (classified as Assistant Professor, Post-Doctoral Fellow or Research Collaborator), collaborators, and fellows (see table 1 for details);
- Creation of a database to record all Third Mission activities promoted by the School and related data useful for impact assessments;
- Survey of indicators useful for research and Third Mission monitoring already in use by the administrative offices, with particular attention to those that impact the FFO and its performance-based quota;
- A better definition of the role of the Advisory Board in the Research and Third Mission QA process.

Professors	11 Full Professors
	8 Associate Professors
Fixed-Term Researchers	8 Type-B Fixed-Term Researchers
	13 Type-A Fixed-Term Researchers
Research Fellows	8 Assistant Professors
	3 Post-Doctoral Fellows
	26 Research Collaborators
Research Associates	1 Term-Contract Worker
	6 Research Fellows

Table 1: Personnel involved in research activities as of April 30, 2021.

4. The relationship with the Joint Students and Teachers Board

The Joint Students and Teachers Board, established by law no. 240 of 2010 and established with the Director's Decree no. 01235(66).06.03.19, is an internal committee to monitor the educational offer, the quality of teaching, and students' services provided by the faculty and researcher body. Because of the characteristics of the IMT School, particularly the Campus model, the monitoring work of the CPDS has also extended to student services not directly provided by professors and researchers. The Director has decided to designate the student representatives in the Governing Bodies as the student component of the CPDS.

The CPDS's current composition was established with the Director's Decree no. 06514(208).02.07.20.

4.1 Guidelines for the CPDS's operation

As already reported in the previous Annual Report, the PQ has, since its inception, dedicated particular attention to cultivating the relationship with the CPDS to collaborate while respecting the diversity of roles fruitfully. To this end, in 2019, the PQ provided the CPDS with clear guidelines through a draft Guidelines for the CPDS 's operation.

Subsequently, the PQ fulfilled its guidance role by inviting the CPDS to publish the Guidelines for the exercise of its functions on the institutional website and ensure the transparency of its role.

The CPDS responded promptly, resuming the draft Guidelines prepared by the PQ and discussing revisions and additions in the September 2020 session. The updated version of the document was then sent to and discussed by the PQ. Following a careful analysis of the contents and a verification of compliance with what is required by law, the PQ suggested to the CPDS to avoid references to the current composition to ensure the document's validity regardless of the current context.

The Guidelines were approved by the CPDS in October 2020 and published on the [institutional website](#).

4.2 Communications

The CPDS has sent the following communications to the PQ:

- Communication of April 25, 2020, on the Advisor change procedure, the availability of the CPDS to formulate opinions on the Teaching Evaluation Questionnaires, the on-Campus space and accommodation management during the health emergency, and the timing of reimbursements for missions and off-site stays;
- Communication of September 19, 2020, focused on the School's management of the emergency;
- Communication of October 10, 2020, related to the student return protocol and the student workstation assignment procedures;
- Communication of October 14, 2020, critical issues regarding the management of the emergency;
- Communication of November 23, 2020, on the role of the CPDS and its relationship with the PQ.

The PQ took on all the communications above and discussed their content during its sessions. For some of the issues, it was suggested that the CPDS forward the communications to further interlocutors.

Having acknowledged the problem, the PQ deemed it necessary to forward an extract of the communication about the Advisor change procedure by students to the PhD Programs Coordinators and the Head of the PhD and Higher Education Office.

The issues related to the management of on-Campus spaces and accommodation during the health emergency period and the return of students were forwarded to the contact person of the IMT School's Working Group for the management of phases 2 and 3 of the Covid-19 emergency and to the Spaces Investigation Committee, according to the responsibilities.

The PQ sent the reports about the communications on the timing of reimbursement of expenses incurred during the missions, the disbursement of the Erasmus grant, and the scholarship increase for off-site stays to the heads of the offices involved (Human Resources, PhD and Higher Education, Accounting and Finance) asking for an in-depth analysis of the average time required to process the requests and the underlying reasons for delays.

Finally, regarding the latest communication received, with which the CPDS opened a discussion about its role and relationship with the PQ, the President of the PQ replied by underlining how the relationship between the two bodies is a central axis of the School's QA system. He also reminded the CPDS that the law recognizes ample freedom to request information and make suggestions without necessarily receiving authorization from the PQ. He, therefore, suggested to the CPDS to proceed independently, limiting itself to informing the PQ of the activities carried out unless there are issues of particular relevance to be addressed or outside the remit of the CPDS.

4.3 Annual Report

On December 30, 2020, the CPDS 's Chairman sent the 2020 Annual Report about the academic year 2019-20 to the Director, the Administrative Director, and the PQ. The report was then published on the institutional website in the Italian and English versions and brought to the attention of the Academic Senate and the Board of Governors in their respective sessions of January 2021.

On March 8, 2021, the PQ participated in the event organized by the CPDS to share the 2020 Annual Report with the Community. In particular, the PQ's President briefly introduced the role of the CPDS in the QA system and the relationships with the other actors working in the field of quality, first of all, the PQ, and acted as the moderator.

4.4 Questionnaires for surveying student opinions

Acknowledging that, in the communication of April 25, 2020, the CPDS had volunteered to assist with the formulation and revision of the questionnaires for the survey of the student opinions about individual courses and the entire PhD Program, in February 2021, the PQ shared the annual questionnaire proposal with the CPDS (see also section 2.1.2).

After careful analysis, the issues highlighted by the CPDS were the following: on the one hand, the risk of not ensuring adequate anonymity, given the requirement to indicate the PhD track and the indirect possibility of tracing the PhD cycle (due to questions addressed only to specific years); on the other hand, having a proliferation of questionnaires and possible content overlap with the findings of the Good Practice

Project (referred to in section 5) and the evaluation of individual courses. In both cases, the CPDS highlighted the risk that participation would be discouraged.

In defining the final version of the questionnaire, the PQ took these comments into account and made the necessary changes.

5. Good Practice Project

As part of the quality monitoring activities, given the continued participation of the School in the Good Practice (GP) project, the PQ deemed it necessary to perform an in-depth analysis of the results of the surveys about the effectiveness of the services provided (Customer Satisfaction).

In May 2020, the PQ analyzed the results of the Customer Satisfaction questionnaires compiled as part of the Good Practice 2019 project (GP2019). In particular, acknowledging the low response rate of the academic component (professors, PhD students, and Post-Docs), the PQ has tried to determine the reasons that might have affected participation.

The PQ also stressed the importance of promptly analyzing data after completing the surveys and strengthening the communication of the information collected by presenting a detailed report to the entire School and potential external actors. The advantages of excellent and immediate communication are an increase in the participation rate and involvement of the participants and an improvement in the response quality for subsequent editions of the project.

Given the performance of the GP2019 surveys, the PQ subsequently investigated the trend in the response rates of the academic component in the three years 2017-2019 and performed a critical analysis of the results obtained in the same period. To ensure the quality of the services offered, identifying those which have received a consistently low level of satisfaction or observed a decline over the three-year period is the basis for taking specific actions to improve the services provided. The PQ discussed the analysis document in July 2020 and sent it to the Academic Senate and the Board of Governors in their respective September sessions.

At the same time, the PQ stressed the need to share the document with the Administrative Management and with all the technical-administrative staff to serve as a basis for designing corrective actions aimed at improving the most critical services.

To promote the dissemination of the results, a new page has been prepared in the Quality@IMT section of the institutional website with a brief presentation of the project and a link to the Transparent Administration section where the annual reports produced by Politecnico di Milano are published.

Finally, the PQ suggests organizing an event to announce the data collected with the Good Practice questionnaires, underlining the importance that this could have in terms of impact and feedback in anticipation of the following surveys.

6. Attachments

6.1 List of meetings of the Quality Enhancement Committee

In the period to which this report refers, the PQ met a total of 8 times, on the following dates:

- May 13, 2020
- July 21, 2020
- September 7, 2020
- September 30, 2020
- October 26, 2020
- February 8, 2021
- February 19, 2021
- March 18, 2021

The meetings were all held online due to the persistence of the pandemic emergency.

6.2 Text of the annual questionnaire

End-of-year feedback questionnaire

Unless otherwise specified, all answers are shown as a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)

Research training (activities such as reading group/journal clubs/seminars)

1. The number of offered training activities was adequate.
2. The topics discussed in the training activities were interesting.
3. The topics discussed in the training activities were coherent with the objectives of my PhD program.
4. Overall, I am satisfied with the research training activities offered by the School.

Comment box (optional)

Relationship with the advisory team (i.e. advisor and co-advisors if any)

5. The frequency of contact with my advisory team was adequate.
6. My advisory team has made themselves available to hold meetings.
7. My advisory team has given prompt feedback to written submissions (e.g., paper/thesis drafts).
8. My advisory team ensures that I make progress in my thesis research.
9. Overall, the supervision I have received has contributed to the successful progress of my thesis.

Comment box (optional)

Research output

10. I am satisfied with the opportunities I had to disseminate my research at the School.
11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I had to disseminate my research at conferences, workshops or other events outside the School.
12. I have worked on an adequate number of research outputs (e.g., articles, essays, book chapters, presentations, etc).

13. Overall, I am satisfied with the research output that I have produced.

Comment box (optional)

Research period abroad

14. Have you spent a study/research/traineeship period abroad in the last year? (yes/no)

If yes:

15. My research period abroad has contributed to the development of my PhD thesis.

16. My research period abroad has been useful to improve my soft skills regarding the dissemination and communication of scientific results.

17. My research period abroad has contributed to the growth of my scientific collaboration network.

18. Overall, I am satisfied with my research period abroad.

If no:

Do you plan to spend a period abroad in the future? (yes/no)

Comment box (optional)

Wellbeing

19. Have you encountered problems with your advisory team? (yes/no)

If yes:

20. Have you reported it to the School? (yes/no/don't know how to report it)

21. Have you encountered problems, either personal or professional, with other members of the IMT community? (yes/no)

If yes:

22. Have you reported it to the School? (yes/no/don't know how to report it)

23. Have you used the School's psychological counseling service? (yes/no/didn't know about it)

If yes:

Have you found the psychological counseling service useful? (yes/no)

Comment box (optional)

The impact of Covid-19 emergency

29. The Covid emergency has worsened the quality of research training that I received.

30. The Covid emergency has worsened the quality of the relationship with my PhD advisor/co-advisor.

31. The Covid emergency has caused disruption to my research period abroad.

32. The School has responded promptly and adequately to the emergency.

Comment box (optional)