



SCUOLA  
ALTI STUDI  
LUCCA

# **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **May 2022 – April 2023**

Approved at a meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023

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## 1. Preamble

As laid down in art. 4, p. 3 of the "Quality Enhancement Committee Operational Procedure", the Quality Enhancement Committee (in Italian Presidio della Qualità or PQ) of Scuola IMT Alti Studi Lucca (hereinafter referred to as "the School") *draws up an Annual Report to summarise and plan its work for the following year. Such report is submitted to the Director (now the Rector), the Academic Senate, the Board of Governors, Assessment Board (in Italian Nucleo di Valutazione or NdV) and the Joint Students and Teachers Board (in Italian Commissione Paritetica Docenti-Studenti or CPDS) and posted on the official website.*

Consistently with the previous years, this Report covers the period May 2022 to April 2023 and will be posted on the official website at [Qualità@IMT](mailto:Qualità@IMT).

### 1.1. Members of the Quality Enhancement Committee

The PQ unit was established by Director's Decree,<sup>1</sup> no. 11733(364).II.19.14.12.21 for the three years 2021-2024. In the period covered by this Report, membership of the PQ changed twice:

- As Dr Andrea Averardi was appointed to the position of Associate Professor starting on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022, Dr Andrea Mola joined the PQ by Rector's decree no. 10572(334).II.19.26.08.22;
- As Ms Serenella Valiani, student of the XXXV course of the PhD program, ended her term, by Rector's decree no. 05473(155).II.19.06.04.23 Ms Alice Bertolini was appointed new student member of the PQ.

Therefore, at the time of drawing up this Report the incumbent members of the PQ are:

- Professor Massimo Riccaboni, Full Professor, as President;
- Professor Ennio Bilancini, Full Professor;
- Professor Andrea Averardi, Associate Professor;
- Professor Mario Zanon, Associate Professor;
- Dr Andrea Mola, fixed-term research fellow (Act no. 240/2010, art. 24, par. 3, letter b);
- Ms Alice Bertolini, student of the XXXVIII course of the PhD program;
- Dr Valentina Calvi, technical-administrative staff;
- Ms Caterina Tangheroni, technical-administrative staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Following the statutory change published in the Official Journal of the Republic of Italy – General Series – no. 105 dated 6 May 2022, the names of the School's bodies and components have been adapted as laid down in art. 2, Act no. 240 dated 30 December 2010 and in the applicable regulations.

## 1.2. Purpose of the Annual Report

Drawn up once a year by the PQ, the Report is intended to monitor and summarise the work completed within the School's Quality Assurance (QA) system, to measure the level of implementation of quality improvement processes, and to report the key issues that according to PQ must be addressed in the following year and any area of improvement that may have been identified. Therefore, the Report is an extremely important, crucial communication tool to boost cooperation among all QA players and across the School's community.

## 1.3. Notes

Apart from the time interval covered by this Report (see [Section 1](#)), for the sake of completeness the work carried out by PQ in May and June 2023 has been mentioned as well, though it will be more extensively addressed in the next Report.

Following the statutory changes published in the Official Journal – General Series – no. 105 on 6 May 2022, the terms Director, Delegates and Managing Director have been replaced with the terms Rector, Pro-Rectors and General Director, respectively.

## 2. The AVA3 System: new requirements and implications

In 2022, the Integrated University Self-Assessment, Evaluation, Accreditation system (AVA), in place since 2013, renewed its Periodic Accreditation system for academic learning centres and programs, known as [AVA3](#).

The new model set up by ANVUR, the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes, partly to meet a requirement set forth by its European counterpart, the *European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA), and the *European Quality Assurance Register* (EQAR), added some new, substantial requirements to the previous model, namely:

- A greater focus on quality requirements for learning centres (overall, a comprehensive overview of quality in teaching, research, Third Mission as well as institutional and managerial activities; a systemic integration of policies, strategies, strategic and operational goals; an architecture of university governance and QA systems; a monitoring of policies, strategies, processes and results; human, economic-financial, structural, infrastructural and information resources with a view to aligning planning and management with strategic planning);
- A greater focus on quality requirements in teaching, research, Third Mission all across the university (planning and management of the curriculum; managing and monitoring of department-wide strategic planning in teaching, research and Third Mission);
- A greater integration of planning requirements for academic programs;

- Implementation of quality requirements in the assessment of PhD programs (pursuant to MD no. 226/2021).

Therefore, the revision of the AVA System led the ANVUR Periodic Accreditation procedures and work methods to adapt accordingly.

However, it has been clear since its enactment that the AVA3 System disregarded the specificity of Scuole Superiori a Ordinamento Speciale, i.e. Higher Education Institutions with special status. Therefore, after a public consultation, the PQ decided it should send CONPAQ (Coordinamento nazionale dei Presìdi della Qualità di Ateneo - National Coordination of University Quality Committees) its comments on the model, placing emphasis on the need for greater details about the management of Periodic Accreditation for Scuole Superiori ad Ordinamento Speciale, because of their distinctive character, and the importance of establishing clear QA and assessment mechanisms, not only for regular and PhD courses, but for Master's degrees as well.

Pending an answer about specific Periodic Accreditation criteria for Schools as well as about the methods and timing of the assessment panel's visits by the Commission of Experts for the Evaluation of Schools of advanced studies (in Italian Commissione di Esperti per la Valutazione delle Scuole Superiori or CEVS), the PQ organised an initiative to teach and raise awareness of a Culture of Quality.

Considering that the AVA3 System makes it clear that students need to be involved in the decision-making, self-assessment and evaluation processes, thus providing access to useful data and information at the requisite level of detail, at the start of the Academic Year 2022/23 the PQ organised a number of mandatory meetings with the students of the XXXVIII course of the PhD program, with the following agenda:

- School's bodies and committees, with a focus on roles and functions, and student membership of the School's bodies and committees;
- Quality Assurance system;
- Role of the Personal Advisor;
- Research integrity.

Held on 15, 16 and 17 November 2022, such meetings allowed the new students to become aware of the School's organisation and other key matters, as well as personally meet the student members of the bodies and committees and some PQ members.

Moreover, on 15 November, the PQ President met the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Services and the PhD program coordinators for the presentation of the new AVA3 requirements, the first step in a collaborative journey that should expedite the adoption of the PhD program evaluation system AVA3.

The PQ welcomed the addition of specific QA requirements for PhD programs, pioneered by the School itself, and in April 2023 it opened a procedure for adapting its student feedback system to the questionnaire templates for PhD-students and PhDs worked out by ANVUR<sup>2</sup>.

Also in connection with the new AVA3 System, aware of the requirements laid down therein and the relevant issues and points of attention, at a meeting on 28 March 2023 the PQ decided to prioritise the issues to be dealt with, with a focus on the recommendations issued by CEVS after the initial Accreditation visit. In preparation for the Periodic Accreditation visit, the PQ put the QA system in research and Third Mission at the top of its priority list.

Other quite important matters for the School that the PQ intends to discuss with the Rector and the General Director are listed below, in no particular order of importance:

- Training in AVA3 for teaching and research staff, students, technical-administrative staff;
- Training and lifelong learning programs for teaching staff, with a focus on quality and innovation in education;
- Defining a process for the design of PhD programs while clarifying the role of the PQ, NdV and CPDS, expected timelines and review procedures;
- Monitoring the PhD-students' publications (in particular, outlining methods for retrospective cataloguing, encouraging the use of the Institutional Research Information System IRIS, requesting a self-certification of registration prior to graduation);
- Revision of the official website (most importantly, checking if all information is complete and up to date and provide easy access to contents).

### **3. Quality Assurance in education**

As a continuation of the periodic review and improvement of the QA system in education, in the period covered by this Report the PQ focussed on completing the periodic review of the student feedback questionnaires in the run-up to the new Academic Year (A.Y. 2023/24) while working out the guidelines to handle the submission of questionnaires and the management of the results.

#### **3.1. Revision of current questionnaires and guidelines**

With regard to the existing questionnaires (*Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire – TEQ, End-of-year Questionnaire and PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire*), following up on the Annual Report 2021-2022 the PQ wanted to inspect the overall structure as well as the wording of every single question and propose a few revisions. Later on, in consultation with the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Systems, the CPDS, the NdV and the Teaching Committee, at a meeting on 28 September 2022 the PQ approved the new versions.

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<sup>2</sup> In June 2023, the PQ decided to adopt the ANVUR questionnaires, to which it added questions from the existing questionnaires (*End-of-year Questionnaire and PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire*). For further details, see sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.

One of the most noteworthy changes made in all the questionnaires was the replacement of the wording "*Any other comments?*" in the free-text questions with the wording "*Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback*". The prompt to offer alternative options, mainly addressed to the respondents who gave negative feedback to one or more questions, aims to increase the proactive involvement of the respondents in a continuous improvement process.

Note that, after the publication of ANVUR's graduate/PhD student feedback questionnaire templates<sup>3</sup>, the PQ had to step in again, thus partly frustrating the revision carried out in the period covered by this Report.

### **3.1.1. Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire – TEQ**

Even though the AVA3 System does not provide for a graduate student feedback survey for every discipline, for several years the School has been implementing a questionnaire-based feedback survey, known as the *Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire* (TEQ). Since 2019, the statistical analysis of the results of the questionnaires has been explained and discussed in the [Annual Report of the CPDS](#).

As to the TEQs, in addition to the changes discussed in the Annual Report 2021-2022, the PQ implemented and adhered to some of the changes proposed by CPDS and the Teaching Committee. Generally speaking, some questions were grouped together when thematically similar, while some questions were reworded so they could be more easily understood by the respondents.

In order to regulate the feedback collection process, the PQ established a minimum number of attending students (a total of four, including resident and non-resident students) for submission of the TEQs as well as criteria to define what an attending student is, i.e. a student who has attended at least 80% of the classes of a specific discipline. In addition, the PQ insisted that the TEQs should be handed out on the last day of class, unless otherwise specified by the course's teaching staff.

To protect the privacy of the teaching staff, the PQ also set a limit on the sharing of the results of the surveys, by ruling that a summary chart be sent to the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Systems and to the PhD program coordinators, while making sure that, in the event of a criticality, they could have access to breakdown data at a reasonable request. This choice is connected to the request made to the Management to deliver the questionnaires separately to non-resident and resident attending students, with the latter also separated according to their PhD program, so the analysis of the results and the final report can reflect the specific character of each PhD program.

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<sup>3</sup> Such questionnaires were approved by ANVUR by Board Resolution no. 64 dated 21 March 2023 and published on 4 April 2023.

At a meeting held on 16 November 2022, the PQ President and the PhD program coordinators agreed to simplify the process for the management of the results of the *Teaching Evaluation Questionnaires* (TEQ) compared to the one described in "Student feedback and satisfaction system ("[...] The PhD program coordinator, after reviewing the results of the survey, draws up a summary report that is discussed by the Teaching Body for criticalities and corrective actions, partly in consultation with the students, especially those who sit in the CPDS [...]"). In the new collaborative method, after reviewing the TEQ results, the Coordinator submits them to the Teaching Body, highlighting the criticalities and with no summary report, while any recommendation, critical situation or planned corrective action is mentioned in the meeting proceedings.

It should be noted, however, that, while the TEQ was being reviewed by the PQ, the context underwent major changes as a consequence of the adoption of the new AVA3 System. During a virtual meeting on "Quality Assurance in PhD programs" organised by CONVUI (Coordinamento dei nuclei di valutazione delle università italiane - National Coordination of the Evaluation Units of Italian Universities) and CONPAQ (Coordinamento nazionale dei Presìdi della Qualità di Ateneo - the National Coordination of University Quality Committees) on 24 October 2022, ANVUR (Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca - Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes) actually presented the innovations brought in by the AVA3 System in PhD Program QA, explaining how the role of the CPDS and the use of specific student feedback questionnaires for each discipline only apply to Academic programs, not to PhD programs.

Aware of the above, the PQ started to reflect on the submission of the TEQs, considering on the one hand the actual gain in terms of quality and improvement of teaching standards, and on the other hand the workload imposed on the Administration offices. In light of the new annual questionnaire for graduate students proposed by ANVUR, the structure of which is very complicated and covers education as well, the PQ is considering the option to leave out the TEQs, currently not included in the AVA3 System, as a potential course of action for the Academic Year 2023/24.

### **3.1.2. *End-of-year Questionnaires***

As they have been just recently introduced, the *End-of-year Questionnaires* have been only slightly changed so far. Particularly noteworthy is the PQ's decision to enquire about the student's PhD programs. Such decision, in the light of the greater range of PhD programs available at the School, first and foremost the XXXVIII course of the PhD program, is crucial to identify and tackle problems in a specific program without infringing the respondents' privacy, as the questionnaires would be submitted to all students from the second year onwards.

Following the publication of the "[First- and second-year PhD student satisfaction survey](#)", defined by ANVUR as a standard tool for collecting the PhD students' opinions, between May and June 2023 the PQ, in consultation with the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Systems, analysed

the main differences between the *End-of-year Questionnaire* and the new model, in terms of contents and submission methods. Though it agreed to adopt the ANVUR questionnaire straightforwardly, the PQ decided to complete it with questions from the *End-of-year Questionnaire* that more directly map the distinctive traits of a postgraduate experience at the School (Annex D).

Note that, having decided to promptly adopt the ANVUR questionnaire, the updated version of the *End-of-year Questionnaire* (Annex C) has never been submitted.

### **3.1.3. PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire**

The revision of the *PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire* was mainly dictated by the will to streamline a very dense questionnaire, its themes often overlapping with the above, and by the need to map the student's opinions about the *career* and *job placement* services. In agreement with the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Systems, the PQ prepared a new, more compact type of questionnaire to be submitted at the end of the PhD course, in order to collect information for a general assessment of the experience. Using the same method as that of the other questionnaires, the proposed revision was shared first with the CPDS, then with the Teaching Committee, and the feedback was taken into account.

The updated version of the *PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire* (Annex E) has been handed out since January 2023. However, following the publication of the "[PhD student satisfaction survey](#)" compiled by ANVUR in April 2023, the QA had, once again, to step in and rework the method for collecting the students' opinions at the end of the PhD program. After a review of the key differences between the *PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire* and the new ANVUR questionnaire in terms of contents and submission methods, the QA decided to adopt the latter. As mentioned in the previous section about the *End-of-year Questionnaire*, the QA also decided to complete the ANVUR questionnaire with questions from the *PhD Program Evaluation Questionnaire* to monitor some of the most distinctive features of a postgraduate experience at the School (Annex F).

### **3.1.4. Student feedback questionnaires: result delivery/management guidelines**

At the suggestion of the PQ, a Questionnaire Workgroup (WG) was set up within the Management and tasked with mapping the questionnaire submission process, including data management and analysis.

Inspired by the contents of the 2019 document, "Student opinion and satisfaction survey", the WG found on one hand that guidelines needed to be developed to assist the Offices involved in their work and to inform the teaching and research staff about how to collect and share the students' opinions, and on the other hand that the document needed to be changed and updated to reflect the changes made over the years.

At the end of the mapping process, then, the WG drew up the document "Student feedback questionnaires: result delivery/management guidelines" and submitted it to the PQ, after sharing it with the PhD and Higher Education Office. Such Guidelines, discussed at a meeting on 25 November, were shared with the Pro-Rector for Didactics and Information Services, then approved on 13 December. Based on such information, the Offices involved in the questionnaire-submission and data-management process implemented the new course of action.

### **3.2. Focus groups**

As mentioned in the previous Annual Report, driven by the wish to thoroughly investigate the potentials of *focus groups* as a tool to examine criticalities or suggestions in areas uncovered by the questionnaires (such as student services), the President called to look for *best practices* at other Italian universities, concerning in particular the use of *focus groups* for the assessment of residential services.

Having selected the case of Università Cattolica, which for years has expressed the opinions and suggestions of the student communities of its campuses (Milan, Brescia, Piacenza-Cremona and Rome) by means of online *focus group* sessions, the President, Dr Calvi and Ms Tangheroni got in touch with it and arranged an informational meeting with one of the consultants at EDUCatt – the Student Support Service of Università Cattolica. Then, feedback about the success of the experience, as part of the assessment of the residential services of Università Cattolica, was shared with the PQ at a meeting on 28 March, and on that occasion it was decided that such consultant should be asked to attend the following meeting and discuss the potential application of *focus groups* to the School's context.

After the meeting, the consultant was asked to put together an experimental *focus group* for the School and provide an estimate of the cost.

After receiving the proposal, the PQ decided to find out if there was real interest in trying out a tool other than a questionnaire. So, the students were asked whether they might be interested in attending a *focus group* on residential services. Based on the results of the survey, which found little interest (29 answers from 213 respondents), the PQ wanted to try to involve the student community again and chose to postpone the decision about the implementation of such tool.

### **3.3. Quality Assurance for Master's and Executive courses**

Following the extension of the School's curriculum and the start of the first Master's degrees<sup>4</sup>, at a meeting on 30 January 2023 the PQ found that they needed to start working at an *ad hoc* QA system.

Professor Averardi and Professor Bilancini, in their double capacities as PQ members and contact persons for the first two Master's degrees, were tasked with designing an initial draft of a questionnaire.

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<sup>4</sup> Executive Master's degree in "Sports Law and Governance of Sports Phenomenon" and Executive Master's degree in "Light Leadership and innovation in educational and training organisations".

After discussing an initial version of the questionnaire at a meeting on 28 March 2023, the PQ proposed to make a few changes and worked out a submission procedure. Namely, the PQ agreed that the rules for other student feedback surveys should apply to the new questionnaire as well, i.e.:

- Use the 5-point Likert scale (Fully agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Fully disagree);
- Include the option "I prefer not to answer";
- Task the Offices with submitting, collecting and processing the feedback;
- Have the results of the survey shared with the Coordinator, who, when a new Master's degree has been defined, shall submit them to the Scientific Committee, point out the criticalities and propose any corrective actions.

In addition, because of the specificity of each Master's degree, the PQ decided to hand the decision about the submission window over to the Coordinator, notwithstanding the need to collect the students' opinions at the final stage of their studies.

Having implemented such changes, the final version of the questionnaire (Annex G) was approved at a PQ meeting on 2 May and was then favourably received by the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Information Systems.

Finally, the PQ recommended that the questionnaire be translated into English, so the English translation could be used if non-Italian speaking international students were admitted to the courses.

### **3.4. Training programs for teachers and researchers**

Prompted by the NdV's suggestions at the joint meeting (see [Section 7.1](#)), i.e. to consider the option to set up a course where the teaching and research staff could learn effective teaching skills, the PQ started to reflect on the issue from a broader perspective. In addition to planning teacher training programs, they found that raising the awareness of the teaching and research staff about the quality of teaching and inform the newly-hired staff of the context and features that make the School one of its kind are a bonus.

The PQ's decision turned out to be perfectly in keeping, on one side, with the AVA3 requirements, particularly with Point of attention "B.1.1 Recruitment, qualification and management of teaching and research staff" and Aspect to be considered "B.1.1.4 The University promotes through its own initiative the education, development and lifelong learning in scientific, methodological and teaching skills of the teaching and research staff as well as the tutors, in furtherance of the quality and innovation, including technological innovation, of on-site and remote educational activities in compliance with the specificity of each discipline and assesses the effectiveness thereof", and on the other side with the creation of the Workgroup on "Recognition and promotion of the

educational skills of university teaching<sup>5</sup> by ANVUR (notified to the PQ at a meeting on 29 November 2022).

After reviewing the model implemented by the University of Milan (teachers training project) and the initiatives planned by the University of Genoa (training courses, seminars and workshops), the PQ decided to include Europe-wide best practices in the assessment. In particular, the Chalmers University of Technology of Goteborg (Sweden), where attendance of training courses is part of the teacher recruitment process and a prerequisite for career advancement, was selected as a case study.

So, the PQ went through the potential contents that could be included in the training scheme for the teaching and research staff and selected those shown in Table 1.

In the light of the School's growth prospects and the many fixed-term research assistants (RTD-a) hired or to be hired in 2023, the autumn before the start of the new Academic Year was selected as the ideal date to organising the training courses.

### **Education and supervision**

- Test assessment and scoring method
- Educational-pedagogical skills
- Human resources (i.e. teaching, supervision and mentoring for students, dynamics of the research team), conflict and complex case management

### **Communication**

- *Public speaking*
- Science communication

### **Context**

- Presentation of the School and its distinctive features, services and facilities, introduction to the use of the IT infrastructure
- Introduction to *Open Access* and the use of the Institutional Research Information System IRIS
- *Mentoring* by senior teaching staff

**Table 1:** Topics to be included in the training program for teaching and research staff.

At first, the PQ envisaged a training program that was mainly designed for newly hired research fellows but open to all the teaching and research staff as well as to students working as *Teaching Assistants*, optional and divided into two half days, the contents of which should be recorded and

<sup>5</sup>The Workgroup on "Recognition and promotion of the educational skills of university teaching" was set up by ANVUR, to work out a survey of the experiences held in Italian universities about the promotion of university teaching. The purpose of the survey is to collect the points of view of lecturers, research fellows and academic governing bodies and open a debate on potential initiatives to support, recognise and enhance professional growth, develop teaching skills and implement educational innovations.

shared even later, as additional staff members were hired. In response to such proposal, the PQ tried to find out whether the School's senior teaching staff were willing to work as trainers or mentors.

Meanwhile, in its quest for a more innovative program, the PQ got in touch with a consulting firm specialising in the teaching of *soft skills*. The consultants' proposal, which involved a much longer and far-ranging training program that initially assumed, was deeply appreciated by the PQ, especially for the design of the process and the approach to training. However, because of the remarkable financial burden it involved, which had not been budgeted for 2023, the PQ decided to opt for a more traditional training program and reconsider such proposal later on.

### **3.5. Additional programs**

One of the measures aimed to improve the quality of teaching, jointly proposed by PQ, NdV and CPDS at a joint meeting on 19 September 2022 (see [Section 7.1](#)), was making the teaching material of every discipline available to all the School's teaching and research staff and students, as from the new Academic Year.

To do this, at a meeting on 28 September, the PQ designed a scheme for sharing the teaching material, which would:

- Improve the educational experience while providing all of the School's community with widest access to the teaching material;
- Help make more informed decisions when choosing the optional courses for the curriculum;
- Increase awareness of the duplicate contents that could feature in different courses;
- Develop synergisms between the teaching and research staff;
- Spread good practices.

Initially enforced in the weeks leading up to the start of the Academic Year 2022/23, such scheme intends to give all the teaching and research staff, as well as the students, read-all access to the files with the teaching material of each discipline (including teaching material from previous years). Apart from adding the syllabus, the teacher of each discipline can upload and update the material in the file, remove what is in it, or leave it as it is.

### **3.6. Future prospects**

As mentioned in the above sections, in the next few months the PQ will be revising the student feedback system again and adapting it to the AVA3 requirements.

Although ANVUR, at the time of publishing the graduate/PhD student questionnaire model, specified that at first the universities may keep using other forms of surveys, whether already tried and tested or recently implemented on condition they contain information about the qualifying features of the PhD program, the PQ agreed to adopt the new models ahead of time and decided to add a few questions from the existing questionnaires that specifically map the School's distinctive features. One of the direct implications of such decision, shared by the Pro-

Rector for Teaching and Information Systems too, is the need to translate and implement the new questionnaires as soon as possible and to update the Guidelines, see [Section 3.1.4](#), the "Student opinion and satisfaction survey" and "The Quality Assurance system". At the same time, the PQ will be called to reflect on the potential discontinuation of the TEQs, which are not part of the AVA3 System.

As to the experimental application of the *focus groups*, the PQ intends to take a decision in autumn, in consultation with the student community.

As to the training and upgrading of the educational skills of the teaching and research staff, one of the priorities of the PQ, in agreement with the Rector and the General Director, is entrusting a third party with the training program and then with the organisation and promotion of the meetings. At the time of drawing up this Report, the PQ is also enquiring whether the senior teachers are willing to work as mentors.

## 4. Quality Assurance in research

As mentioned in [Section 2](#), the main goal of the PQ in the run-up to the Periodic Accreditation visit is and will be completing the QA system in research and Third Mission (see [Section 5](#)).

### 4.1. Bonus Scheme

Consistently with the work done in 2019, between 2022 and 2023 the PQ supervised the design of the Bonus process, in the light of the work schedule covered by PRO3, the Three-Year University Plan 2021-2023 , Goal "E – Investire sul futuro dei giovani ricercatori e del personale delle università" (*Investing in the future of young research workers and academic staff*), Action "E.4 – Integrazione del Fondo per la Premialità (art. 9, Act no. 240/2010)" (Supplementing the Bonus Fund), with special reference to Indicator "E\_k – Risorse disponibili sul fondo per la premialità rispetto al costo totale del personale universitario" (*Resources available on the Bonus fund vs total cost of academic staff*).

Prompted by the PQ, the criteria for access to the Bonus fund were outlined and selected by the Research Committee and by the Teaching Committee. Such Committees were supported by a dedicated WG composed of technical-administrative staff (for further details, see [Section 9](#)), who revised the "Bonus fund regulations", mapped the process for access to and distribution of the Bonus fund, and drew up the procedure.

The choice of criteria took the shape of a grid of indicators, that in the first year will be used to test the operation of the process and to collect information about the educational, research and Third Mission work carried out by the teaching and research staff.

After taking note of the proposed criteria and procedure, the PQ thoroughly discussed them at meetings in October, November and December, during which it proposed to make a few changes. In addition, it was suggested that the threshold values should be changed at the first annual review of the indicators, in order to promote a gradual increase in the expected quality standards.

At a meeting on 7 November 2022, the Assessment Board approved the bonus allocation criteria for the teaching and research staff that should be used at the first allocation of the fund, though it invited the School to consider stricter criteria for the next years and/or introduce personal score cards for the assessments and bonuses of the teaching and research staff.

The proposed changes to the “Bonus fund regulations”, as well as the procedure, application and criteria were approved by the School’s Board of Governors at a meeting on 31 January 2023 and then posted on the School’s intranet.

#### **4.2. Monitoring research outputs**

A simulated Research Quality Assessment event (in Italian Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca or VQR), promoted by the PQ in November 2020, prompted a discussion on the need to open a procedure for the regular collection and analysis of data on research outputs published by the School’s teaching and research staff.

A quantitative analysis of the publications filed in the Institutional Research Information System IRIS, published in some of the School’s policy papers and reports (such as for instance the “Research and Third Mission Report”), found a discrepancy between the number of indexed publications in the Scopus databank in April 2023 and the number of publications filed in IRIS.

In addition to the criticality of the number of filed products, which does not give a real picture of the actual scientific production of the School, the Library and Research Enhancement Office repeatedly pointed out that the registration in IRIS is often associated with incomplete information, especially in the open-access version.

Therefore, in the last year, the PQ widely discussed the criticalities associated with the spreading of a culture of sharing for research outputs and the need to raise the awareness of the School’s scientific community about the use of IRIS. As a matter of fact, any activity that may lead to define a procedure for monitoring research outputs and self-assessment, including qualitative ones, depends on the data available in IRIS.

To ease and promote the filing of research outputs, the Library and Research Enhancement Office took measures, one of the most remarkable of which is sending a welcome email to the teaching and research staff when they start working at the School, with information about how to use IRIS, and a monthly newsletter listing the newly filed publications and offering useful tips and news about the institutional database.

Moreover, the PQ believes that the use of IRIS may be additionally boosted by the Bonus Fund application procedure, a prerequisite of which is exceeding the threshold for membership of the Teaching Body of the PhD program.

### **4.3. Future prospects**

In the current scenario, the PQ believes that it is of utmost importance to work hard on setting up an effective self-assessment mechanism for research outputs and build a sound QA system on such basis, as a guarantee of continuous improvement.

To such end, the Research Committee, which includes a few PQ members, has been called to play a proactive role in the choice of criteria and in the definition of the data-collection and self-assessment procedure.

In this scenario, the PQ has favourably looked upon the idea to enter into an agreement with CRUI (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università italiane - Conference of Italian University Rectors) for the use of Criterium, a new support system that helps assess the research outputs and that will equip the School with a helpful tool for the monitoring and self-assessment of publications (at least for the bibliometric sections), while encouraging the filing of publications in the Institutional Research Information System IRIS, which the metadata will be harvested from.

The signing of the CRUI contract was approved by the Governing Bodies of the School at meetings in June 2023.

## **5. Quality Assurance in Third Mission**

Similarly to what has been described in [Section 4](#) about QA in research, for the QA system to be fully implemented it is essential that Third Mission activities be assessed as soon as possible, as such assessment will help outline the School's developmental lines as well as being a qualifying feature in the run-up to the next VQR event.

### **5.1. Third Mission monitoring**

Because of the partly unsatisfactory outcome of the assessment of the Third Mission case study submitted by the School at the VQR event 2015-2019, at the end of 2022 the PQ began to consider the option to adopt a Third Mission monitoring and self-assessment procedure, so as to make a more informed decision at the next assessment.

After planning to introduce an annual Third Mission report, the PQ involved the Pro-Rector for Communication, Third Mission and Disability in the design of a monitoring form to collect qualifying information. In consultation with the Communications Committee, the PQ tasked the Planning, Control and Quality Unit with the development of a specific Third Mission data collection form. Inspired by the standard form outlined by ANVUR in Annex 2 to the [VQR call 2015-19](#) (case study submission form), the form was built around the School's context based on the comments of all the people involved.

At the same time, a dedicated WG drew up a procedure for the inventorying and self-assessment of Third Mission activities. At the time of drawing up this Report, such procedure had been submitted to the Rector and Pro-Rectors.

## 5.2. Future prospects

Considering the comments made by CEVS in its final assessment ("*It would be convenient for the School to complete the development of its QA system as soon as possible so as to quickly implement it and test its effectiveness, and take corrective actions if needed*"), it is crucial to have a QA system for the ongoing Third Mission activities as soon as possible.

So, the PQ planned to start the first Third Mission monitoring and self-assessment event in Autumn 2023, in good time to draw up the "Three-Year University Plan 2024-2026" that outlined the School's strategic developmental lines.

## 6. Campus and student services

As part of QA in the *Campus* model implemented by the School, the PQ addressed a few issues that turned out to be most important from the perspective of the Periodic Accreditation of the centres and Academic programs, and for the improvement of the students' perception of the quality of the halls of residence and services.

### 6.1. Development of the *Campus* model

As to the expansion of the *Campus*, please note that at the start of 2023 the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Lucca granted free right to use the new building in Via Brunero Paoli. Having such building as a hall of residence remarkably increased the space that can now meet the School's increasing need for student housing.

Table 2 below lists the numbers of beds and desks that are currently available for the students.

<b>Building</b>	<b>No. of beds</b>	<b>No. of desks</b>
Residence – San Francesco <i>Campus</i>	95	95*
Study Room – San Francesco <i>Campus</i>	-	65
Residence – Via Brunero Paoli	100	100*
Open Space – Library		32
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table 2:** Number of beds and desks currently available to the students in the *Campus*. \*Number of workstations in each room.

Lastly, note that last April the School finalised the purchase of Palazzo Boccella, which, once restored and retrofitted, will host the Rector's Office and part of the administration offices. Accordingly, part of the former Boccherini building, where the management is currently headquartered, will be allocated to the teaching and research staff.

## Workstation booking system

During the pandemic emergency, the School deemed it appropriate to implement a booking system for the workstations located on the ground floor of the Library, both to comply with the health and safety requirements and to track the number of people on the premises.

As such system was widely appreciated by external users, the School decided to keep the booking system in place even after the emergency and even if the restrictions had been lifted. Therefore, in order to improve such service, a market survey was conducted to find new *software*. The choice fell on "Affluences", a software tool that can be used to book many different resources (workstations, classrooms, events, services), with differentiated access rights depending on the bookable spaces through *email domain*, an easy user interface, and app and web accessibility.

Note that, with the "Affluences" app, now the students can not only book the workstations on the ground floor of the Library (shared with external users) but also the offices they have available in the Library (previously recorded on a paper file).

Due to the need to manage and optimise the use of the workstations located in the other buildings, the Library and Research Enhancement Office suggested to the Space Committee that the working range of "Affluences" should be extended to include the desks on the third floor of the Library and the desks in the *Study Rooms*. Following up on such suggestion, the Space Committee got in touch with the supplier and is considering the option to have the booking system customised.

The PQ hopes that, before the start of the Academic Year 2023/24, all of the students' workstations except those in the rooms may be bookable and the use thereof may be monitored over time.

## Transition to sustainable energy

Since the issuance of the AVA3 System, whereby the University must ensure a sustainable use of the resources over their life cycle, even by setting up dedicated jobs and positions (e.g. *energy manager* and *mobility manager*), at a meeting on June 2022 the PQ promptly suggested the General Director to appoint a member of the technical-administrative staff (or a third party) as *energy manager*, not least because the Campus is expected to acquire new buildings and expand.

The appointment of an *energy manager* in October was followed by the first works for the transition to sustainable energy, such as the definition of an Energy Saving Handbook. A comparison between the numbers for the Academic Years 2021/22 and 2022/23 shows the positive results listed below:

- On average, an approximately 50% reduction in gas consumption in the San Francesco Campus in the winter months (November to March);
- An approximately 6% reduction in power consumption in the San Ponziano Campus from November to April.

## **6.2. Development of internal communication with students**

In response to the students' many comments on the problems they had finding information on the official website and the intranet, in the period covered by this Report Ms Valiani reviewed the information available on the School's intranet and suggested it should be reorganised.

The suggestion of rationalising the contents was welcomed by the Rector and acted upon by the IT Services Office in the first few months of 2023. At the same time, after enquiring about the needs of the student community, especially the international students, Ms Valiani advised the PQ to prepare a web page grouping together the most frequently asked questions with the answers, and add the information that is currently missing on both the official website and the intranet.

The PQ welcomed such recommendation, mainly with a view to providing the student community with full access to information and upgrading the available service, though it pointed out that it would have been important for the webpage to be developed and updated by the students themselves, with the help of the management.

Later on, the option to issue an informative brochure prepared by the student community *for* the student community, as part of the initiatives for the improvement of internal communication supervised by the Communications Committee, was considered.

The drafting of such brochure is currently under way and is expected to be completed by the end of July.

## **7. Relations with the Joint Students and Teachers Board and the Assessment Board**

### **7.1. Joint meetings and collaborative actions**

The first joint meeting of the QA bodies was held in the School's premises on 19 September 2022 and was attended by PQ, NdV and CPDS members as well as by the Rector and the General Director.

The items on the agenda were:

- Level of advancement of the School's QA system;
- Necessary evolution of the QA system in teaching, in the light on the expansion of the School's curriculum;
- Initiatives to improve cooperation among PQ, NdV and CPDS;
- Implications of the AVA3 System for the School;
- Tools other than questionnaires for feedback collection and assessment of services.

Among all the actions agreed upon, the PQ would like to mention:

- Making joint meetings a recurring event, acting as a place to meet and exchange views so as to motivate the School to grow and develop in QA;

- Making the agendas and proceedings of the meetings accessible to all the members of the three Committees and leaving it to the President to consider whether to share any other material that might be interesting for all of them;
- Taking special care of training the student members in QA issues.

As part of coordination, after the joint meeting the PQ thought that the CPDS should be called to adopt a new template for the minutes based on those used by the other QA bodies. Then, Dr Calvi said she was willing to assist the CPDS recording secretary in drawing up the first few minutes.

## **7.2. Annual Report of the CPDS 2022 and presentation**

As it happened in the previous years, after drafting its Annual Report for the Academic Year 2021/22, the CPDS contacted the PQ, sent it the document and asked for feedback prior to approving and publishing it.

After analysing the contents of the document, the PQ opened a discussion about it at a meeting on 13 December 2022, then sent its comments to the CPDS.

Having implemented the PQ's suggestions, the Annual Report 2022 of the CPDS was approved on 22 December 2022 and posted on the official website in Italian and English. Finally, the document was presented to the entire community of the School at an event held in the vestry on 19 April 2023 (it could be attended online too).

Note that, with a view to cooperating and taking a common position, such event was also attended by the PQ, the Rector and the General Director.

## **7.3. Meeting between Rector, General Director and Presidents of PQ and CPDS**

On 14 February 2023, the Rector wanted to meet the PQ and CPDS Presidents and the General Director to discuss the criticalities reported by the CPDS in the Annual Report and as evidence of the School's interest in the reported problems

The most notable issues discussed at the meeting included:

- Most appropriate ways to promote the inclusion of international students in the School as well as in the local community, and to motivate them to learn Italian;
- Number of workstations available to the students;
- Terms of payment for mobility grants (increase of grants, Erasmus grants, etc);
- Criticalities from the allocation of the rooms to the students, and criteria for allocation of single rooms.

At the meeting, the parties also discussed a potential change in the membership of the CPDS, mostly by increasing the number of members so as to have greater representation of all PhD programs of the School (including PhD programs of National Interest). They finally decided to leave the membership of the CPDS as it is and find, instead, some contact persons for each PhD

program/curriculum to liaise with the students' reps in the CPDS and to attend the CPDS meetings, when invited and when needed.

## **8. The *Good Practice* project 2022/23**

In the attempt to monitor the quality of its services, the School joined the *Good Practice* (GP) project, coordinated by the Polytechnic University of Milan (Politecnico di Milano) for the years 2022-23.

### **8.1. Customer Satisfaction surveys**

In keeping with the previous years, the PQ kept playing a proactive role in promoting the completion of the questionnaires submitted as part of the GP project to record the users' satisfaction with the administrative services.

The starting date of the survey was announced by the President on behalf of the PQ to the teaching and research staff, PhD students and research fellows who had been employed for at least part of 2022 by sending an email on 16 February 2023. Later on, on a weekly basis, the Planning, Control and Quality Unit reminded them on behalf of the PQ that they could fill in the questionnaire.

The promotion of the questionnaire with the technical-administrative staff (PTA) was entirely taken care of by the Planning, Control and Quality Unit on behalf of the PQ.

After checking the response ratios, the PQ encouraged the student reps to play a proactive role in PQ and in the bodies and all of the CPDS in the promotion of the questionnaire. In addition, the PQ urged the Rector to take action, resulting in the Rector's sending a notice to the students on 8 March about the School's QA work and reminding them to fill in the GP questionnaire.

The survey was completed on 10 March, and the response ratios are listed in Table 3. A comparison between them and the previous ones generally shows a greater turnout, especially with the students. However, it is clear that some initiative to promote the questionnaire with the research fellows, similar to the one intended for the students, will have to be planned in the next GP project.

	<i>Good Practice 2022</i>			<i>Good Practice 2021</i>		
	No. of filled-in questionnaires	No. of potential respondents	Response ratio	No. of filled-in questionnaires	No. of potential respondents	Response ratio
<b>Professors (Full, Associate)</b>	17	25	68.0%	16	24	66.7%
<b>RTDa/b (Fixed-Term Research Assistants)</b>	19	22	86.4%	9	14	64.3%
<b>PhD students</b>	78	180	43.3%	60	167	35.9%
<b>Research fellows</b>	9	52	17.3%	13	40	32.5%
<b>Total DDA (Teachers, students and research fellows)</b>	123	279	44.1%	98	245	40.0%
<b>PTA</b>	38	43	88.4%	40	42	95.2%

**Table 3:** Turnout in Customer Satisfaction surveys for the *Good Practice* project about the services provided in 2021 and 2022.

## 8.2. Meetings with Office managers

On 4 and 5 April 2023, the President and Dr Calvi met with the Office Managers to discuss the results of the Customer Satisfaction surveys 2021 and 2022 as well as any criticality reported by the CPDS in the Annual Report 2022. Potential areas of improvement reported at the meeting are listed in Table 4.

With reference to the secondment refunds and mobility grants, the PQ suggested that the CPDS should urge the students to submit the full documentation to the Offices and remind them that, if the documents are incomplete, the refunds/payments cannot be processed, and the technical-administrative staff will not be responsible for the delay.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Criticalities</b>	<b>Implemented and/or suggested solutions</b>	<b>Parties involved</b>
<b>Communication</b>	Problems with internal communication	The Communications Committee is considering the option to take actions to improve internal communication	Communication and Events Office Communication Committee
<b>Social media and website</b>	The posts on the official social media channels are only in Italian	It has been suggested that the option to publish posts in Italian and English should be considered as already done by the Library and Research Enhancement Office	Communication and Events Office
	Problems finding information on the official website	Based on the AVA3 requirements, it has been suggested that the contents of the official website should be reviewed (pending a potential general redesign of the website)	Communication and Events Office IT Services Office (all Offices if under their remit)
	Research seminars not adequately publicised	Research seminars are not publicised on the official social media channels.  It has been suggested that the Communication and Events Office should support the PhD and Higher Education Office in the definition of strategies that may give greater prominence to seminars.  It has also been envisaged that seminars should be organised as <i>seminar series</i> that can have greater visibility on social media channels	Communication and Events Office PhD and Higher Education Office

<b>Area</b>	<b>Criticalities</b>	<b>Implemented and/or suggested solutions</b>	<b>Parties involved</b>
<b>Canteen</b>	Catering service	<p>The School entered into an agreement with a foodbank to make sure no surplus food goes to waste.</p> <p>In addition, the School got in touch with the catering company to provide students in the halls of residence with a breakfast service at a capped price.</p>	Campus Management and Front Office
<b>Missions</b>	Long waits to receive refunds for secondments	<p>As notified on 21 March, after the upgrading of the Office, all applications for refunds have been processed.</p> <p>In addition, the Human Resource Office eventually sent an email to the whole community to remind them of the procedure they need to go through to apply for a secondment and receive a refund.</p>	Human Resource Office CPDS
<b>Mobility</b>	Long waits to receive mobility grants	<p>The average terms of payment for the increase in the research grants and the Erasmus grants are 30 and 25 days after reception of all papers, respectively.</p> <p>It has been suggested that the cases in which the refunds took a very long time to be paid (e.g. 140 days) should be analysed to understand why it happened.</p>	PhD and Higher Education Office
<b>Research</b>	Support in the submission of projects	<p>It has been suggested that the option to hire a new supporting professional (<i>Grant Officer</i>), mainly to</p>	Rector General Director Research and Knowledge Transfer Office

<b>Area</b>	<b>Criticalities</b>	<b>Implemented and/or suggested solutions</b>	<b>Parties involved</b>
		assist with the drafting of projects, should be considered.	
<b>Hardware</b>	Subsidies to students for purchasing digital devices	<p>At the time of the pandemic emergency, first-year students received subsidies for purchasing digital devices from the fund of the MUR (Italian Ministry of University and Research). Now that the Ministry's fund is no longer available, such subsidies cannot be granted any more.</p> <p>It has been suggested, therefore, that the student's Advisor should report those cases in which the School is called to step in and provide the student with the means to complete his/her education and research projects.</p>	<i>Advisor</i> Rector General Director IT Services Office

**Table 4:** List of criticalities and potential areas of improvement, discussed at meetings between the PQ President and the Office Managers.

### **8.3. Improvement actions**

The PQ pointed out that, considering the dissatisfaction with the canteen<sup>6</sup> and the recurring comments made in the free-text questions, the School and the canteen manager agreed to make a few major changes to improve the standard of the service. On 20 February 2023, an extra time slot (12.00pm-12.30pm) was added for teachers, research staff and students only, and it was agreed that the School's users would have a priority queue during the other time slots.

As to the terms of payment of secondment refunds<sup>7</sup>, on 21 March the HR Manager informed the PQ and the CPDS Presidents that all outstanding refund applications had been processed. Since then, the longest time ever recorded between the submission of the full documents and the settlement of the refund has been 15 days. Any delay is typically due to the submission of incomplete documents and is not therefore the Office's responsibility.

### **8.4. Future prospects**

Following on what has been mentioned in the previous Report, based on the complaints received about the difficulty of linking some questions of the *Customer Satisfaction* questionnaire to the specific context of the School and the lack of questions about life on *campus*, the PQ discussed the option to tailor the survey with the liaison team of the GP project of Politecnico di Milano.

Later on, after interacting with the expert consultant in focus groups (see [Section 3.2](#)), the PQ posited that such tool could totally replace the Customer Satisfaction questionnaire, and that the focus groups could be supported by a questionnaire about services, which would be designed from scratch based on the School's distinctive features and the areas that are assumedly most relevant to improve its operation.

## **9. Process mapping**

As to the mapping and revision of the internal processes, in May Dr Calvi and Ms Bertoncini, as contact persons for the Operational Management Team, held a training course called 'Lean Thinking and process mapping', mainly addressed to newly hired technical-administrative staff but open to anyone.

After the training course, the names of people willing to join the WG were written down, and the mapping and revision of the processes that have greater strategic impact among those identified by the PQ, the Rector and the General Director at the start of 2022 began<sup>8</sup>:

- Bonus Scheme;
- Submission and management of student feedback questionnaires.

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<sup>6</sup> Question: "The catering service/places to eat are adequate (quality and choice of food, kindness)".

<sup>7</sup> Question: "Please specify how satisfied you are with secondment refunds".

<sup>8</sup> For further details, see the Annual Report 2021-2022.

The choice of the former process naturally fitted the context of the response program, "Merito, formazione e interscambio culturale" (*Merit, education and cultural interchange*), submitted by the School for the University Plan 2021-2023 (PRO3) while the choice of the latter process was accounted for by the revision of the questionnaires started by the PQ.

In October 2022, the President met with the General Director to discuss the progress of the WGs' work. On that occasion, the General Director pointed out that, as membership of the WGs is optional, the number of technical-administrative staff involved in the mapping work was very low and that in that year those people had been busy in other activities that could not be predicted at the time of defining the number of processes to be worked at, but it then turned out to be a priority for the School.

The PQ closely supervised the work of the two aforesaid WGs, by answering questions and passing its opinion on the documents produced along the way. Lastly, at a meeting on 13 December 2022, the PQ approved the "Bonus Allocation Procedure" and the document, "Student feedback questionnaires: result delivery/management guidelines".

As the PQ President suggested that the questionnaire approval procedure needed to be regulated to avoid the submission of surveys not endorsed by the School, the WG was tasked by the General Director to work at the development of a "Survey Policy".

Submitted to the PQ at a meeting on 2 May, the document was approved by the PQ and then forwarded to the Rector and to the Pro-Rectors for a review. Finally, the "Survey Policy" was approved by the Board of Governors at a meeting on 31 May 2023 with the endorsement of the Academic Senate.

The PQ deeply appreciates the Management's ability to promote and pursue the WGs' work, despite the hurdles of external factors and the low number of participating staff.

At the same time, the PQ deems it appropriate to have a regular review of the prioritisation of the mapping work, considering that other internal processes of the School too could benefit from the WGs' support. In addition, the PQ suggests that, if unable to map and review all processes, the relevant Offices should take care of defining and sharing some guidelines, as and when needed.

## 10. Self-assessment

Based on an analysis of the level of advancement of the School's QA system and considering the interactions with some of the parties involved, the PQ deems it appropriate to mention the following points of attention, in the hope they may inspire the governing bodies of the School to reflect on the issue.

- **Monitoring research outputs**

For the School's QA system to be complete, a system for monitoring research outputs needs to be implemented. Even though the lack of such a system had been known for some time

and had also been reported by CEVS after the Initial Accreditation Visit, the deliberation on the terms and remit of the monitoring system took much longer than expected, partly due to the upgraded filing of outputs in the institutional repository IRIS.

The PQ hopes that all the components of the School may join forces to complete an initial monitoring event by spring 2024 and then a periodic review of the process.

- **Third Mission monitoring**

Similarly, to complete the School's QA system it is essential to implement a Third Mission monitoring system too. As it happened with research, the deliberation on the terms and remit of the monitoring system took a long time. A proposal for Third Mission monitoring guidelines was submitted to the Rector and Pro-Rectors in June 2023 to be eventually submitted to the Academic Senate and to the Board of Governors at their respective meetings in July.

The PQ hopes that the academic community and the governing bodies may cooperate closely so that an initial monitoring event may be carried out in 2023, followed by a periodic review of the process.

- **Management of students' feedback surveys**

One of the processes that needs to be more carefully monitored is definitely the management of feedback from questionnaires, as to which the presentation and discussion of feedback within the Teaching Body is not an established practice. Inspired by the PDCA method (*Plan, Do, Check, Act*) for continuous improvement, it is essential that the Coordinator and the entire Teaching Body become aware of the students' opinions before they define the curriculum and structure of the PhD program for the following Academic Year and any improvement actions. The PQ hopes that every Teaching Body may plan to discuss feedback from the questionnaires at least once a year and prior to defining the educational programs. The PQ is also planning to implement a constant monitoring work as from the XXXIX course of the PhD program.

- **Involvement of student reps**

An inherent difficulty in obtaining positive feedback from the student community goes hand in hand with the low response ratio in the previous surveys. In this scenario, the PQ repeatedly pointed to the need for a greater involvement of the student reps, not just to improve internal communication but to urge the students to take a positive attitude and thus make their contribution to the School's QA processes.

The PQ hopes that the School may promote initiatives to increase the Culture of Quality and the involvement of the students in the QA processes.

- **Spreading a Culture of Quality**

By looking at the School's initiatives for spreading a Culture of Quality, it is clear that such actions are generally too inconsistent. Actually, from time to time, and mainly in the run-up to the Initial Accreditation Visit, other initiatives have been held alongside the CPDS event for the presentation of the results of the Annual Report which regularly takes place in Spring.

Considering the constant turnover in the student community and in junior research positions, the PQ believes it is essential to plan a number of School-wide awareness-raising initiatives to effectively inform every single community member that they can and must take part in the QA processes, insofar as they fall within their remit.

- **Process mapping**

In the last three years, the mapping and revision of internal processes, which the Management has been busy working at since 2019, have remarkably slowed down, due on one hand to the increased workload of the relentless growth of the School, and on the other hand to a poor participation in the WGs.

With a view to streamlining and improving the quality of the services, the PQ thinks it is essential to continue such activity, while reconsidering the order of importance of the processes that need to be worked at.

## **11. Future prospects**

A summary of the development prospects identified by PQ after an analysis and review of the QA system as a whole, in light of the evolution of the context following the enactment of the new AVA3 System, is provided below (Table 5).

**QA System**

- Revision of the QA System in accordance with the AVA3 System
- Training programs to promote the Culture of Quality (with a focus on student reps)
- Organisation of guidance services in preparation for the Accreditation Visit
- Continuation of joint initiatives with NdV and CPDS
- Planning of joint hearings with NdV

**QA in Education**

- Definition of the PhD design process
- Adaptation of the student feedback survey system to the AVA3 requirements (including a decision about TEQs)
- Update on result delivery/management guidelines for questionnaires
- Monitoring the results of the first Master's degree student feedback survey
- Organisation and promotion of a training program for teaching and research staff

**QA in Research and Third Mission**

- Completion of the QA system in research and Third Mission
- Implementation of Third Mission Monitoring and self-assessment Guidelines
- Monitoring the results of the first Third-Mission self-assessment
- Definition of a monitoring process for the PhD students' publications

**QA in Services**

- Decision about the implementation of focus groups on residential services (pilot scheme)
- Decision about the customisation of service quality surveys
- Decision about the implementation of an anonymous reporting system

**Table 5:** Development prospects identified by PQ.

## **12. Annexes**

### **A. List of Quality Assurance meetings**

In the period covered by this Report, the PQ met 13 times on the days listed below:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Notes</b>
18 May 2022	Online	
20 June 2022	Online	
20 July 2022	Mixed mode	
19 September	Mixed mode	Joint meeting with PQ, NdV, CPDS
28 September 2022	Mixed mode	
19 October 2022	Mixed mode	
3 November 2022	Mixed mode	
29 November 2022	Mixed mode	
13 December 2022	Online	
30 January 2023	Mixed mode	
21 February 2023	Mixed mode	
28 March 2023	Mixed mode	
2 May 2023	Mixed mode	Meeting initially planned for 26 April

## B. List of events and training activities

The training activities promoted or organised by PQ are listed below:

- meetings for the students of the 38<sup>th</sup> course of the PhD program (15, 16 and 17 November 2022)
- training course for students and research fellows on "*Research integrity: an overview*" by Professor Marco Paggi and "*Copyright law and Copyright infringement*" by Professor Marilena Filippelli, La Sapienza University, Rome (promoted by PQ, organised by the Library and Research Enhancement Office) – 15 November 2022.

Some PQ members attended the training courses listed below:

- Workshop organised by CONPAQ about "The new AVA3 System: between continuity and innovation" – 25 May 2022;
- Event organised by CONPAQ about "Quality Assurance in PhD programs" – 24 October 2022;
- Training course organised by Fondazione CRUI (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università italiane - Conference of Italian University Rectors), "AVA3: framework, news and opportunities" – 8, 9 and 16 March 2023;
- Training course organised by Fondazione CRUI (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università italiane - Conference of Italian University Rectors), "AVA3: framework, news and opportunities" held on 8, 9 and 16 March 2023.

Finally, note that the PQ asked the CPDS, especially the new student reps, to attend the course organised by Fondazione CRUI on joint committees, which was eventually cancelled.

### C. End-of-year Questionnaire<sup>9</sup>

1. Please indicate your PhD Program

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

2. The number of offered training activities was adequate
3. The topics discussed in the training activities were engaging
4. The topics discussed in the training activities were consistent with the objectives of my PhD Program
5. Overall, I am satisfied with the research training activities offered by the School

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

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

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

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

#### Research output

11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I had to disseminate my research
12. I worked on an adequate volume of research outputs (e.g., articles, essays, book chapters, presentations, etc.)
13. Overall, I am satisfied with the research outputs I have produced

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

#### Research stay abroad

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

If you answered yes:

15. My research stay abroad has contributed to the development of my PhD thesis
16. My research stay abroad has been helpful to improve my soft skills

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<sup>9</sup> As thoroughly described in [Section 3.1.2](#), having decided to adopt the ANVUR questionnaire (Annex D), this updated version of the *End-of-year Questionnaire* has never been handed out.

17. My research stay abroad has contributed to the growth of my scientific collaboration network  
If you answered no:

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

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

### **Wellbeing**

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

If you answered yes:

20. Have you reported the problems with your advisory team to the School? (yes/no/didn't know how to report it)

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

If you answered yes:

22. Have you reported the problems with other members of the IMT community to the School? (yes/no/didn't know how to report it)

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

If you answered yes:

24. Have you found the psychological counselling service useful? (yes/no)

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

## D. PhD student satisfaction questionnaire<sup>10</sup>

### Section A

1. Does your PhD program include structured training activities (courses, seminars, workshops)?
2. Is the training activity separate from the one taught in the Master's degree courses?
3. Did the training activity include additional modules as well?
4. How is the training activity monitored in the course of the PhD program?
5. How is the research project monitored in the course of the PhD program?
6. Have you benefited or are you benefiting from the minimum 10% extra budget for research projects as per MD no. 226/2021?
7. Have you spent, are you spending or do you plan to spend any research stay abroad in line with your training program?

If you have spent/are spending a research stay abroad

*7.a My research stay abroad has contributed to the development of my PhD thesis*

*7.b My research stay abroad has been helpful to improve my soft skills*

*7.c My research stay abroad has contributed to the growth of my scientific collaboration network*

8. Have you used, are you using or do you plan to use the max 50% increase in the mobility grant?
9. Why haven't you chosen to spend a research stay abroad during your PhD program?
10. Have you spent, are you spending or do you plan to spend any research stay abroad, in line with your training program, at a national research centre, company or public body?
11. Have you received or are you receiving financial support for periods spent at a national research centre, company or public body?
12. Why haven't you chosen to spend a research stay at a national research centre, company or public body during your PhD?
13. Is a workstation for PhD students available on the premises of your PhD program?
14. Have you personally worked or are you personally working as a teacher or teaching assistant during your PhD program?
15. During your course has any research project been carried out in partnership with other Universities?
16. During your course has any research project been carried out that promoted technology transfer in partnership with a company?

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<sup>10</sup> As briefly mentioned in [Section 3.1.2](#), this questionnaire is largely based on the form (in Italian) issued by ANVUR on 4 April 2023. The additions made by the PQ (in English) have been drawn from the *End-of-year Questionnaire* in Annex C.

## **Section B**

### **Training**

1. The training activities are exhaustive and consistent with the main topics of my PhD course.
2. The topics addressed in the training activities are thorough and up-to-date.
3. The training activities help with the development of the PhD thesis.
4. The workload of the structured training activities (courses, seminars, workshops) lets me spend enough time on my research projects and my thesis.
5. The interim assessments (exams, presentations, papers) are just a formality or have not been carried out at all
6. Overall, I am satisfied with the training activities provided

### **Experiences abroad**

7. During my PhD, I have received proper information and support from my teachers about experiences abroad.
8. The support received from my home university in my research stay abroad is satisfactory.
9. The support received from the host university/institute in my research stay abroad is satisfactory.
10. Overall, I am satisfied with my research stay abroad.

### **Experiences at other national research centres/companies/public bodies**

11. During my PhD, I have received proper information and support from my teachers about experiences at other institutions.
12. The support received from my home university in my research stay at other institutions is satisfactory.
13. The support received from the host institution in my research stay is satisfactory.
14. Overall, I am satisfied with my research stay at other research centres/companies/public bodies.

### **Teaching**

15. My teaching helps me with my training
16. The workload of my teaching lets me spend enough time on my training and research projects and on my thesis

### **Facilities and equipment**

17. The rooms and spaces used for the training activities are adequate (you can see, you can hear, you can sit)
18. The personal space allocated to PhD students is adequate (size, equipment, etc.)
19. The library services meet my needs
20. The IT equipment and connections are suitable for all the activities carried out there

21. The research equipment is adequate and accessible
22. I am satisfied with the support provided by the secretary's office

### **Transparency and engagement**

23. Information about training and research activities is constantly updated
24. PhD students are involved in the planning of such activities
25. Information on deadlines and administrative procedures is constantly updated

### **Research training (activities such as reading groups/journal clubs/seminars)**

26. The topics discussed in the training activities were engaging
27. The topics discussed in the training activities were consistent with the objectives of my PhD Program
28. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

### **Research output**

29. I am satisfied with the opportunities I had to disseminate my research
30. I have worked on an adequate volume of research outputs (e.g., articles, essays, book chapters, presentations, etc.)
31. Overall, I am satisfied with the research outputs that I have produced
32. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

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

33. The frequency of contact with my advisory team was adequate
34. My advisory team made themselves available to hold meetings
35. My advisory team gave prompt feedback to my written submissions (e.g., paper/thesis drafts)
36. My advisory team ensured I made progress in my thesis research
37. Overall, the supervision I have received has contributed to the successful progress of my thesis
38. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

### **Wellbeing**

39. Have you encountered any problems with your advisory team?  
if you answered yes  
39.a Have you reported the problems with your advisory team to the School?
40. Have you encountered any personal or professional problems with other members of the IMT community?

if you answered yes

40.a Have you reported the problems with other members of the IMT community to the School?

41. Have you used the School's psychological counselling service?

if you answered yes

41.a Have you found the psychological counselling service useful?

42. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

### **Overall satisfaction**

**43.** Overall, so far I am satisfied with my PhD

## E. PhD Program Evaluation questionnaire

1. Please indicate your PhD Program

### Overall Evaluation

2. Please rate your overall experience in each of the following areas:
  - Academic experience
  - Academic advice and guidance
  - Interaction between disciplines
  - Research training
  - Work-life balance

The extent to which the School has provided a welcoming and supportive environment

The extent to which the School has provided a culturally sensitive environment

Visa and immigration support

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

### Facilities, Resources, and Services

3. How would you rate the quality or availability of the following resources and services provided by the School?
  - Financial support
  - IT resources: computers and software
  - Library: services and resources
  - Plagiarism checker and thesis submission
  - Study rooms and personal workspace
  - Accommodation

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

### Placement and career prospects

4. What is your current job status?
  - Employed by a University/Research Centre
  - Employed in the private sector
  - Internship
  - Job seeker/interviewing
5. Have you used the career services provided by the School? (yes/no)  
If you answered yes:
  6. How would you rate the quality of the career services? (Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor)
  7. What improvements to the career services would you suggest? Comment box

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

**PhD Program**

8. Would you recommend your PhD Program to other students? (Definitely yes, Probably yes, Uncertain, Probably not, Definitely not, Prefer not to answer)
9. Which aspects of the PhD Program did you enjoy the most? Comment box
10. What changes to the PhD Program would you recommend? Comment box

Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback.  
(Comment box, optional)

## F. PhDs satisfaction questionnaire

### Section A

1. Was this PhD program your first choice?
2. Did this PhD program include a structured training activity (courses, seminars, workshops)?
3. Was the training activity separated from the one taught at the Master's degree courses?
4. Did the training activity include additional modules as well?
5. How many hours of structured training activity did you attend throughout your PhD program?
6. How was your training activity monitored in the course of the PhD program?
7. How was your research project monitored in the course of the PhD program?
8. Have you presented the results of your thesis or other research projects at any meeting, workshop, PhD school, etc.?
9. Have you published or submitted for publication the results of your thesis or other research projects (even with other authors)?
10. Have you benefited from the minimum 10% extra budget for research projects as per MD no. 226/2021?
11. Have you spent a research stay abroad during your PhD program, insofar as consistent with your educational goals?
12. Have you used the max 50% increase in the mobility grant?
13. Why didn't you choose to spend a research stay abroad during your PhD program? (check all that apply)
14. Have you spent any research stay at national research centres, companies, public bodies during your PhD program insofar as consistent with your educational goals?
15. Have you received financial support for the periods you spent at national research centres, companies, public bodies?
16. Why didn't you choose to spend a research stay at national research centres, companies, public bodies during your PhD program?
17. Is a workstation available for every graduate student on the premises of your PhD program?
18. Have you personally worked or are you personally working as a teacher or teaching assistant during your PhD program?
19. If you have, how many hours have you taught overall throughout your PhD program?
20. During your course, has any research project been carried out in partnership with other universities?
21. During your course, has any research project been carried out that promoted technology transfer in partnership with a company?

## **Section B**

### **Training**

1. The training activities were exhaustive and consistent with the main topics of my PhD course
2. The topics addressed in the training activities were thorough and up-to-date
3. The training activities helped with the development of my PhD thesis
4. The workload of the structured training activities (courses, seminars, workshops) let me spend enough time on my research projects and my thesis
5. The interim assessments (exams, presentations, papers) were just a formality or were not carried out at all
6. The activities largely involved guest lecturers and experts as well
7. The activities largely involved international lecturers and experts as well
8. Overall, I am satisfied with the training activities provided

### **PhD thesis**

9. My PhD supervisor was helpful and always on call
10. My PhD supervisor helped me build a scientific collaboration network
11. My thesis helped me learn to organise and disseminate the results of my work
12. The groundwork for my thesis helped me build a scientific collaboration network
13. Overall, I am satisfied with the research I did for my PhD thesis

### **Research**

14. The other research I did was related to the main topics of my PhD thesis
15. The research I did helped me develop my PhD thesis
16. The workload of research let me spend enough time in the training activities and in my thesis
17. The research I did helped me learn to organise and disseminate the results of my work
18. The research I did helped me build a nationwide scientific collaboration network
19. The research I did helped me build an international scientific collaboration network
20. My PhD journey made me more adept at conducting independent research projects
21. Overall, I am satisfied with the other research projects I conducted

### **Experiences abroad**

22. During my PhD, I have received proper information and support from my teachers about experiences abroad
23. The support received from my home university in my research stay abroad was satisfactory
24. The support received from the host university/institution in my research stay abroad was satisfactory
25. During my stay abroad, I received adequate supervision for my thesis project

26. My stay abroad helped me develop my PhD thesis
27. My research stay abroad helped me learn more
28. My research stay abroad helped me build a scientific collaboration network
29. Overall, I am satisfied with my research stay abroad

### **Experiences at other national research centres/companies/public bodies**

30. During my PhD, I have received proper information and support from my teachers about experiences at other institutions
31. The support received from my home university in my research experience at other institutions was satisfactory
32. The support received from the host institution in my research experience was satisfactory
33. In my experience at other institutions, I received adequate supervision for my thesis or research project
34. My experience helped me in the development of my PhD thesis
35. My research experience at other institutions helped me learn to disseminate the results of my work
36. My research experience at other institutions helped me build a scientific collaboration network
37. Overall, I am satisfied with my research experience at other institutions

### **Teaching**

38. My teaching helped me with my training
39. The workload of my teaching let me spend enough time on my training and research projects and on my thesis

### **Facilities and equipment**

40. The rooms and spaces used for the training activity were adequate (you could see, you could hear, you could sit)
41. The space allocated to research was adequate (size, lighting, security, etc.)
42. The personal space allocated to PhD students was adequate (size, equipment, etc.)
43. The library services met my needs
44. The IT equipment and connections were suitable for all the activities carried out there
45. The research equipment was adequate and accessible
46. I am satisfied with the support provided by the secretary's office
47. How would you rate the quality or availability of the following resources and services provided by the School?  
 Financial support  
 Plagiarism checker and thesis submission  
 Accommodation
48. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

## Transparency and engagement

49. Information about training and research activities was constantly updated
50. PhD students were involved in the planning of training and research activities
51. I have always been adequately informed of deadlines and administrative procedures

## Overall satisfaction

52. The PhD program was heavily skewed towards theoretical/abstract knowledge
  53. The PhD program was heavily skewed towards technical/practical knowledge
  54. Overall, I am satisfied with my PhD program
  55. If I could go back in time, I would enrol in this PhD program again
  56. If I could go back in time, I would choose this university again
  57. If I could go back in time, I would do a PhD abroad
  58. Would you recommend your PhD Program to other students?
  59. Which aspects of the PhD Program did you enjoy the most?
  60. What changes to the PhD Program would you recommend?
  61. Please rate your overall experience in each of the following areas:
    - Academic experience
    - Academic advice and guidance
    - Interaction between disciplines
    - Research training
    - Work-life balance
  - The extent to which the School has provided a welcoming and supportive environment
  - The extent to which the School has provided a culturally sensitive environment
  - Visa and immigration support
62. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

## Placement and career prospects

63. What is your current job status?
64. Have you used the career services provided by the School?
  - if you answered yes
    - 64.a How would you rate the quality of the career services?
    - 64.b What improvements to the career services would you suggest?
65. Please elaborate on what should be improved, especially if you provided negative feedback. (Comment box, optional)

## G. Master's course evaluation questionnaire

### Organisational profile of the Master's degree course

1. The administrative services supporting the Master's degree course (submission of application, selection, enrolment, payment and during the courses) have been adequate

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

2. As a city, Lucca is an adequate centre for the Master's degree (in terms of accessibility, transport, residential facilities, etc.)

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

3. The residential facilities provided by the IMT School are adequate

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

Not provided

4. The option to attend your courses in "mixed mode" and "alternative mode" (in-person and online) was helpful

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

Not provided

5. The cost of the Master's degree is reasonable for the curriculum and the services provided

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

### **Education**

6. The educational goals and the Master's program have been clearly defined since the start

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

7. The topics have been exhaustively and effectively tackled by the teaching staff

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

8. The topics covered were interesting

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

9. The topics covered may be useful for my professional future

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

10. The teaching staff were knowledgeable and helpful

Fully agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Fully disagree  
Prefer not to answer

11. Prior learning as an entry requirement has been really useful for and relevant to my Master's degree

Fully agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Fully disagree  
Prefer not to answer

12. The contents of the Master's degree have adequately met my academic profile

Fully agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Fully disagree  
Prefer not to answer

### **Overall experience**

13. The Master's degree has provided adequate knowledge and skills for my intended profession

Fully agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Fully disagree  
Prefer not to answer

14. The Master's degree has provided useful contacts for my professional future

Fully agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

15. The job placement service included in the Master's degree was adequate

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

Not provided

16. I would recommend this Master's degree to other people

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

17. I would enrol in this Master's degree again

Fully agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Fully disagree

Prefer not to answer

18. I think the support provided by the School's partners in the organisation and conduction of the Master's degree course was

Fine

Unsatisfactory (please explain why)

Neither good nor bad

Prefer not to answer

There were no partners

19. Suggestions for improvement of the Master's course

(free text)