QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The School’s Quality Assurance framework is based on the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and on the national guidelines for Self-Evaluation, Periodic evaluation and Accreditation (AVA) issued by ANVUR.

The School’s strategy is to actively involve the entire academic community in order to reach the research objectives; whether educational, scientific or “third mission” (hereafter innovation), to improve facilities and to ensure compliance with quality standards.

The School’s *Quality Assurance System*, is structured in four consecutive phases linked by the “Plan - Do - Check – Act cycle” (PDCA), which guarantees the critical review of the entire system. The School has defined the processes, the actors involved and the expected results of this system in its *Guidelines for Quality Policies*, approved in 2018, and further improved in June 2019 following the review of the actions followed in the first half of 2019. The organization of the QA System involves the following categories of actors:

**Governing bodies** (the Director, Director’s Delegates, Academic Senate, Board of Directors and the Secretary General);

**Monitoring and assessment bodies** (Quality Assurance Unit, Student-Professor Joint Committee, Evaluation Committee, International Scientific Advisory Committee);

**Teaching and research structures** (Scientific Area Coordinator, Area Board, PhD Teaching Board, Committee of PhD Coordinators, QA referents from each PhD Teaching Board, Principal Investigator/Research Groups, Interdisciplinary Laboratory, Inquiry Commissions);

**Administrative offices** (Students’ Secretariat, Scientific Secretariat, Research Funding and International Relations Office, TTO Service, Management Control Office, Quality Assurance Manager, Staff of the Director and the Secretary General)

The Governing Bodies define and develop the Quality Policies that are then put in place by the Quality Assurance Unit. The latter encourages the teaching and research structures to adopt the improvement measures which are monitored by the Joint Student-Professor Committee, by the Quality Assurance Unit and by the Evaluation Committee. Finally, the administrative offices provide all stakeholders with the necessary support to achieve and pursue their quality objectives.

The progress of the QA system and its ability to achieve quality goals is evaluated by:

- the *Quality Assurance Unit* which supervises the adequate and uniform performance of QA procedures based on the guidelines defined by the Governing Bodies. It provides the necessary support, ex-ante and in progress, to the actors responsible for implementing strategies,
monitoring QA processes and ensuring a correct information flow between the Evaluation Committee and the Student-Professor Joint Committee;

- the Student-Professor Joint Committee, regulated by art. 13 of the Statute, has the task of drawing up a comprehensive annual report for each doctorate course which considers the overall teaching and research offer, with particular reference to the results of the student survey, highlighting any specific problems of individual PhD courses;

- the Evaluation Committee carries out a surveillance role to evaluate the overall efficacy of the Schools’ QA system ex-post. It also puts forwards proposals for improvement;

- the International Scientific Advisory Committee - ISAC, foreseen by art. 11 of the Statute with the goal of analysing the progress and development of the School’s scientific activity in relation to the development of international research.

Amongst the monitoring and assessment bodies, the International Scientific Advisory Committee also gives an important contribution to the School’s Quality Assurance system. The Committee generally meets every three years and collects information from the Administration and the Evaluation Committee, as well as through on-site visits and consultations with the School’s scientific members.

The ISAC provides SISSA with a valuable assessment of the the status of the School’s scientific activities and suggests potential areas of development. The report is addressed to the School’s governing bodies and to the Ministry of Education, University and Research. The Evaluation Committee has drawn important insights from the latest ISAC report in November 2017, also regarding the assessment of the School’s QA system, which was conducted through specific interviews with the internal assessors, the Quality Assurance Unit, the Student-Professor Joint Committee, the deans and the students’ representatives.

Since 2018, the Evaluation Committee has observed a higher level of awareness of the QA system as well as a renewed openness to discuss and implement improvement recommendations. More specifically, in 2018 and in the first six months of 2019, the School made a considerable effort to improve the efficacy of the Quality Assurance System through the implementation of actions that led to a real improvement in the monitoring of processes and of the flow of information between different bodies and structures, thereby allowing for the rationalisation, coordination and support of the various procedures. By issuing the Guidelines for Quality Policies, the School formalised and described the players, processes and objectives of the Quality Assurance System in the field of teaching/training, research and innovation, engaging the Quality Assurance Unit and the Scientific Areas.

The School defines its own Quality Policies within the scope of the Teaching/Training, Research and Innovation processes, consistently with the Strategic Plan 2016-2020:

- the Quality Policy of Teaching/Training is geared at ensuring the sustainability over time of the educational offer and at promoting the attractiveness of the School, focusing particular attention on integrating the educational demand of students, with academic activities, high-level research opportunities and career development;
the Quality Policy of Research and Innovation is geared at creating a stimulating context for increasing competitiveness in research to maintain its excellence and transfer its results to favour social and economic progress.

In accordance with the Quality Assurance cycle, during the planning phase at the end of 2018, the School set out specific quality objectives that were included in the Strategic Plan 2019-2021 and submitted to interim monitoring in May 2019. In February 2019, in order to promote self-assessment and the definition of improvement measures, the School’s Management, together with the support of the Quality Assurance Unit, requested the Scientific Areas to put forward their proposals based on the recommendations in the Evaluation Committee’s 2017 report. These proposals were presented to the Quality Assurance Unit and approved by the School’s bodies in March 2019.

After a thorough analysis, some of the proposals were translated into specific quality objectives to be included in the Integrated Plan 2019-2021 during the interim monitoring phase, while the remaining proposals became common guidelines for all scientific Areas. As part of the self-assessment phase, following the Evaluation Committee’s report on the feedback from the student survey 2017/2018, the Student-Professor Joint Committee carried out a preliminary analysis of the results and of the Evaluation Committee’s assessment of them, the outcomes of which are contained in the mid-term Report drafted in June 2019. The main purpose of the mid-term Report is to keep the School’s governing and monitoring bodies informed and updated on the activities of the Student-Professor Joint Committee and on the drafting progress of the Annual Report. The mid-term Report was presented to the Quality Assurance Unit in June 2019. The QA Unit will take into consideration the suggestions and observations in both the mid-term report by the Student-Professor Joint Committee and the Evaluation Committee’s report. The findings will be the basis of new commitments for continual improvement and define the quality objectives for the 2020 management period.

During all phases of the quality assurance cycle, the Quality Assurance Unit provided its support by assessing general progress, discussing proposals with the Student-Professor Joint Committee, and by drafting plans for improving quality in the field of teaching/training, research and innovation. More specifically, as regards training, upon suggestion by the Quality Assurance Unit, in 2019 the School established the Committee of PhD Coordinators and nominated a reference professor for quality assurance for each PhD course. The purpose of this action is to improve the monitoring of teaching processes and to raise awareness of quality issues. Finally, the Quality Assurance Unit also improves communication with the Evaluation Committee.

More information on the School's Quality Assurance System is available on the website: [https://www.sissa.it/qualita](https://www.sissa.it/qualita)

Documents and explanatory texts uploaded in the SUA_Scuole database are available on the Quality page of SISSA website, in the section relative to accreditation: [https://www.sissa.it/cevs](https://www.sissa.it/cevs)