

Guidelines for Quality Policies

International School of Advanced Studies



SISSA

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INTRODUCTION

The International School of Advanced Studies (SISSA) is a research and higher education institute that promotes the development of culture and of scientific research and prepares young graduate students for advanced research and higher university teaching.

In line with its mission and strategic policies, the School promotes the enhancement of Quality in all the activities carried out within its institutional aims, as provided for by the "AVA" system (Self-assessment – Periodic Evaluation - Accreditation) and by the ESG¹.

This document defines the set of standards adopted by the School for the realisation of its vision of quality in order to:

- promote a culture of self-assessment with a view to continuous improvement
- clearly identify goals, actors, responsibilities and review procedures
- determine the information flows of the processes involved
- ensure the effectiveness of the services provided and satisfy the needs of all stakeholders

The actions promoted by the School for Quality Assurance are implemented through the specific targets issued in the appropriate planning documents (e.g. Integrated Plan).

¹ *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG), ENQA 2005 - 2009*

THE SCHOOL'S QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System (ANVUR) defines the Quality Assurance System (QA) as "the set of internal processes related to planning, management and self-assessment of training and scientific activities, including forms of internal and external verification, which aim to improve the quality of higher education while respecting the responsibility of universities towards society"².

In line with the provisions set by ANVUR, the School implements a set of procedures involving the entire academic community with the aim of ensuring continuous improvement in the areas of teaching/training, scientific research, "third mission" (hereafter Innovation)³ and services that support them.

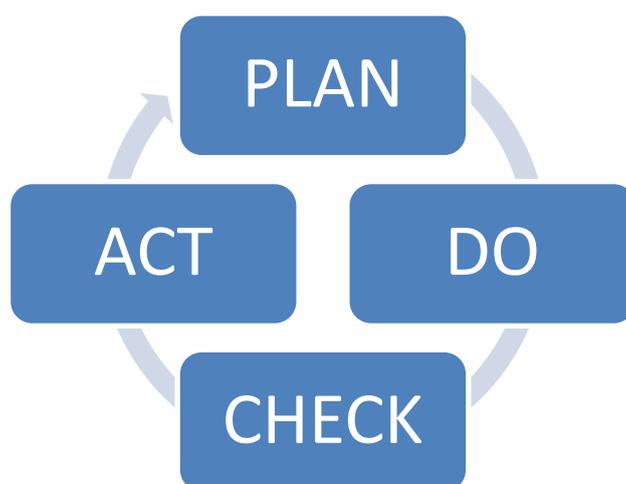
For this purpose, the School promotes an integrated Quality Assurance System that defines its processes, actors involved at different levels of responsibility and expected results.

Quality Assurance cycle

Quality Assurance (QA) is the set of activities implemented to ensure that quality objectives can be achieved. Therefore all QA actions must be planned, systematically adopted, documented and periodically checked.

For the effective functioning of this system, it is necessary that the process phases follow a cyclical course in order to ensure the critical review of the entire system.

The model applied to the School's QA system is the PDCA (*Plan - Do - Check - Act*) cycle, which has the following graphic representation:



² *Linee guida per l'accreditamento periodico delle sedi e dei corsi di studio universitari*, ANVUR 10.08.2017

³ The so-called "Third Mission" of SISSA aims to respond at the societal and economic challenges, using the knowledge from research and education of the School's activities. This implies taking responsibility, actively and consciously, for the society in which SISSA is immersed. Therefore, "INNOVATION" means technology transfer and knowledge dissemination.

Quality is guaranteed by ensuring the continuous flow of this cycle with the active involvement of all actors at different levels of responsibility.

Actors

The following image shows the categories of actors involved in the School's Quality Assurance System:

GOVERNING BODIES	MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT BODIES	TEACHING AND RESEARCH STRUCTURES	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director • Director's Delegates • Academic Senate • Board of Directors • Secretary General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Assurance Unit • Student-Professor Joint Committee • Evaluation Committee • International Scientific Advisory Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area Coordinator • Area Board • PhD Teaching Board • Committee of PhD Coordinators • QA Referents from each PhD Teaching Board • Principal Investigator/Research Groups • Interdisciplinary Laboratory-ILAS • Inquiry Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' Secretariat • Scientific Secretaries • Research Funding and International Relations Office • TTO Service • Management Control Office • Quality Assurance Manager • Staff of the Director and the Secretary General

The main functions of the actors within the Quality Assurance System are the following:

Governing bodies

The Governing Bodies define the School's Quality Policies in the fields of training, research, innovation and the methods for implementing actions aimed at achieving the objectives.

Monitoring and assessment bodies

These structures of the QA System oversee the implementation of quality policies and verify their effectiveness with a focus on continuous improvement.

- Quality Assurance Unit (PdQ)

The Quality Assurance Unit supervises the adequate and uniform performance of QA procedures based on guidelines defined by the Governing Bodies.

For this purpose, 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.

In particular, the functions of the Quality Assurance Unit are:

- coordinating and supporting the procedures for Quality Assurance;
- verifying and certifying the information requested in the SUA-RD;
- monitoring the surveys of students' opinions;
- activating any initiative useful to promote a culture of quality inside the School;
- evaluating the efficacy of the improvement actions and their actual consequences;
- monitoring the implementation of steps taken following recommendations and/or conditions formulated by the Commission of Experts for the Evaluation of Schools (CEVS) on external visits.

- **Student-Professor Joint Committee (CPAD)**

This Committee, regulated by art. 13 of the Statute, has the task of annually drawing up a comprehensive report for each PhD course which considers the overall educational offer, with particular reference to the results of the survey on students' opinions, highlighting any specific problems of individual PhD courses.

- **Evaluation Committee (NdV)**

This Committee, regulated by art. 10 of the Statute, carries out a surveillance role to evaluate the overall efficacy of the School's QA system ex-post. It also puts forwards proposals for improvement. In fulfilling its role as internal and external evaluator, it operates to increase the culture of quality and the development of the School's QA system and, at the same time, supports ANVUR and the Ministry for Education, University and Research (MIUR) within the purpose of monitoring compliance with the requirements of the initial and periodic Accreditation of study courses and of premises. It draws up an annual evaluation report according to the guidelines issued by ANVUR, in which it provides information regarding compliance with QA requirements and any initiatives implemented to promote quality. On the basis of this document, the Quality Assurance Unit and the Governing Bodies are ready to receive opinions and suggestions.

- **International Scientific Advisory Committee (ISAC)**

The School, as required by art. 11 of the Statute, has an advisory/evaluation/strategic body, the International Scientific Advisory Committee - ISAC with the purpose of analysing progress and development of the School's scientific activity in relation to the development of international research. It meets every three years and draws up a written report making recommendations for the future.

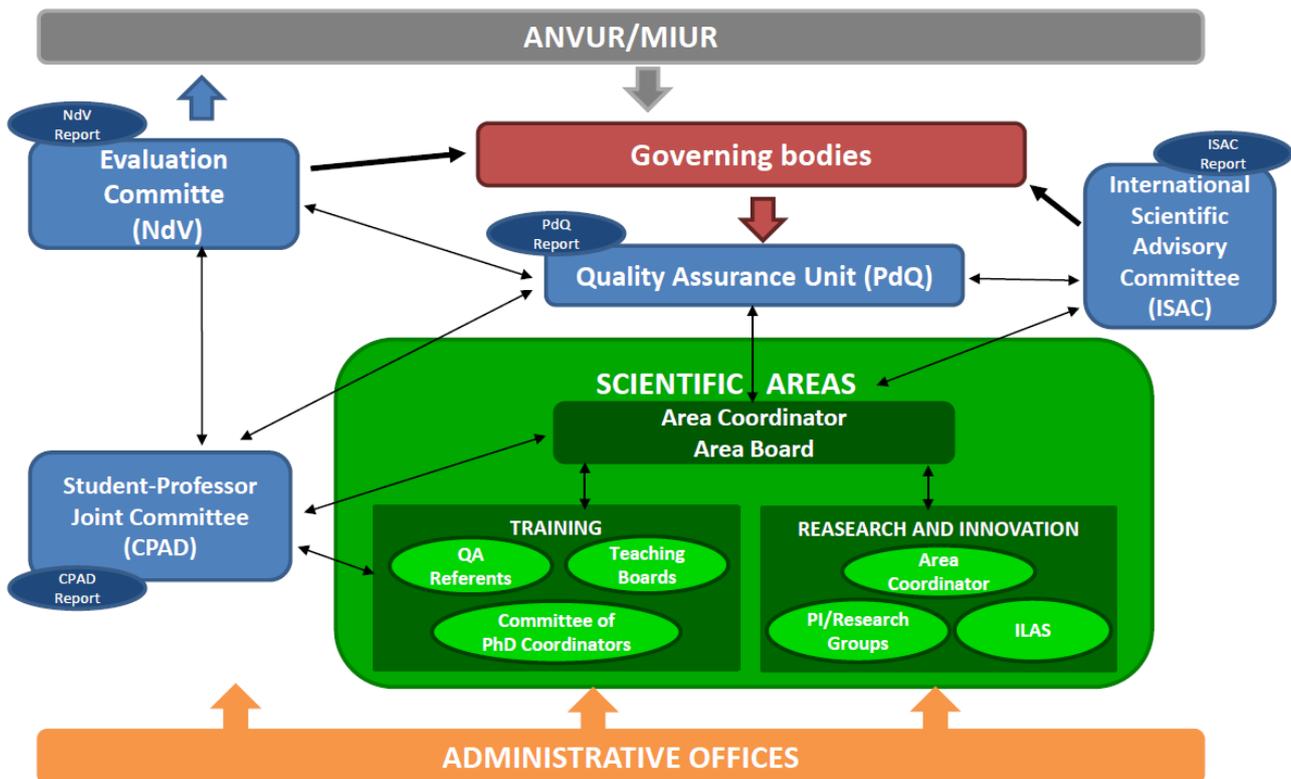
Teaching and research structures

The teaching and research structures supervise the whole processes and ensure the ordinary and effective exercise of teaching, research and innovation activities. They implement actions to improve the quality of the School in line with the strategic objectives and proposals of the PdQ and the NdV.

Administrative offices

These offices provide all the other actors of the Quality Assurance System with the technical-administrative support needed to carry out self-assessment, evaluation and accreditation activities and to pursue quality objectives.

The following schematic representation shows the organisation of the School's Quality Assurance System:



QUALITY POLICY OF TEACHING/TRAINING

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.

Quality actions ⁴

In accordance with the Strategic Plan and the guidelines of the ANVUR system of Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation (AVA), the School guarantees the quality of teaching/training by taking actions in order to:

- Define a balanced relationship between enrolled students and professors and an adequate training activity
- Promote relations with prestigious Italian and foreign universities in order to ensure the School's attractiveness
- Optimize the allocation of resources aimed at student mobility and at attracting Visiting Scientists
- Ensure the availability of adequate educational and scientific facilities
- Ensure an adequate relationship between role professors and research staff and promote excellence in education staff
- Effectively employ the academic staff in the Teaching Boards for each course of study
- Implement transparent selection procedures focused on the skills needed to successfully complete the training courses
- Encourage the creation of international conventions for incoming and outgoing mobility
- Promote services and opportunities for academic and professional placement
- Support the activation of services for the well-being of students
- Ensure adequate financial support for research activities in Italy and abroad
- Regularly monitor the progress and effectiveness of didactic and research training activities, also considering the enhancement of the skills acquired after obtaining the PhD degree.
- Evaluate students' satisfaction during and at the end of the course of study
- Monitor the effectiveness of international mobility experiences and of initiatives in support of academic and professional placement
- Examine the proposals for improvement included in the annual report of the Student-Professor Joint Committee and of the Evaluation Committee.

⁴ The actions of the School's Strategic Plan have been reviewed according to the indications of the AVA system. The actions promoted by the School for quality assurance are implemented in the operational objectives within the appropriate planning tools (e.g. Integrated Plan).

QUALITY POLICY OF RESEARCH

The School promotes the development of post-graduate education in order to provide the necessary skills to carry out highly qualified research activities, contributing to the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

In order to achieve its institutional aims in the field of research, the School operates respecting the freedom of research for professors and researchers, promotes national and international scientific collaboration with prestigious research institutions, and promotes cooperation with the scientific network and the business environment of the territory.

The Quality Policy of Research therefore is geared at creating a stimulating context for increasing competitiveness in research to maintain its excellence.

Quality actions ⁵

In accordance with the Strategic Plan and the guidelines of the ANVUR system of Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation (AVA), the School guarantees the quality of research by taking actions in order to:

- Define targets and allocation of resources in a single planning process to ensure adequate availability of facilities and resources for research
- Define a procedure for the approval of project activities by the scientific Areas
- Establish a system of incentives for attracting Grant winning researchers (e.g. ERC)
- Consolidate and increase the scientific network ensuring the allocation of adequate resources for international mobility
- Ensure the availability of adequate structural and instrumental resources
- Promote the visibility of the School through the organisation/participation in events aimed at developing a constant dialogue with the territory and companies
- Strengthen the collaboration with the scientific and business context both nationally and internationally in order to establish partnerships in the field of institutional research
- Regularly monitor the progress of research, also considering performance at different levels of aggregation
- Carry out internal monitoring (so-called pre-audit) to verify compliance with the provisions of the various Grant Agreements and to prevent the risk of non-recognition of costs incurred
- Use the UNIBAS system for the intermediate monitoring of the performance of the research activity in order to maintain an excellent evaluation in the Research Quality Assessment (VQR)

⁵ The actions of the School's Strategic Plan have been reviewed according to the indications of the AVA system. The actions promoted by the School for quality assurance are implemented in the operational objectives within the appropriate planning tools (e.g. Integrated Plan).

- Promote the analysis and identification of improvement hypotheses to be included in the three-year plans of the scientific Areas
- Examine the proposals for improvement included in the annual report of the Evaluation Committee and of the International Scientific Advisory Committee.

QUALITY POLICY OF INNOVATION

Although the School dedicates its main resources and skills by vocation to research and training, it is active in the field of innovation, where it is necessary to take into account the continuous evolution of the local, national and European context and the new prospects that can create important opportunities for researchers and students. The Quality Policy of Innovation considers as fundamental components the quality of the skills available, the transfer of the research results to favour social and economic progress.

Quality actions⁶

In accordance with the Strategic Plan and the guidelines of the ANVUR system of Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation (AVA), the School guarantees the quality of innovation by taking actions in order to:

- Strengthen the protection of intellectual property through training and financial support activities
- Encourage activities aimed at the promotion and creation of companies from research results
- Supporting commercial research/consultancy activities with external clients
- Support PhD students interested in placement outside academic institutions, in companies, as entrepreneurs and/or professionals
- Developing strategies and services for the transfer of knowledge, also in partnership with local universities and institutions of excellence at national and international level
- Encourage the spread of scientific culture, including primary and secondary schools, and continuous training in the field of HPC, Communication of Science and health care
- Organise and participate in non-profit events with educational, cultural and social development value
- Regularly monitor the progress of innovation activities
- Ensure ex-ante evaluation of outsourcing contracts and other technology transfer initiatives (e.g. patents) through the work of the Commission for the Valorisation of Talent and the Transfer of Knowledge
- Monitor the innovation initiatives developed by affiliated companies through the activity of the Strategic Scientific Committee.
- Promote the analysis and identification of improvement hypotheses to be included in the three-year plans of the scientific Areas
- Examine the policy proposals formulated by the Strategic Scientific Committee (for affiliated companies) and the International Scientific Advisory Committee.

⁶ The actions of the School's Strategic Plan have been reviewed according to the indications of the AVA system. The actions promoted by the School for quality assurance are implemented in the operational objectives within the appropriate planning tools (e.g. Integrated Plan).