



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

# University of Milan

## Quality Assurance System

### **PARTICIPANTS and BODIES**

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## ACRONYMS

ANVUR	Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes	PSA	University Strategic Plan
QA	Quality Assurance	PTD	Departmental Three-Year Plan
AVA	Self-Assessment, Periodic Assessment, Accreditation	RRC	Cyclical Review Report
CdA	Board of Directors	SA	Academic Senate
CdS	Study Programme	SMA	Annual Monitoring Report
CPDS	Joint Teaching Staff-Student Committee	SUA-CdS	Annual Study Programme Datasheet
DG	Office of the Director General	SUA-RD	Annual Datasheet for Department Research
MUR	Ministry of University and Research	SUA-TM	Annual Third Mission Datasheet
NdV	Independent Evaluation Unit	TAB	Technical, Administrative and Library Staff
PhD	PhD programme	UniMi	University of Milan
PQA	Quality Assurance Board		

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this document is to give an overview of the University of Milan's Quality Assurance (QA) System, which has been in place since 2013 and is described on the University [website](#).

### 1.1 Statutory and regulatory framework

- ✓ [Presidential Decree no. 76 of 1 February 2010](#) "Regulation concerning the organisation and functioning of the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes"
- ✓ [Law no. 240 of 30 December 2010](#) "Regulations on the organisation of universities, academic personnel and recruitment, and delegation to the Government to incentivise the quality and efficiency of the university system"
- ✓ [Legislative Decree no. 19 of 27 January 2012](#) "Enhancing the efficiency of universities and introducing performance-based mechanisms to allocate public funding based on a set of criteria, also by means of a periodic accreditation of universities, and by increasing recognition for fixed-term research staff during their first contract year, pursuant to art. 5, paragraph 1, subpart (a) of Law no. 240 of 30 December 2010"
- ✓ [Ministerial Decree no. 289 of 25 March 2021](#) "Strategic guidelines for generating a three-year plan for the university system (2021-2023)"
- ✓ [Ministerial Decree no. 1154 of 14 October 2021](#) "Self-assessment, assessment, initial and periodic accreditation of universities and study programmes"
- ✓ [Ministerial Decree no. 226 of 14 December 2021](#) "Regulations concerning the accreditation methods of PhD locations and programmes and the criteria for the institution of PhD programmes by accredited bodies"
- ✓ [Ministerial Decree no. 301 of 22 March 2022](#) "Guidelines for the accreditation of PhD programmes, in accordance with art. 4, paragraph 3 of Ministerial Decree 226/2021"
- ✓ [ANVUR Guidelines and supporting materials](#) for the periodic accreditation of university campuses and study programmes (AVA3, 2023).



## 1.2 University reference documents

- ✓ [University Statute](#)
- ✓ [General Regulation](#)
- ✓ [Strategic Plan](#)
- ✓ [University Quality Policies](#)

## 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The goal of UniMi's QA system "is to guide and codify the methods through which the University aims to achieve its goals, and to establish a series of necessary actions to implement ongoing improvement." ([University Quality Policies](#) 2022). The purposes and objectives of the QA System are detailed in this document.

The QA System aims to allow students, as well as all stakeholders, to play an active role in the continuous-improvement process at the University.

The System complies with the law and the most recently promulgated AVA Guidelines. The Quality Assurance System is modelled after the "[Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#)" (ESG 2015).

The University of Milan has been actively engaged in quality processes for over thirty years. The University has taken part in the Campus and CampusOne projects (which involved a number of different study programmes in the 1990's), and boasts several degree programmes and administrative offices that have submitted voluntarily to accreditation by external entities.

With the AVA system, UniMi has standardised and expanded the range of best practices already in use by adopting the instruments contemplated under the system itself (cyclical review reports, CdS monitoring, CPDS reports, opinion surveys for undergraduate, graduate and PhD students, monitoring and review of PhD programmes, SUA-CdS and SUA-TM datasheets), and by optimising internal tools such as the University Strategic Plan (PSA) and Departmental Three-Year Plans (PTD). The PQA encourages adherence to established guidelines for the most salient of QA operations, also according to a calendar set by the Ministry. These [guidelines](#) are available on the University website, in the sections on Quality Assurance.

Especially for large universities like UniMi, the management of QA processes requires a concerted organisational effort and the implementation of the proper lines of communication and document flows. These efforts need not only be carefully planned, but also, and most importantly, they have to be shared with the University community. By the same token, the findings of all monitoring and assessments must be duly disseminated in order to keep everyone apprised of what works, and the challenges still to be overcome. It is only by reflecting on the results achieved and by taking on the recommendations made by the QA bodies, that the University can continue to improve its practices.

The Quality Assurance Board (PQA) has generated, and continually maintains and updates, a road-map to the document and information flows critical for QA operations. The document entitled "[Mappatura dei documenti e delle informazioni di rilevanza per AQ e relativi allegati](#)" (Road Map to QA - relevant records and annexes) provides a comprehensive and detailed listing of all document flows generated by the central and departmental bodies of the University, noting the filing location and access authority for each. Through these operations, the PQA both monitors and enforces the completeness of all document and information flows which are significant to the QA process.



### 3. PARTICIPANTS AND BODIES WITHIN THE QA SYSTEM

The key players in the University’s QA system are:

- ✓ Governing bodies
- ✓ Quality Assurance Board
- ✓ Independent Evaluation Unit
- ✓ QA Steering Committee
- ✓ Departments
- ✓ Study programmes
- ✓ Joint Teaching Staff-Student Committees
- ✓ PhD programmes
- ✓ Undergraduate, graduate and PhD students.

Working in support of these entities is the University’s central and departmental administrative staff (TAB), who reports to the Director General.

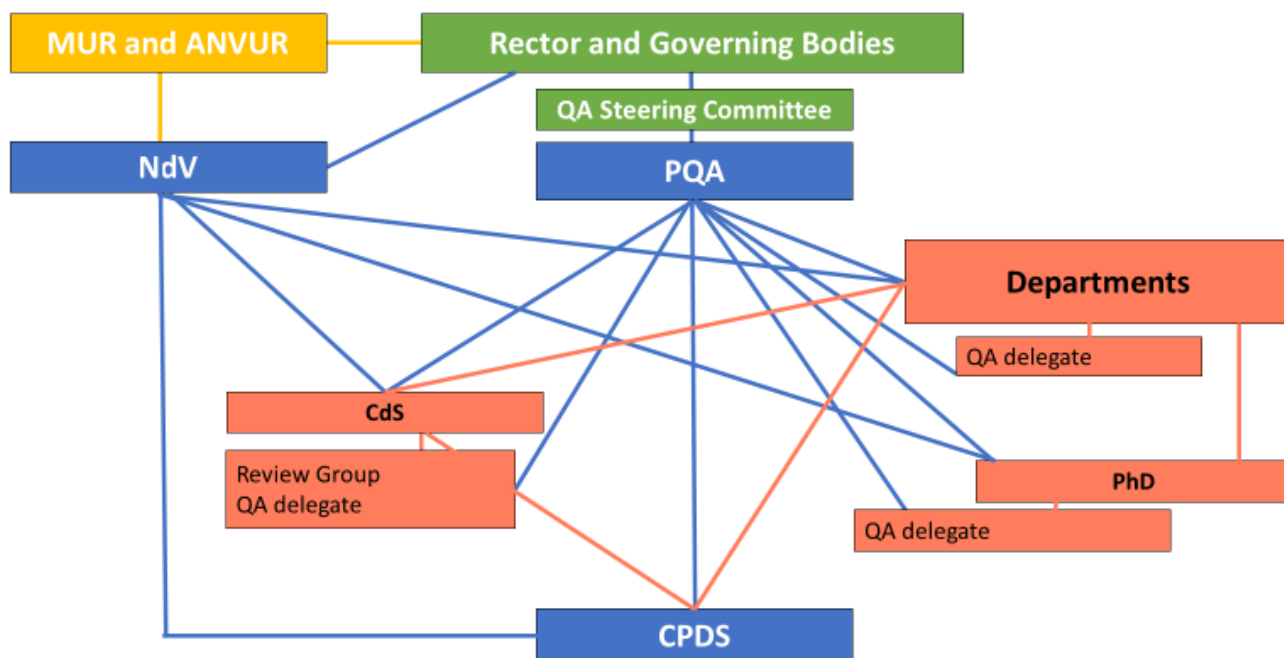


Table 1 – Participants and bodies of the University of Milan’s QA system

#### 3.1 Governing bodies

The University governing bodies are the Rector, the Board of Directors, the Academic Senate<sup>1</sup> and the Director General. The responsibilities of the governing bodies in respect of the QA system include:

- ✓ delineating and updating the [University Quality Policies](#)
- ✓ establishing a network of QA bodies to ensure the implementation of these Policies
- ✓ approving the review of the governance system and the review of the functioning of the University’s QA system, also following the directions of the PQA and the QA Steering Committee

<sup>1</sup> A Teaching Committee has been established within the Academic Senate, tasked with conducting enquiries and studies, and chaired by the Deputy Rector for Education.



- ✓ assuming responsibility, through the designated divisions and bodies, for carrying out those measures necessary to guarantee the ongoing improvement of all study programmes and PhDs, departments, and the University at large.

## 3.2 Quality Assurance Board

The Quality Assurance Board (PQA) was implemented in 2013, and restructured in 2017 and 2022. The following types of members sit on the Board:

- teaching staff, selected to represent a variety of disciplines and subject areas
- technical-administrative staff with assigned responsibilities for QA in teaching, research and the third mission, as well as for strategic and performance planning, data management and customer satisfaction surveys
- one student representative for undergraduate and graduate programmes
- one PhD student representative.

The full list and the Rector's Decree for the appointment of the Board members may be viewed on the [designated page](#) on the UniMi website. As required under ANVUR Guidelines, the PQA's primary responsibility is to implement Quality Policies, cultivate a culture of quality, and monitor QA processes.

Notably, the PQA:

- ✓ cultivates and fosters a culture of quality and continuous improvement by raising awareness among and seeking buy-in from the whole University community, also through training and informational sessions
- ✓ provides support and guidance to the governing bodies on QA matters
- ✓ maintains an open dialogue on QA processes, engaging all stakeholders and the governing bodies to allow them to take a holistic view of QA operations
- ✓ directs all QA processes by establishing [Guidelines and Policies](#), providing QA-related support to all University offices and departments
- ✓ ensures information flows on QA processes, including those relating to internal evaluation bodies (NdV and CPDS) and to ANVUR
- ✓ promotes, develops and monitors QA operations on a department level, and within study programmes (starting from their implementation) and PhDs
- ✓ collaborates with the Research Observatory on research matters, within the limits of each body's own role, and in accordance with the University Quality Policies
- ✓ collaborates with the Doctoral School on QA applied to PhD programmes, within the limits of each body's own role.

The PQA is supported by a network of QA delegates for Departments, study programmes and PhD programmes, who promote QA processes on a local level, monitor process outcomes, and provide support to the PQA in its Quality-Assurance communication and awareness-raising efforts.

The PQA posts summaries on recently completed monitoring efforts, meeting minutes, and an annual report of its operations [on its webpage](#). The PQA maintains an open line of communications with all governing bodies through its chair.

The PQA has an administrative support office. Heads of the organisational units most directly involved in processes relating to assessing and managing teaching, research, and third mission activities sit on the PQA, ensuring a constant link between the PQA and those units.

## 3.3 Independent Evaluation Unit

The Independent Evaluation Unit (NdV) has been a statutorily mandated entity (Law no. 537) since 1993, and operates pursuant to legislative provisions, liaising with the designated national evaluation entities. The Unit



members, who are nominated by the Rector and appointed by the Board of Directors, include a maximum of nine experts with advanced technical and professional expertise, primarily sourced from outside the University; member CVs are posted on the University website. At least two of the members must also have expertise in non-academic assessments. The Unit also includes a student member. The Unit's current membership may be viewed on the [designated webpage](#) on the UniMi website.

The NdV relies on the support of a [designated office](#), as set out in the University Statute. The office is tasked with collecting, coordinating and comparing information (both national and international), as needed for planning and for all decision-making processes that require adequate technical and informational support. The heads of the various academic, scientific, and administrative offices are nonetheless required to supply information to the NdV upon request.

The Unit is tasked with the following:

- ✓ issuing a binding opinion on whether the University meets the ANVUR criteria for initial accreditation, for the purposes of establishing any new study programmes
- ✓ providing support to governing bodies and to ANVUR for monitoring results achieved against periodic assessment indicators, as well as for generating additional performance indicators to monitor the University's strategic objectives
- ✓ auditing (through document review or hearings), and submitting recommendations on the quality of study programmes, taking into account performance indicators, CPDS reports and student feedback
- ✓ auditing (through document review or hearings), and submitting recommendations on the quality of PhD programmes, taking into account performance indicators and PhD student feedback
- ✓ auditing (through document review or hearings) and submitting recommendations regarding research undertaken at the department level
- ✓ reviewing the proper functioning of the University's QA system
- ✓ issuing an opinion on whether the scientific and professional background of contract lecturers is sufficient
- ✓ carrying out annual assessments on the efficiency and economic-financial sustainability of all University operations and achievements, as well as the efficiency and efficacy of administrative services
- ✓ assessing offices and staff, with the goal of championing excellence and improving performance.

The NdV generates an annual report on the findings of its assessments. The report is [posted](#) on the UniMi website along with meeting minutes and promulgated guidelines, and is submitted directly to the governing bodies.

### 3.4 QA Steering Committee

The QA Steering Committee was created in 2019 to coordinate activities in preparation for the periodic accreditation visit by ANVUR expert evaluators. It was then re-established by the Rector in April 2021, after the ANVUR visit, to coordinate QA operations and provide opinions, advice, suggestions and strategic guidelines to the Rector, for the purpose of defining objectives, priorities, plans, programmes and general directives for administrative action in this arena.

Sitting on the Steering Committee are the Rector, the Vice-Rector and Deputy Rector for Research and Innovation, the Deputy Rector for Education, the Director General, the Chair of the PQA, the Managing Director of the Performance, Quality Assurance, Assessment, and Open Science Policy Division and the Managing Director of the Academics and Training Division. The President of the NdV also takes part in the operations of the Steering Committee.

Managing Directors of the different University divisions are invited to participate in the activities of the Steering Committee where necessary, particularly in those activities related to domain B of the AVA system. Close collaboration among all divisions is guaranteed by the presence of the Director General in the Committee.



## 3.5 Departments

The University of Milan is structured into departments, whose functions include carrying out scientific research and third mission activities, as well as providing teaching within study programmes and PhDs. Based on the principle of “restricted” autonomy, as set by the University, departments are periodically called upon to establish their own objectives, consistent with the goals of the PSA, by generating a Departmental Three-Year Plan (PTD). These objectives, which are based on research, teaching, the third mission and QA, are matched with performance indicators subject to periodic monitoring.

In terms of research and the third mission, the PTD is supplemented by annexes that document the monitoring process, and the implementation of improvements. The PTD and its annexes provide a complete overview of the department, and are strictly related to its strategies. In terms of teaching, the QA system is enacted primarily through the study programmes (CdS) and PhDs, as contemplated by the AVA system.

### Head of Department and QA delegate

The Head of Department appoints a QA delegate; together, they are responsible for QA processes at a department level. Each department organises its internal QA system as they see fit. The organisation of the QA system is described within the designated section of the PTD, and made available on the designated page on the department’s website.

The Department **QA delegate** is tasked with:

- ✓ fostering a culture of quality within the department
- ✓ coordinating review and monitoring operations
- ✓ providing support to the Head of Department and other designated parties in conducting QA operations
- ✓ acting as a department liaison to the PQA, encouraging the proper flows of information.

## 3.6 Study programmes

Study programmes include Bachelor’s, Master’s and single-cycle Master’s degree programmes. A programme offered by a single department is managed by a departmental academic board, whereas a programme offered jointly by two or more departments is managed by an interdepartmental academic board.

### Head of the study programme, Academic Board, Review Group and QA delegate

Those responsible for QA processes of study programmes are the Head of the study programme, the Academic Board, the Review Group and the QA delegate. These processes include tasks required for the initial and periodic accreditation of study programmes, monitoring and review operations, and discussion of the findings of all monitoring operations, as well as of CPDS and NdV reports.

For each study programme, the following is required:

- ✓ Quality Policies for teaching activities must be implemented, and the PQA must be supported in its efforts to cultivate a culture of quality, especially among students
- ✓ continuous improvement must be fostered and the efficacy of all measures implemented must be audited
- ✓ a SUA-CdS and SMA must be drafted each year, pursuant to PQA guidelines
- ✓ the overall performance of the CdS must be periodically monitored and assessed, highlighting any critical areas, proposing solutions, and identifying the administrative domains where these solutions should be implemented
- ✓ an RRC must be produced, if so required by the designated entities.

The **Head of the study programme**, who chairs the Academic Board, is tasked with managing and improving the QA system within the study programme. He or she oversees review operations, opens a dialogue on the analysis and





suggestions provided by the CPDS, and ensures that all instructions by the PQA and University bodies are carried out.

The **Review Group**, which includes a student contingent and the QA delegate, is chaired by the Head of the study programme, and must implement all monitoring and review processes. The members of the Review Group are listed in the Annual Study Programme Datasheet (SUA-CdS) under the heading “QA Management Team”.

The **QA delegate** for the study programme:

- ✓ fosters a culture of quality within the study programme
- ✓ participates in the operations of the Review Group
- ✓ provides support to the Head of the study programme in conducting QA operations
- ✓ acts as a study-programme liaison to the PQA, facilitating the proper flow of information.

### 3.7 Joint Teaching Staff-Student Committees

The **Joint Teaching Staff-Student Committees (CPDS)** are made up of an equal number of instructors and students. For any programme lacking a student representative, a procedure is launched to engage the students through a call for applications, for those spots needed to ensure that all study programmes are equally represented.

The CPDS has the following functions:

- ✓ monitoring educational offerings and the quality of teaching, as well as the quality of service offered to students by professors and researchers
- ✓ identifying performance indicators for assessing the findings of the above activities
- ✓ issuing opinions on which programmes should be closed, and which new programmes should be instituted
- ✓ generating an annual report based on the template provided by the AVA system, and on the PQA guidelines.

Furthermore, the CPDS is responsible for the following:

- ✓ issuing opinions on whether the credits awarded for educational activities are truly commensurate with their learning objectives
- ✓ assessing learning outcomes in accordance with the applicable law
- ✓ measuring student satisfaction with each course, other training activities and the study programme overall, in tandem with other efforts implemented by the University, and in coordination with the NdV
- ✓ raising awareness within the student body regarding University quality policies.

### 3.8 PhD Programmes

PhD programmes provide “the skills needed to perform — in universities, public bodies or private entities — highly qualified research activities, also for the purpose of gaining access to a career in the civil service and combining highly innovative professional pathways.”<sup>2</sup> PhD programmes of the University of Milan may be offered by one department, or more departments jointly.

PhD coordinator, Faculty and QA delegate

Those responsible for QA processes of PhD programmes are the PhD coordinator, the PhD Faculty of Instructors and the QA delegate. These processes include tasks required for the initial and periodic accreditation of PhDs, monitoring and review operations, and discussion of the findings of all monitoring operations, as well as of NdV reports.

For each PhD programme, the following is required:

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<sup>2</sup> Art. 1, paragraph 1 of Ministerial Decree 226/221



- ✓ Quality Policies for teaching activities must be implemented, and the PQA must be supported in its efforts to cultivate a culture of quality, especially among PhD students
- ✓ continuous improvement must be fostered and the efficacy of all measures implemented must be audited
- ✓ a Programme Specification and Monitoring and Review Form must be drafted each year, pursuant to PQA guidelines
- ✓ the overall performance of the PhD programme must be periodically monitored and assessed, highlighting any critical areas, proposing solutions, and identifying the administrative domains where these solutions should be implemented.

The **PhD coordinator** is tasked with managing and improving the QA system within the PhD programme. The coordinator oversees review operations and ensures that all instructions by the PQA and University bodies are carried out.

The **QA delegate** for the PhD programme:

- ✓ fosters a culture of quality within the PhD
- ✓ provides support to the PhD coordinator in QA processes
- ✓ acts as a PhD-programme liaison to the PQA, facilitating the proper flow of information.

The **PhD Faculty** is tasked with discussing and approving monitoring and review processes. Faculty meetings that address Quality Assurance issues, such as survey findings, stakeholder consultations and monitoring and review processes, should always have PhD student representatives in attendance<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.9 Undergraduate, graduate and PhD students

In establishing its Quality Policies, UniMi has positioned its students front and centre. This is one of the basic principles of the policies. Undergraduate, graduate and PhD students are encouraged to play an active role in the process to develop and enhance quality levels within the University, by serving as [student representatives](#) on University bodies, by completing evaluation surveys on courses attended, and by filing complaints.

These [evaluation surveys](#) allow students to express their satisfaction with the quality of teaching, the organisation of courses and facilities, and to report any issues they come across. Ensuring that this feedback is acted upon is a fundamental QA process for the University.

The process of [collecting and reviewing complaints](#) includes submitting reports periodically to the study programmes, as well as to all implicated administrative services, and to the governing bodies.

Establishing an open line of communication with students is crucial both to safeguard student rights and to monitor all processes, with a view to ensuring continuous improvement of teaching and student services. Amongst the tools available to students are:

- the [Student Council](#)
- the [Doctoral Students' Council](#)
- the [Observatory on University Education Incentive Programmes](#): established in 2019, the Observatory facilitates an ongoing and direct line of communication on the proper functioning of the main services offered to students
- the [Undergraduate and Postgraduate Student Ombudsman](#), an institutional figure vested with impartiality and independence of judgement, who facilitates direct dialogue between students and instructors, monitors compliance with University regulations, receives complaints and reports, and suggests improvements and interventions.

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<sup>3</sup>Art. 16, paragraph 9 of the University Regulation for PhD Programmes and Students