

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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1 Premise

The present document describes the quality assurance system adopted by the IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca. This system aims to guarantee and promote the effectiveness, the efficiency and the excellence of the School's activities in all of the relevant areas, particularly the education, research and Third Mission sectors.

Interpreting the guidelines for the initial and periodic accreditation of Special Ordinance Schools, published by ANVUR in 2018, as an opportunity, the IMT School has summarized its quality assurance objectives in the "Quality Policies" document. At the same time, the School has introduced a system that puts these general indications into effect and guarantees the control and constant improvement of all the services offered.

The Quality Assurance System (hereinafter QA) includes all of the activities and procedures foreseen by the IMT School in order to guarantee:

- the quality of all services provided;
- the pursuit of all of the objectives that the School sets;
- the self-evaluation and the evaluation of the objectives achieved;
- the continuous improvement of the School's activities, procedures and of the QA system itself as the result of the self-evaluation and evaluation processes;
- the involvement of all of the final beneficiaries (internal and external stakeholders) in the School's processes.

2 The Methodology of the Quality Assurance System

The IMT School has adopted a method based on two fundamental principles in planning its QA system:

- PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act): defines the "cyclical" nature of the QA process, that aims at a continuous quality improvement over time thanks to a constant control of the procedures used, guaranteed by a cyclical revision of the processes.
- Lean Thinking: a state-of-the-art method that many firms and some innovative institutions use that is based on a lean administrative operation (the so-called "Lean Office") to monitor and plan the QA process.

3 Organization of the Quality Assurance System

The QA processes starts from the development of a plan that consists in the formulation of the strategic lines of development, to be contained within the Three Year Plan, in which the general goals of the education, research and Third Mission sectors are described.

The QA process continues with an implementation phase of the actions required to meet said goals, and a control phase meant for verifying the effective concretization of the objectives, concluding with a self-evaluation and evaluation period that represents the first step in a new improvement cycle.

Figure 1 represents the phases in the PDCA cycle applied to the QA system of the IMT School, a system in which the phases of strategic planning, monitoring of the application of the QA system to the objectives, of self-evaluation and analysis and later evaluation, and of the definition of improvement actions, are put into perspective.

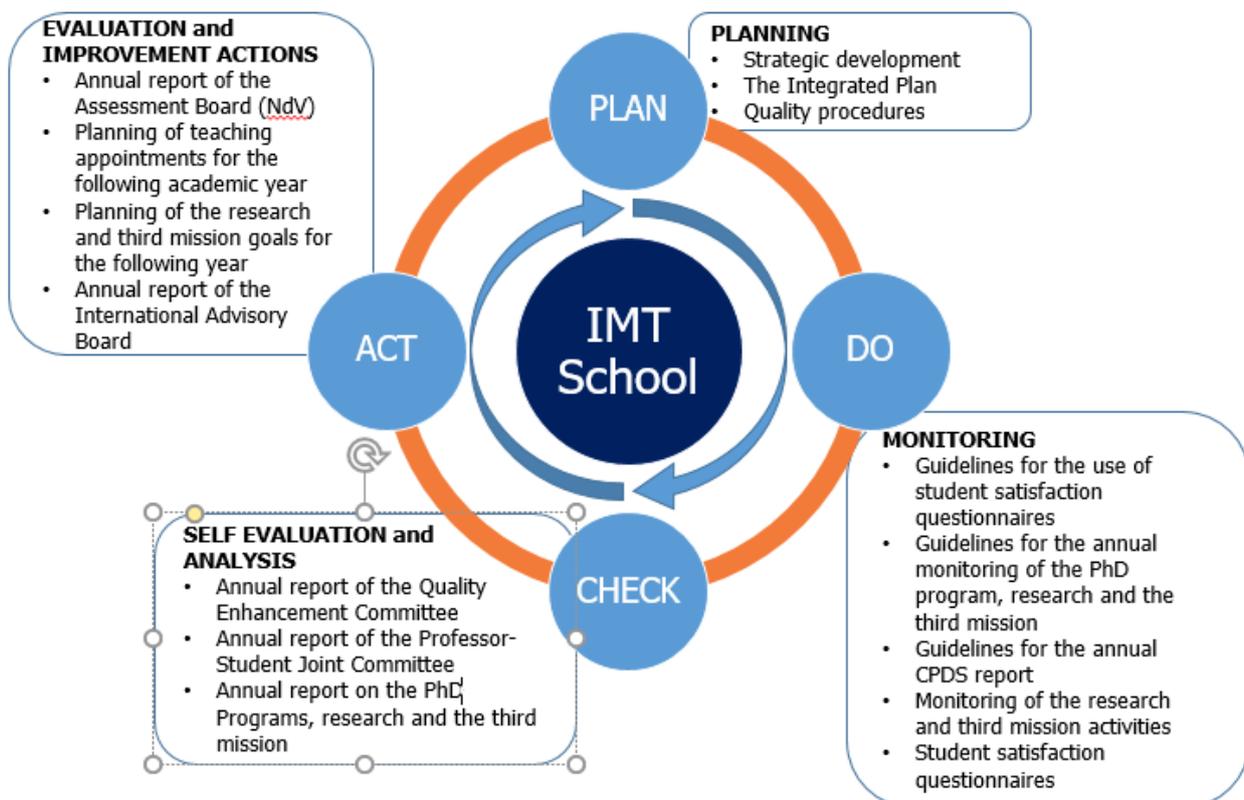


Figure 1: The PDCA cycle applied to the internal processes of the IMT School

CPDS: Professor-Student Joint Committee (*Commissione Paritetica Docenti-Studenti*)

PQ: Quality Enhancement Committee (*Presidio della Qualità*)

The structures and the organization of the School’s QA system are represented visually in figure 2, with particular emphasis on the principal information flows that guarantee the correct functioning of the system itself and dictate the relationships between the School’s governing bodies and the various actors within the QA system.

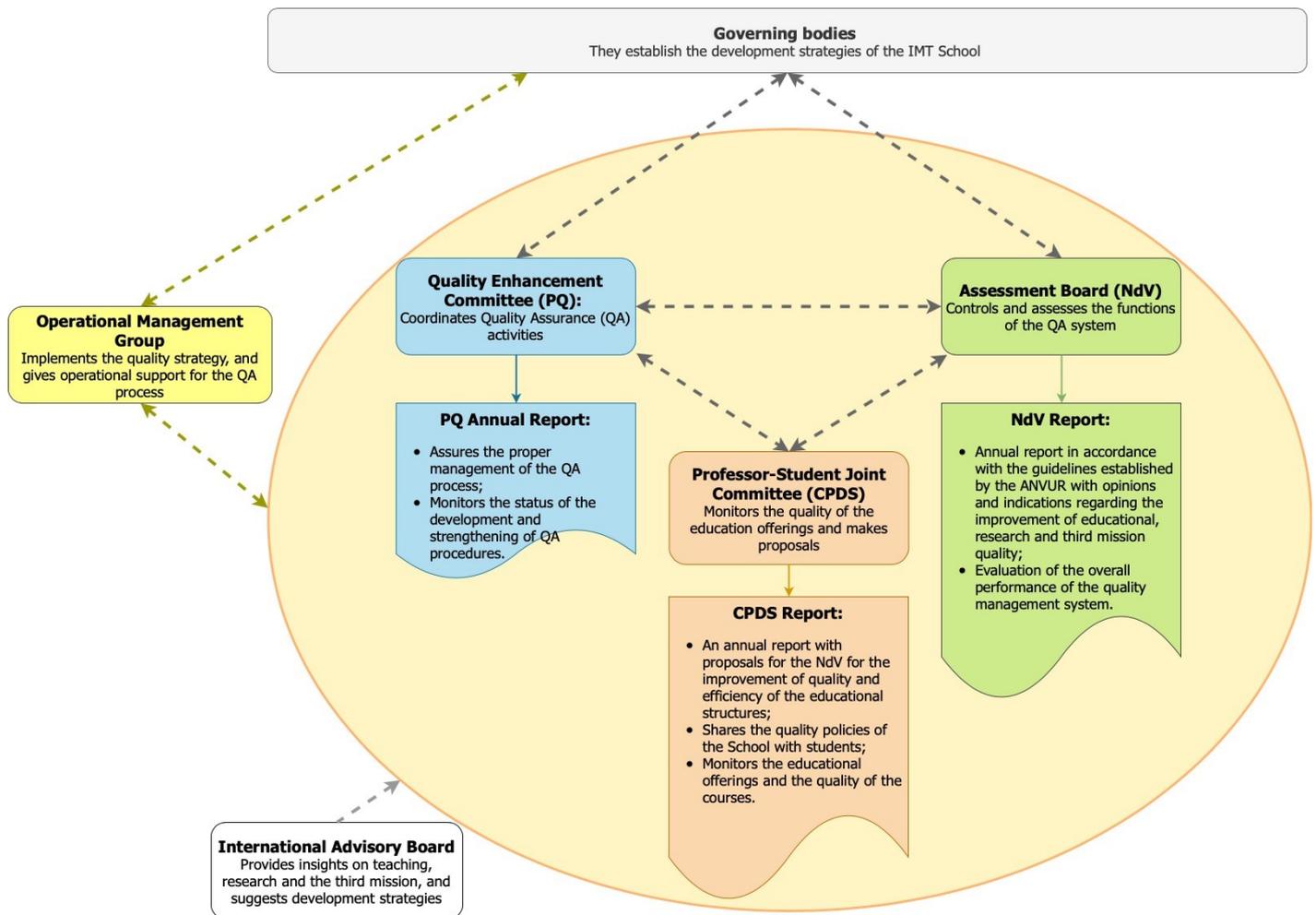


Figure 2: Organization of the quality assurance system of the IMT School

4 Assurance of Educational Quality

The IMT School implements a specific QA process to guarantee the quality of the educational offerings. This process is guided by a set of strategic objectives that are executed by means of specific actions, through which the School implements its own quality policy and improves its educational offerings, responding to the expectations of all internal and external stakeholders.

Against this backdrop, the School adopts essential principles to ensure the quality of the educational program that are consistent with the European standards and guidelines the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and with the principle of cyclical process review (PDCA).

In particular, the IMT School:

- monitors and evaluates student opinions with respect to single courses and to the Programs on a whole and the services that were offered therein, as the basis for the identification of potential critical issues and for the planning of corrective measures;
- encourages a constant and open dialogue with students through periodic meetings on specific arguments relative to the education offering and its integration with research;
- recognizes merit, identifying and valorizing the abilities of students and faculty, through selection and recruitment procedures that are transparent and in line with the highest international standards;
- respects and valorizes the heterogeneity of the students' backgrounds, allowing for flexibility within the course planning when needed;
- annually monitors the data regarding the educational offerings and students' research for planning (plan) and verification of expected results (check).

5 Assurance of Research Quality

The IMT School implements a QA process to guarantee the quality of research that is based on the collection and analysis of data and indicators with a double aim: first of all, to establish the groundwork for a strategic plan and the subsequent attribution of resources, and second to identify potential critical issues and therefore to plan improvement actions.

In particular, the School:

- analyzes research activities and systematically monitors the scientific production of professors, researchers and doctoral students, for the purpose of internationalization as well;
- promotes, supports and verifies the ability to attract research funding;
- activates recruitment planning procedures, which also has the goal of facilitating the entry of brilliant young minds into the world of research;
- allocates resources, which may also be through competitive calls aimed at achieving strategic research objectives;

- recognizes research and Third Mission merits through a reward system.

6 Assurance of Third Mission Quality

The IMT School implements a QA process to guarantee the quality of the Third Mission that is based on the collection and analysis of data and indicators in order to identify possible critical issues and therefore to plan improvement actions.

In particular, the IMT School:

- evaluates the employment performance of its accredited spin-off companies;
- evaluates the performance of the impact of the School on technology transfer;
- evaluates the performance of the transfer of knowledge in terms of cooperation agreements activated with local institutions and the impact of dissemination events.

7 Assurance of Quality through the involved actors

The principle actors of the QA system guarantee the involvement of internal and external stakeholders and the dissemination of the quality culture throughout the entire IMT School community.

The central role is carried out by the Quality Enhancement Committee (PQ), which has the task of designing the QA system and of guaranteeing its correct functioning. The Governing Bodies (Director, Academic Senate, Board of Governors), the Assessment Board (NdV), the Professor-Student Joint Committee (CPDS) all play a fundamental role in guiding, supporting and evaluating the PQ and the QA processes.

Further support to the PQ, in the definition and application of organizational learning processes in the field of operational management and the School's QA, is provided by the Operational Management Group.

The Operational Management Group, a staff unit in the Administrative Direction, is composed of personnel from different offices and promotes the pursuit of organizational effectiveness and efficiency through the application of operational management principles. In particular, the Group implements an organization structured in processes aimed at continuous improvement and periodic review of the processes within the School through Lean principles.

Finally, the International Advisory Board, a primarily consultative body, provides insights and suggestions on education, research and the Third Mission.

ACTOR	FUNCTIONS (linked to QA)	DOCUMENTS PRODUCED
Quality Enhancement Committee (in charge of QA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes the quality culture Monitors the QA process Promotes information/training initiatives for the subjects involved in the QA process Provides consultation and support to the Governing Bodies with respect to QA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality policies Annual PQ report Minutes from PQ meetings Guidelines
Governing bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and deliberate on the strategic development of the IMT School Evaluate the effective implementation of the strategic development lines, foreseeing possible corrective actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Plan Integrated Plan Meeting minutes Deliberations
Assessment Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulates opinions and recommendations regarding QA Expresses a binding opinion regarding the possession of the requirements for the initial accreditation Provides support to the ANVUR and the MIUR in monitoring and compliance with the requirements for periodic accreditation Expresses opinions and direct indications to the PQ and to the Governing Bodies aimed at improving the quality of teaching and research activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual NdV report Minutes from the NdV meetings
Professor-student Joint Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors, evaluates and formulates opinions on the educational offering, the quality of teaching and the services offered to students Formulates improvement proposals related to the education sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual CPDS report Minutes from the CPDS meetings
Operational Management Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides operational support for the QA process Maps and monitors IMT School processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value Stream Maps (VSM) Flow-Charts Procedures
International Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a third opinion on the education, research and Third Mission sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Report

Table 1: Actors involved in the QA process