



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

UNIVERSITY OF MILAN

# University Quality Policies

*December 2019*

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## RECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

The issue of quality is by no means an abstract one, but it is difficult to pin down because interpretations vary depending on the decisions, strengths, and weaknesses that arise around such processes. The idea of “measuring” quality would have been considered a contradiction in terms by most modern philosophers. Impermanence, mutability – these are, in fact, the ideas connected to quality, ones that defy objective measure. On the other hand, over its history, quality has also been what differentiates things from a certain point of view. It designates them, giving them stability, recognition, and a specific “determination”.

In today's environment, all public institutions are called upon to implement a Quality Assurance policy as an essential part of their overall management strategy. Internal stakeholders must develop and implement that policy through appropriate structures and processes that align with the objectives they have set, and must engage external stakeholders as well.

To introduce the idea of quality and how to measure it, one must keep in mind that quality (and the system that might be built up around it) cannot be blind to the circumstances, that is the overall environment, in which the University operates, within a specific national and international context. So, for example, if the public expenditure on students in Germany is approximately Euro 15,000 per capita per year, whilst Italy spends only Euro 5,000, there is no denying that on a “service” level, the playing field is anything but level. This holds true even within advanced university systems, connected to countries that are economic powerhouses. If our brand of “Quality” cannot hold its own against the version seen in analogous environments, then context matters. After all, the economic factor remains a necessary, albeit not sufficient, element in the implementation of a quality-management system.

We should not forget that the Italian university system lives within a framework where the rules – from recruitment to structuring the third cycle, from assessment to research strategies, from instructor training to programme-enrolment caps – have lots of grey areas, casting a pall over any attempts at lasting strategic impact. Take, for example, University construction (an essential element to ensure the efficiency of a number of services). How can we fail to mention that funding dried up in 2008? Universities are the only “scholastic” arena where the public sector no longer handles facility maintenance, leaving all repairs to be paid for out of University funds, which then must be diverted from teaching and research.

To cite another obstacle in generating a quality policy, how can we fail to mention that the “right to an education” programme is no longer sufficiently funded? At university campuses across Milan, where by now over 40% of all students come from outside the region, situations pop up and can easily become “emergencies”. Indeed, some local areas are diverging more and more from the overall Italian university system which, as structural and organisational differences amongst campuses grow, has had a hard time setting a cohesive tone in general, and much more so with respect to “policy”.

The quality issue can therefore be called “strategic” first and foremost because it begs a question which is neither simple nor easily answered: how do we manage widespread emergencies, and where / how do we allocate resources, given this unstable, fragmented environment in which ambiguous rules abound?

Law 240 (which required, for some institutions like the University of Milan, a shift from a model based on nine Faculties to a fragmented one based on 33 departments) certainly did not help matters much in terms of developing a Quality System. One of the current emergencies is therefore represented by the need to provide central services in an efficient manner, so that the Departments and the Study Programmes might easily access them. This is especially important because they are not able to provide these services themselves. Harmonising bureaucracy and efficiency is no small feat when one is attempting to build a Quality System.

That said, the true challenge for quality management will be to tackle not only internal problems, but ones we might label “external” as well. It is difficult to grasp one’s own mission without considering one’s relationship with the region (and the relationship between the University and the workplace). We must also take into account the role played by other universities, even though it is not always feasible to partner with them to forge a system. And yet how crucial would that be right now, especially in terms of those on a post-graduate track, or in terms of our interactions with the region? We must recognise our own areas of excellence whilst acknowledging specific areas of improvement. A multi-disciplinary university’s path towards excellence is paved with challenges. All of this must include sufficient analysis. We must take a systematic approach to problems rather than (as is so often the case in Italy) a sporadic one.

Setting these premises aside for the moment, although not permanently (we are talking about iron-clad restrictions placed upstream of our operations), our University cannot fail to place the issue of quality front and centre in its development. After all, quality touches all dimensions of the university (teaching, research, the Third Mission, i.e. University Innovation and Community Leadership, to be sure, but also planning and recruitment, reorganisation of administrative services and projects for managing and reclaiming spaces), an issue which the “University system” overall is increasingly called upon to address, both nationally and internationally. Although resources must in large part be set aside for maintaining existing infrastructure (both with respect to personnel costs, as well as for services, and to keep facilities maintained), this does not mean that innovative positions, or fine-tuning the quality of programmes which are already under way, cannot happen.

Working in Quality, setting a shared path for pursuing objectives, the tactics to achieve them, and the ways to monitor them and assess the results achieved, will allow the Departments and the University to grow, with a view toward ongoing improvement. That kind of growth (by way of, and toward, quality) must arise from within a Strategic Plan, which provides guidance on where to invest, and with what expectations. Our University’s Strategic Plan therefore intends to develop a global project, based on a person- (student and staff) centred approach, to build a culture of quality across the University, implementing a cycle of continual improvement that would encompass all University missions. To that end, we should note that, based on the new realities of the AVA 2.0 system and ANVUR guidelines, over the course of 2017, the University of Milan redesigned the internal Quality Assurance (QA) system, and restructured roles and competencies to direct and coordinate a set of QA processes in an organic manner, using standardised logic, thereby building a network of point persons on a central and local level.

It is essential that this takes place with a high degree of synergy. A large university is a complex structure. The first task for those who develop quality systems is to align the dimensions, structures, and initiatives which are predicated on various scientific and instructional needs. This alignment must be able to tackle objectives, and to clarify how the Strategic Plan, the Integrated Performance Plan, the Three-Year Construction Plan, the reports and recommendations supplied by the Independent Evaluation Unit, the Departmental Three-Year Plans and, last but not least, the financial statements, work in harmony together. To that end, the budget is not just an economic or financial instrument, but a tool used to strike a balance amongst various needs. In this context, “balance” is not just an accounting term, it is truly a roadmap for a process wherein the budget is generated based on the most material data from the approved financial statements. This way, they take into account the dynamics of actual expenditures and the trends in the underlying economic substance.

Quality, to conclude, is not an abstract concept, but a process which must unfold as an intricate project. Models must be continually sought out from similar situations in Italy and internationally. We should not forget that in its most basic and truest form, a quality policy hopes to render the University fully “inclusive”. After all, the ultimate goal for the quality of its training and scientific programmes ultimately is to improve culture, and society as a whole.

Elio Franzini

## QUALITY POLICIES

### PURPOSE

The goal of the Quality Policies 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.

The theme of quality is at the forefront of the Rector's Planning Document<sup>1</sup> which is an integral part of the University's management strategy, as a public institution. This is based on general, across-the-board standards, which are then applied specifically to University missions, management, and organisation.

The criteria to which the University refers are the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>2</sup> and the AVA System accreditation requirements contemplated by applicable regulations<sup>3</sup>.

All processes implemented to reach the objectives set forth in the University's Strategic Plan (and, consequently, the Departmental Three-Year Plans) must align with these standards and criteria.

### RECIPIENTS

Quality Policies set forth in the instant document represent the University's undertaking toward:

- students and their families;
- University personnel (instructors and technical, administrative, and library personnel);
- stakeholders within and outside the University;
- Italian and European institutions;
- professional boards, businesses, and associations;
- the national and international scientific community;
- any entities, institutions, universities involved in Research and Higher Education.

### SCOPE

Quality Policies, approved by the governing bodies and shared across all academic communities, may be implemented through the organisational structure and the strategic plan for the University. These are generated by internal players and by the impacted organisational units. They are monitored and advocated for by the Quality Assurance Board. They are subject to review by the Independent Evaluation Unit. The application of these standards, in accordance with established criteria, must be made manifest through tangible, measurable improvements in teaching, research, and the Third Mission, as well as administrative and management activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Passed at the Management Board meeting of 26 February 2019

<sup>2</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.anvur.it/attivita/ava/accreditamento-periodico>

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The University of Milan defines quality as the only channel through which to achieve its mission and objectives.

To that end, the University has equipped itself with a quality-assurance system inspired by the “AVA” System (Self-Assessment, Periodic Evaluation, and Accreditation for the University System). The system is predicated on internal procedures for design, management, self-assessment, and ongoing improvement in the areas of teaching quality, research, the Third Mission, as well as in all organisational, administrative, and management operations. The University of Milan's Quality-Assurance policy's main objective is responsible independence in the use of public resources, and in collective and individual behaviour relating to its operations.

The University of Milan promotes a quality culture and raises awareness of the same at all levels, through continuous improvement of its own Quality-Assurance system, taking steps to ensure that organisational units and individuals are assuming responsibility for its implementation. Specifically, the University intends to promote a streamlining process, to increase greater synergy between downtown and the surrounding communities, fully deploying the talents of all personnel, in order to reach the strategic objectives we have undertaken, and to steer the efforts of the academic community toward creating value for the public.

The University of Milan, across its many operations, and more specifically to implement those processes aimed at reaching the objectives set in the Strategic Plan, pursues these fundamental quality principles, listed below in no particular order:

- Student-centred approach
- Transparency, lawfulness, integrity
- Inclusion, gender equality, and a focus on personal wellbeing
- Internationalisation, and promoting exchanges and mobility
- Listening and engaging stakeholders inside and outside the University
- Sustainability and environmental protection

These fundamental principles, in addition to guiding the University towards continuous improvement, represent a kind of pact with civil society regarding the quality of our teaching programmes, research, and the Third Mission.

These are made manifest through the different activities carried out by the University, keeping their key recipients' interest in mind, and through an alignment with a series of Quality Assurance objectives stated in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan.

## DELINEATION OF PRINCIPLES

### Student-centred approach

The University of Milan abides by the standards promulgated in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) promoting the centrality of the student during his or her academic journey. The idea is to spark their engagement, participation, and motivation in order to amplify learning outcomes.

The University will take steps to ensure all its missions (teaching, research, and the Third Mission) converge and coalesce for the benefit of the student and his/her educational journey. The University undertakes to ensure an academic experience which is constantly improving, and which stays strongly rooted to the outside world. It ensures training that meets European standards, is accessible to all students, respectful and attentive to the individual needs of each person, whether in terms of their advantages or vulnerabilities, not only within the context of applicable regulatory provisions, but by constantly increasing, using all available methods, the right to an education.

The University encourages listening to students, soliciting their feedback and buy-in for all decision-making processes, and encouraging them to take an active part in the University bodies.

### Transparency, lawfulness, integrity

The University of Milan is actively committed to promoting transparency, lawfulness, and integrity in teaching, research, the Third Mission, and all management and administrative operations, cognizant of the central role they play in Quality Assurance. The University clearly delineates internal roles and responsibilities in order to render all decision-making processes transparent, and all objectives clear, along with the strategies enacted to reach them, and their expected outcomes. Moreover, the University intends to adopt a management system for all across-the-board, integrated processes in terms of functional responsibilities, with a view toward ensuring high standards of service for all users inside and outside the University, and to achieve ongoing improvement.

In that respect, the University has taken a proactive stance on implementing guidance from Italy's Anti-Corruption Authority, tailoring the recommendations to the realities of university operations, making it an institutional priority. That said, any attempt to implement a rule would be hampered unless supported by sufficient efforts to raise awareness and educate the community. Therefore, the University is producing a series of educational and informational opportunities to develop a culture of lawfulness.

In order to introduce such principles as a means of supporting the institutional architecture, a Pro-Rectorate for Lawfulness, transparency, and equal rights has been established. On impetus of the former, a Working Group which utilises a networking system based on a series of contacts stretching across academia has likewise been instituted. The University further passed a Code of Ethics which includes, *inter alia*, fundamental values, and sets rules of conduct for the academic community. By optimising these tools, and along with an activation of new modalities of safeguards and controls (for example, the Student's Ombudsman, Transparent Administration, Civic Access, Whistleblowing, of recent implementation), the University of Milan intends to be fully accountable both inside its walls, and in the community at large.

On the topic of accountability with respect to the products of our Research, the University pursues principles of Open Science aimed at ensuring open access to the results of scientific production obtained through public funding. The University of Milan is fully committed to applying international standards for open access to scientific research

findings and data, pursuant to the Declaration of Messina<sup>4</sup>, signed by our University (in 2005, no less) in support of the Declaration of Berlin<sup>5</sup> and through the document produced by the LERU, *Open science and its role in Universities*<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, within the University an Open Science Commission has been established. Delegates from each department sit on this Commission, and set guidelines and tools to support and to implement open-science policies on an ongoing basis.

Finally, the University Ethics Committee promotes and guarantees compliance with Research Integrity, organising *inter alia*, training opportunities which are mandatory for doctoral students.

### Inclusion, gender equality, and a focus on personal wellbeing

The University of Milan considers the wellbeing of the academic community to be a central objective, one that must always guide its actions, as reflected by the decision to establish a Pro-Rectorate for Lawfulness, transparency, and equal rights. Equality, a focus on diversity and inclusion: these are indispensable elements in the pursuit of that objective. These principles take shape in the following ways: by removing all gender-based discrimination, by establishing a number of safeguards to create an environment that focuses on equality between the sexes, and to raise awareness within academia regarding gender violence. Also critical is a series of concrete actions to overcome discrimination based on culture, race, religion, sexual orientation, and disability.

Indeed, the University of Milan considers disabilities an enrichment and expansion of the University community. Within this arena, once again, the University relies on dedicated services, and the actions of a deputy of the Rector tasked with coordinating and supporting initiatives to ensure and improve inclusion. Students with specific learning disabilities will benefit from accommodations and inclusion efforts which are constantly being improved.

The University of Milan works to ensure protection of refugee rights, and to welcome them onto campus. In order to create an environment that lends itself to personal wellbeing, the University ensures psychological counselling for students, and protections for all staff (Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Committee and Discrimination Ombudsman).

### Internationalisation, and promoting exchanges and mobility

Creating a true melting pot – multicultural, multilingual, and transnational – for the University of Milan at a central and campus level: this pledge must inform all our operations.

The University of Milan considers this principle to be a priority strategic objective, and undertakes to promote internationalisation of the students' experience in the classroom and in a practical setting. We encourage student mobility through study abroad programmes, international post-graduate programmes, alternative international experiences. We also facilitate interactive learning sessions, and provide support for types of collaboration and joint projects amongst Universities. Taken as a whole, these actions will be developed as part of a network of Universities with common educational and research goals. The University of Milan has joined the 4 EU+ European University Alliance to design and test a new development model for the European educational system which contemplates, amongst other efforts, new types of mobility for students, instructors, and staff.

As a research-intensive institution, the University of Milan promotes the international side of Research. Pursuant to the European Charter for Researchers, it encourages all manners of mobility within a global human-resource policy. It takes into account (within its performance-review and professional advancement system for researchers) the value of mobility itself.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://cab.unime.it/decennale/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Dich\\_MessinaITA.pdf](http://cab.unime.it/decennale/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Dich_MessinaITA.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://openaccess.mpg.de/67682/BerlinDeclaration\\_it.pdf](https://openaccess.mpg.de/67682/BerlinDeclaration_it.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.leru.org/publications/open-science-and-its-role-in-universities-a-roadmap-for-cultural-change>

The University of Milan, whether independently or as a member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), promotes the sharing of best practices on an international level, and undertakes to adopt standards and guidelines that promote the University's international outlook.

### Listening and engaging stakeholders inside and outside the University

The University of Milan solicits feedback and encourages engagement from all members of the academic community, and from all stakeholders both inside and outside the University.

In terms of setting its development goals, the University believes it essential to seek input, prior to taking action, from all internal stakeholders, and to share the objectives and methods to reach them.

In terms of educational offerings, the University promotes a periodic review which takes into account the findings of study programme monitoring in terms of enrolment, supporting students to stay on track in their studies, and helping to provide them with professional opportunities after graduation, whilst also listening to student feedback. The University of Milan gives ample strategic weight to designing educational offerings with input from the business world and from the job market. It therefore promotes ethical, ongoing, and fruitful discussions with external stakeholders to ensure its educational offerings align with a swiftly changing professional job market and socio-economic climate. This is done with a view towards increasing the employment options for graduates of the various study programmes.

In terms of research and the Third Mission, the University of Milan solicits feedback and buy-in from its own scientific, political, and social stakeholders. The goal is to work towards a consensus, and thus public and private investments and funds, with all external stakeholders. The University of Milan has set an objective to increase the impact of its own scientific and intellectual production, understood as research's influence on society, as a beneficial transfer of experience, knowledge, discoveries, and lines of thought through baseline, applied, and translational research, as well as through public engagement, educational activities, business activities, and social activities aimed at influencing the decision-makers, public policies, and professional practice.

### Sustainability and environmental protection

The University of Milan intends to actively promote the standards and objectives contemplated under the UN's Agenda2030 (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)<sup>7</sup> assuming a leadership role for the region, within the scope of the University's expertise, insofar as sustainability and environmental protection are concerned. To that end, the University has equipped itself with an organisational support dedicated to sustainability, including for example the initiatives geared toward reducing emissions and the use of plastic, energy savings, and the promotion of sustainable mobility.

The University, as an agent responsible for educating the citizenry, feels called to contribute to creating the conditions for raising awareness on sustainability in all forms within the community. Within that framework, and in part through the recommendations provided by CRUI on this issue, the University intends to promote pathways for Sustainable Development for students and staff.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>



## QUALITY GOALS

The fundamental principles of the Quality Policies, which must inform all University missions and operations, are reflected in a series of Quality Assurance objectives set forth in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, as shown in the table below.

- OBJ. QA 1 Promote internationalisation of the departments within the framework of University policies
- OBJ. QA 2 Constant improvement of our educational offerings
- OBJ. QA 3 Reinforcing skills in department planning and monitoring
- OBJ. QA 4 Pledging quality standards for services rendered, and providing these to users
- OBJ. QA 5 At the forefront of lawfulness and transparency
- OBJ. QA 6 An inclusive university
- OBJ. QA 7 A sustainable university

QUALITY POLICIES	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE						
	QA 1	QA 2	QA 3	QA 4	QA 5	QA 6	QA 7
Student-centred approach	©	©		©		©	
Transparency, Lawfulness, Integrity			©	©	©	©	©
Internationalisation, and promoting exchanges and mobility	©	©					
Listening and engaging stakeholders inside and outside the University	©	©	©	©		©	©
Inclusion, gender equality, and wellbeing	©	©		©		©	©
Sustainability and environmental protection							©