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*University Policy
on gathering, processing, using and
disseminating the opinions and satisfaction
levels of PhD students and graduates*

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1. Introduction

University of Milan surveys

Student surveys are an essential Quality Assurance (QA) tool that helps the University of Milan maintain a **student-focused** approach in line with the University Strategic Plan and the Quality Assurance Policy.

The University's **Quality Assurance Board** is responsible for gathering the opinions of PhD students and for organising and optimising the survey process. The Quality Assurance Board is supported in implementing this process by the Performance, Quality Assurance, Assessment and Open Science Policy Division.

AVA 3 Guidelines

The AVA 3 Model applies the QA System to PhD programmes. Point of attention D.PHD.3.1 requires all PhD programmes to have in place “a system for monitoring processes and results of their research, teaching and third-mission/social impact activities, as well as of their actions aimed at taking into account the voices of



PhD candidates. This includes gathering and analysing their opinions and systematically analysing the findings.”

In this respect, the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR) has made **two survey forms** available to PhD students (Year 1 and 2) and soon-to-be PhD graduates (final year, pre-graduation). These forms are attached to this Policy.

Transitional phase

In the absence of any specific ministerial guidelines or continuous past experience for reference, **this policy uses as reference the surveys produced by ANVUR. PhD students are surveyed once a year and before graduation in all programme cycles. The opinions gathered cover all material aspects of the course.**

The University of Milan also participates in the “PhD graduate profiles” and “PhD graduate employment status” **surveys conducted by Almalaurea**. As things stand, there are some **areas of overlap** between the first of these Almalaurea surveys and the ANVUR survey for soon-to-be PhD graduates, in terms of the questions asked and the timing of the survey (before graduation). Pending guidance from the working group established by ANVUR, the completion of both the Almalaurea and ANVUR questionnaires will remain mandatory **during the initial implementation phase**.

2. Target and objectives

This procedure is targeted at the University’s PhD students, PhD Faculties of Instructors, Departments and the University’s bodies.

This document aims to:

- define the actors involved and their role in the process;
- provide guidance for analysing and using the survey results;
- define – at the University level – the collective procedures for monitoring and disseminating the data collected;



3. Actors involved and their role

The PhD student survey process entails three levels of intervention, as shown in the image below.

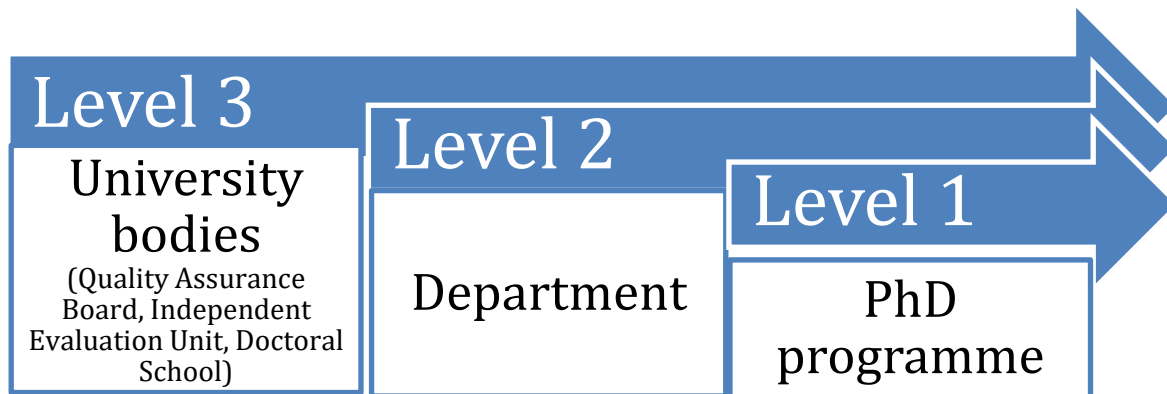


Figure 1: Actors involved in the PhD student survey process

Level 1: the PhD programme

PhD students

All PhD students enrolled on a PhD programme at the University participate in the survey.

Each PhD students is required (before advancing to the next year of study or graduating) to express their opinion in an **informed, attentive and timely manner**.

The Quality Assurance Board will identify suitable ways of informing PhD students about their participation in the survey and what it will involve.

PhD Faculty, instructors, tutors

The survey results are received by the **PhD Faculty of Instructors for each PhD programme and discussed in the presence of PhD student representatives**. The Faculty then promotes initiatives to disseminate the findings of the surveys to PhD students.

The PhD Faculty **fosters and conducts analysis and discussion of the survey results, formulates proposals for improvement and ensures that these are disclosed** in the form of minutes or other selected methods to:

- PhD students, explaining the findings and any steps taken;
- instructors and tutors, who are asked to assess the positives, room for improvement and critical issues.

The opinions gathered from PhD students throughout the programme and upon graduation are used in a structured manner to review the PhD programme, with the active participation of PhD student



representatives. If results in any area are found to be unsatisfactory, the Faculty can take steps to collect additional information, including from PhD students, and to identify actions for improvement.

QA delegate

The Faculty must have a designated Quality Assurance delegate, who should:

- encourage a culture of quality assurance within the PhD programme;
- foster a process of continuous improvement;
- oversee the internal QA system;
- notify the Quality Assurance Board of any critical issues or good practices regarding the survey process.

Where deemed appropriate, the Departmental QA delegate can also perform the role of QA delegate for the PhD programme.

Level 2: the Departments

Departments

As part of their regular monitoring processes, each Department reviews the survey findings for the PhD programmes under its administration and agrees the next steps with the Faculty of Instructors of each PhD programme.

Level 3: University bodies

Doctoral School

The Doctoral School **analyses and considers the opinions** of PhD students and graduates **annually** and informs the Quality Assurance Board and the governing bodies accordingly.

Quality Assurance Board

First of all, the Quality Assurance Board **oversees the implementation of national guidance** regarding updated survey tools and methods, rules, timeframes, stakeholder data access, transparency of results and their dissemination to the wider community.

Secondly, the Quality Assurance Board **defines the University Guidelines** on handling and using results and monitors their application in the University's academic programmes.

Thirdly, the Board **implements actions aimed at continuous quality improvement** and at the optimisation of the PhD student survey process, by taking into account the reported recommendations and areas for improvement, as well as the remarks made by the Independent Evaluation Unit on the survey process.

Finally, the Board **shares the results** of PhD students and graduates surveys with the Doctoral School and the Independent Evaluation Unit.



Independent Evaluation Unit

During **its hearings** on PhD programmes, the Independent Evaluation Unit verifies, *inter alia*, that opinions are being gathered correctly.

In its Annual Report, the Unit analyses the survey findings and formulates recommendations and suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the survey process and the analysis and self-assessment of results. It then verifies, annually, that these recommendations are being implemented.

4. Survey methods

The University adopts the [ANVUR models](#) for all its PhD programmes.

All PhD students enrolled on any of the University's PhD programmes for that academic year are surveyed. Surveys are conducted online, anonymously and in the language in which the programme is delivered (Italian or English).

Surveys are to be completed at the end of each year of studies, usually by November¹, and cover all activities carried out during the year. **Students must complete the survey if they are to advance to the next year of studies.**

In the final year, students have to complete the survey when applying for admission to the final PhD exam, i.e. before defending their thesis. **The survey is made mandatory by its inclusion among the final administrative steps that PhD students must fulfil before sitting the final exam.**

5. Internal reporting and publication of results

The University of Milan, with the support of the administrative and technical units, internally manages the online collection of surveys, data processing and the production of a statistical report for the actors involved, which is available on the website.

The **PhD Programme Report**, issued in the language in which the programme is delivered, provides an overview of the PhD programme, the number of responses and the average values for all aspects evaluated. The report is made available to the Faculty of Instructors of the relevant PhD programme in time for its annual monitoring and review activities.

The University will also publish aggregated findings on its website so that the survey results can be publicly accessed by current or prospective PhD students, their families and any other interested parties.

¹ Exceptions apply to PhD programmes that begin at different times of the year



6. Timeline

The following timeline is **indicative** and applies only to the **initial implementation phase**. This timeline will have to be verified once the procedure actually begins.

Activity	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
First-year and second-year PhD students survey ²												
PhD graduates survey (for soon-to-be graduates) ³												
Alma laurea PhD students survey ⁴												
Findings sent to PhD Faculties, Departments and governing bodies												
Results analysed by PhD Faculties												
Results analysed by Departments												
Results published online												
Alma laurea survey results published ⁴												

Appendices

- FIRST-YEAR AND SECOND-YEAR PhD STUDENTS SATISFACTION SURVEY (Italian version)
Approved by Resolution No. 64 of the ANVUR Governing Board on 21 March 2023
- PhD GRADUATES SATISFACTION SURVEY (Italian version)
Approved by Resolution No. 64 of the ANVUR Governing Board on 21 March 2023
- English versions of both ANVUR survey forms, produced by the University of Milan

² Exceptions apply to PhD programmes that begin at different times of the year

³ Subject to thesis defence sessions, which are held at specific times of the year

⁴ Carried out by Alma laurea independently of the University of Milan