

SUPSI

# Institutional accreditation of SUPSI: executive summary of the self-assessment report



SUPSI consists of four departments - Environment, Constructions and Design (DACD), Business Economics, Health and Social Care (DEASS), Education and Learning (DFA) and Innovative Technologies (DTI) - together with the Management board and Internal Services. Affiliated to SUPSI there are a Theatre Academy (ATD), a University of Music (CSI-SUM), a Distance Learning University of Applied Sciences (FFHS) and a Physiotherapy School (SUPSI Landquart).

SUPSI offers approximately 40 Bachelor and Master degree programmes with more than 5,000 students, hundreds of Advanced Studies and Continuing Education courses with approximately 8,000 participants each year, and conducts applied research activities and services amounting to an annual financial volume of tens of millions of francs. Approximately 1,500 people collaborate actively with the University, performing scientific, managerial, technical and/or administrative functions.

## The internal quality assurance system (IQAS)

The IQAS of SUPSI is based on three well-known quality assurance principles: (1) **modelling of an institution through a set of key processes**, (2) **development of the quality of the entire institution through a continuous improvement cycle** and (3) **periodic external assessment through a critical comparison of quality assurance methods with external peers**. The IQAS consists of 22 key processes. Continuous improvement of the IQAS is ensured through the application of an internal PDCA-cycle lasting approximately two years, and periodic external audits (approximately every 7 years) for each key process. **The SUPSI IQAS has been completely re-defined over the last 4 years by means of a participative process that started from a set of pre-existing quality devices and methods. These were subsequently revised, restructured and/or completed in order to define a system that, as fully as possible, is integrated into the regular activities and the strategic development of the University, covering all the activity domains and meeting the quality standards of the European higher education area. The SUPSI IQAS consists of three main documents: *Quality Policy and Strategy*, stating the principles on which the IQAS is based, *Quality Assurance Framework*, describing the structure and the organisation, and *Quality Handbook*, with a specific variant for each affiliated School, specifying the 22 key processes in detail.**

**The correct application and the continuous improvement of each key process depends on a process-network** consisting of a process manager, who is transversally responsible for the process for SUPSI as a whole, and process coordinators for each department and affiliated school. These networks are one of the key strengths of the SUPSI IQAS.

The supervision, coordination and harmonization of the IQAS is ensured by the **Quality Coordination Commission**, managed by the General Director, that brings together all the process managers and the representatives of the Quality Service.

At Department / Affiliated School level, the supervision, coordination and involvement of the stakeholders (collaborators, students and alumni) is ensured by **Quality Commissions**, managed by their respective Directors and formed by the Process Coordinators for each specific unit.

Continuous IQAS improvement measures are defined internally by the **process-network** on a two-year basis. All measures are approved and reviewed by the SUPSI management Board **biennial reports**, which also include any improvement measures resulting from the periodic external audits.

The 22 key processes contemplated in the SUPSI IQAS are listed below. It is important to note that, where considered appropriate, attention to sustainability is included in individual processes and not defined as a process in itself.

1. **Strategy:** how, on a four-year basis, SUPSI defines a single strategy that applies to all departments and affiliated schools.
2. **Evaluation of study programmes:** this process involves three sub-processes. (1) Evaluation of the study cycles, a periodic internal (and in some specific cases external) audit of each study cycle, analogous to program accreditation, with the involvement of external independent peers. (2) Revision of study cycles, describing the procedure in the event of significant revisions to existing study cycles. (3) Establishment of study cycles, regulating the creation of new study cycles.
3. **Student learning experience:** a formalized procedure completed by students at the end of their study programmes, in which they evaluate their entire educational path at SUPSI.
4. **Student evaluation of teaching:** regular student evaluation of each module and course, through a formalized procedure. The results are usually also presented to and discussed with the students themselves.
5. **Development of teachers' pedagogical and teaching skills:** assessment and improvement of the pedagogical skills of teachers.
6. **Continuing education management system:** management, monitoring and continuous improvement of the continuing education and lifelong learning programmes delivered by SUPSI.
7. **Research projects and provision of services:** management of the research projects and services conducted by SUPSI.
8. **Evaluation of research and service units:** each SUPSI Institute and Competence Centre is evaluated periodically, by means of an internal audit with external peers.
9. **Intellectual Property:** management of intellectual property and establishment of start-ups and spin-offs.
10. **Participation:** participatory rights of the representative groups of SUPSI, and forms of concrete involvement.
11. **Definition of regulations:** preparation, revision and approval procedure for SUPSI regulations.
12. **Indicators:** monitoring, management and continuous improvement of the IQMS and its elements.
13. **Equal opportunities:** management and improvement of equal opportunities and diversity.
14. **Risk management:** identification, management and mitigation of the main risks facing SUPSI.
15. **Internal audit:** organization and management of internal auditing at SUPSI.
16. **Employees:** planning, recruitment, empowerment, definition of objectives, careers, professional development, career enhancement, well-being of human resources.
17. **Finance and controlling** budget, forecasting, financial development plan, investment planning, balance sheet, cash management and internal financial auditing.
18. **Information technology management:** management and development of ICT-resources, digitalization of processes, ICT education and support to employees, and data security.
19. **Real estate and Facility Management:** management and development of the SUPSI real-estate portfolio.
20. **Student and Employee Mobility:** promotion and management of incoming and outgoing mobility programme participants.
21. **Student life-cycle:** student support and management before, during and after their studies.
22. **Organisational communications:** internal (for both students and employees) and external institutional communications.

Each key process is described in detail in the quality handbook, and in the variant versions for the affiliated schools.

## Strengths, challenges and opportunities for IQAS development

For each quality standard area related to the institutional accreditation, this section summarizes the main strengths and weaknesses of SUPSI with respect to the standards and the corresponding continuous improvement domains (CID) identified in the self-assessment report. It is important to note that the SUPSI self-assessment report is the outcome of a lengthy two-year intensive participative procedure, involving hundreds of internal and external stakeholders.

### Quality assurance strategy

**Strengths:** a comprehensive and detailed IQAS, anchored to regular SUPSI operations, making it possible to assign each single collaborator tasks and responsibilities for quality improvement and assurance. Internal and external audits. Active involvement of all representative groups in the SUPSI institutional accreditation self-assessment process.

**Weaknesses:** young age of the IQAS: not all the key processes and groups have fully matured yet.

**CID 1:** make the IQAS fully operational.

**CID 2:** foster a culture of quality and participation in the IQAS.

### Governance

**Strengths:** tasks and activity domains of SUPSI are clearly stated, and correspond to the University profile. One single strategy for all departments and affiliated schools. Management and valorisation of heterogeneity. Distribution of responsibilities and tasks. Equal opportunities. Risk management. Internal auditing.

**Weaknesses:** potential of the system not yet fully exploited. Qualitative and quantitative data dispersion. Development measures related to the strategy and improvement measures related to the IQAS spread over several documents. Participation and feedback should be further improved. Action plan for the development of sustainability still missing.

**CID 3:** write and execute action plans for the departments and affiliated schools.

**CID 4:** improve participation further.

**CID 5:** improve equal opportunities further.

### Teaching, research and services

**Strengths:** academic and management autonomy. Transparency and accountability. Initial and continuing education consistent with the state of the art of HE in Europe. Education and research strongly anchored to the professional fields and the regional reality. Support from central services to the activities in the four mandates. Coordination of activities in the four mandates by way of transversal strategic working groups.

**Weaknesses:** study-life balance, except in the FFHS. Transparency of assessment criteria. Dropout rates in some study areas. Exploitation of the synergy potential between the different disciplinary sectors within departments and affiliated Schools. Balance between research and teaching activities.

**CID 6:** foster and sustain the development of the four mandates.

**CID 7:** foster the dialogue and balance between the four mandates.

## Resources

**Strengths:** available human, real estate, and financial resources. Recruitment procedures. Human resource management. Transparency in terms of financial resources. New campuses.

**Weaknesses:** Some current real estate resources. Remuneration policy not completely transparent and not always attractive. The procedure for annual empowerment and evaluation talks should be fully established and harmonized. In general, the professional development and career paths of all employees should be supported and improved further.

**CID 8:** foster further the development of human resources.

**CID 9:** create and develop new digital and real estate resources.

## Internal and external communication

**Strengths:** coherent, transparent, equilibrated external communications, appreciated by the stakeholders. Regular and positive presence in the regional and national mass media. Internal and external information regarding initial and continuing education programmes.

**Weaknesses:** the SUPSI web page is old and, although complete and up to date, does not correspond to current web-communication standards. Communications are not sufficiently personalised. Communications regarding research projects and researcher profiles. Equilibrium and synergy between the institutional communications of SUPSI as a whole, and communications from the affiliated schools. Equilibrium between communications regarding the four mandates.

**CID 10:** strengthen and personalise internal and external communications.

The continuous improvement measures listed in the current biennial report on the IQAS are explicitly anchored to the ten CIDs.



