
QA POLICIES

EDUCATION

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THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The Scuola Normale Superiore is a University Institution of Higher Education, research and advanced training with a special degree system. It is based in Pisa and Florence and forms part of the Italian and European network of Schools of Excellence.

The Scuola Normale comprises three academic structures: the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Sciences in Pisa, and the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences in Florence.

From its foundation until present day, the Scuola Normale has maintained its specific characteristics intact: an exclusively merit-based student selection; a close interweaving between education and research; an integrated college life; an openness to international exchanges.

The Statute of the Scuola Normale, under Article 2, sets forth its aims as follows: *"The aim of the Scuola Normale is to promote the development of culture, education and research in the mathematical, natural, humanities and socio-political sciences, while exploring their interconnections. To this purpose, it strives for the highest training level, both undergraduate and postgraduate, lifelong and periodic, giving special priority to the relationship between training and research, for an enhanced interaction with the outside world"*.

The Scuola's education tradition is focused on undergraduate and PhD courses and has developed over the years as much as to encompass PhD courses as well.

1. UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

The undergraduate courses are presented on page <https://www.sns.it/it/didattica/corso-ordinario/corsi-studio> and are graphically illustrated in the chart on page 6.

1.1. EDUCATIONAL MODEL

The Scuola strives to identify and nurture the talent and quality of its students, providing courses designed to develop individual potential and skills. The aim of the undergraduate courses is hence "to integrate and improve the quality and level of the pupils' academic preparation, developing their critical faculties". Generally speaking, the undergraduate courses of the Scuola Normale Superiore are designed in a distinctive educational approach compared to the other Universities' Degree courses and Master's Degree courses.

As a matter of fact, building on the knowledge and skills that students gain by attending their relevant University courses, it is possible to centre the Scuola's educational efforts on the in-depth study of issues and methodologies at a high level, often times remarkably high in relation to the progress made by the students along their path.

This vocation for critical study that distinguishes the Scuola's internal educational system is supported and made easier by the students themselves. Having passed an admission examination aimed at identifying their critical skills, they are able to interact with the lecturers and, consequently, to encourage the setting of higher-level training objectives.

In the three academic structures, of course, this can lead to different directions depending on the specific nature of the disciplines.

In the undergraduate courses of the Faculty of Humanities, lecturers present subjects within their specific areas, providing concrete demonstrations of the investigation methods used; great emphasis is placed on the methods and techniques of scientific research adopted by the international community. They propose and hold seminars aimed at giving students the scientific tools required in their specific disciplines by collectively carrying out and discussing autonomous research. A peculiar feature of the educational programme at the Faculty of Humanities is the presence of some courses that involve the joint participation of undergraduate students, even 1st year students, and PhD students. This takes place for the former to speed up the acquisition of critical thinking methods and for the latter to practice mentoring and supervision activities.

In the Faculty of Sciences, the courses of the initial years systematically include more advanced topics compared standard university courses, as students are asked to solve exercises on a very frequent basis both during classes and autonomously. Plus, they are involved to a greater degree thanks to the mentoring activities. Master's courses are more monographic and specific: they generally represent a starting point for research and are often attended by both Master's and PhD students, favouring the exchange of perspective with a view to understanding research issues.

The undergraduate course of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, now in its third year, can be attended starting from the fourth year of the course and has been conceived in compliance with the general characteristics of the Scuola's undergraduate courses. The course focuses on the development of critical thinking to better understand political and social change at the national and international level. Discussions on specific topics encourage the participation of the students.

The peculiarity of the teaching model of the Scuola Normale is the integration of education and research, which is the backbone of the course of study. Students are called to constantly exchange views both with senior colleagues and with PhD students, as much as with researchers and professors that compose the teaching staff. College life allows a regular dialogue and sharing of opinions and insights, bringing into reality the vision of the Scuola as a laboratory of ideas.

The "normalista" student is required to attend both the classes of the degree courses of the University to which he/she is enrolled (Pisa or Florence) and the classes held at the Scuola Normale ("lectures, seminars, foreign language courses, laboratory activities, as well as periods of study, internships and traineeships at highly qualified institutions and other activities aimed at enriching his/her education").

The Scuola's distinctive educational model is also made possible by a student / lecturer ratio that is highly competitive compared to standards.

1.2. ADMISSIONS

Students are admitted to the undergraduate courses after successfully completing an assessment-based selection process: every year there is an admission examination with written and oral tests (two written tests and two oral tests for the Faculty of Sciences and of Political and Social Sciences, three written tests and three oral tests for the Faculty of Humanities). The marks obtained in the high school final exam are considered for evaluation purposes, candidates are assessed exclusively on the results obtained in the tests.

The tests are aimed at evaluating the candidates' preparation, talent, motivation and potential for cultural and professional development, rather than merely verifying that they possess the

general knowledge of the discipline for which they are applying for.

The ratio between the number of candidates and the number of places available every year, which is about 1/6 (Site of Pisa), shows both the Scuola's level of appeal to young people embarking on a university course and the selectivity of the admission process.

The Site of Florence started the first selection process in 2017/2018 and the ratio between applications and available places was 3.3.

The selection of the successful candidates is the result of an accurate comparative evaluation carried out by the adjudicating commissions, which are made up of at least five members, chosen amongst full professors and researchers from the Scuola and other universities; at least one member of each commission belongs to one of the relevant universities.

Candidates can be young people from all over the world with a valid qualification to be admitted to Italian universities, provided that they are under 22 years of age for the first year or under 25 years of age for the fourth year. Admission examinations may be held in Italian and English.

1.3. COURSE OBLIGATIONS

Students are required to comply with certain course obligations, as laid down in the educational regulations and institutional rules of each relevant academic structure (see sections [Regolamenti istituzionali](#) and [Obblighi didattici](#) respectively). More specifically, students must:

- maintain a minimum grade average of twenty-seven out of thirty in the Scuola and University each year;
- attend two internal courses each year, consisting of one or more modules, for a total of at least 80 hours - Resolution of the Academic Board of 28/03/13;
- pass the test of each individual educational activity with a minimum grade of twenty-four out of thirty (24/30) both in the Scuola and University;
- study a foreign language, other than one's mother tongue, such as English, French and German, and a second language amongst the above-mentioned languages, or others approved by the Governing Council, by attending lectures at the Scuola or at affiliated institutions;
- sit an annual exam at the Scuola, according to the procedures defined by each Faculty. Students who do not pass the exam are not admitted to the following year and lose their place;
- conclude the course of study at the university to which they are enrolled (Pisa or Florence) and at the Scuola within the time limits laid down in the educational regulations: it is therefore excluded the possibility of *fuori corso* enrolments (students who have not completed university exams within set time period) or retentions.

The failure of a student to fulfil his/her didactic obligations or to attain the scores required to pass the oral and written exams will entail the loss of his place.

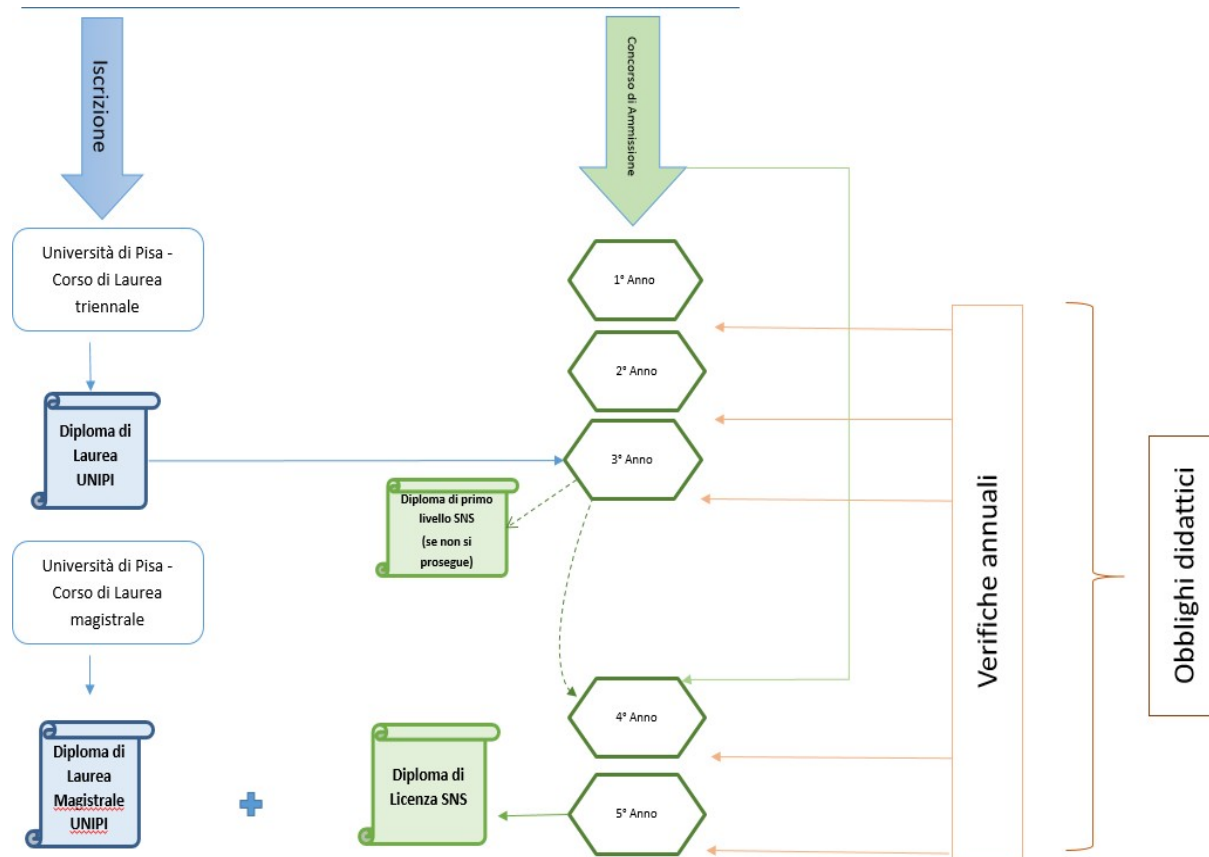
1.4. UTILITIES AND FACILITIES

Students admitted to undergraduate courses are accommodated in a college located in the historic centre of the cities of Pisa and Florence, where the sites of the Scuola are based. A number

of benefits are offered for students to focus their energies exclusively on studying:

- free study course at the Scuola;
- total or partial reimbursement of fees due and paid to the University of Pisa or Florence;
- allocation of a study grant the amount of which is decided each year by the federated Executive Council on the proposal of the Governing Council;
- free access to college services, canteen, laundry service, recreational and sports areas;
- inclusion in an exchange network to participate in mobility programmes for study and/or research with a grant;
- financial grant to carry out off-site study and research activities and for internships;
- access to facilities (laboratories and centres) that offer students direct training in research methods and research experience development practices;
- possibility, at the Site of Pisa, of receiving psychological counselling service, aimed at students who need to tackle problems that are quite common to gifted students, as well as issues that may emerge in a context that requires very high performance standards.

CORSI ORDINARI



2. PhD COURSES

The Scuola has a long tradition also in the organisation of advanced specialisation courses, initially recognised as equivalent to PhD courses and subsequently included among the PhD courses as per article 4 of Law no. 210/1998.

In recent years, the post-graduate course programme has expanded with the establishment of joint doctoral courses with other universities and research institutions:

- Data Science, with the Università di Pisa, the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, the Scuola IMT Alti Studi di Lucca and the CNR (National Research Council);
- Transnational Governance, with the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna;
- Astrochemistry, with the Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II.

The courses are presented on page <https://www.sns.it/it/didattica/phd/corsi-studio> and are graphically illustrated in the following chart.

2.1. EDUCATIONAL MODEL

The objective of the PhD courses is the achievement of a high level of specialisation in science and the preparation for research activities.

The courses are divided into an educational programme tailored to each student and designed to broaden his/her cultural background also through specific interdisciplinary paths, as well as to hone his/her specialised skills with the development of distinctive research programmes. The PhD course includes disciplinary and interdisciplinary educational activities and further training in languages and computer science. Furthermore, educational activities are carried out in the fields of research management and knowledge of European and international research systems, research exploitation and intellectual property.

As with undergraduate students, the backbone of the course of study is the integration between education and research. The Scuola, which strives to be a laboratory of ideas, allows a constant dialogue with colleagues, junior and senior, but also with lecturers during events of collegial life.

In addition, the Scuola, through the synergy between education, research and third mission, and, through the enhancement of its network of alumni, aims to broaden the range of opportunities available within its doctoral courses: efforts are made to establish collaborations with leading companies in their respective fields of activity, to fund recruitments of personnel specialised in innovative research subjects of shared interest, as well as to activate placement opportunities in non-academic contexts.

2.2. ADMISSIONS

Admission to the PhD course is subject to an evaluation based on qualifications and examinations. The evaluation is aimed at assessing the candidate's suitability for scientific research and his/her basic preparation for the course programme. The tests are defined in the call for applications and may be held also in English.

2.3. COURSE OBLIGATIONS

PhD students are required to comply with strict educational obligations as set out in the regulations for advanced specialisation and PhD courses (see sections [Regolamenti istituzionali](#) and [Obblighi didattici](#)).

More specifically, they are required to:

1. to attend and pass at least three annual courses. An "annual course" is to be understood as a course lasting a minimum of forty hours and a maximum of eighty hours, also consisting of several modules whose total duration is within the above-mentioned limits. (Resolution of the Board of Directors of 28/03/13);
2. attend at least one hundred and fifty hours of training activities (seminars, training courses on safety and use of scientific equipment, language improvement activities and activities on research management, on European and international research systems and on the enhancement of research and intellectual property) specifically provided for PhD courses by the Scuola or other universities/research institutions, provided that they are part of an overall comprehensive programme approved by the bodies of the Scuola itself;
3. sit an annual examination consisting of: interview before a committee composed of members of the teaching staff, drafting of a report on the educational, teaching and scientific activities carried out during the year, as well as of a report on the progress of the research project.

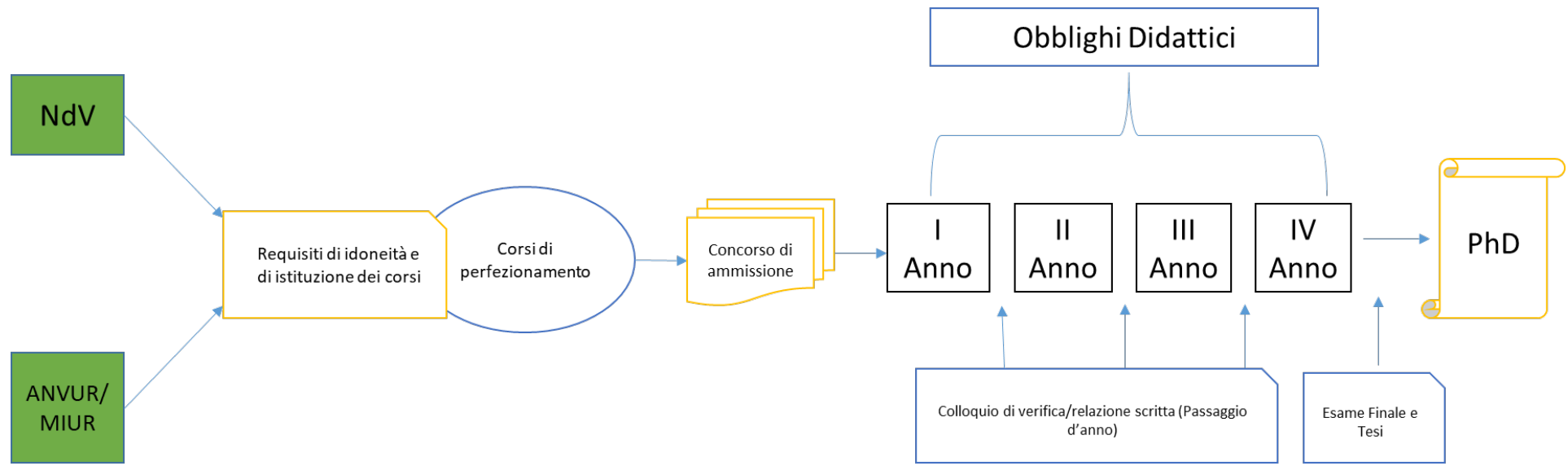
The failure to comply with these obligations entails the interruption or termination of the course, with consequent suspension or loss of the scholarship.

2.4. UTILITIES AND FACILITIES

The benefits are to some extent similar to those offered to the students of the undergraduate courses mentioned above:

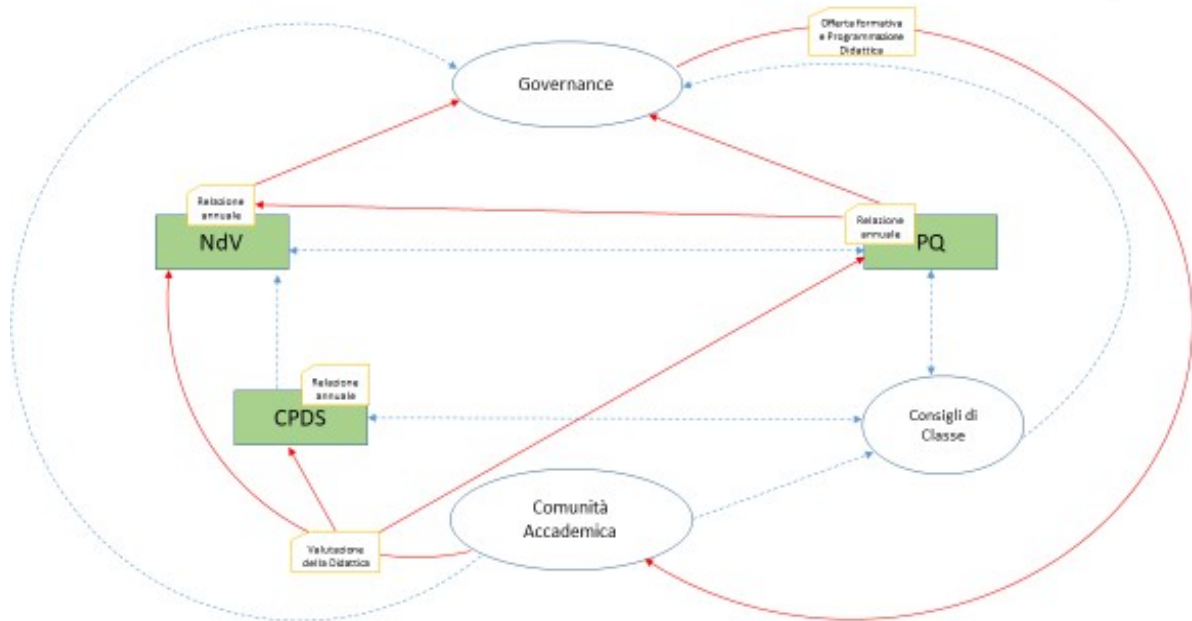
- free study course at the Scuola;
- reimbursement of the regional tax for the right to study;
- allocation of an PhD scholarship including an accommodation grant, the amount of which is decided each year by the federated Executive Council on the proposal of the Governing Council;
- the opportunity to benefit from special grants to carry out study and research activities off-site;
- for foreign students, reimbursement of travel expenses incurred for arrival in Italy, and reimbursement of expenses related to the application for a residence permit and registration with the National Health Service;

CORSI DI PERFEZIONAMENTO



3. QUALITY ASSURANCE FLOW CHART

3.1. EDUCATION QA



Key

- Panels with green background = bodies/structures responsible for internal checks
- Circular panels = other Quality Assurance (QA) actors
- Dotted two-way arrows = reciprocal information flow between the various actors
- One-way arrows = interaction in which one actor provides information, guidance, instructions and/or support to another
- Red arrows = continuous improvement cycle (Plan - Do- Check- Act)

3.2. EDUCATION QA MAPPING

The Education QA System has the governance of the Scuola engaged, during the strategic planning phase, in defining the Scuola's course programme and planning policies, at both undergraduate and PhD course level, in close connection with the lines of research developed by the Scuola's lecturers.

The implementation of the policies happens through a set of statutory and regulatory provisions that govern high-level education. The system of education monitoring and control, embedded in the rules of the Scuola, based on admission exams, average grades, annual interviews for admission to following year, study plans with at least 80 hours of courses per year in addition to those of the university of enrolment, final exams, has a strong historical tradition and is one of the tools that allowed the Scuola to achieve excellence over time.

The academic community, in its broadest sense, directly and proactively takes part in the

educational process and provides feedback to monitoring and governing bodies, in particular through the Joint lecturer-student Commissions and the teaching evaluation questionnaires. In particular, the academic and governing bodies of the Scuola, at all levels, are involved in customer satisfaction evaluations and information feedback from the Joint lecturer-student Commissions and the Evaluation Team, and take them into account in a prompt and constructive manner when determining their policies.

This establishes a constant dialogue between the top management and the grassroots academic community, in which a request/action leads to a response/reaction in the governance strategies.

SUBJECT: Governing bodies.

PHASE: Plan.

PURPOSE: Definition of strategic planning and general policies, definition of educational programming, control through monitoring tools.

OUTPUT: Documents. Strategic Plan of the Scuola, Policies for the implementation of the strategic plan, approval of educational programming documents.

TIME FRAME: Continuous, annual or multiannual.

SUBJECT: Bodies of academic structures (Faculties).

PHASE: Plan.

PURPOSE: Proposing educational planning, defining students' obligations, defining the educational quality levels.

OUTPUT: Documents. Regulations, resolutions.

TIME FRAME: Continuous throughout the year.

SUBJECT: Academic community (professors, researchers, postdoctoral researchers and students).

PHASE: DO.

PURPOSES: Support to the development of the educational QA, production of the information flow, provision / fruition of education, feedback on the quality of education and services.

OUTPUT: Documents. Educational activities, Customer Satisfaction.

TIME FRAME: Continuous on an annual basis.

SUBJECT: Federated Evaluation Team.

PHASE: Check.

PURPOSE: Verification of accreditation requirements for PhD courses, evaluation of education and quality policies and coordination of QA processes.

OUTPUT: Documents. Reports, minutes and opinions on the fulfilment of the accreditation requirements of the PhD courses.

TIME FRAME: Depending on the output and on the deadlines set by ANVUR/MIUR.

SUBJECT: Quality Control Unit.

PHASE: Check.

PURPOSES: Monitoring and supporting the implementation of educational QA policies and developing the information flow.

OUTPUT: Documents. Annual report and minutes.

TIME FRAME: Continuous on an annual basis.

SUBJECT: Joint lecturer-student Commissions.
PHASE: Check.
PURPOSES: Supporting educational QA development and production of information flow.
OUTPUT: Documents. Annual report and minutes.
TIME FRAME: Continuous on an annual basis.

SUBJECT: Class councils.
PHASE: Check.
PURPOSES: Supporting educational QA development and production of information flow.
OUTPUT: Documents. Resolutions and minutes.
TIME FRAME: Continuous on an annual basis

SUBJECT: Governing bodies.
PHASE: Act.
PURPOSE: Analysis of reporting documents and adoption of actions aimed at improving and consolidating the levels achieved.
OUTPUT: Documents. New Strategic Plan of the Scuola, new Policies for the implementation of the strategic plan, approval of the reporting documents, new educational programming.
TIME FRAME: continuous, annual.

3.3. TOOLS FOR QUALITY MONITORING

The following tools are used to ensure the quality of the process:

- Specific document production (as required by ANVUR and/or the Scuola);
- Education monitoring/dialogue sessions (admission exams, average grades, annual interviews for admission to following year, study plans with at least 80 hours of courses per year in addition to those of the university of enrolment, final exams);
- Information flow through requests and proposals managed by the various bodies;
- Surveys of customer satisfaction and employment results (AlmaLaurea).

3.4. THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

In addition to carrying out relevant activities, the Educational Service of the Site of Pisa has carried out an intense back office activity for years, aimed at supporting students, especially during the initial phase of their studies. The student administration office, situated right in front of the canteen and therefore easily accessible, is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Students consider the student administration office to be an open, welcoming and supportive service, which helps to establish a climate of trust. As a matter of fact, students refer to the office not only for matters strictly related to their careers as students, but also for advice on general problems related to their life in the Scuola's community.

The student administration office manages a series of other activities dedicated to students. Furthermore, it works hand in hand with the staff involved in career counselling, promotion of psychological well-being and support for people with disabilities.

At the Scuola's Florence site, at Palazzo Strozzi, the Educational Activities and Research Support Service is available to students for all the services related to their educational programmes, from

admission to completion, for study plans and course requirements, and for mobility due to off-site study and research. The Educational Service also includes a series of support activities for students, both in the undergraduate and PhD courses, dedicated to issues that are not strictly academic, but are connected to the academic sphere, among which:

- the activity of *in itinere* guidance, employment guidance and placement, planned and carried out by dedicated and qualified staff, also with the involvement of the students, in a participatory mode;
- the psychological support service run by external consultants (accredited psychologists and psychotherapists) selected on the basis of specific tender procedures. This service has been designed and implemented according to the specific needs of the students, taking into account their peculiarities and educational paths in a perspective of international community. This service is managed in coordination with the Educational and Student Services, in a perspective of ongoing evaluation aimed at ensuring the quality of the services provided and feedback-driven development. The information about the psychological well-being of the students are treated in professional and confidential terms;
- support activities dedicated to people with disabilities, also in collaboration with USID - Office Services for the Integration of Students with Disabilities of the University of Pisa. Starting from the specialist tutoring, specific actions are progressively planned according to the special nature of the case and the needs of the disabled person. On top of that, support is provided along their career path, also for all those issues that are not directly related to education (*in itinere* guidance, employment guidance and placement, coordination with the psychological support service);
- the connection with the Alumni network for the enhancement of mentoring and professional placement activities.