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Teaching quality assurance in the Italian University system. *The AVA accreditation process*

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Some definitions

- **Quality:** level at which some intrinsic characteristics satisfy the requirements (*UNI EN ISO 9000:2005*).
- **Qualities of a University:** level at which the characteristics of the education and research system satisfy the requirements, i.e. the way in which prearranged objectives and results obtained are similar to each other (*AVA document*).
- **Quality assurance:** all the activities carried out in order to produce adequate confidence that the objectives of Quality will be satisfied (*AVA document*).
- **Quality control:** techniques and operational activities implemented to meet the requirements for quality (*UNI EN ISO 8402:1995*).
- **Quality management:** coordinated activities to direct and control an organisation with regard to quality (*UNI EN ISO 9000:2005*).

Some acronyms

- **CdS**, *Corso(i) di studio* - Study Programme(s)
- **NdV**, *Nucleo di Valutazione* - Evaluation Board

- **SUA-CdS**, *Schede Uniche Annuali relative ai Corsi di Studio* – Annual single forms related to Study Programme
- **SUA-RD**, *Schede Uniche Annuali della Ricerca dei Dipartimenti* – Annual single forms of Departments' research projects

- **RAR**, *Rapporti Annuali di Riesame* – Annual review reports
- **CEV**, *Commissioni di Esperti (ANVUR) della Valutazione* - Evaluation experts committee, from ANVUR

- **PQ**, *Presidio di Qualità* – Quality Committee
- **CP**, *Commissioni Paritetiche Docenti-Studenti* – Teachers-Students Joint Committee

- **AQ**, *Assicurazione della qualità* - Quality Assurance



References at European level

The subscribers of the Bologna process have instructed the ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) to develop standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education, in 2003.

The document "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)" was drafted in 2005 in order to be adopted by the European Universities. It was aimed at providing support and guidelines for all institutions of higher education that wish to develop their internal system of quality assurance.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

The standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance are seven and represent the key aspects that, according to ENQA, characterise the quality of training; these are the requirements that must be met to ensure the quality of training.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance
2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
3. Assessment of students
4. Quality assurance of teaching staff
5. Learning resources and student support
6. Information systems
7. Public information

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance

Institutions should have clear **formal mechanisms** for the assurance of the quality and of the **standards** of their study programmes awards

They should also explicitly commit themselves to develop a culture that recognize the importance of **quality** and its assurance. They should design and implement strategies for continuous quality improvement.

Political Strategies and procedures should have a formal status and should be communicated to the public. They must also provide for the involvement of students and other stakeholders.



European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the **approval, periodic review** and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

3. Assessment of students

Students should be assessed using **published** criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied **consistently**.



European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

4. Quality assurance of teaching staff

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are **qualified** and **competent** to do so. They should be **available to those undertaking external reviews**, and commented upon in reports.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

5. Learning resources and student support

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are **adequate** and **appropriate** for each programme offered.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

6. Information systems

Institutions should ensure that they **collect, analyse** and **use** relevant **information** for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

7. Public information

Institutions should **regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information**, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

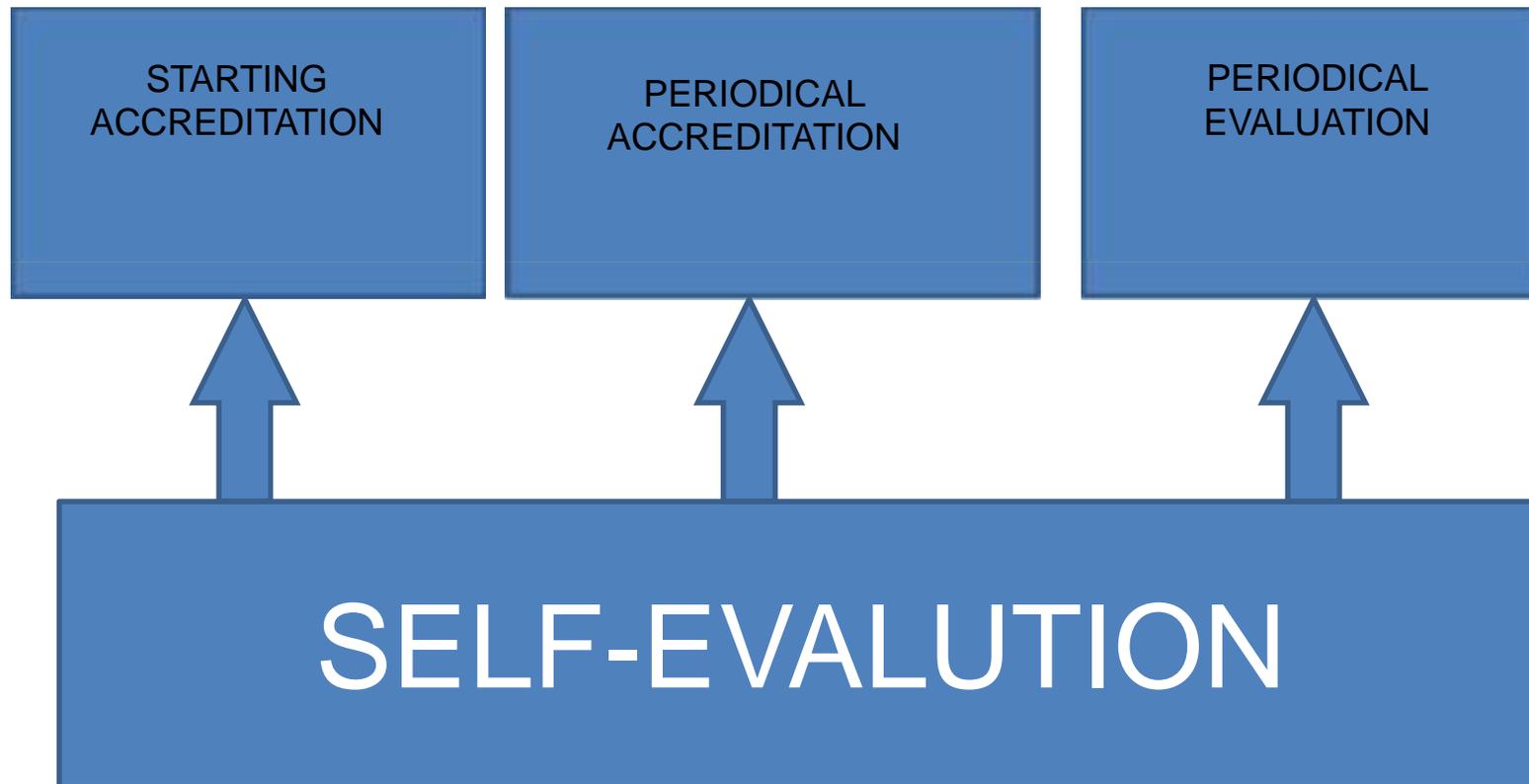
ANVUR: the Agency in charge of the accreditation process

The **National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (ANVUR)** acts in Italy with the following functions:

- ***Supervises*** the national public system of evaluation of quality of Universities and research Institutes.
- ***Cares*** for external quality assessment of the activities of Universities and Research Institutions receiving public funds and directs the activities of the Evaluation Board (NdV).
- ***Evaluates*** the effectiveness and efficiency of public programmes aimed at financing and incentivising research and innovation.



The AVA system in short



Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation: comprehensive, systematic and documented analysis of the activities and results of the Study Programme (SP) described in the “SUA” form, necessary to have a comprehensive view of the performance of the SP.

Here is a reference model that describes the ideal characteristics of what must be self-assessed. With regard to this model the SUA shows the strengths and weaknesses, and the maturity level of the SP. Based on the results of the self-assessment, the Board of the Study Programme can plan corrective actions, preventive or for its improvement.

The form SUA-SP of a given academic year (containing data) together with its Review Report concerning the same academic year (which analyses those data) is the annual self-evaluation document (goals/outcomes analysis), and that's all.



Periodical assessment

Evaluation by ANVUR aimed at measuring

- **efficiency**

- **economic and financial sustainability** of the activities

- **results** achieved by each University in the field of education, research and quality assurance

in relation to the indicators referred to in annexes **E e F** (*Ministerial Decrees 47 and 1059 of 2013*).



Accreditation

Accreditation is the process by which a "third party" formally recognizes that an organization has the expertise and the means to carry out its tasks.

First of all, accreditation gives assurance to users that their needs are met and that their fundamental rights are protected by a competent authority.

Accreditation

The quality assurance system of university education is designed to achieve three main objectives:

- **assurance** for users by MIUR and ANVUR that the institutions of higher education of the country meet at least the minimum preset threshold level for **quality**;
- the **exercise of responsible and reliable autonomy** by Universities in the use of public resources and in the collective and individual behaviours related to training and research activities;
- the **continuous improvement** of the quality of research and training activities.

Accreditation

The Quality Assurance / Accreditation system of University education takes into account **organisational and structural** factors, definition of **expected results**, check of the **actual** ones and their correspondence with **external demand** of **training** or **research**.

Accreditation

The accreditation process includes **three phases**:

- Documentation for **self-evaluation** to be prepared by the Institution assessed, based on its own QA, with contributions of the Joint Committee and of the Evaluation Board, having as reference the levels and the criteria established by the Accrediting Agency;
- **External assessment** of the self-evaluation documentation, done by independent experts, through verification also by means of on-site visits carried out according to pre-established guidelines and concluded with the drafting of an External Evaluation Report;
- Analysis of the External Evaluation Report by the Accrediting Agency and consequent decision on the attribution or revocation of the **Accreditation**



Initial Accreditation

Authorization by the Ministry to set up University **venues and study programmes**, subject to the verification of the requirements:

- didactical
 - research qualifying
 - structural
 - organizational
 - economic – financial sustainability
- referred to in annexes A and B (*Ministerial Decrees 47 and 1059 of 2013*).



Periodic Accreditation

Verification of the **persistency** of the requirements that led to the initial accreditation and possession of additional quality requirements of efficiency and effectiveness of activities with reference to the indicators referred to in Annex **C** (*Ministerial Decrees 47 and 1059 of 2013*).

- at least every **five years** for **venues**
- at least **three years** for **study programmes**



Requirements for QA

The verification of the following requirements is established in case of **new activations** and in **periodic accreditation** (*Annex C to MD 47/2013 as modified by MD 1059/2013*):

AQ1- the University establishes, declares and actually pursues appropriate policies to achieve its vision of the quality of education

AQ2- the University knows to what extent its policies are actually implemented by study programmes



Requirements for QA

AQ3- the University requests the study programmes to practice continuous improvement of quality, pointing towards increasing value of results

AQ4- the University has an effective organization with powers of decision and of supervision on the quality of SPs, of the training offered to students, and of research

Requirements for QA

AQ5- the AQ system is actually applied and is effectively running in the SPs visited by sample at the University

AQ6- evaluation of research within the Quality Assurance system

AQ7- sustainability of teaching activities



Accreditation of Study programmes (SPs)

The study programmes get the **initial accreditation** by Ministerial Decree no later than 15 June preceding the academic year of activation, subject to the verification requirements set out in Annex **A**.

Accreditation of Study Programmes

Periodic accreditation is granted to study programmes that meet the requirements for initial accreditation and those for Quality Assurance (QA) referred to in Annex **C** and, where appropriate, of further requirements proposed by ANVUR as a result of analysis, study and experimentation, and adopted by MIUR.



Accreditation of Study Programmes

The verification of initial and periodic accreditation requirements is performed by means of the on-site visits of the “CEV” selected by ANVUR, the evaluation activities of the Evaluation Board and any other available information.

Accreditation of SPs – requirements

A. Transparency

B. Faculty

C. Limits to fragmentation of educational activities and to the diversification of SPs

D. Structures

E. Quality Assurance

A. QA activities documented

B. detection of students, and apart the students preparing their final dissertation

C. compilation of the “SUA”-SP

D. preparation of the Annual Review Report

F. Economic and financial sustainability



The «SUA»-SP

The «SUA»-SP supersedes and incorporates the previous Ministerial databases of the educational and training offer.

It is useful for planning, for activation/accreditation, quality assurance and for outward communication, as well as for the external evaluation.

It consists of two parts, divided into sections:

- **Quality**
- **Administration**



The «SUA»-SP - Quality

- Section A – Objectives of the training: what the SP aims to achieve through the design and implementation of the courses. In design it is necessary to consider both the demand for training on the part of families and students (internal stakeholders), both the demand for skills in the labour market and professional organisations (external stakeholders).
- Section B – Student experience: comprises the plan of studies, the temporal order of the courses and related exams, the learning environment, i.e. the infrastructure and the context services provided for students.

The «SUA»-SP - Quality

- Section C – results of education: describes the results of training by data regarding enrollment, career and exit of students, as well as the effectiveness of studies with reference to their inclusion in a workplace.
- Section D – organisation and quality management: concerns the management and organisation of the Quality Assurance system of education, both at the University level (Committee for Quality of Education Control, Evaluation Board and Faculty-Students Joint Commission), both at SP level (quality of the learning outcomes and educational service quality).



The «SUA»-SP - Administration

Contains information about the Study Programme (SP), i.e. the contact persons and facilities, the reference Faculty, the student representatives, the composition of the QA management group, the mentors, the possible enrolment limit planning, the presence of multiple or joint degree, course locations, any articulation in curricula.

- Planned teaching offer Section: that is the **Didactical Regulations of the SP** in which all the training activities are defined for the cohort of students starting in the academic year, referred to in the “SUA” form.
- Delivered educational offer Section: that is the **Studies Prospectus** including all the learning activities delivered in a given academic year and targeted at different cohorts of students.
- Section F - educational regulations: basic, characterizing, related or integrative educational activities, other activities, any notes regarding the training activities.



The Review Reports

The Review Report, which is an integral part of the training activities for QA, is a planned and recurring process aimed at verifying the appropriateness of the Study-Programme's learning outcomes planned by the Course of Study, their correspondence with the results and the effectiveness of the Course's management.

It includes also the research of the causes of any unsatisfactory results, in order to take all appropriate corrective actions and improvements.

The Review Report can be:

- Annual
- Cyclical



The Annual Review Report (RAR)

It is drawn up annually in order to monitor training activities, their tools, services and infrastructures.

On the basis of the analysis of quantitative data (enrolment in Study Programme, regularity of the study curriculum, ending of the Study Programme and entry into the labour market) and the related indicators, taking into account their evolution over the previous academic years, the critical issues observed or reported on individual segments of curriculum and on their coordination during the academic periods, the Annual Review Report supports, analyses and comments:

- **the effects of the remedial actions** contained in the previous Annual Review Reports;
- **the strong points and the areas to be improved** which arise from the analysis of the current academic year;
- **corrective actions on the critical elements** highlighted, the changes deemed necessary on the basis of the changing conditions and the actions carried out in order to improve the situation.



The Cyclical Review Report

It is drawn up at intervals of several years, depending on the duration of the SP and on the frequency of accreditation and in preparation for a periodical accreditation visit. The report highlights the permanence of the validity of the training objectives and of the management system used by the SP to achieve them. It examines the relevance of the training needs which is at the basis of the SP, the professional figures of reference and their expertise, the consistency of the learning outcomes foreseen by the SP as a whole and by the individual courses and the effectiveness of the SP management system.

The cyclical Review Report supports, analyses and comments:

- **the effects of remedial actions** contained in the previous cyclical Review Reports;
- **the strong points and the areas to be improved** which arise from the analysis of the current period and the perspectives for the next periods;
- **the corrective actions** on the critical elements highlighted, the changes deemed necessary on the basis of the changing conditions and the actions carried out in order to improve the situation.

The role of the Administrative Staff in the AVA process: the «SUA»-SP

The document is carried out by the SP coordinator aided by the colleagues of the SP-QA committee, at Department level.

The administrative staff, notably the Head of the Teaching Unit and the Head of the Research Unit support the academic staff providing:

1. data about student enrolment; teaching and research activities; exams; drop-outs; ...
2. expertise about legislation and rules (from SP ideas and blueprint into the “real” SP.)



The role of the Administrative Staff in the AVA process: the «SUA»-SP

Once the document is ready, is up to the (administrative) Head of the Teaching Unit to input all the data into one electronic form.

Only he / she may have access to the IT system, in order to avoid that too many people are working on the same document and also for privacy reasons.

The stakeholders involved in the QA system

1. Governing Bodies and General Management (so-called Senior Management)
2. Evaluation Board (NdV)
3. Quality Committee (PQ)
4. Peer boards (CP)
5. Schools
6. Departments
7. Study Programmes (SPs)

Responsibility and quality Policy

The **responsibility** for the University quality is under the jurisdiction of the **Top Academic Bodies**:
Rector, Administrative Board, Academic Senate and General Manager.

Their role is to define the **guidelines** for the quality policy.

The Quality Committee is responsible for University QA.



The QA system's bodies

The QA system involves all the staff (both teaching and administrative), but above all three main bodies are involved in the evaluation:

- 1. The University Quality Committee (PQ)**
- 2. The Teachers-Students Joint Committee (CP)**
- 3. The Evaluation Board (NdV)**



The University Quality Committee

The **UQC** is an internal structure aimed at promoting the culture quality within the University and at providing expert advice to the government bodies of our University on QA issues, of control and monitoring of QA processes, promotion of continuous quality improvement and support to University structures in the management of QA processes.



The University Quality Committee

The PQA has the task of supporting the implementation of quality policy defined by the governance bodies, preparing the necessary organizational tools, therefore:

supports the structures involved in the setting up and management of the processes involved in the QA,

verifies that all the processes are carried out as planned, eventually producing the necessary operational guidelines,

monitors the results of the processes,

evaluates the achievement of objectives.

The PQA assumes the overall responsibility for QA



UQC's role

The UQC is therefore placed in a position of coordination among the academic bodies, including the Evaluation Board and those responsible for quality at the level of teaching and research structures. It is also the main privileged speaker towards the CEV during accreditation visits.

The respect of the UQC's powers and functions is checked, first of all by the Evaluation Board and, during the accreditation process, by the CEV within the Periodical Accreditation QA requirements.

The Teachers-Students Joint Committee

The CP is composed by an equal number of Professors and Students; its activities are:

- **monitoring** of the educational offer and of the teaching quality, as well as of the service activities for students;
- **identification of indicators** for the evaluation of the results of the educational offer
- **formulating opinions** on the activation and suspension of SP.

The CP expresses its opinions and makes proposals for the improvement which are collected in an Annual Report, to be sent to the UQC and to the Evaluation Board by every December 31.



The Evaluation Board

The Evaluation Board is a University body whose tasks are **evaluation** and **formulation of guidelines**.

It deals - pursuant to Law 537/93 and Law 370/99 – with **internal evaluation** and formulation of **guidelines/recommendations** regarding:

- administrative management,
- teaching and research activities,
- interventions for supporting the right to education

The EB carries out its activities by monitoring, also through comparative costs-performance analyses, proper use of public resources, impartiality and efficiency of administrative action, productivity of teaching and research.



The Evaluation Board

The “AVA” document attributes to the Evaluation Boards further tasks, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **Assessment of the University Quality Assurance policy**, with particular reference to its consistency with the European and national standards and guidelines and to its compatibility with the available resources;
2. **Assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organization** (processes and organizational structure) of the University for training and research, and for QA of training and research;
3. **Assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness** of the QA system of SPs and Departments;



The Evaluation Board

4. **Evaluation of the implementation and monitoring of the quality** of training and research QA at the level of University, SPs, Departments and coordinating structures (students 'opinion, reports of CP, guidelines of the government bodies, ...) ;
5. **Evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the management** for training and research quality, also with regard to the effectiveness of interventions for quality improvement;
6. **Formulation of guidelines and recommendations** to improve the quality of education and research activities of the University;
7. In addition, **to check the persistence of the quantitative and qualitative requirements** for the initial and periodical accreditation of the Study-Programmes and of their venues.

The open points in the activity of the Evaluation Board

The Evaluation Board has to assess the organization of the Quality Assurance, and then it evaluates the performance of the Quality Committee.

However, some operational tasks are not clarified yet:

- the evaluation from the students belongs both to the Evaluation Board and to the Quality Committee.
- The quality improvement belongs both to the EB and the QC
- The evaluation of the results and the audit cannot be left only to the EB.

A reasonable solution would be to commit the ex-post evaluation to the EB and the monitoring to the QC.



In short

EB has **documented** functions of monitoring and internal auditing of the system operation of the Quality Assurance of the University, whose instruments are designed and managed by the Quality Committee according to government bodies' decisions.

The EB in the AVA report :

- evaluates the organization in the management of the Quality Assurance (QA) for training and research
- evaluates the effectiveness of the organization of the University
- evaluates the effectiveness of the organization of the study-programmes
- evaluates the effectiveness of the Departments
- evaluates the effective implementation of QA for training and research
- evaluates the interactions between the Teachers-Students Joint Committee and the Quality Committee responsible for managing of the study-programmes and also the results of improvement measures explicitly needed
- evaluates in every fields the effectiveness of the improvement measures and their actual consequences
- provides guidance and recommendations



Accreditation and functions of the EB

In order to receive the accreditation by ANVUR for newly activated study-programmes, the EB checks if these meet the indicators of initial accreditation defined by ANVUR, and, only in case of a positive outcome, it edits a technical-explicative report.

This technical-explicative report is inserted into the ministerial database and creates one of the elements that ANVUR evaluates during the accreditation of the above-mentioned study-programmes.

The EB in the statute of USG

Art. 23 - The evaluation board

1. The evaluation board is composed by six experts in management and evaluation of scientific and educational facilities, two of which are chosen among the teachers in service at the University, and by a student designated according to the rules of the General Regulation.
2. The components, belonging to different cultural areas, are proposed by the Rector and approved individually by the academic senate. The coordinator is elected by the EB among the members not in service at the University. A pro-rector or a delegate of the Rector with the task of informing and connecting, attends the meetings without voting rights.

The EB in the statute of USG

3. The Coordinator shall convene the meetings and coordinates the activity of the board. In case of a tie, his vote shall prevail.
4. The board assesses the activities of the University every year and exercises any other functions assigned to it by the legislation, including the present Statute and the regulations of the University.
5. In the evaluation of educational and scientific activities, the board uses external experts specialists in various disciplines. It also uses self-assessment documents prepared by departments and by the council of the study-programmes. It also uses the observations made in this regard by schools, joint committees constituted by the University and by the observers for the quality of education and research.

The EB in the statute of USG

6. The board transmits every year, no later than the month of November, a report to the Rector, the Academic Senate and the Board of governors for the decisions according to their jurisdiction. To this report are attached self-evaluations referred to in the previous paragraph.
7. The structures involved may reasonably ask, for once, the review of evaluation reports.
8. The members of the boards remain in charge for not more than three years and may be reappointed only once. Each year two members are appointed or confirmed.
9. The board has operating structures and financing that allow it to be completely independent

USG Evaluation Board

- prof. Giliberto Capano – full professor- SSD SPS/04 Political Science - Università degli Studi di Bologna – **external member and president**;
- prof. Paolo Carbone – full professor - SSD ING-INF/07 electrical and electronical measurements- Università degli Studi di Perugia – external member;
- prof. Simone Lazzini – associate professor - SSD SECS-P/07 business economics- Università degli studi di Pisa - external member;
- dott.ssa Emanuela Stefani – director of the conference of the italian rectors (CRUI) and of CRUI foundation - external member;
- prof.ssa Antonella Rovere – full professor – SSD M-STO/09 paleography - Università degli Studi di Genova;
- prof.ssa Mara Zuccardi Merli – full professor - SSD SECS-P/07 business economics - Università degli Studi di Genova;
- Ms. Francesca Glorialanza, student.

Web site: <http://www.unige.it/nucleo/>



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Thank you for your kind attention!