



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

## Rapporto Annuale 2017 - 2018

*Executive summary - english version*

**Nucleo di Valutazione di Ateneo**

THE UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

Nucleo di Valutazione di Ateneo  
University Assessment Committee

ANNUAL UNIVERSITY REPORT  
2017-2018

## • **THE NUCLEO DI VALUTAZIONE'S ANNUAL REPORT**

**2017-2018**

### • **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The object of the Nucleo di Valutazione (NdV) annual Report is to comment informally on the organisation and management of Padova University with a key assessment focus on quality, efficiency and transparency. The Report examines how the University's organisation and management of human, instrumental and physical resources meets its strategic aims. This year the Report contains a new chapter dedicated to the ANVUR visit which took place from 12th to 16th November, involving all areas of the University and representing a great stimulus to the University's life and future growth.

The Report presents and analyses significant data and indicators which will improve and enrich the monitoring mechanisms that have been developed over the years. It is to be hoped that this ordered and reasoned summary of the evidence gathered during the year will be a useful tool for whoever wants to have a picture of the University's students, teachers, staff, departments, initiatives and research.

The Report begins with a brief introduction, followed by ten chapters on people, organisation, teaching, student services, research, third mission and social impact, the visit of the CEV (Commission of Expert Assessors) from ANVUR, internationalisation, the management of financial resources and, finally, University buildings.

### **PEOPLE**

Well over 8,000 people work for the University of Padova, as academic staff or administrative and technical staff. This growing community constitutes a great resource for the University, which, unlike other universities, has been able to consolidate the numbers of people studying and working there through good management practices.

In 2017/18, 57,914 students studied at Padova University, a figure which has remained fairly stable over the past three years. (In 2015/16 the number was 57,272).

As regards staff, the past three years has seen an increase in the numbers of full (PO) and associate (PA) professors, and more markedly in temporary researchers (RTD), a fact that would indicate the University is in a phase of staff renewal and openness towards the external world. The University has 2,201 teachers: 532 PO, 965 PA, 363 RTI and 341 RTD.

An examination of the composition of the University's teaching staff shows that there has been a fall in the number of permanent researchers (RTI) and a marked increase in the numbers of temporary researchers (RTD). This policy has led to Padova having a higher-than-average percentage of temporary researchers; in 2018 only Florence and Federico II Naples had more RTDs. However it should be pointed out that the average age of RTDs

at Padova continues to be high and increasing slightly (39 years) when positions of this sort should be occupied by younger scholars.

There has been little change in the numbers of technical-administrative staff (PTA) and managerial staff (2,283). There are also 42 Language Experts and Collaborators (CEL) and 39 agricultural workers.

As previous Reports have indicated, although this depends greatly on where they work, there is still an imbalance in the numbers of women employed as teachers and researchers by the University. With only 37% of its teaching staff being women, Padova remains the worst case in Italy of gender imbalance at university. This is particularly so at higher career levels. Only 23% of PO and 36% of PA are women. 50% of RTI are women, but only 43% of newly appointed RTD are female, a missed opportunity to reduce the gender gap. There has been a slight improvement in this area compared with 2017 (in 2017, 21% of PO were women) and hopefully the trend will continue and bring about the end of gender imbalance, especially in the light of the importance given to this issue.

In contrast to the teaching staff situation, the percentage of women in the PTA is over 50% for all categories. However in top positions, the situation is different, with only 3 female Managers (27%). Recent recruitment at managerial level has not redressed this imbalance, which has fortunately benefitted by the return of a female manager who had been on leave.

On the subject of recruitment, the NdV applauds the University's adherence to legislation regarding the hiring of teachers. Article 24 of Law 240/2010 established that only 50% of researchers could be promoted to professorial standing. Between 2014 and 2018 Padova University hired only 35.7% of professors in this way. The figure for 2018 was 20.7%. This shows how Padova has not only amply respected the law but has also favoured procedures that fairly consider candidates from outside the University.

In 2018, Italian universities received 2,058.54 recruitment points, many more than the 1,526.2 of 2017. Likewise for Padova University, the 2018 value (78.69) is higher than 2017 (68.0), although in percentile terms this represents an increase of only 16% whereas the national average is 33%. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, there is the smaller weight (3.7% compared to 4.1% in 2017) that contract terminations had on the recruitment points because more contracts were terminated in 2018. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a decrease in weight of the University's "margin", which is the financial capacity to cope with new recruitment determined as the difference between 82% of total net income and total staff expenses and infrastructure costs. This decrease is due to the University's significant commitment to recruitment and promotion both for PTA and teaching staff. According to certified data provided by the Ministry's PROPER procedure, Padova University's staffing costs increased by almost 10 million Euro between 2015 and 2017. Padova is the Italian university which invested most in staff over those three years.

Data analysis of retirement shows that again in 2018 there is a consistent number of retirements, particularly among full professors where the average age is obviously higher. Estimates of contract terminations due to retirement vary greatly within the different Departments; for example, between 2016 and 2026 almost 50% of the current staff in the Department of Medicine will retire.

Padova occupies a good position in the Special Plan for the recruitment of type-B researchers (law, L 144/2018 has allocated 30 million Euro for 2019 and 88.630 million Euro from 2020 to hire researchers as described under

article 24, comma 3, letter b) of the law L 240/2010). The plan, creating 1,511 posts nationally (206 more than the previous Plan), is disciplined by Ministerial Decree 204/2019 with the express purpose of facilitating the entry of young people into research and increasing the competitiveness of Italian University research at the international level. Padova is in fifth place among Italian universities with an allocation of 58 researchers, a figure which represents 4% of the national total.

Finally, the NdV is pleased to see that, despite an increase in student numbers, the University has managed to maintain a good student-teacher ratio, better than other similarly-sized Italian universities.

Although Padova University is large, healthy and relatively dynamic, there is still room for improvement and the NdV would recommend it institute policies to favour staff renewal and turnover at all levels in view of the great numbers of retirements expected in the near future. As regards teaching staff, attention must be paid to recruiting young people (temporary researchers, research affiliates and post-doctoral students), to redressing imbalances in the composition of the teaching body and to reducing the gender gap in top positions. Given its great traditions and history, positive gender policies and active promotion of professional growth are essential for Padova University's image.

## **ORGANISATION**

Over the last year, the University has continued the important reorganisation project that initially regarded the Central Administration (2017-2018) and then the Departments and decentralised structures, including the University Library System (2018-2019). The reorganisation of the System has followed the Administration Council's Guidelines, whose main aim is to organise all University structures and their managerial processes in the interests of simplification, effectiveness and internal efficiency.

The NdV recognises the efforts made by the University to define and start this reorganisation and the commitment undertaken to ensure its future completion.

In particular, the NdV, also in its role as an Independent Assessment Organ (NdV/OIV), recognises the strategic role played by the updated Performance Measurement and Assessment System (SMVP) in supporting the administration's reorganisation processes. The NdV/OIV positively views SMVP updates for 2018 and 2019 which essentially regard the importance of linking performance cycles with the budget cycle, also in decentralised structures, via the identification of baselines, targets and performance monitoring indicators, taking into account where necessary the Departments' and centres' specific characteristics and the need to communicate fully and clearly to a wide range of directly or indirectly interested parties.

Regarding the management of the Performance Cycle, the NdV/OIV hopes that the University will adopt an approach to assessment and control that respects the deadlines laid down by law. In fact, in recent years (2016-2019), despite the appointment of a person responsible for the management of the integrated performance cycle as suggested by the NdV in the 2016-2017 Report, the University is constantly late in approving integrated Performance Plans.

Regarding the instruments adopted for setting up the SMVP, the NdV again applauds the University's decision to continue its participation in the *Good Practice* (GP) project, which favours and promotes constant monitoring of organisational performance by benchmarking the efficiency and effectiveness of specific administrative services.

The NdV/OIV considers this project to be a particularly effective instrument for the entire Performance Cycle process and hopes its results will be given greater publicity so as to further involve the University in the current processes of improvement. The NdV/OIV notices that greater coordination between the GP project's data gathering and data elaboration deadlines and the Performance cycle would help the University respect the deadlines established by law.

Finally, the NdV/OIV is particularly appreciative of the administration's efforts to make good use of customer satisfaction surveys, which reveal opinions on perceived performance and thus involve people more profoundly. The NdV/OIV suggests that this instrument and its effectiveness be closely monitored.

Considering the warnings expressed in the first Gender Budgeting document of 2016 and its 2017-18 update, recent pronouncements on gender equality by MIUR and ANAC, the UN's 2030 Agenda and the NdV's frequent referral to the topic, Padova University at the end of 2018 made proposals to promote gender equality in the university and significantly reduce the gender gap.

## **TEACHING**

In 2018/2019, Padova University offers a wide range of degree courses: 179 as compared to 177 in the preceding year. There are 80 first-level degree courses, 87 second-level degree courses, and 12 single-level courses (4 of which are in Medicine and Surgery).

Despite this wide choice and little change in the numbers of students enrolled, there has been a 5.7% drop in the number of new enrolments in first-level degree courses and single-level courses, which is a high number when compared to the national average (-3%).

However, second-level degree courses continue to be very attractive: not only has the number of enrolments increased but there have been increases both in the numbers of students from other parts of Italy (from 20% to 23% in the past five years) and international students (from 2.3% to 5.8% in the same period). The increase in international students is partly attributable to the fact that there has been an increase in the number of courses taught in English. On the other hand, there continues to be a fall in enrolments from students from other parts of Italy in first-level and single-level degree courses.

Therefore, thought has to be given to the effectiveness of what is being done to make Padova an attractive university, especially as far as first-level courses are concerned. Apart from considerations of quality and choice, it may be necessary to consider other measures (for example, in the area of career/study orientation). It is however clear that quality and choice are the important factors for second-level students because they are more self-aware and mature.

Summer courses at Bressanone continue to attract students, despite the fact that there has been a decrease in the number of courses available: the number of applications is stable and surveys demonstrate that students are satisfied with the location, teaching methods and services on offer.

The quality of teaching and the way it is articulated is partly reflected by examining student careers. The data reveal significant differences between Schools and indicate situations where drop-outs and difficulties in acquiring course unit credits assume alarming proportions. Although there has been little change in 2018 compared with the preceding year, there has been a little improvement, evidenced by the diminishing numbers

of regularly enrolled students who did not acquire course credits and the increasing numbers of students graduating on time.

To promote a culture of excellence, in 2004 the University founded the *Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori* (SGSS), which offers innovative, interdisciplinary educational methods and a close link between teaching and research. The School is highly attractive and the number of applicants remains stable: most candidates come from other parts of Italy. According to data supplied by the *Associazione Alumni della Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori*, it appears that SGSS students obtain better-than-average results (90% graduate with full marks, 99% graduate on time), about half live and work abroad (49%), the majority work in research (57%) and 96% found employment within a year after graduating.

Padova University offers a wide range of postgraduate courses, including PhD courses, Specialisation Schools, first- and second-level Masters courses. The University also organises masterclasses and professional refresher courses, training courses and *Summer-Winter School*. In 2017-2018 the University activated a training course worth 24 course credits in Anthropology, Psychology, Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology for secondary school teachers applying for career advancement.

Second-level degree graduates continue to show interest in research doctorates: the call for candidates on the 34th cycle saw an increase in the number of applicants (2,718 compared to 2,392 for the 34th cycle and 2,406 for the 32nd) and in the numbers of study grants available.

The general picture then for 2017/18 is very positive. As highlighted in previous years, specific circumstances in some degree courses or single course components create worrying student career data. We would therefore renew the recommendation of giving greater space to innovative teaching methods (e-learning, digital support, social media for teaching) to integrate or substitute traditional approaches. This consideration and the recent CEV visit may act as a good starting point for giving more importance to data gathered from student opinion surveys (we suggest that they be used in a less formal way and that students be more actively involved in opinion analysis in Joint Student-Teacher Committees (CPSD)) and specific surveys should be introduced to assess single problems and monitor proposed measures and interventions (as we suggested last year).

Turning to employment opportunities for second-level degree graduates, Padova University occupies first place among similar Italian universities for the numbers of graduates in employment both one year and three years after graduation. The 20th survey "Graduate Employment Situation", promoted by Consorzio AlmaLaurea, involved over 9,000 Padova University graduates, which represents 75.3% of the total (9,190 out of 12,210 students).

One of the crucial components in the University's Quality Control (AQ) processes is the student opinion survey for each course. The survey is carried out via a questionnaire that students compile before enrolling for an examination. The questionnaire elicits the students' levels of satisfaction, the degree to which they feel involved in university community life and their suggestions on how to improve teaching. The University has made a great effort to carry out these surveys: in 2017/18, 94% of assessable courses were assessed (7,225 out of 7,671). The figure varies a little between the various Schools but is never below 90%. The surveys involved almost 53,000 students who compiled more than 340,000 questionnaires, in almost 260,000 cases as attending students. The introduction of the obligation to compile these questionnaires has had a significant effect, bringing about a 12% increase in compiled forms for attenders and a 24% increase for non-attenders. General satisfaction levels (7.77

on average), satisfaction with organisational matters (8.13 on average) and satisfaction with teaching (7,86 on average) are high in all Schools.

Regarding these surveys on teaching quality, the NdV underlines the importance of adding other information to the students' assessment, for example the percentage of attenders and non-attenders. Open-ended questions on teaching quality are also very useful in understanding strong and weak points and are often used by teachers to make improvements. Finally, as suggested in the past, it would be useful if universities shared their experiences in this field, and the NdV positively views initiatives in this sense, both locally and nationally.

The ANVUR visit was a good opportunity to promote a culture of attention to quality; the NdV hopes that attention to this will continue to remain high, involving everyone at all times in the organisational and managerial processes of the University's courses and teachings.

## **STUDENT SERVICES**

As regards student fees, the Administration has decided, on the basis of what emerged in 2017, to maintain a sliding scale for fees if the application of the maximum figure envisaged by law is economically disadvantageous for the student and to make no changes to single annual fees, reductions or exemptions for lower-income students.

As reported last year, student representatives informed the NdV of delays in the payment of the final instalment of study grants, caused by the blocking of regional funds destined for students. The University stepped in and released funds to cover the total cost of study grants. In 2017/18, the University earmarked 80% of the Supplementary State Fund received the preceding year, plus a quota of profits from the 2016 Budget, for a total sum of 8 million Euro so as to guarantee the payment of nearly all grants, a gesture of responsibility towards the students and their families.

For 2018/19, the University has decided to earmark 2 million Euro annually to a special fund so as to guarantee the payment of student grants.

The NdV favourably views the University's efforts to guarantee citizens' constitutional right to education and will monitor the effectiveness of these efforts. The fact that the University has put aside its own funds to cover grants when this should be the responsibility of Regional Administration is particularly worthy of praise.

Regarding incentives, the NdV is pleased to see that in 2017/18 and 2018/19 the University awards grants to deserving students ("Mille e una lode") which reward the best students on each Course of Study (about 3%) with services to the value of 1,000 Euro (periods of study abroad, additions to Erasmus grants, internships in Italy and abroad, tutoring). It is not even necessary to apply for the grant because the selection process is automatic, the winners being notified via email to their university address.

Moreover, since 2016, Padova University has recognised significant student sporting achievements with an incentive of 1,500 Euro. 38 students were rewarded in this way in 2016/17, a figure which increased to 68 in 2017/18. Attention to sport is one of the University's strategic objectives and the NdV is pleased to see that 2018 saw significant development of University Sport and Wellbeing projects directed at all students.



Generally speaking, the NdV views student services at Padova University very positively. Of particular note is the ease with which students can apply for facilitations, exemptions and study grants, some of which are commendably innovative.

The NdV also notes the increasing use of orientation for new students, a service that reaches much greater numbers than in the past. Also monitoring has revealed a notable increase in the amount and effectiveness of tutoring. In this area, the NdV particularly applauds established projects such as *Drop-out*, *Risveglio (Wake-up)* and *Cultura e accoglienza (Culture and Reception)*, and the experimental projects started in 2017, *FisiChat* and *MathChat*, which use the University online platform (Moodle) to provide help in Physics and Mathematics with a real-time, peer tutoring service.

Regarding job placement activities, the NdV sees that there were 23,930 internships in 2017/18, an increase over the preceding year. There is also a constant growth in internships carried out abroad (673), which represent almost 3% of the total.

Student opinion on internships in 2017/18 is, on the whole, as for the preceding year, positive. However, the different natures of the various Schools and relevant professional environments, coupled with the low percentage of students who assess the internships make it difficult to draw a complete picture of the situation and to make a definitive assessment. The NdV recommends that a better system for gathering student opinion should be adopted here, impressing upon potential respondents the importance of their opinion to the University for making improvements.

To meet the University's internationalisation objectives, the *Centro Linguistico di Ateneo* (University Language Centre) continues several useful projects: *Learning English for Academic Purposes*, *Face-to-face tandem learning*, *E-Tandem*. The NdV believes these projects should be monitored to assess their effectiveness and to investigate increasing their range. Such projects could have an excellent cost-benefit ratio as well as having a good effect on integration.

The NdV continues to appreciate the efforts made by the University to guarantee the right to education for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Particularly noteworthy is the increased personalisation of student support services, accompanied by the involvement of the family and local services. The NdV underlines the importance of these services both in terms of inclusion and promotion of psycho-physical health. The following initiatives are particularly relevant: last year, an attempt was made to create a collaboration network working for inclusion within the University community; there is a continuing effort to personalise university careers and promote inclusive teaching methods for students with disabilities or learning difficulties; there has been an expansion of services offered by the Psychological Assistance Service - Wellbeing without Risk (SAP BSR) which now boasts a reception desk and a support system specifically for international students; the promotion of activities offered by the University Sports Centre (CUS). As in other areas, the NdV advises more monitoring of opinions regarding these support services and there should be greater participation in elections of a representative of the Disability and Inclusion Area in the Student Council.

The NdV appreciates the efforts made by the University to fund those cultural and social initiatives promoted and managed by students to make their studies more proficient and improve the quality of university life, particularly in the areas of culture, cultural exchange, sport and leisure. Last year 85 such initiatives received funding for a total of 150,000 Euro and involved 10 outside bodies, other universities and associations. Moreover,

attractive University proposals in the area of wellness, sport and well-being have led to four interesting projects: the Student-Athlete Programme, the *Lion Cup*, *1001 Vela Cup* and *EduChef*.

Finally, the NdV positively views the University's attention to student representation by the introduction of an electronic voting system in 2018-2020 elections, the introduction of an *Open Badge* for student representatives, the creation of a consulting organ formed exclusively by international students and the organisation of training days for students elected onto the various University organs. The NdV suggests their effectiveness be monitored closely.

## **RESEARCH**

In 2017 and 2018, the new criteria for distributing resources and valuing research became more or less definitive. Padova's Strategic Guidelines 2016-2018 and its latest Integrated Performance Plans (2017-2019 and 2018-2020) set objectives to improve publication quality, as well as to increase the number of first-class scientific publications and the international visibility of its research in a bid to raise the University in both the national and international rankings.

The main events of 2017/18 were the establishment of the University Quality Praesidium (PQA), the "University Departments of Excellence" competition, which saw Padova as Italy's top-performing university, and the visit by ANVUR's Evaluation Commission (CEV) as part of its Periodic University Accreditation scheme. All of these events contributed to strengthening organizational quality across the University and, where necessary, launching a major overhaul, with research being one of the main areas involved.

A huge step towards improving quality processes was taken when the Research Quality Supervising Commission (CPQR) was established. The CPQR drew up a set of "Operational Guidelines for Departments for the Implementation of a Departmental Research Quality System" in a bid to link the University's quality cycle with that underway in each department. The year 2018 was the first time that the Departments filled out a Departmental Research Review Form (SCRI-RD), which enabled each department's experience to be evaluated by monitoring indicators and analysing the causes of variance between achieved and unachieved objectives. This highlighted any strengths that could be built on and/or weaknesses that needed to be dealt with.

The NdV's analysis of the documents in the initial stages of this new quality process revealed that the Departments showed a differing range of abilities when it came to planning research and evaluating the results. Although this outcome is a predictable part of a new Quality Assurance system, it needs to be processed in order to stimulate reflection that will promote continuous improvement within Research, as happened for Teaching. Poor planning risks making ex-post evaluation difficult and ineffective, undermining the work performed and reducing it to a mere formality. In light of this, the NdV encourages the University to strengthen its ongoing actions (see "Operational Guidelines for Departments for the Implementation of a Departmental Research Quality System") so that any departments with a less advanced approach to QA policies are steered towards more virtuous behaviour.

Overall, the Research QA process has taken a major step forward over the last two years, a result that the NdV considers extremely positive. Likewise, the NdV believes, as does ANVUR, that the Departments' development-

planning documents should be standardized (e.g. PTSR, teaching budget plan, departmental development project) in order to simplify and streamline the procedures.

Between 2017 and 2018, the NdV notes that MIUR funding continued to be erratic. Once the five-year Departments of Excellence funding competition had concluded, MIUR issued the PRIN competition, with its 2017 budget being almost twice that of the previous competition in 2015. This was partly due to no competitions being issued in 2016; no competitions were issued in 2018, either. This erratic situation makes it increasingly difficult to plan financially for research and testifies to the chronic lack of MIUR-awarded research funding. In light of this, the NdV welcomes the way that the University continues to support its research with a broad range of projects, thus giving its Departments a competitive edge over those at other Italian universities.

Regarding European projects and their funding, 31 Horizon 2020 projects were funded at Padova and 14 projects were funded by foundations and other EU programmes. The NdV notes that the number of Horizon 2020 projects funded in 2018 was down slightly on the previous year (37), but the fall in funding was far more significant as the University failed to acquire ERC projects (2017), which reduced average funding and thus overall income. Although it is still too early to assess the significance of these figures, the NdV believes that the situation must be monitored and, should it continue, that corrective action be taken.

Despite also winning fewer European and national projects (14 in 2018 compared with 22 in 2017), there was no fall in funding, which remained substantially steady, even slightly up on 2017.

Overall, considering the objective data on the quantity and quality of Padova's research, its enviable position in the Italian university ranking, and its climbing of international ones, the NdV concludes that research is one of the University's strengths. It is unthinkable, however, that this healthy situation will continue without government backing, but currently the University's commitment is constant and its research enjoys considerable financial support. The NdV believes that some aspects are to be monitored, especially the efficiency of the University's organizational and QA models, as well as its support schemes for winning competitive funding.

### **THIRD MISSION AND SOCIAL IMPACT**

Nowadays, Italian universities have a full understanding of how important the Third Mission (TM) is to a Quality Assurance system, with the University of Padova launching a bespoke Quality Assurance process based on strategic objectives that have been reviewed and summarized in its key documents. Specific objectives and the related indicators have been established for each area and the importance of TM has also been confirmed by a Commission for the Supervision of Third Mission Quality (CPQTM) being set up within the University's own Quality Praesidium (PQA).

In its Annual Report 2016/17, the NdV observed that some Departments were dealing with TM proactively, setting up bespoke commissions, but others are more reticent when it comes to considering TM among their institutional duties. The University's new Quality Assurance system envisages that the extent to which the Three-year Research and Development Plan (PTSR) objectives are achieved, including TM objectives, will be monitored annually in all Departments with the Departmental Research Review Form (SRRD). The NdV also believes that TM will become a field in its own right, breaking away from Research at some point in the future. With this in mind, CPQTM has started working towards devising the guidelines and model for a Third Mission Three-Year

Development Plan (PTSTM) for the University's Departments. The NdV welcomes the University's commitment to carrying out this TM-related action and considers it necessary for the consolidation of a bespoke QA system comparable to the ones introduced for Teaching and Research. The University has thus proved to be taking due consideration of the NdV's observation that its TM QA system was still too underdeveloped for it to be evaluated, a consideration that also appeared in the AVA Annual Report 2018.

As ANVUR has said that TM activities are an integral part of both Research Valorization and the Production of Public Assets, the NdV hails the commitment of the researchers in some University departments to turning the results of their work into patents, with special mention going to those who have set up spin-off companies, which are rapidly growing in number year after year. Furthermore, although some Departments have cited the difficulties of the current economic downturn, third-party revenue has remained fairly stable. Also noteworthy are the University-controlled or -participated brokering bodies that are devoted to promoting research, fostering new enterprises and finding placements for graduates, as are the various medical departments valorising their research with clinical trials.

With regard to continuous learning, the NdV welcomes the University's production of distance-learning tools, such as the MOOC, seeing this as both positive and strategically important, with the tools themselves being particularly useful for both guidance (e.g. bridging gaps in learning) and blended-learning to complement traditional classroom teaching. It recommends, however, that the development of the international distance-learning market for universities be monitored closely. The NdV also notes that there is little propensity to develop the lifelong-learning activities that ANVUR classifies as TM; if this sector is to grow, the University should encourage and valorise these activities more convincingly.

The NdV appreciates the University's widespread and ongoing commitment to holding cultural initiatives and public-engagement events that involve a wide range of University Departments, with them attracting large crowds and much publicity. A special mention should go to its online magazine Bo Live, which opened in 2018 after three pre-existing initiatives (Il Bo, ViviPadova and RadioBue) were merged and expanded. Bo Live offers quality content on a wide range of issues with the potential to appeal to a non-specialist audience. In an age when information is fragmented and we are bombarded with fake news and scientifically baseless theories, the NdV appreciates the University's decision to fulfil its natural duty to take public responsibility for providing unbiased, fact-based information.

In mid-to-late 2017, the Bo 2022 Project officially launched the celebrations for the University's 800th anniversary, with three main areas for the celebrations being established: the University's museums, its historical studies, and communications. The NdV views it as positive that the celebrations will revolve around TM events, especially public engagement, which will involve a vast number of University Departments and personnel.

## **PERIODIC ACCREDITATION VISIT TO DEPARTMENTS AND DEGREE COURSES**

The University of Padova underwent its periodic accreditation visit by ANVUR's Evaluation Commission (CEV) from 12 to 16 November 2018. The visit directly involved the University's institutional and governing bodies (Rector, Pro-Rectors for Teaching, Research and Third Mission, the Director General, the Academic Senate and

Board of Governors, the Quality Praesidium and the NdV), plus a sample of 15 Degree Courses (CdS) and 3 Departments.

The University is awaiting the first CEV report, which will decide upon the periodic accreditation of its Departments and lay the foundations for the final report by ANVUR's Governing Council.

The NdV wishes to stress that the University's preparations for the CEV visit were long and thorough, with them seeing the various Quality Praesidium Commissions (Teaching, Research and Third Mission) and the University's governors work extremely closely. The entire University played its part in preparing for the visit: a key role was played by student representatives and by the academic staff with QA responsibilities. The Technical and Administrative staff (PTA) also made an invaluable contribution.

Preparations began three years prior to the visit, with the NdV establishing an audit plan for a sample of 33 courses chosen (32 of which were visited) and 5 Departments (4 of which were visited); introducing extensive QA monitoring on Teaching, Research and Third Mission; and designing a pathway for the improvement of how the performance cycle is established and monitored.

By the second round of audits in the 2017/18 academic year, the NdV noted that some major progress had been made to remedy the weaknesses revealed in the first round (2016/17) and it appreciated the effective work that the Commission for the Supervision of Teaching Quality (CPQD) had done to eliminate these weaknesses and to improve the model used to write the Annual Report by the Joint Student-Professor Commissions (CPDS).

Over 2017/18, the CPQD supervised the periodic review process of 178 CdS, i.e. all of the active courses in 2017/18 that had completed at least one cycle and were not being phased out. It provided guidelines, plus a model for writing the review report, and ensured that the deadlines were observed.

The Departments underwent an identical process, with the Research Quality Supervising Commission drawing up operational guidelines for the introduction of a Departmental Research Quality System (May 2018), plus guidelines and a model for the completion of Departmental Research Review Form (version dated 25/06/2018). The same work was started by a Commission for the Supervision of Third Mission Quality.

The NdV retains that these extensive preparations for the CEV visit demonstrated the enormous commitment of everyone involved, both directly and indirectly. Furthermore, under the motivated, effective leadership of the University governance, these preparations inspired a collective effort towards the continuous improvement and consolidation of first-rate practices and activities.

## **INTERNATIONALIZATION**

The University recognizes and promotes internationalization as a priority and a strategy for its development, with key documents (Strategic Guidelines 2016-2018 and Integrated Performance Plan 2018-2020) stating that its primary objectives are to further enhance its international reputation as a centre for top-quality research and to turn its courses into increasingly open and international learning-environments.

The NdV commends the action taken to translate both the international sections of the University's website into English and generally all of the information needed by an international audience (e.g. posters, videos, brochures and social-network content). It also notes that much of this action has already produced notable improvements

on previous years. Especially noteworthy are the University's investment in the International Office to support cooperation with China and the introduction of a Chinese version of the University's website, currently one of the few Italian universities to have done so.

As internationalization is particularly strategic in terms of postgraduate education, the NdV welcomes the increase in the proportion of international PhD students (from 16.7% in 2016/17 to 18.5% in 2017/18), with 50.2% of them coming from Asia. This figure, up on the 46.1% of 2016/17, is the result of the solid relations that the Padova has built with Chinese universities over recent years.

The University of Padova offers a growing number of international courses set up and run with overseas universities, with Padova launching 21 international degree courses in 2017/18 alone. There was an increase in the number of Bachelor's and Master's courses held in English (18), Master's courses held entirely or partly in a foreign language (26), PhD courses held in English (28), International Winter and Summer Schools (32), and individual modules in English within degree courses held in Italian.

Although the University has made a great effort, it still has much to do in terms of raising the international appeal of its Bachelor's and Master's courses. The percentage of first-year students with a foreign high-school diploma was 1.8% in 2017/18, a modest, yet stable figure in recent years, but one that positions Padova above only the universities of Bari and Napoli "Federico II". When we look solely at Master's degrees, 5.8% of the University's students had an international Bachelor's degree. This figure is higher than for its Bachelor degree students and up on the 3.6% of the previous academic year, however it places Padova a poor fourth among the universities of its comparison group, behind Milano Statale, Bologna and Firenze.

University of Padova students have a wide range of international mobility schemes and initiatives available to them. Overall, 80% of mobility students, both outgoing and incoming, come under the Erasmus+ Studio scheme, with other major schemes including Erasmus+ Traineeship, Erasmus Mundus, and bilateral agreements. Within its comparison group (2016/17 figures), Padova ranks second for its proportion of outgoing students (2.8%) and third for incoming (2.2%). With the 1,674 cooperation agreements signed in 2017/18 (up 9% on the previous year), the number of international mobility schemes has increased constantly, as has the number of students involved. In 2017/18, 42 new and 23 renewed bilateral inter-university cooperation agreements were signed, mainly with non-EU universities, bringing the total number of active agreements to 209. The University has also shown a growing commitment to the awarding of Joint or Dual Honours degrees with foreign universities and, although the overall number of said degrees is still modest, the number of incoming degree-seekers (521) has soared, up 38% on 2016/17.

The NdV applauds the positive results of work to recruit Visiting Scientists and Visiting Professors, as numbers have risen progressively, with the 2017 competition attracting 66 Visiting Scientists and an overall budget of 260,000 euro. The "Competition to Fund the Internationalization of Teaching 2017/2018" enabled 115 Visiting Professors to work at Padova. The "Visiting Programme 2018" competition run by the CARIPARO Foundation enabled a further 144 scholars (76 Italian and 68 international) to benefit from mobility in 13 countries.

As Internationalization is one of the University's top priorities and investment is to be considered strategic for its future development, evaluation activities must be bolstered in a bid to provide an ever-clearer and deeper insight into the effectiveness of the work performed and to establish areas in need of improvement. The NdV believes that the University of Padova has all of the requisites to improve its international ranking even further, but it

must be more determined to evaluate and monitor all of its numerous activities, and thus adopt increasingly clearer financial and organizational objectives, times, actions and tools.

## **MANAGEMENT OF ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Under the terms of Italy's national university transfers framework (Ministerial Decree DM 587/2018 distributing the State University "Ordinary Financing Fund" [FFO]), 2018 saw the University of Padova confirm its ranking for the funding distributed on the basis of the categories established in 2017. The year 2018 was also the first time that the Departments of Excellence funding was introduced, with Padova being awarded 7.8% of Italy's total resources for these departments and confirming its strong position for national research. What is more, the University improved its ranking on 2017 in terms of standard cost, which rose from 4.22% to 4.33%. This result nudged it just above the national average in terms of the ratio between standard cost and historic share, which can be considered an index of efficiency for the use of ministerial funds, especially in terms of the cost of academic staff.

In 2017, the FFO accounted for about 53.5% of the University's operating income (Income Statement 2017), up slightly on previous years. However, its proportion of University-generated income edged down on previous years to stand at about 24%. The NdV therefore advises the University to continue its commitment to increasing its resources from both competitive research funding and commissioned research, despite the fact that in 2017 the latter was already up 3% on the previous year.

The year 2017 was the third that the University of Padova used a financial and property accounting system, which replaced its traditional public financial accounting to meet the requirements of Italian Legislative Decree DL 18/2012. The University managed to close and approve its budget by the deadline set for large universities, once again improving on the time it took the previous year. The University board was notified on 24 May 2018 that the budget had been closed and on 19 June 2018 that the budget had been approved. The NdV appreciates the significant progress the University made in 2017 and encourages it to continue in this vein.

In contrast, the NdV notes a mild but progressive deterioration in some of the indicators established by Legislative Decree DL 49/2012 (ratio of expenditure on personnel to operating income, debt level, and economic and financial sustainability), which partly determine the "personnel points" available to universities for recruitment and career progression. Examples include "Ratio of expenditure on personnel to total income" in 2017, which rose to 67% (it was 66.3% in 2016 and 64.5% in 2015) and "Financial sustainability", which fell to 1.18% (compared with 1.2% in the previous two years). The NdV understands and appreciates that this trend is the outcome of the University's human capital investment policy and thus does not deem the result to be a problem per se. However, it does believe it important that these indicators be monitored constantly in a bid to predict their dynamics effectively.

The NdV also notes that in January 2019 ANVUR published its "Guidelines for the Integrated Management of Performance Cycles and the Budget of Italian State Universities" in an attempt to provide useful instructions on these matters. The document highlights "the importance of the budget process as a key pathway towards integration" and stresses "the need to anchor objectives and resources to a series of measures that compare planning with achievements by the end of the financial year". In light of this, the NdV reiterates that the

University must ensure stronger ties between objectives and allocation of resources, and that it must fully exploit the advantages of the financial/property and analytical systems. These systems provide extensive support for monitoring and controlling management costs and facilitate ties with the performance cycle, thus enabling the University to evaluate the effectiveness of its action for achieving its strategic and operational objectives.

## **PROPERTY**

This is the second consecutive year that the NdV has dealt with Property in its Annual report, as it is convinced that the manner in which this patrimony is conserved, maintained and managed is of enormous importance for the University. This belief is also clear from the 175-or-so million euro that the University has earmarked for its property in the three-year period 2019-2021.

The University's 2019-2021 three-year plan confirms that its approach towards building-work is extremely transparent. It is University policy to draw up a preliminary project for each building, or group of buildings, that focuses on safety standards, user needs, plus optimization of spaces and their use. The building-work over this three-year period will both complete the work scheduled in the previous plans and start the new work deemed necessary to ensure that the University expands sufficiently and streamlines logistics.

Building-work is also an integral part of University strategy and has been recently reviewed in its "Strategic Guidelines 2016-2018", which details three main objectives (Economic and Financial Equilibrium, Sustainability and Safety, and Property Management) and their respective measures. The objectives in the University's "Performance Cycle: strategic objectives 2017-2018" paper have remained unchanged, but the related indicators and measures have been reviewed.

The University's strategic objectives for building-work focus mainly on financial sustainability, energy-saving and use of resources. The NdV appreciates the enormous commitment that the University has made to building-work in order to adapt its infrastructure to the development needs of the large and modern university it is. The NdV equally commends the University's decision to include building-work and the related issues among its strategic guidelines.

The University's building plan focuses on streamlining and reorganizing work in order to ensure the quality of spaces, as well as functional and economic efficiency. The main work includes: the completion of the Humanities department in via Beato Pellegrino; the conversion of the former Piave Military Barracks into a new Social Sciences department; and the refurbishment of the Fusinato Student Halls, which will become the new seat of the *Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori*. Plans for the new Engineering department, near Padova Exhibition Centre, have been made, but not yet approved or funded; thus, the NdV recommends that the plans be considered and monitored carefully.

The University administration is conducting a thorough and analytical census of how many classroom places, IT stations and lab places are effectively available, but, as the NdV has already mentioned, the complete picture is not yet clear. This information is needed rather urgently, one reason being that the University is using classroom occupancy rate as a quality indicator in its Strategic Guidelines 2016-2018 for building-work.

In the management report attached to the Single Budget 2016, the Rector pointed out some issues with the financial resources needed for renovation and building-work, plus routine and extraordinary maintenance, as



although these resources had been made available, they had only been partly used. A comparative review of the three-year building plans, which are approved each year, revealed that in a number of cases the funds earmarked were still not being used in the year envisaged, but were being carried over to the next three-year plan, with their use being postponed for one year. Although these delays are, in some cases, due to external circumstances, be they unforeseen or unforeseeable, the NdV still believes that the timeframes established and the feasibility of meeting deadlines need to be thought through carefully, with consideration being given to the constraints placed by the availability of human resources.