DOC 1. INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF SCUOLA NORMALE SUPERIORE
EVALUATION PROTOCOL

Summary

SECTION A. INITIAL ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS (MINISTERIAL DECREE 439/2013)

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
STRUCTURAL REQUIREMENTS	- In-school residence, namely the availability of appropriate accommodation facilities (e.g. University colleges) for the number of students enrolled to study at the school and specifically a number of beds within the school or available on the basis of agreements with external accommodation facilities not less than the number of pre-doctoral students envisaged. - Availability of teaching and scientific facilities such as classrooms, libraries and laboratories appropriate for the educational activities and the type of research subjects envisaged. - Economic and financial sustainability of the school's activities	- The School has both Pre-Doctoral Courses where it is requested to provide lodging facilities and Ph.D.programs for which it is not required to provide lodging facilities. **The Committee would like to understand how this organization works and if there are related critical aspects** - Classrooms, libraries, computer facilities, etc. appear adequate to the number of students and well furnished. How are laboratories and research centres used by the students (predoc and doc)? Is the technical support adequate? **The Committee would like to get a clarification on these points during the visit.** **Role of research activities in the school** - Experimental labs are different in size, resources, heritage. The Committee would like to understand the role of the various labs in fulfilling the mandate of the school for pre-doc and postdoc. We would like understand more about the quality and the usage of the labs, always in the context of the School mission. The **Committee would like this aspect to be clarified during the visit.** Funding of the laboratories from the outside or by school budget? Who is ensuring technicians' salaries and adequate and continued technical services? **The Committee would like to understand more about the HPC resources available to students** - Financial indicators are all very good, though slightly decreasing in the last few years (personnel). We note a substantial lack of international competitive funding. The rate of international (EU) competitive programs awarded to the school is surprisingly low, in particular in certain research area**.**

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
		The Committee would like to understand this aspect, for each of the research areas involved. There are signs of unbalance between the various research areas in the schools. We would like to understand better this point. We would like to see the ranking analysis performed in the QA report split according to the various research sectors/department. We did not see the budget forecast for next years nor possible development plans . How does this relate to the federation process? How does the federation process connect to the SWOT analysis presented in the strategic document? **We would like to discuss these points during the visit** **The Committee would like to understand more about the medium-term future vision of the school** Specifically we would like an answer the following question: **which actions are undertaken to ensure that the main goals of the school statute are met in the rapidly evolving world of research ?**
STUDENTS	- Selection admission procedures, including foreign languages, aimed at encouraging the development of an international student body; - a minimum number of 150 duly enrolled students in pre-doctoral courses, where these are offered, - 100 in doctoral or postgraduate courses, where these are offered.	We did not found references to the orienteering courses that the School provides to the high school students. This is an important contribution to the school following its statute goals. We would like in general to hear about the activities that the school implements to ensure an adequate participation in the competitive selection of students from all-over Italy. Selection procedures are up to international standards; the success rate of applicants is of the order of 1/6 which is indeed very selective – is there any time dependence? Is the ratio of doctoral students similar ? **it would be interesting to see the time evolution and the comparison.**

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
		How many pre doc students come from abroad ? are there any incentives to select non Italian pre-docs ? Advertising at national and international level seems quite negligible. Language policy at Pisa University: are the courses in the Italian language ? and within the school ? what about doctoral courses ? ERASMUS PROGRAM: how many incoming and outgoing? There is a mention of reduction of University of Pisa/ERASMUS/SNS collaboration? Why ? What about the same statistics for doctoral students ? **We would like to get these figures.** Collaboration with UniPi is essential for the School's functioning. **We would like to hear more about strengths and weaknesses of this model** An admission exam for foreigners is always a critical issue due to travel and remote telematic oral sessions that are also difficult. Which measures are in place to help these candidates? How important is it for the school to gain a significant proportion of non Italian/ Italian students for the two courses ? **We would like to hear more about this issue** **For example the Committee would be interested to discuss the adoption of a selection procedure close to the UK/US one**: selection is based on paper submission, then for the few selected candidates an interview is arranged, and the school offers reimbursement of travel expenses as necessary (mainly if the interview cannot be done via skype/remote) Are the difficulties with the selection of new PhD students the same across the different fields of the school?

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
		Would it be possible/suitable to develop the present exam into an electronic one? Has it been considered ? Advantages vs disadvantages. Would the school consider a growth in number of students (both courses) a medium term goal ? how has the number of students evolved in the last 10-20 years ? **We would like to hear about these issues** Are there –post-graduate training fellowships? **If yes, it would be helpful to know how they will be organized, selected, etc**. We could not find a detailed plan for the future evolution of positions in each PhD course; **The Committee asks for clarifications of these points during the visit.** Fellowships are increased during periods spent outside Italy. Are there contributions coming from the foreign receiving institutions?
TEACHING STAFF [1]	- The indicator relating to the number of students per faculty member for pre-doctoral courses is calculated as the ratio between the number of regular students enrolled in pre-doctoral programmes and the number of professors employed by the school (full, associate or adjunct professors in accordance with Article 6 of Law No 240/2010) or 100% available on the basis of agreements with other universities. The student/faculty member ratio should not be less than one faculty member every ten students. - The indicator for doctoral courses is based on the total number of students enrolled in doctoral courses divided by the total number	In terms of faculty members the overall number is adequate to cover the various research areas although detailed data on how they are subdivided among the different areas/labs/PhD courses is lacking, making it difficult to judge if there are themes/teams understaffed. **The Committee asks for clarifications of these points during the visit.** Are there indications of the student scores depending on the topic/course/project? Is the number of lab technicians adequate considering the research laboratories?

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[1] Namely the maximum amount of teaching that can be provided. These requirements define the student/teacher relationship and the minimum number of research staff, assistants and researchers.

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
	of tenured faculty members (full, associate or adjunct professors in accordance with Article 6 of Law No 240/2010) or 100% available on the basis of agreements with other universities. For doctoral ad postgraduate courses, that ratio should not be less than one teacher every eight students. - The number of research assistants and researchers should not be less than double the number of professors (full and associate)[2]. The calculation includes full, associate and adjunct professors and those available 100% under agreements.	**The Committee asks for clarifications of these points during the visit.** Please provide statistics of international grants and visiting grants.
STUDENT'S SERVICES	- Availability of mentoring programmes for pre-doctoral students and placement for the entire student population; - Availability of mobility funds for pre-doctoral students to be defined for each undergraduate class for which supplementary tuition activities are offered by Schools for Advanced Studies; - Availability of mobility funds for doctoral students intended to encourage participation of students in research activities and research teaching both nationally and internationally on a scale at least equal to that required for students in Universities doctoral courses (Article 9(2) and (3) of Ministerial Decree No 45/2013); - Requirement that all places for doctoral/postgraduate courses are covered by study grants or an equivalent endowment (see Ministerial Decree No 45/2013 and subsequent Ministerial Memorandum No 0011677 of 14 April 2017 "Guidelines for accreditation of doctoral courses").	Is there an effective Job Placement Service? How do students choose their directions towards professional activities ? **The ERASMUS placement** program functions well: does SNS participate in it ? **The Committee would like to discuss this in more detail during the visit.** What about incoming mobility for researchers and success in securing grants: ERC, Marie Sklodowska-Curie, FET projects, etc.. **We would like to hear more and to receive some data.** The School meets all requirements in terms of funding, mobility programs etc. The number of collaborations and agreements with local, national, and international entities to foster mobility, further traineeships, and future occupation opportunities is ample and diverse. **What about the non-academic world ?** Outgoing mobility: availability of an excellent network of institutions, both national as well international. The number of students which benefit seems however small and may be declining. Why?

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[2] The number of researchers and research assistants may include these individuals even if they are associated with other bodies providing they operate full-time at the school under specific agreements.

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
		The Committee would like to discuss which segment of students benefits from outgoing mobility support. Is Is there support available for doc students to travel to conferences ? Are the amounts foreseen by Art.9 comma 3 of DM 45/2013 which regulates accreditation of PhD courses made available to students? **The Committee asks for clarifications of these points during the visit.** We would have liked to see more data on the post-PhD career of the students (how many stay at SNS for post-doc formation, how many stay in the academic world and in which roles etc.) We would like to understand how efficient the job placement service is. **The Committee would like to have some explanation on how it operates and how it is working.** We would like to discuss the issue of the underdeveloped student network (Alumni and so on) Is there any level of fundraising ?
TEACHING	- Whether supplementary teaching for students in undergraduate and Master's degree programs is provided, the conclusion of agreements with universities that have obtained an accreditation grade of at least C - "satisfactory" under Ministerial Decree No 987/2016 (Article 3(3) and Article 10(2); - The appropriateness of supplementary tuition provided by the School within each basic course in relation to the undergraduate courses that may be taken at the same time by the school's students. This involves identifying the classes related to the undergraduate courses that may be taken by students admitted to a specific basic course, grouped by uniform discipline/subject according to research area.	**How does the selection process of Academic staff work?** Which model is used, internally, to ensure that the best selection is performed according to international standards? We ask to specifically address this question As regards hiring the academic component: RTDa-RTDb Research post docs and so on, which are the policies? Doc Students: Tutoring : we would like to understand more about how this works. Details are lacking on how the study plan of the doc students is decided, assembled, formulated. The teaching regulations specify the type and range of the duration of

REQUIREMENTS	INDICATORS	REQUIREMENT EVALUATION
	- The requirement for pre-doctoral students to attend at least 50 hours on average per year of educational activities provided by the school within the specific academic class[3] and at least 20 hours of teaching provided outside that class in order to promote an interdisciplinary approach to study; - The requirement for doctoral students to actually attend at least 150 hours of teaching in total over the entire duration of the course specifically provided by the school for these students and intended to expand their knowledge base, where applicable through specific interdisciplinary methods, and specialist preparation through development of original research programmes[4];	courses for the first and following years but it is not fully obvious if the 150 hours of teaching are met just by lectures, or including hands-on ad-hoc research training, etc. Availability of interdisciplinary courses and laboratories is of paramount importance given the SNS's excellent heritage in the various field of research and teaching. However, it is difficult to judge the breadth and level of interdisciplinarity of the available courses and if students are encouraged to expand their study plan outside their respective field. For instance, are student placements among the various research groups *taking* place during the first year? The role/involvement of the individual research groups in the PhD program is not clear either. **The Committee would like to receive a detailed explanation of how quality teaching and courses are planned and implemented.**

Preliminary evaluation Section A
SNS management dedicates a large effort on selecting the most promising students among the applicants, both for the pre-doc and the doctoral courses, and to provide them solid training, good laboratories and selected opportunities to become members of the best teams among the research communities at national and international level. SNS has been operating under stable conditions and with good economic indexes since several years and likely matches all the "initial accreditation requirements" identified by the ministerial decree 439/2013. This situation, however, does not exclude the existence of trends/areas/issues which could be improved, in some cases even significantly.

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[3] The term academic class refers to the various internal divisions of Schools, sometimes called classes, in other cases institutes or other terms.

[4] This offer includes various types of educational activities not limited to hours of classroom teaching. It may also refer to doctoral teaching provided by other university and research institutions providing it forms part of an overall organic programme approved by the school's governing bodies.

During the preliminary analysis of the documents provided, the Committee identified several   areas where

a) there are some useful/essential information missing or need to be clarified;
b) there are elements which are interesting and motivate deeper discussion.

These items have been identified as comments, often with **bold text** in the Section A, column 4. This list of questions, which adds and complement the list of questions provided by ANVUR, will be the subject of detailed discussion during the on site visit. We then request SNS management to identify the personnel (academic and administrative) and the students who could best address the questions which have been raised.

Comments to the preliminary evaluation- Section A

(to be completed by the School)

SEE ATTACHMENT " 000_Invio_Risposte_Protocollo_SNS"

Final evaluation – Section A

SNS matches all the "initial accreditation requirements" identified by the ministerial decree 439/2013. The questions listed above **in bold** were discussed and requested information were provided during the visit to the satisfaction of the evaluation Committee.

STRUCTURAL REQUIREMENTS

The School has both pre-doctoral courses where it is requested to provide lodging facilities free of charge and Ph.D.programs for which it is not required to provide lodging facilities. Residentiality is indeed the hallmark of the SNS. There are a number of colleges both in Pisa and in Florence which accommodate the "corso ordinario" students and eventually exchange students. In case students resort to external housing, the SNS provides financial support. The facilities also include the SNS canteen in Pisa, the central role of which was insisted on by the students interviewed: not only does it provide excellent food but also functions as a point of academic and social interaction between teachers and students ("ricevimensa" as one student put it). During lockdown the SNS provided funding for students eating elsewhere. The student feedback on the quality of housing was very favourable, including free IT facilities and social activities such as sport, among others; many students highlighted the intellectual advantages of mixing with individuals from different fields in the colleges. As to available classrooms, labs and library facilities, the situation is on the whole very good, as confirmed by the student interviewees. The SNS library in Pisa is very well endowed in research works both in paper and electronic format. The Florence unit in Palazzo Strozzi has little office space, class rooms and a small library. As the SNS is acquiring a new building in Florence, the situation should improve. It is possible to obtain books from the Pisa library, and the high number of important libraries in Florence such as the BNCFand that of the EUI, which compensate the limitations of the Strozzi library to a certain degree.

SNS has been operating under stable conditions and with good economic indices since several years, developing innovative methodologies in high education related fields, like job placement, pre-doctoral dissemination and interdisciplinary studies. The economic situation of the SNS is good, with sufficient funds for research as well as for important construction work on existing premises such as the restoration of the Collegio Carducci and the Pisa library, among others, and acquisition of a new building in Florence, among others. Depending on the lab, external funding may be as high as ten times the funding from the SNS. The SNS has a good track record for obtaining ERCs and MSC funding.

The federation process will no doubt profit the SNS and partners through increased academic and institutional weight necessary in competing for academic recognition and research funding at both national and international level.

STUDENTS

The SNS management aims to select the best prospective students from the applicants (rate of admission 1/5 for both pre- and doctoral students) and provide them with solid training, good laboratories and select opportunities to become members of the best teams in the research communities of the SNS fields of research. The formal requirements are fulfilled, there being approximately 300 pre-doctoral and 300 doctoral students. There are successful outreach measures (e.g. "Scuola Normale goes to School" recently reaching 37 500 secondary school students and teachers) that serve to orient students towards the selection of university courses at the national level.- While the SNS is very well known and appreciated as an institution of HE in Italy, there is some work to be done to increase its international visibility (see recommendations). Financial support is provided for candidates chosen for the interview to travel to Pisa. Despite the virtual absence of international advertising, the SNS manages to attract international talent in particular to PhD programs. The PhD student feedback highlighted, however, the usefulness of establishing an applicant portal for easier information retrieval. The constant interaction between pre- and doctoral students, characteristic of the SNS, was mentioned as a particularly important feature by students interviewed; traditionally older students have mentored younger ones, a more institutionalised mentoring service having been put in place very recently. Both bilateral and Erasmus+ exchanges function well, 2020 naturally being an exception from the point of view of mobility; in addition to subsidies provided by these programs, both pre- and doctoral students profit from SNS-internal travel subsidies to undertake research sojourns and attend conferences abroad; the student feedback on this subject was very favourable. The cooperation with the University of Florence and, to a much lesser degree, with the University of Pisa, were seen as critical points: in Florence, where the SNS is institutionally present for less than a decade, the student feedback seems to indicate a virtual vacuum on this point, whereas the problems with the University of Pisa relate to scheduling lectures and recognition of Erasmus+ credits. In Pisa solutions to the problems seem to have been reached. On the whole, student satisfaction with all aspects is conspicuously high.

STUDENTS' SERVICES

The School meets all requirements in terms of funding, mobility programs etc. (cf. also above). The number of collaborations and agreements with local, national, and international entities to foster mobility, further traineeships, and future occupation opportunities is ample and diverse. The feedback on the services from the students interviewed throughout very good. The SNS emerges as an institution open to constantly improving its practices according to suggestions from the students. Considering the strong corporative identity forged during pre- and doctoral studies, the virtual absence of institutional activities targeting alumni is surprising and should be seriously looked into (see recommendations).

TEACHING

Organization: the SNS was traditionally organized in two classes, Science and Humanities. Recently a third class was added: Political Sciences. Good gender balance among students is observed. The interdisciplinary environment is ensured and the coexistence of the three classes and their disciplines is an aspect which makes SNS unique in Italy. The Classes

autonomously decide their scientific strategies including staff hiring and development of new initiatives, which are subsequently approved by SNS senior management. SNS autonomy in defining medium- to long-term scientific and educational strategies is one of the pillars of the School 'tradition of excellence.

The selection process, both for ordinary as well as for PhD students is one of the SNS strengths: the team of examiners devote a lot of care to selecting students on the basis of their potential in the research fields of SNS. In spite of this high standard and quality, SNS has a low visibility at the international level and even within Italy. Online selection during pandemic showed to be more effective in recruiting both international and Italian students from far away regions. More developed applicant portal particularly regarding research opportunities would be beneficial.

SNS activity heavily relies, for the ordinary courses and for the internationalization (ERASMUS), on the local university, in most cases the University of Pisa and, to a smaller extent, the University of Florence. The Committee noted that notwithstanding the importance of these relationships, the connections between these institutions seem not ideally structured for timely addressing and solve issues related to lecturing time schedules or to ERASMUS credit recognition.

The PhD courses are well organized: SNS organization and support, as well as the quality of the courses are well appreciated by the students of all three classes. Similarly, the possibility to concentrate on research without obligation to teach courses, is highly appreciated by the students.

The student-teacher ratio at the SNS is 5 to 1. The other ministerial criteria regarding the number of teaching staff are fulfilled as well. Lab technicians are in good supply, largely financed by the SNS. The high quality and engagement of teaching and auxiliary staff were praised by all of students interviewed.

TEACHING STAFF

As for the QA of courses given by partner institutions: In Pisa, the SNS works in close collaboration with the University of Pisa; although the content of some courses might overlap, the students interviewed did not see this as a problem. Scheduling overlaps were frequently pointed out (see above) but the situation has been improving. The University of Pisa has an its own system of QA. In Florence, the problems of coordination between the SNS and the University of Florence were frequently alluded to. Student feedback highlighted the paramount importance of the availability of interdisciplinary courses and laboratories given the SNS's excellent heritage in the various fields of research and teaching.

RESEARCH

During the last decade two important institutional initiatives, both located in Florence, were added to the SNS organization: the Institute for Advances Studies "Carlo Azeglio Ciampi", an interdisciplinary, inter-classes research center and, as mentioned above, the new PhD course in Political Sciences. These projects show the degree of initiative and dynamism SNS is able to develop to adapt to societal and scientific evolution. We note that in addition to the scientific and educational enrichment and development these initiatives can provide an interesting source of new experience in dealing with a new organizational model for SNS. The Ciampi Institute is an interesting example of very flexible organization: it is a temporary initiative subjected to extensions, funded mostly through private funds and making use of temporary, double -appointment professorship positions. The new Class of Political Sciences is growing quickly in terms of staff, still maintaining a good turnaround: this dynamic had avoided, so far, the issue of the internal careers which has been seriously affecting, for decades, the hiring and the careers of staff within the classes of Science and Humanities.

In addition to these initiatives, SNS has been awarded two departments of excellence, one for the Science class and one for the Humanities class, providing significant resources for the development of advanced, multidisciplinary research projects.

The School has a long and successful tradition in competing for research grants and for attracting good junior and senior research staff and students. Teaching, research and other services compare well at the elite international level using standard parameters. SNS research is organized in a number of laboratories, which are the backbone for their research and thesis offering. SNS support to these laboratories, in addition to hosting them, with a yearly grant covering a fraction of the expenses and some units of technical personnel: most of the cost for the laboratory operation is covered through research grants. The committee noticed the absence of a laboratory for fundamental physics, both for experimental as well as theoretical activities, a field where both SNS and Pisa University have a most prestigious tradition in research and education: this absence is creating a cultural imbalance in SNS research offering in physics, considering that the research in solid state physics is well covered by the very successful NEST laboratory initiative.

The Committee notes that SNS would benefit from a review by an independent external body of experts, to evaluate periodically the scientific goals and their achievement, the balance among the various fields and the status of the new initiatives: in this way the school management would receive useful suggestions for correction and improvements, whenever it would be appropriate.

ADMINISTRATION

The administration is one of the SNS strengths . With about 230 people in the administration, SNS is able to provide students with all kinds of in-house services and support: from providing lodging and the canteen, to technical support for the various laboratories, to the choice among the courses or among the offer for international stages, to sports to cultural activities, SNS administration services are highly appreciated. Placement and technology transfer activities are also well developed. The quality of the administration services is ensured by a team featuring a large fraction of staff with bachelors and/or masters degrees. There are ongoing efforts to train the administrative personnel by providing useful training opportunities. The quality of the service provided and the appreciation of the students of both ordinary and PhD courses justify the large fraction of the SNS resources invested on the administration.

SECTION B. THE SCHOOL'S STRATEGIC AND PLANNING DOCUMENT

The planning Document sets out the School's aims and strategies for educational and research offers, the specific approach to QA a well as the role and position of the School in the national and international contexts. The document must indicate the basic choices, objectives and corresponding priorities that guide policy choices made by the School, the mission that the school identifies for itself within the national university system, and how it is positioned within the international landscape, specifying the role assigned to the school's doctoral and pre-doctoral programmes, if present, how they relate to choices made in terms of research and infrastructure, the consistency of those choices and priorities and achievement of the stated objectives. The document must demonstrate the school's economic and financial sustainability and all resources relating to teaching for the school's educational activities when it is fully on-stream. The CEVS should then check the consistency of the School's strategies, objectives and means (see Guidelines page 20).

NB: Strategic and Planning Documents might change across Schools which are free to organise its contents and structure (template not provided)

CONTENTS	CEVS EVALUATION
STRATEGIC VISION, OBJECTIVES AND SCHOOL ORGANISATION	The School has an excellent positioning within Italy. It is not clear, however, how the School compares at international level on various evaluation parameters which are standard in these comparisons (e.g. quality of the laboratory, support for networking, support for incoming, outgoing, conference attendance, quality of everyday life, transportation and so on). **The Committee would like to receive more information about this kind of comparison.** The School has developed a Documento Programmatico 2019-24 which includes a policy for ensuring the Quality of the Teaching Courses, of the Research and of the other related activities like outreach and TT **The Documento Programmatico and its implementation will be a topic for detailed presentation and discussion during the visit. In particular the Committee would like to hear about the verification steps of the effectiveness of the measures planned in this document.** Feed-back from the students, in particular, is of basic importance to understand career development. We were unable to find numbers about career follow up of the students after the School. There is an Alumni organization which might help in this regards. Is SNS supporting the Alumni activity? How does it compare with the other Schools in the federation? **The Committee would like to understand this point in detail.** Hiring of excellent researchers and professors is of basic importance for the future of the School. Indeed VQR results pertaining to teaching and research staff are be good. However there is no description of how hiring is organized. There is no evidence, for example, related to the

CONTENTS	CEVS EVALUATION
	proportion of international staff and how this ratio is maintained/improved. Similarly there is no information on strategies to activate/deactivate courses, research lines or laboratories. We note a dramatic variation in the academic staff composition during the last 10 years: was it planned? Are there critical aspects? **The Committee would like to understand in more detail the hiring procedures at the School.** **We would also like to hear about training policies regarding the administrative and technical staff.**
POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR QA	The School has a Nucleo di Valutazione: the available report stops at 2018. Little is said about the crucial relation with the external universities, in particular Pisa and Florence. The quality of these universities is 1:1 linked to the quality of the SNS students' education. **The Committee would like to discuss this topic** **We would like to hear about the more recent developments in particular as regards : a) international grants b) hiring processes c) students' feedback d) effects of the federation process.** **The Committed would also like to hear about the existence of structured feedback from the international communities relevant for the School.** How is the international evolution of the various fields of research active within the school monitored and how is feedback incorporated into the medium term School strategies? The feedback collected from the users (students, technical, administrative staff) is often very useful for planning ahead. **The Committee would like to understand better how this feedback is collected, analyzed and used to improve the management strategies of the School.**
INTERNATIONALISATION	The international strategies of the School are not emerging with clarity The Schools has various agreements with national and international universities. **The Committee would like to understand more about how the School plans to keep its attractiveness and its internationalization at the highest level.**

Preliminary evaluation Section B

SNS is definitely among the leading predoc and PhD schools in Italy: it has a strong capability to attract international students and doctoral students

SNS has the potential to keep and improve its international positioning in the future: its Documento Programmatico 2019-24 and the reports of the Nucleo di Valutazione are likely the two most important tools both for defining and understanding the School's future path and for verifying the effectiveness of the policies implemented.

During the analysis of the documents provided online , the Committee identified a number of areas where

  a) some useful/essential information is missing or to be clarified;
  b) there are elements which would motivate deeper discussion.

These items have been identified **in bold text** in the Section B detailed table above and will be the subject of a detailed discussion during the visit, in order to check the consistency among the various elements of management and policy strategies .

We then request the SNS management to identify the personnel and the students who could best address the questions which have been raised.

Comments to the preliminary evaluation - Section B

(to be completed by the School)

SEE ATTACHMENT " 000_Invio_Risposte_Protocollo_SNS"

Final evaluation – Section B

(to be completed by the CEVS after the on-site visit, max 2500 words)

  (A) STRATEGIC VISION, OBJECTIVES AND SCHOOL ORGANISATION

The Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) is an advanced School for undergraduate and graduate students with a prestigious history of excellence in education and research since its foundation by Napoleon in 1810. During more than two centuries of operation SNS has adapted to varied social and political conditions, assembling a unique heritage in Italy, while maintaining the founding elements of its Statutes: excellence in higher education, selection based on merit and not on wealth, freedom of research with reference to the highest quality standards. During the last three decades SNS has had to face changes of legislation affecting public universities, a growing role of technology transfer and of relations with the private sector. Various measures and initiatives have been undertaken by SNS management and have been discussed during the visit. In some areas SNS is still adapting to these changes, for instance as regards staff recruitment.

SNS, in particular, has been significantly affected by the objective reduced mobility/ impermeability, between universities, due to the absence of incentives and mechanisms for accounting for budgets / staffing points, which make hiring from outside "expensive". This reduced mobility limits what has been one of the traditional functions of the School, of exporting talents within the national university system. This issue is not present at international level.

SNS is focused on student education (Graduate and PhD courses). The School has an excellent positioning within Italy as well at European level. In spite of its relevance on the national context, SNS size has increased very slowly with time, the limiting factor being the availability of additional resources: this fact is affecting, to a certain extent, the scoring of the School at the international level and has been one of the driving factors towards the federation with SSUP and IUSS. The Committee did not specifically address the issue of the federative process. Nevertheless, we remarked on the potential for mutual advantages to emanate from this process for what concerns SNS and SSUP, due to existence of areas of clear complementarity among the two Schools, SNS mostly devoted to basic sciences, SSUP mostly to engineering and medicine.

NETWORK AND SOCIETY

One of SNS characteristics is its strong identity principle which is the result of a unique social and academic environment maintained during the years. SNS is open to international students in particular in its PhD programs while the university courses are, understandably, addressed mostly to Italian students.

In general, we noted that there is an imbalance between the value of SNS and the quality of its teaching and education, on the one hand, and the effort to advertise it, both nationally (ordinary courses) and internationally (PhD courses), on the other. This tradition by-word-of-mouth is not conducive to fully exploiting the SNS potential: at national level there is evidence that the proportion of lower income students participating in the selection process is declining, while at international level, the school is not easily known to foreign students looking for PhD fellowships.

The Committee appreciated the recent but very successful effort to develop a Technology Transfer office: in less than five years the results achieved have been impressive, developing a value proposition which is interesting to the private sector, strengthens the preparedness of SNS students to cope with a non-academic post-SNS careers outcome, while maintaining strong links to SNS scientific values.

The Committee received excellent feedback about the support that the SNS provide to students, both at entrance level, during the courses as well as in connecting to the strong offer of international short-medium term stages. SNS offers to the students an excellent program of non-academic, high quality activities, from sport, to music, to theater.

Alumni: the Committee noted that a school with the tradition and the strong identity principle characteristic of SNS should have a stronger alumni association. This is an issue which has been floating for a long time, with various attempts at a voluntary level, which however never reached a critical mass. We recommend that SNS management take an initiative to strengthen the Alumni association by providing a level of institutional support, considering the relevance of such an initiative for the former SNS students and staff as well as the network of connections linking SNS to the society, in particular on the issue of career placement for former SNS students. The Friends of the SNS association represents a useful instrument linking SNS to the society, receiving in return support for specific initiatives.

SNS has a strong and qualified activity devoted to outreach and orientation of undergraduate students.

(B) POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR QA

SNS has a set of QA policies which appears well organized and follow the European Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG): the resulting documents are available on the School web site and are of good quality.

An example of the SNS quality presidium has been provided on the occasion of challenges connected to the COVID19 pandemic: through the internal school network the necessary actions and communications have been implemented, in a way which has been appreciated by the students.

The recent decision to improve the quality of the tutoring system by making it more official, goes in the direction of improving the quality of the services provided by SNS.

The level of feedback collected from the users (students, technical, administrative staff) looks good.

(C) INTERNATIONALISATION

SNS international strategies are well defined and are of basic importance in maintaining SNS attractiveness and competitiveness at international level.

The School has several agreements with national and foreign universities, which provide a rich choice of ordinary and PhD students. Most of the students are spending quite some time abroad, mostly through Erasmus bilateral agreements.

A fair fraction of PhD students are coming from abroad, following careful and flexible selection procedures. More advertising at both national and international level could boost income of foreign students.

SECTION C. FURTHER COMMENTS, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE NEXT PERIODIC ACCREDITATION *

Section C
In view of the next periodic accreditation we have the following recommendations.   On the preliminary evaluation procedure

- Procedure was well-organized and documents were provided timely. The scheme which has been followed for the preliminary evaluation could be used in the future without significant changes.

On the issues noted during the preliminary evaluation the Committee would like to single out the following points

- **Regarding the hiring process:**

SNS has been significantly affected by the reduced mobility/ impermeability, between universities, due to the absence of incentives and mechanisms for accounting for budgets / staffing points, which make hiring from outside "expensive". This reduced mobility limits what has been one of the traditional functions of the School, of exporting talents within the national university system. The significant recent increase in the teaching staff (RTDB) and these considerations have inspired a very prudent policy of the management towards RTDB positions, only with a view to turnover or direct call of prestigious grant winners (ERC, Marie Curie, ...). These considerations also inspired the request of the rectors of the Scuole Superiori to the Minister not to have resources specifically dedicated to a single recruitment channel (RTDB), but to be able to use these resources more freely. In a slightly more permeable university system, some of these critical issues would in any case be solved and a further enhancement of the role of SNS would certainly be achieved, but in the current situation this significantly limits the potential of SNS and should be corrected

- **Regarding the research activities:**

a) the establishment of an independent International Committee to periodically review SNS goals and achievement should be considered to support the Director and the senior management on the verification of SNS strategies effectiveness and the achievements of goals.

b) to consider the establishment of a fundamental physics laboratory (experimental / theory) to improve the visibility towards the students, balancing the activities among the different physics fields within the SNS and taking advantage of the very significant competences existing within the University and research centers in Pisa.

Regarding the external communication:

a) Improve the quality and the intensity of the communication to increase the international visibility of SNS.

b) Build stronger ties with the University of Pisa and of Florence in order to address and solve student related issues

To be noted that the initial accreditation concerns Schools that have already been operating for a long time. The data obtained so far permits an evaluation of the extent to which Schools comply with periodic accreditation requirements. The CEVS is thus invited to suggest and issue recommendations to the School's governing bodies on how to improve policies and performance in order to meet periodic accreditation requirements.

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE CEVS – INITIAL ACCREDITATION

X   RECOMMENDATION FOR ACCREDITATION

☐   RECOMMENDATION FOR NON-ACCREDITATION