

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT REPORT

PROVIDER ACCREDITATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Scientia Institute of Doctoral Studies

Carried out between
11th and 12th November 2025

Quality education for
confident futures .

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Abbreviations List

ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQA	External Quality Assurance Audit
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LMS	Learning Management System
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Executive Summary

Overview of the Audit Process

This report is a result of the External Quality Assurance process undertaken by an independent peer review panel upon application to obtain initial accreditation. The panel evaluated the documentation submitted by the educational institution and conducted an onsite audit visit. The panel is responsible for reaching conclusions on all Standards in line with the Minimal Indicators outlined in the External Quality Assurance Provider Accreditation Manual for Higher Education Institutions.

Timeline

<i>EQA Audit Timeline – Scientia Institute for Doctoral Studies</i>	
<i>Induction meeting</i>	<i>3rd June 2025</i>
<i>Desk-based analysis</i>	<i>16th September 2025</i>
<i>Pre-accreditation provider meeting</i>	<i>22nd October 2025</i>
<i>Audit visit</i>	<i>11th – 12th November 2025</i>

Summary of the Conclusions Reached by the Peer Review Panel

The panel considered 11 Standards. Of these, Standards 1, 4, 6 and 11 were considered substantially compliant, Standards 3 and 8 were considered partially compliant, and Standards 2, 5, 7, 9 and 10 were considered non-compliant.

The panel made 51 recommendations.

About the External Quality Audit

About the External Quality Audit

The scope of external quality assurance in Malta is to evaluate the education providers against the indicators included in the External Quality Assurance Provider Accreditation Manual for Higher Education Institutions (<https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EQA-Accreditation-Manual.pdf>) (hereafter referred to as “the Manual”), through the analysis of the self-assessment documentation, the IQA document, and the QA Manual as well as through the information recorded by the peer review panels during the accreditation visits.

Based on this scope, the external quality assurance processes conducted based on the Manual aim to:

- certify the compliance of the providers with the indicators included in the Manual;
- consolidate the internal quality assurance systems at institutional level;
- support the providers in the quality enhancement and continuous development of their operations;
- increase the quality of learning outcomes across the Maltese higher education sector;
- enhance the student learning experience.

Standards for Accreditation

- Standard 1: Mission and strategic management
- Standard 2: Governance, organisational structure and administration
- Standard 3: Quality management
- Standard 4: Integrity, accountability and information management
- Standard 5: Teaching and administrative staff
- Standard 6: Design, monitoring and review of programmes
- Standard 7: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
- Standard 8: Student administration and student support services
- Standard 9: Learning resources and facilities
- Standard 10: Research, development and/or other creative activity
- Standard 11: Institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation

The Standards and indicators as per the Manual have been drafted in alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The **MINIMAL INDICATORS** included in the Manual reflect the mandatory level of achievement that providers have to demonstrate compliance with for accreditation purposes and therefore must be met both before the commencement of their operations (at licensing stage) as well as throughout their activities (during every audit process).

The **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS** included in this Manual reflect the mandatory level of achievement that providers have to demonstrate compliance with during the audit process in order to have their accreditation confirmed. Therefore, performance indicators must be met, starting with the first audit that a provider undergoes five years after the commencement of its operations as well as throughout their entire licensing period, thus are not included in this report.

Where applicable, additional indicators have been developed in the context of online provision.

The peer review panels are nominated by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA). Each panel shall have a minimum of three members: a Chair,

between one and five experts, and at least one student. Each panel has the duty to gather, verify and exchange information and supporting elements so as to be able to check the statements made in the self-assessment documentation, Internal Quality Assurance Document, and Quality Assurance Manual as well as during the accreditation visits, and to formulate their own assessments on the performance of the provider against the Standards included in the Manual. For providers proposing to offer fully online and/or blended learning, the panel will have an additional peer reviewer specialising in online evaluation.

The peer review panel shall discuss and exchange the collected evidence, verify the comprehensiveness and interpretation of the data, and analyse various sources in order to come to a consensual, coherent and consistent conclusion through triangulation and cross-referencing. All peer review panel members are required to sign a Declaration of Interest Form prior to starting work on the external quality assurance process.

The approach of the QA audit is not simply about checking whether providers adhere to the regulations; it examines how providers are developing their own systems in addressing the expectations of sound management of educational standards and the quality of their learning and teaching provision. It does not involve the routine identification and confirmation of criteria – a 'tick-box' approach – but rather a mature and reflective dialogue with providers about the ways in which they discharge their obligations for quality and the identification of existing good practices.

Peer review panels will consider the indicators included in the Manual when determining the judgement for each Standard. The judgements for each Standard will be expressed as follows:

- **Compliant** - The institution is entirely in alignment with the Standard, which is implemented in an effective manner.
- **Substantially compliant** - The institution is to a large extent in alignment with the Standard, the general principles of which are followed in practice.
- **Partially compliant** - Some parts of the Standard are met while others are not; the implementation of the Standard is not effective enough.
- **Non-compliant** - The institution fails to comply with the Standard.

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) considered this report and forwarded it, along with the accreditation decision, to the MFHEA Board for endorsement.

The Peer Review Panel

The peer review panel comprised:

Chair of Review Panel:	Milan Pol
Peer Reviewer:	Tornike Khoshtaria
Student Peer Reviewer:	Matthew Kitching
Digital Reviewer:	Ghania Zgheib
Accreditation Coordinators (MFHEA):	Giacomo Annese, Fiona McCowan

Specific Terms of Reference

As defined in the MFHEA Quality Audit Manual of Procedures, the panel was responsible for examining how the institution manages its responsibilities to ensure the provision of the quality and standards of the education they offer.

A number of issues were addressed, including the fitness for purpose and effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) processes, including an examination of the systems and procedures that have been and are planned to be implemented, together with the documentation that supports them; the compliance of providers with the established regulations and any conditions or restrictions issued by the MFHEA; the governance and financial sustainability of providers, including assurance about the provider's legal status, the appropriateness of corporate structures and the competence of staff with senior management responsibilities; conditions for online provision, and more.

Institutional Context and Mission Statement

Scientia Institute of Doctoral Studies (hereinafter Scientia) is a higher education institution registered in Malta and owned by Scientia Higher Education Ltd. According to its vision, Scientia “seeks to democratize access to high quality, innovative and societal relevant doctoral studies and assists students and professionals, especially in low and developing economies, in developing future proof careers that can contribute to a more sustainable world.” (SAR, p. 3)

Scientia plans to initially concentrate on “an online part-time Doctoral (PhD) Academic degree programs at MQF/EQF level 8 in the wider field of business-related topics.” (SAR, p. 4). At a later stage, Scientia plans to expand its courses to post-graduate certificates. Scientia intends to focus its programmes “on professionals working in SMEs, corporations and government from different backgrounds in Latin America, Africa and Europe”. (SAR, p. 4) Scientia plans to work with 100 students in its first five years, increasing to 40-50 graduates annually by 2029.

As for the mission of Scientia, it is formulated as follows: “Scientia provides a relevant and inclusive academic learning and research community where students from different backgrounds and regions can participate in fully online and accessible study programs and benefit from an experienced multi-cultural faculty and can exchange ideas and experiences to develop their academic research, professional competencies that enable them to have a positive impact on their direct environment”. (SAR, p. 8)

Analysis and Findings of Panel

Analysis and Findings of Panel

Standard 1: Mission and strategic management

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

1.1 The institutional mission is concise, clear and aligned with strategic planning.

Panel's Findings:

As already stated above, the mission of Scientia is formulated as follows: “Scientia provides a relevant and inclusive academic learning and research community where students from different backgrounds and regions can participate in fully online and accessible study programs and benefit from an experienced multi-cultural faculty and can exchange ideas and experiences to develop their academic research, professional competencies that enable them to have a positive impact on their direct environment”. (SAR, p. 8)

It can be agreed that the mission statement is directed to all three main pillars which up-to-date higher education institutions are built on: learning/teaching, research, and the so-called third role (public/community reach). As such, the mission statement can be seen as concise and clear. As concerns its alignment with strategic planning, there can be seen the links, especially to learning/teaching and research-related activities, accompanied with financial plans.

- 1.2 The institution has a strategic development plan that is measurable, time-bound and achievable.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia has its strategic development plan (Scientia Strategic Plan 2025-2029) in which several themes (areas) are mainly paid attention to: business history, business environment, labour market perspective for PhD graduates, strategic objectives and mission, academic programmes offered, target market and marketing strategy, governance, organisational structure and administration, internationalisation, partnership and service to society, risks and mitigation, and finances (financial plan). Some other areas are not explicitly dealt with, for instance, research (number of publications planned and finances to support publishing and conference participation is mentioned, though) and staff development. Selected central Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (as stated in the Internal Quality Management Policy) at strategic level include programmes and faculty complying with MQF standards, the number of students, publications and satisfaction levels of both students and faculty. These indicators as stated are measurable, timebound and can be viewed as achievable.

- 1.3 There is an operational plan which describes future activities derived from the strategic plan, sets Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and timelines together with resources needed for their implementation, and defines the responsibility for implementation of the goals.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia has its operational plan, and it is structured a bit differently than the strategic one. Attention is paid to programmes, quality management, integrity, accountability and information management, administrative and teaching staff, design, monitoring and review of programmes, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, student administration and student support services, learning resources and facilities, and research. While the choice of these areas can be viewed relevant (but staff development and external relations are not explicitly dealt with, for instance), the differences in structuring and attention paid to individual areas of institutional operation may cause a bit of uncertainty as concerns clear links between strategic and operation plans.

The operational plan offers a more detailed description of plans/intentions of the institution related to the above-mentioned areas; however, KPIs and timeline together with resources needed for their implementation are not a part of this document. This is, however, to some extent stated as a part of the strategic documentation and in the Internal Quality Management Policy document. Goals are not always clearly defined in

the operational plan, nor are responsibilities for their implementation (the information about personnel and their roles/positions is indicated, though).

- 1.4 The allocation of the institutional financial resources is done through a transparent budgeting process and is aligned to the strategic and operational plans.

Panel's Findings:

A financial plan is a part of the Scientia Strategic Plan 2025-2029, as chapter nine of this document. It is a five-year plan with annual specifications, projecting incomes and expenditures for the years 2026-2030. The cash flow forecast includes revenues from student tuition fees, growing from Euro 60,000 in 2026 to Euro 300,000 in 2030. The cash inflow is complemented by a one-off capital investment by the company owners of Euro 50,000 to finance the first investment and provide working capital.

Alignment of financial planning with strategic and operational plans can be seen especially in relation to teaching, administration and to some extent research-related activities as well as external collaboration.

- 1.5. The institution has a plan that ensures the business continuity of all its major processes. The plan takes into account all possible risks and mechanisms for their prevention as well as strategies for risk assessment and mitigation.

Panel's Findings:

The Scientia Strategic Plan 2025-2029 also deals with the issues of business continuity, and it explicitly states some risks and mitigations. Key risks perceived relate to the achievement of the targeted number of students, student retention and successful development of an online learning community. Mitigation strategy includes an active recruitment of students via alumni, the networks of Scientia in Africa, Latin America and Europe (namely, with some universities for which this could mean a chance “to upgrade their academic profile and extend their program offerings” (SAR, p. 10).

A dropout rate is viewed as a second key risk mitigation strategy, and it relates mainly to individualised work with students.

These risks and strategies to mitigate them can be understood, especially the first one. Upgrading the academic profile of some other higher education institutions can be connected with many other specific issues related to formal opening the channels to those without the right of conducting higher level of studies.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

1.12. Strategic and operational plans mention online and blended learning.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The mission statement of Scientia states that it provides a relevant and inclusive academic learning and research community where students from different backgrounds and regions can participate in fully online and accessible study programmes and benefit from an experienced multicultural faculty and can exchange ideas and experiences to develop their academic research and professional competencies that enable them to have a positive impact on their direct environment. The mission statement is in line with the objectives and the goals of the programme which is to provide students with an accessible PhD programme and provide opportunities for learners to obtain a multicultural approach to learning through a distributed group of professors and researchers.

The Board and the Head of Institution shared their vision for online learning and the methods and resources that will be used to support the delivery of online learning. For an institution that will be delivering its programmes only through online channels, a more holistic vision for their online learning strategy should be in place taking into consideration a learner-centred methodology, leadership and management, digital resources, and quality assurance. The panel recommends that the institution develop this vision and include the different resources needed to provide a meaningful and engaging learning experience for the learners.

Judgement: Substantially compliant

Recommendations:

- R1: The institution should make clear links between strategic, operational and internal quality management documentation.
- R2: The institution should pay more attention to research and staff development in its strategic documentation.
- R3: The institution should ensure sufficient financing of research-related and staff development areas of its operation.
- R4: The institution should consider risks related to the academic profile of its offer, namely, to the research profile of the staff and the whole institution.

R5: The institution should develop a holistic online learning vision, taking into consideration a learner-centred methodology, leadership and management, digital resources, and quality assurance.

Standard 2: Governance, organisational structure and administration

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

2.1. The procedures and criteria for the election/appointment of leadership positions and governance bodies are clearly defined in institutional regulations and made transparent to the academic community of the institution.

At the moment, Scientia has a Governing Board composed of owners of the Scientia Higher Education Ltd. The Board has responsibility “for the overall institutional strategy, final financial and legal responsibility of the organisation and validates study programs” (Scientia Strategic Plan 2025-2029, p. 16). For further development of the institution, the Academic Senate is envisaged, and this should be responsible “for the approval and monitoring of academic programs, teaching and learning – including online – methods, research and compliance with academic regulatory standards...” (ibid, p. 17). The Senate is planned to be composed of representatives of staff, lectures and students, namely, “The Academic Senate is made up of the Head of Institution, Head of Partnerships, Head of Operations, 2 Faculty representatives and 2 Student representatives.” (ibid, p. 17)

Since the institution is in its early stage of development, there are only plans for election/appointment of Senate members. “Faculty representatives in the Academic Senate are elected for two years by academic staff. Student representatives are elected for two years by student councils. The student population forms a student council and will organise internal student elections. To avoid any influence, regulations for the student election process will be developed by the first student cohort at the start of the academic year. Transparent election schedules and procedures published annually.” (ibid, p. 17) These plans were confirmed at the interviews during the onsite visit.

There is also a plan to establish an Executive Committee at Scientia. This body should be in charge of the daily operations of the organisation. The committee is planned to be made up of the Head of Institution, Head of Partnerships and a Head of Operations. Appointment procedures are not specified in this case.

Scientia has also established an International Advisory Board consisting of several international experts – appointment procedures are not specified.

2.2. The persons occupying leadership positions and those sitting on senior governance bodies are qualified and fit for the responsibilities of their roles.

Panel's Findings:

Staffing of Scientia is done only partly at this stage. It can be agreed that the people who are now in key leadership and governance positions at Scientia are experienced and qualified and they are fit for the responsibilities of their roles, as indicated by their CVs and proven during the interviews. This relates to the Head of Academic Programs (Victor van Reijswoud), the Head of Partnership (Augustinus van der Krogt), and the Coordinator of Quality Management (Matthias Staat). According to the information gained during the onsite visit, some other people who are envisaged for key positions (namely, Elisabeth Rodas, stated as Head of Operations) were not contracted yet at the time of external evaluation.

2.3. Provisions are made for membership of governance bodies to include representatives of all stakeholders – students, academic and administrative staff and, where possible, representatives of the labour market.

Panel's Findings:

As already stated in section 2.1, the institution is in its early stage of development and, at the moment, the provisions for membership of governance bodies to include representatives of all stakeholders are only in the form of plans.

2.4. There is a formally adopted organisational structure where governance, decision making, and distribution of responsibilities of all levels and units are clearly defined in an achievable and realistic manner.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia has provided in its documentation a formal organisational structure in which several hierarchical levels are stated: Governing Board, Academic Senate, and Executive Committee. Their responsibilities and a scope of decision making are defined. Further, the organisational structure indicates three structural areas dealing with specific agendas: external relations, academic issues including quality assurance, and administration. These directions of focus are linked to specific units which should deal with given agendas. It needs to be reminded again, that at the moment, the organisational structure relates to the planned, not yet fully existing situation.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

2.10. A key managerial post or unit dedicated to the management of online and blended learning from an educational point of view is included in the organisational structure of the institution.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The institution states that online platforms and learning resources fall directly under the activities of the Head of Institution, who is an expert in IT and online learning systems and online learning methods. During the audit visit, the Head of Institution confirmed that they do not have a managerial post dedicated to online learning, although the self-assessment report states otherwise. He explained that they will mainly use their in-house online teaching expertise developed over the years. He also mentioned that they have in-house expertise in online learning, which keeps them up to date with any new advancements and technologies. In the case of an expert in this area, their role as an online expert should be added to the organisation chart, especially since the only mode of teaching is online. The knowledge of the institution in online teaching seemed to be limited to synchronous teaching through real-time sessions, while online learning requires a whole pedagogy to maintain student engagement and retention. The panel recommends that the institution hire a part-time expert in online learning/instructional design to provide expertise on delivering effective online teaching.

2.11. Sufficient resources are allocated to adequately cater for the technical infrastructure, training and systems for online and blended learning.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The institution is investing in Google Workspace for education and Smartsheet as a student information system. Google Workspace provides opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous learning. While Smartsheet is a good tool for project management, team coordination and task tracking, it does not provide access to students to check their tuition and grades, submit petitions and download their transcripts. As a start, Google Workspace is a good virtual learning environment (VLE) if the tool is used to develop an engaging online learning experience and not as an online repository. The institution is advised to invest in a student information system that allows the learners to check their tuition and grades, submit petitions and download their transcripts for transparency purposes. The panel also recommends that the institution invest in a plagiarism detection tool such as Turnitin as the tool built into Google Workspace has limited capabilities.

As for training, a budget should be allocated in the financial plan as it was not evident in the strategic plan document.

Judgement: Non-compliant

Recommendations:

- R6: The institution should hire a part-time expert in online learning/instructional design, to provide expertise on developing and delivering effective online teaching.
- R7: The institution should invest in a student information system and plagiarism/AI detection software.
- R8: The institution should specify appointment procedures for the Executive Committee as well as the International Advisory Board.
- R9: A budget for training should be allocated in the financial plan as it was not evident in the strategic plan document.

Standard 3: Quality management

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 3.1. The institution has formally adopted a quality management policy that describes the organisation of the quality management system, its processes, mechanisms, instruments, reporting, data collection, timeframes and quality cycle. The policy is a public document.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has adopted a formal Internal Quality Management Policy, which sets out the organisation of its quality assurance (QA) system, PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) processes, KPIs, reporting structures, data sources and timeframes. The policy explicitly covers all standards and outlines the cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and improvement. It is designed as a public document accessible via the institutional website upon accreditation approval. The policy further links QA mechanisms with online learning requirements and describes data collection from the learning management system (LMS) and student information system. Despite a comprehensive policy on paper, interviews did not confirm that staff or potential students were familiar with the QA mechanisms, reporting procedures, or the actual use of PDCA cycles. The review team was not able to confirm whether the policy is implemented in practice, understood across the organisation, or used as an operational guide. Awareness was limited, and several stakeholders were unable to describe QA processes beyond broad intentions.

- 3.2. The responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties, institutes and/or other organisational units as well as those in leadership roles and students, with respect to quality management, are clearly defined.

Panel's Findings:

The staff manual defines responsibilities for the Governing Board, Academic Senate, Executive Board, the Head of Institution, and the Coordinator for Quality Management. Each position includes explicit duties relating to QA oversight, programme monitoring, academic integrity, and compliance with accreditation standards. Student roles are also referenced through Senate representation and feedback mechanisms such as module surveys. During the interview the review team was not able to confirm that the stakeholders clearly distinguished the responsibilities. Moreover, there is evidence that one person combines two administrative positions, which might arise conflicts of interests. The evaluation team could not determine whether the defined roles are

applied in practice or whether QA responsibilities are dispersed informally, which raises concerns about role clarity, accountability and conflicts of interests.

3.3. The quality management system forms part of the institutional strategic management system and covers the whole range of activities, both academically and non-academically.

Panel's Findings:

Both the Strategic Plan and the Internal Quality Management Policy link QA activities to strategic goals, KPIs and long-term planning. QA indicators (student satisfaction, publication outputs, programme compliance with MQF standards) are embedded in the institutional monitoring framework. The QA cycle is explicitly connected to annual academic and institutional reports, Senate oversight, and continuous improvement activities. Despite strong alignment in documentation, the interviews did not confirm integration of QA into actual strategic management practices. Staff were unable to demonstrate how QA results feed into decision making, resource allocation, or programme development. There was no evidence of planned systematic follow-up activities or QA-driven planning.

3.4. The institution has relevant structures in place to provide oversight arrangements for quality management; sufficient staff, including at least one quality management role occupied by an internal staff member, resources and administrative support are allocated for the operational activities of quality management.

Panel's Findings:

Documents confirm the existence of a Coordinator for Quality Management with defined functions, reporting lines and qualifications. Quality assurance oversight is also planned to be shared between the Academic Senate, Head of Institution and Executive Board. The Internal Quality Management Policy assigns responsibility for annual quality assurance reporting, monitoring of KPIs and programme-level reviews.

3.5. The institution regulates procedures for the quality management of any elements of an entity's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties; in the case of local representatives or franchises of foreign providers, explicit reference is made to the quality management procedures of the parent provider and the role of the local representative or franchise.

Panel's Findings:

The operational plan and strategic plan refer to future partnerships with universities and industry, including advisory boards and academic cooperation arrangements. However, after reviewing the documents the review team found that no detailed QA procedures for subcontracted or partner-delivered activities are included. There is reference to contractual conditions in the education and examination regulations, but these pertain mainly to third-party services, not academic delivery. During the side visits the interviews confirmed that partnerships are still at an early stage and QA frameworks for external activities are not yet developed. The staff described intentions rather than established procedures, and the institution has not yet drafted policy instruments defining how external teaching, supervision or administrative tasks would be monitored.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

3.13. The quality management policy includes arrangements specific to online and blended learning.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The Internal Quality Management Policy includes general arrangements and does not refer explicitly to online learning. Specifically in monitoring and evaluation, little reference is made to online learning. The policy needs clear procedures for:

- Regular review of online courses
- Surveys for online learner satisfaction
- Analytics-driven improvements (engagement, dropout patterns)
- Peer review of course design
- Annual audit of courses/synchronous sessions using rubric-based evaluation

Furthermore, a continuous improvement framework is required for the online programme, and this includes:

- KPIs and benchmarks for online and blended learning
- Data-driven improvements to content, delivery and tools
- Stakeholder feedback loops (students, professors and partners)
- Review cycle (e.g., every semester)

Judgement: Partially compliant

Recommendations:

- R10: The institution should develop a clear QA framework for all future subcontracted or partnered activities. This must include due diligence, monitoring mechanisms, reporting obligations, and alignment with MQF standards. Procedures are to be finalised before entering any formal collaboration.
- R11: The institution should include clear procedures for online learning in its policy, specifically in relation to monitoring and evaluation of online programmes.
- R12: The institution should put its quality assurance policy into practice by clearly defining roles, processes and reporting lines, and making sure communication is clear so that all staff and students understand their responsibilities.
- R13: The institution should introduce mandatory staff induction.
- R14: The institution should formalise the use of QA evidence in strategic decision making, including documented procedures showing how QA outcomes inform planning, resource allocation, staff development and programme review.

Standard 4: Integrity, accountability and information management

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 4.1. The institution has a Code of Ethics through which it defends the values of academic freedom and ethical integrity; the Code is fit for purpose and is made publicly available on the institutional website.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has a published Code of Ethics that is readily available on the institution's website. The Code establishes expectations for ethical integrity at the institution and states that individual freedom is a core principle at Scientia. It also views independence as a principle, which it sees as cultivating a culture that is characterised by diversity and independent intellectual thinking where students and faculty staff can think, express and develop freely by securing neutrality in terms of ideology or religion and in relation to commercial interests of third parties. So, while there is no direct reference to academic freedom these two things taken together clearly span the territory of academic freedom. Nevertheless, the panel considered that it would be beneficial to refine the Code of Ethics to explicitly reference academic freedom and the impact this has on teaching, learning and research. Additionally, the Code of Ethics is also described as the Code of Conduct within the document itself and elsewhere. The panel recommends the institution review and revise the Code of Ethics to explicitly reference academic freedom and address nomenclature.

- 4.2. The Code of Ethics requires that all internal stakeholders act consistently with high standards of ethical conduct and academic integrity in research, teaching and performance evaluation, and in the conduct of administrative duties, and to avoid conflicts of interest; the Code promotes a culture against intolerance, discrimination and harassment of any kind amongst students and staff.

Panel's Findings:

While the Code of Ethics does require high standards of ethical conduct and sets out a series of related principles, the panel found that there are significant deficiencies in the Code. In particular, the Code only refers to research in relation to staff training. There is, therefore, no detailed regulation in place that sets out expected ethical behaviour for staff and students undertaking research. For example, the panel would have expected to see standards relating to collaborative research, data collection, ethical approval processes for empirical research, research misconduct including fabrication, falsification, misrepresentation, etc. Such standards should also address collection and

storage of data and duty of care. More generally, the Code also fails to address procedures for conflict of interest. The panel considers that this information is especially critical for a doctoral school and if not provided in the Code itself should be appropriately cross-referenced within the Code. The panel recommends the institution establish comprehensive and robust ethical standards for research.

- 4.3. The institution publishes on its website clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible information about its activities, including programmes. The information available shall be sufficient for prospective students to be able to make an informed choice in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences they are likely to acquire on successful completion of the programme. The information provided shall be in accordance with the MFHEA regulations.

Panel's Findings:

The institution's website remains under development. Currently, the site publishes the Doctoral Program Description that informs prospective students and other stakeholders about the knowledge, skills and competences they are likely to acquire on successful completion of the programme. Information is accurate and up to date, including a reference to the accreditation status of the institution as pending. Information about the institution's other activities is currently limited, in part owing to its phase of development. The panel recommends the institution further develop the website to include news and other information about planned student services, research and other activities.

- 4.4. The institution has defined information management regulations, including on data protection and the protection of user privacy, aligned with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provisions.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has an Information and Communication Technology Policy that states the Data Protection Officer is responsible for ensuring GDPR compliance. The Head of Institution will act as the Data Protection Officer in the first instance. The panel found that while ICT Policy references Security and Data Protection the content is relatively basic and focuses on the security of cloud platforms and handling permissions based on data classification. The Student Agreement also references privacy protections for students. However, the panel considered that the information management regulations should be expanded to comprehensively address procedures for ensuring GDPR compliance, including principles, training for staff, and expectations and requirements

in relation to collecting, storing and processing data. The panel recommends the institution revise and strengthen policies regulating management information.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

- 4.9. Staff understand the ethical implications of their actions at all times and attention is paid to the application of principles of academic ethics in the digital and online environment.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The Code of Ethics presents a set of guidelines for the education community, management, staff and students. Yet, the guidelines do not emphasise ethical considerations in an online learning environment. Further guidelines should be included to emphasise integrity in evaluation and guide students on the ethical use of digital and AI tools, data privacy and confidentiality in online learning, responsible use of AI, professional conduct and communication in online settings, timely and constructive feedback, etc.

- 4.10. The institution has developed clear policies that cover issues such as recording of lectures and meetings, acceptable use, security, data protection, ownership of intellectual property, avoidance of creative theft, and commercialisation of ideas developed by staff and students.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The institution will be offering synchronous online sessions. Pre-recorded lectures are not part of the online learning model. Recording synchronous lectures is not clearly represented in policies. The panel recommends that the institution create guidelines on the recording of lectures. Guidelines should emphasise ethical considerations in an online learning environment. The institution should also highlight the digital elements that are particular to the online learning environment, such as AI-generated work, online assessments, professional conduct and online interaction with peers, responsible and safe use of technology, etc.

- 4.11. The digital tools used by the provider, e.g., virtual learning environment (VLE), learning management system (LMS), communication tools and resources, leave a digital footprint; the data is analysed and included in the review process, with full respect to data protection regulations.

Digital Peer's Findings:

Indicator 4.11 refers to data gathered from the VLE in terms of student interaction and engagement in the learning process to inform programme developments and revisions. The provider refers to storing student information with supporting documents in the Smartsheet system to justify this indicator. Based on the demonstration of the VLE and the description of the online learning model, the instructional design will focus on uploading documents and assignments to be completed by the students individually. In the absence of interactive asynchronous online activities and student-student interaction and collaboration, the VLE will provide limited data on how the online learning modules can be improved. The panel recommends that the institution revisit its vision for its online learning and instructional design.

Judgement: Substantially compliant

Recommendations:

- R15: The institution should establish comprehensive and robust ethical standards for research.
- R66: The institution should revise and strengthen policies regulating management information.
- R17: The institution should review and revise the Code of Ethics to explicitly reference academic freedom and address nomenclature.
- R18: The institution should further develop the website to include news and other information about planned student services.
- R19: The institution should revise the Code of Ethics to emphasise ethical use of digital and AI tools, data privacy and confidentiality in online learning, responsible use of AI, professional conduct and communication in online settings, timely and constructive feedback, etc..

Standard 5: Teaching and administrative staff

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 5.1. A comprehensive set of policies is accessible to all teaching and administrative staff. It includes provisions referring to recruitment, rights and responsibilities, performance evaluation, promotion and professional development.

Panel's Findings:

The staff manual, operational plan and Internal Quality Management Policy provide a set of policies covering recruitment, duties and responsibilities, required qualifications, performance expectations and general principles for professional development. The staff manual describes the roles of the Governing Board, Academic Senate, Executive Board, and academic and administrative staff, including expected functions and reporting lines. The operational plan outlines quality expectations, reference to training activities, and the integration of staff into the quality assurance cycle. However, while these documents contain relevant elements, they do not form a single integrated staff policy, and several components (promotion, performance evaluation methods, and structured development planning) are described only, but not implemented. During interviews, the stakeholders did not demonstrate awareness of these policies.

- 5.2. The institution has defined clear, fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and appointment of all staff; these promote academic and professional expertise and are considerate of gender balance within the staff body.

Panel's Findings:

The staff manual specifies required qualifications for each role and outlines basic expectations for recruitment, stating that staff should meet academic and professional criteria. The operational plan also indicates that recruitment will follow defined standards for teaching and administrative posts. However, these descriptions remain general and do not include explicit, step-by-step recruitment procedures. During the interviews, it was indicated that recruitment has largely taken place through personal networks. The evaluation team could not confirm any evidence of open, competitive or transparent recruitment, nor any measures relating to gender balance. In the future, this might raise concerns about fairness, consistency and compliance with good practice in higher education.

- 5.3. The qualifications of teaching staff are at least one degree higher than the qualifications achieved by its completion. This requirement may be waived in justified cases, such as foreign language lecturers, industry guests, specialists and doctoral candidates.

Panel's Findings:

The doctoral programme description states that teaching staff must hold an MQF/EQF level 8 qualification and have relevant research and teaching experience. The staffing table provided by the institution shows that most core academic staff hold a PhD. However, two instructors do not hold a PhD - they teach some core modules, including research methods, data analytics and literature review components. Additionally, coaching and development workshops are provided by master qualification holders and one personnel with a master's degree but claims equivalence based on experience, which is not formally justified in the documents. During the interviews, the institution did not present a formal rationale for exceptions or indicate how academic standards will be safeguarded in modules led by staff without a doctoral degree. Given the advanced level of the programme, this is a significant concern.

- 5.4. Arrangements are made for part-time and sessional teaching staff; in the case of teaching staff providing limited and ad hoc services, institutions monitor professional development activities that ensure they are up to date with developments in their fields and with the methodological requirements of their programmes.

Panel's Findings:

The staff manual summarises duties for part-time and external lecturers and notes that all courses are subject to quality monitoring. The internal quality management policy states that all teaching formats undergo evaluation using standardised questionnaires. During the interviews, the stakeholders did not confirm any structured approaches for onboarding or supporting part-time staff. There was no evidence that professional development or pedagogical training is planned to be monitored.

- 5.5. The number of teaching staff allows a student-staff ratio which is adequate for the optimal delivery of education, including the support necessary for students, and is comparable to European best practice.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has not yet enrolled students, so no student–staff ratio can be assessed. The SAR indicates a planned intake of ten students in the first year. The staff list includes several qualified academic staff, but roles and workload distribution are not clearly aligned with expected student numbers. The evaluation team was not able to confirm whether staffing levels are sufficient for the supervision-intensive structure of an online doctoral programme. Without a clear supervision model and workload plan, it is unclear whether the planned staff can provide adequate academic and pastoral support.

- 5.6. The workload of teaching staff is appropriately quantified and regularly monitored; it includes the teaching contact hours, preparation, evaluation and complementary functions, including development activities. Teaching loads are taking into account the nature of teaching requirements in different fields of study.

Panel's Findings:

The doctoral programme description provides contact hours, assessment hours and independent study hours for each module. However, none of the documents quantify academic workload per staff member or describe how workload is monitored. The operational plan does not provide allocation formulas, contact hour limits or mechanisms for balancing teaching, supervision, assessment and administrative tasks. During the interviews the review team was not able to confirm any workload management system. The institution was unable to explain how teaching hours, supervision or assessment loads are calculated, and it became clear that several individuals currently perform multiple roles without formal workload limits. This creates risks of overload and inconsistent academic delivery.

- 5.7. The institution has a clear plan for all staff professional development for its full-time staff that is strategically driven, has a structured approach for identifying such needs, and allocates appropriate resources for its implementation.

Panel's Findings:

The staff manual and operational plan mention professional development in general terms, noting that training and continuous improvement are part of the institution's quality culture. However, there is no detailed plan, no budget allocation and no structured needs analysis. Throughout interviews it became apparent that the staff were not aware of any formal development programmes or specific training opportunities. The evaluation team found no evidence of a systematic approach to identifying development needs or linking them to strategic goals.

- 5.8. Criteria and processes for performance evaluation are clearly specified and made known in advance to all staff; performance review also informs professional development aims.

Panel's Findings:

Performance evaluation is referenced in the staff manual, and the internal quality management policy mentions monitoring of teaching quality through evaluations and academic reporting. However, the review team was unable to identify the concrete criteria, timelines or procedures for performance review, especially for teaching staff. in the documents provided by the institution.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

- 5.16. New staff orientation includes induction into the support mechanisms for tracking student participation and engagement in online courses and guiding students to support units in case of challenges.

Digital Pee's Findings:

In response to this staff orientation, the provider states that Scientia will work with a first group of eight faculty who have been involved in the development of the doctoral programme and policies. New faculty will be actively onboarded by the members of the Executive Board in the first month of hiring. The onboarding will transfer understanding and use of institutional policies, regulations, online teaching methods and use of the student information system and the online learning platform by weekly online meetings with the team. The panel recommends that the provider develop induction training for any new faculty members who join the programme or staff who are involved in supporting online learners.

- 5.17. The institution provides and/or facilitates for its academic staff specific training in online and blended learning, such as online learning design, developing and implementing pedagogies for online and blended learning, or successful delivery of online and blended learning.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The SAR states that faculty recruited must have broad experience in online learning methods and the use of online learning platforms, and Scientia will also organise training sessions and workshops at the end of each semester to evaluate online teaching methods and share best practices. Based on the audit visit, it was gathered that the institution should develop itself in terms of online learning strategies and assessments to keep up with the latest trends. The instructors' experience with online teaching was limited to synchronous sessions and interactive exercises within the sessions. While this proves their experience in synchronous online teaching, this does not ensure that all new faculty will have this experience, nor does it show that they can design meaningful learning experiences. The panel recommends that the institution hire an instructional designer to assist with the design of online courses and train faculty on the latest trends in online learning.

Judgement: Non-compliant

Recommendations:

- R20: The institution should hire an instructional designer to assist with the design and delivery of online courses and provide a professional development plan to train faculty on the latest trends in online learning.
- R21: The institution should consolidate its staff-related policies, which must be implemented consistently and supported by documented procedures.
- R22: The institution should formalise and document a transparent recruitment process with open calls, criteria-based selection and clear decision making records. Gender balance and equal opportunity principles should be integrated into recruitment procedures.
- R23: The institution should ensure all staff teaching core doctoral content hold qualifications at the appropriate level or formally document a justified exception in line with MFHEA expectations. Staff responsibilities should be adjusted if necessary to protect academic standards.
- R24: The institution should introduce a clear and transparent workload model covering teaching, supervision, assessment, preparation and administrative duties, and monitor it regularly.

- R25: The institution should develop a structured professional development plan with clear priorities, procedures and resource allocation, and ensure all staff are aware of the opportunities available.
- R26: The institution should establish a clear performance evaluation framework, communicate it to all staff and ensure it is linked to professional development and quality improvement.

Standard 6: Design, monitoring and review of programmes

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 6.1. The institution has formalised policies and procedures for the design of its programmes, which it implements effectively in practice.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR and the Internal Quality Management Policy outline a formal procedure for designing new programmes. The documents describe a workflow where management proposes programmes, market and PEST analyses are carried out, stakeholders are consulted, and final approval goes through the academic senate and governing board. The doctoral programme description also presents a structured design with modules, learning outcomes and assessment methods, and the policies show an intention to align with MQF and EQF requirements. However, during the interviews staff could not clearly describe the design stages or explain how these procedures work in practice. Teaching staff and employers were not able to show how the approval workflow functions or how any evidence is documented. The review team could also not confirm consistent application of the procedures across the institution.

- 6.2. In designing its programmes, the institution is guided by its mission and the needs of the labour market. The choice of study programmes is based on up-to-date sectoral know-how such as, but not limited to, market analysis, Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) analysis, and demographic research.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR states that programme development is guided by market analysis and PEST analysis, with sectoral needs referenced in the strategic plan. The doctoral programme is positioned as internationally focused, targeting working professionals in multiple regions. However, the documentation does not provide concrete labour-market data, sources or comparative indicators. The strategic plan briefly mentions global demand for flexible doctoral education, but detailed labour-market evidence is not presented in the programme description. During the interview the review team did not confirm a structured market analysis. Staff referred to general global demand but did not demonstrate how sectoral data, trends or demographic information shaped programme content or structure.

6.3. The institution ensures that the design process reflects the following characteristics:

- they define the expected student workload in terms of ECTS credits; expected student workloads are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 25 study hours;
- they indicate the target audience, including any geographic/regional targeting, and the minimum eligibility and selection criteria, where applicable;
- they are learning outcome-based, distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences;
- they indicate appropriate learning dynamics and a measure of tutor-student and peer-learning interaction as is appropriate for the course level and content;
- they indicate appropriate resources and forms of assessment;
- they provide students with opportunities to elect non-compulsory components;
- they indicate the minimum requirements in terms of qualifications and competences for teaching staff;
- they indicate the person/s responsible for:
 - course design and content development;
 - technical support;
 - teaching the course and interacting and supporting students;
- they are in line with the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the Malta Referencing Report 2012 and subsequent updates;
- the process of identification of training programme needs involves the participation of external stakeholders who are likely to benefit from the outcomes of such provision;
- programmes that are employment-oriented involve stakeholders from the world of work in their design;
- they are designed so that they enable smooth student progression;
- they involve students in their design;
- they are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

Panel's Findings:

After reviewing the programme it became clear that it covers most of the required elements, including learning outcomes, assessment methods, staff qualifications, learning approaches and workload estimates. However, a number of discrepancies are still visible.

- **Workload** inconsistencies: Modules 1, 2, 3 and 4 show different workload figures between the programme summary (17 contact + 2 assessment + 231 independent hours) and the detailed module descriptions (48 contact + 8 assessment + 194 independent). These mismatches repeat across several modules.
- **Duplicated** level-8 descriptors: A few modules reuse the same doctoral-level phrases such as “promotes scientific, social and ethical advancement” instead of providing module-specific outcomes.
- **Generic** learning outcomes: Parts of the text appear almost copied across modules, especially for research methods, critical thinking and leadership competences. This weakens the uniqueness of each module.
- **Alignment** with MQF level 8: Although the programme claims full level-8 alignment, many learning outcomes are written in very broad terms. They rely on standard doctoral verbs but do not always show the advanced, specialised depth expected at level 8.
- **Stakeholder** involvement: The documents mention involvement of students, lecturers, industry partners and an advisory board, but there is no evidence at all (minutes, feedback, consultation notes) to prove this actually happened.
- **Electives**: The programme is fully compulsory and does not offer non-compulsory components, and this is not justified.
- **Responsibility** for module design: Lecturer and coach roles are described, but it is not clear who is actually responsible for content development, technical support and academic oversight of each module.

Interviews did not confirm any participation of potential students, employers or external peers in the design. Staff could not explain how the learning outcomes were drafted or how level 8 alignment was checked. They also did not mention the workload inconsistencies or show awareness of the issues already raised in the programme/module report.

6.4. The programmes' structure and content ensure a logical sequencing of their components, a relevant balance between theoretical and practical activities, and

sufficient opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes within a reasonable timeframe.

Panel's Findings:

The programme has a clear progression from introductory research foundations to prospectus development, methods training, analytics, three academic papers and a final dissertation. This structure allows a logical build-up of research competences. Modules 5, 6, and 7 have consistent workload distributions (500 hours each), and the curriculum shows a coherent research trajectory. However, overlaps exist between modules covering similar content areas, and the early modules contain repeated descriptors rather than focused module-level learning outcomes. Some modules contain contradictory workload data. The review team did not have an opportunity to meet with module tutors/supervisors/students (only one potential student attended), hence, the expert team was not able to confirm how the institution will manage progression once students enrol. No concrete explanation was provided on handling delays, workload challenges or publication requirements associated with three academic papers.

- 6.5. In developing its programmes, the institution conducts comparative analyses of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR states that comparative analysis with foreign doctoral programmes has been conducted and is included in the strategic plan. However, no comparative tables, benchmarking summaries, or specific reference institutions are presented in the documentation. The programme description does not include such evidence either. Interviews did not confirm awareness of benchmarking results. Staff referred to “international practice” but could not explain how other doctoral programmes were analysed or how findings were integrated into the design. Additionally, programme aims/mission stated that the programme is innovative. However, the expert team was not able to gather objective insights or judgements of this statement.

- 6.6. The programmes’ design is conducted in close engagement with internal and external stakeholders, including administrative staff, external academic peers, students and employers.

Panel's Findings:

Policies state that programme design and review include participation from students, faculty, industry partners and Advisory Board members. The SAR also references stakeholder involvement. However, the programme description does not include documented feedback from any external stakeholders, nor does it show how their inputs shaped the programme. No stakeholder meeting minutes, feedback forms or consultation reports were provided. Interviews suggested that stakeholder involvement is intended but has not yet been implemented. No consistent process is in place, and staff could not identify specific external participants.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

6.13. Programmes designed for online and blended delivery cater for any specific particularities at the level of learning outcomes, their delivery and assessment, and pedagogies that enhance student interaction and gauge student learning in digital environments.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The provider has adopted a synchronous model for the delivery of contact hours through:

- 6 x 4-hour synchronous lecturing and workshop sessions between the lecturer and small groups of students
- 6 x 2-hour one-on-one synchronous sessions for tutoring between the lecturer and student
- 6 x 2-hour one-on-one synchronous sessions for coaching between the lecturer and student

While this mode of delivery is appropriate for this level of learning outcomes, integrating asynchronous learning activities into the online learning approach could provide more support for the learners and engage them in collaborative learning activities.

6.14. Online and blended programmes are reviewed through established quality assurance methods that have been adapted to the specific pedagogical and methodological approaches.

Digital Peer's Findings:

This indicator suggests that the institution uses QA rubrics at the course level to ensure that developed courses are of quality. Examples of these rubrics are Quality Matters Rubric and OLC Scorecard, which are used to evaluate online learning at the course level. This is not evident in the reviewed documents submitted by the provider. The panel recommends that the institution set QA checklists or measures to evaluate online learning at the course level.

Judgement: Substantially compliant

Recommendations:

- R27: The institution should select QA checklists or measures to evaluate online learning at the course level.
- R28: The institution should develop a revised online learning model that takes into consideration current trends in online learning and adopts a learner-centred approach.
- R29: The institution should make its programme design procedure fully operational, involve all interested parties properly, and make sure everyone understands their roles and the approval steps.
- R30: The institution should document labour-market evidence more explicitly and demonstrate how this analysis informs programme design.
- R31: The institution should correct the workload inconsistencies, rewrite module learning outcomes, so they meet level 8 expectations, and remove duplicated text.
- R32: The institution should implement a structured stakeholder consultation process with documented outcomes.

Standard 7: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

7.1. The teaching methods and learning environments are planned to be student-centred and to stimulate students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This includes:

- a) enabling flexible learning paths;
- b) considering the different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- c) using innovation in pedagogical methods, including digital technologies;
- d) providing students with adequate support from the teaching staff.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has developed a teaching and learning philosophy that is centred on constructive learning approaches and Kolb's experiential learning cycles. The institution informed the panel that programmes and modules are designed based on Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design framework. The panel considered that the theoretical basis for the planned approach to teaching and learning is sound. Flexible learning paths are further enabled through online learning and the tutorial model, based on academic coaches, is evidence of an appropriate plan for providing support from teaching staff. However, the panel noted, as discussed elsewhere in this report, that modules on the VLE are currently underdeveloped and the institution was not able to fully articulate how the theoretical approach will be translated into practice and in particular to enable high-quality online learning. The institution is recommended to develop a documented strategy and implementation plan for its approach to student-centred teaching, learning and assessment.

7.2. The assessment system is designed in a way that ensures:

- a) the criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance in a way that is understandable to students;
- b) if possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments;
- c) the achieved learning outcomes are analysed in relation to the intended outcomes;
- d) the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;

- e) there are quality management arrangements in place to ensure the fitness for purpose of the assessment (validity, reliability, efficiency, transparency, fairness, authenticity, adequacy of feedback); this may include the usage of rubrics, second grading, internal moderation, external examination, usage of anti-plagiarism software.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has yet to approve individual assessment tasks and therefore no corresponding assessment criteria have been established. However, the programme specification does make reference to the assessment strategy for each module, including the assessment type and weighting.

The institution informed the panel that the Senate holds responsibility for compliance with the examinations regulations and ensuring assessment is fit for purpose. The panel found that the Education and Examination Regulations do confirm the Senate's responsibility for ensuring compliance with the examination regulation. However, the panel also concluded that precise arrangements for ensuring the validity, reliability, transparency and fairness of assessment are yet to be finalised and are not fully addressed in the Education and Examination Regulations. The institution informed the panel that the Senate will be responsible for approving assessment tasks and grading rubrics and, in doing so, confirming these are constructively aligned with learning outcomes. The institution also stated that, as senior leaders had done in other institutions, grades will likely be submitted to the Senate for confirmation and approval. However, these arrangements are not detailed in any regulations, and the institution did not confirm whether any second grading or sampling will take place. The institution is recommended to strengthen its regulations to comprehensively detail quality management arrangements for assessment.

7.3. The institution regulates the maximum number of opportunities a student is granted to pass one given assessment.

Panel's Findings:

The Education and Examination Regulations for Doctoral Studies contains a section on Retaking an Examination. It states that doctoral programme examinations (written, oral or minor) may be retaken only once. Students who fail an examination must retake the failed examination in the next term. In the interim between exam attempts, the doctoral student and his or her advisor should develop a plan for addressing deficiencies noted during the first examination. This plan should be put in writing and distributed to the Programme Committee for input prior to scheduling the second attempt. Failure on the second attempt on any programme examination disqualifies the student from doctoral study. The same applies to doctoral defences.

- 7.4. The institution has an appeal procedure which is well disseminated, makes clear the grounds on which academic appeals may be based, the criteria for decisions, and the remedies available.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has a basic appeals procedure set out. In case of complaints students will in the first instance contact the lecturer responsible for the module to discuss the issues at hand and find possible solutions. In the second instance students can present a written complaint to the Examination Commission where the issue will be treated. In the third instance a final appeal can be presented to the Academic Senate. The institution is recommended to strengthen the appeal procedure to include the grounds for appeal, timescales and support arrangements for those submitting an appeal

- 7.5. Where applicable, a work-based learning/internship is integrated with speciality studies and students are provided with adequate supervision; there are detailed procedures defined to ensure the specific contribution of the work-based learning/internship to the programme's learning outcomes.

Panel's Findings:

This standard is not applicable as the institution does not offer work-based learning/internships integrated with speciality studies.

- 7.6. The institution has clearly defined the responsibilities for the supervisors of theses at all levels, including PhD students.

Panel's Findings:

Students are attached to a Doctoral Program Committee composed of a Chair, who is a faculty member in the major field of study, and a second member who is a part-time member of faculty. The Doctoral Program Committee guides the student throughout their doctoral programme. Specifically, the Doctoral Program Committee supports the student in developing a Plan of Study and oversees the programme examinations. This information is set out in the Doctoral Student Handbook. The institution has also established an expected frequency of meetings between the student and the supervisory team. However, Scientia is yet to clearly define the responsibilities and expectations of supervisors in staff guidance or policy documentation. The institution is recommended to refine or expand policies and procedures to provide clearly defined responsibilities for supervisors.

- 7.7. The high standard for the evaluation and defence of theses is ensured through transparent and fair procedures and by the involvement of highly qualified academic staff in the process, including those coming from outside the institution.

Panel's Findings:

Arrangements for the dissertation defence are set out in the Student Handbook, though not in the Education and Examination Regulations. A Doctoral Dissertation Committee is established that includes the members of the Doctoral Program Committee with the addition of a third academic staff whose primary appointment is outside the candidate's programme, or Scientia School for Doctoral Studies, who is familiar with the standards of doctoral research in the field of the dissertation and with graduate faculty membership of any accredited academic institution. The institution informed the panel that it envisages the third member of the committee to be external and not contracted to Scientia, but it does not want to rule out individuals who may have previously worked with the institution. Considering the fact that the Doctoral Dissertation Committee is principally composed of the supervisory team. The institution is recommended to ensure regulations governing operation of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee are tightened to address ambiguity and ensure consistent externality with at least one member not contracted as part-time faculty of the institution.

The institution informed the panel that it has not established a minimum or maximum word limit for student theses on the basis that it is more concerned about establishing whether the work is quality and of the requisite standard. However, the panel considers that this has the potential to negatively impact fairness and transparency if students are permitted to submit work that can vary widely in length. The institution should establish parameters for the length of student dissertations.

The institution also informed the panel that there is an expectation to publish three articles prior to defending their thesis. This would typically be a Q3 journal or above and could include conference presentations, but the institution wouldn't accept three conference presentations alone and at least some publications must be journal articles. However, the panel found that these requirements are not established in writing and, therefore, remain unclear to students and stakeholders. The institution is recommended to formalise and publish publication requirements to be awarded a PhD.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

7.13. Teaching, learning and assessment are adapted to online and blended delivery and closely aligned with digital resources.

Digital Peer's Findings:

Online teaching is limited to synchronous sessions, group and individual. The provider is advised to include asynchronous sessions. As for assessments, they are appropriate for online learning as they are performance assessments (role-plays, research papers, oral presentations, debates, etc.) all of which assess higher level thinking skills.

7.14. Online and blended arrangements cater for activities that exploit active, constructive, cooperative and authentic learning, as well as student-to-tutor and student-to-student interaction in digital environments.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The provider stated and explained during the audit visit that the synchronous sessions aim to promote student-student and student-tutor engagement and interaction. Some of the learning activities stated in the doctoral programme description suggest that. The panel recommends that more collaborative and constructive activities be integrated into the structure of the programme, specifically in the modules.

7.15. In online assessments, measures, such as online proctoring systems, are taken to require confirmation of the identity of the test taker and the integrity of the test taker environment.

Digital Peer's Findings:

Traditional tests and exams are not part of the programme. Therefore, an online proctoring system is not a requirement. However, credible plagiarism and AI detection software are a must to ensure the learners maintain academic integrity. The panel recommends that the provider invest in such tools. Furthermore, policies for professors are key to ensure that they use the right strategies and methods to validate students' work that could result from AI tools. Similarly, AI policies for assessment are a must.

Judgement: Non-compliant

Recommendations:

- R33: The institution should strengthen its regulations to comprehensively detail quality management arrangements for assessment.
- R34: The institution should strengthen the appeal procedure to include the grounds for appeal, timescales and support arrangements for those submitting an appeal.
- R35: The institution should formalise and publish publication requirements to be awarded a PhD.
- R36: The institution should develop a revised online learning model that takes into consideration current trends in online learning and adopts a learner-centred approach.
- R37: The institution should invest in plagiarism and AI detection software and develop an AI policy.
- R38: The institution should develop a documented strategy and implementation plan for its approach to student-centred teaching, learning and assessment.
- R39: The institution should refine or expand policies and procedures to provide clearly defined responsibilities for supervisors.
- R40: The institution should ensure regulations governing operation of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee are tightened to address ambiguity and ensure consistent externality with at least one member not contracted as part-time faculty of the institution.
- R41: The institution should establish parameters for the length of student dissertations.

Standard 8: Student administration and student support services

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 8.1. Accurate and reliable information about the institution, including the range of programmes, admissions procedures, services, scholarship opportunities, tuition and administrative fees, and other relevant information, is made publicly available to prospective students and other interested parties.

Panel's Findings:

The institution's website remains under development. Currently, it provides a basic overview of why prospective students might wish to study at Scientia, an overview of the doctoral programme, faculty details and admission requirements. The website currently misses information on tuition fees, scholarships and student services. The institution is recommended to further develop the website to include information required as part of the minimal indicator, specifically surrounding tuition fees, scholarships and student services. Furthermore, the panel found that the programme does not reference the precise awards students will receive on completion of their programme, which the institution confirmed is a PhD in Business Administration. The institution is recommended to ensure the website, and in particular programme pages, contains a clear and explicit reference to the title of the academic award.

- 8.2. Admissions requirements are clearly specified and appropriately determined for the institution and its programmes.

Panel's Findings:

The website clearly details the entry criteria for the doctoral programme that includes an EQF Level 7 qualification or master's degree or a student's prior professional experience and studies and a corresponding Policy for Recognition of Prior Learning. Students must also have a minimum of 3 years professional experience, proficient working level of language in which the programme will be conducted (English), basic digital competencies to collaborate using the institution's digital learning platform and excellent personal motivation. Information is submitted online to the Registrar's Office and applicants must provide certified copies of degrees and diplomas and a passport photo. Students are required to attend an online interview.

- 8.3. A comprehensive set of policies is made widely available within the institution, providing clear and transparent information required for all phases of the student “life cycle” – admission, assessment, progression, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, recognition, certification and qualification award – including all concerning regulations, the rights and responsibilities of students, Code of Conduct, actions to be taken for breaches of conduct, responsibilities of relevant officers and committees, and penalties that may be imposed. Policies cater for the social dimension of higher education by taking active measures to safeguard the equity, inclusion and diversity of the student body.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has a number of policies in place that relate to the requirements of the minimum indicator. The Internal Quality Management Policy includes sections on admissions, progression, certification and graduation. The institution also has Education and Examination Regulations and an Inclusion and Accessibility Policy in place. However, the panel determined that there were gaps in the overall policy architecture in place at the institution and extant policies lacked the requisite clarity. For example, the institution informed the panel that when a student fails a module they will not be permitted to progress to the next year of study until it has been successfully completed. This will mean repeating the year of study. While the institution stated that this would be detailed in the Education and Examination Regulations the panel found that this was not currently the case. Similarly, this is not explicitly stated in the Study Progression section of the Internal Quality Management Policy. Furthermore, the panel determined that it is not prudent to outline student progression regulations in two separate documents. The Internal Quality Management Policy states that the maximum period of registration on a doctoral programme is 5 years (with 1 inactive). However, in the Education and Examination Regulations it states that students are allowed to finalise their programme in the standard period of programme study (3 years) plus a 2-year extension. It then goes on to say students can request an inactive period of maximum one year. It does not make clear that the period of inactivity is counted as part of the 5-year maximum registration period. The institution is recommended to ensure procedures regarding progression are clearly articulated in formal regulations.

The institution also informed the panel that it does not currently have mobility policies and procedures in place and is yet to finalise its approach (and therefore policy) relating to transcripts as this is currently an active discussion with Maltese authorities.

The Internal Quality Management Policy states that the website reflects the institution's commitment to clearly articulated policies. Essential policies concerning admission, assessment, progression, student status changes, mobility, recognition, certification and qualification award, along with student rights and responsibilities, the Code of Conduct, and disciplinary procedures, must be readily available. It also states that the

website will demonstrate the institution's proactive measures towards a balanced student body, reflecting the social dimension of higher education. The panel found that only some of this information is currently available on the website.

- 8.4. The institution regulates the maximum time a student can spend inactive within the institution (without engaging with their academic commitments and assessments) before their enrolment status is terminated and the student expelled.

Panel's Findings:

Students are admitted for the validated and published duration of a programme, which is 3 years for the PhD programme. The Education and Examination Regulations state that students are allowed to finalise their programme in the standard period of programme study plus a 2-year extension. Furthermore, students can request an inactive period of maximum one year.

- 8.5. There is a student agreement between the institution and each student which protects student rights and lawful interests.

Panel's Findings:

The institution has developed the Scientia Student Agreement. The Agreement sets out the duties of the student and the institution. It also outlines financial conditions, including the tuition fee of Euro 6,000 per year. The Agreement also sets out withdrawal, default and refund procedures, privacy, intellectual property and dispute arrangements.

- 8.6. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to deal with academic misconduct, including plagiarism and other forms of conduct breach.

Panel's Findings:

The institution informed the team that the policies and procedures for academic misconduct are codified in the Code of Ethics and the Education and Examination Regulations. The panel found that the Code of Ethics encompasses some principles and positions that would commonly be found in other such policies such as an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy or in Student or Staff Codes of Conduct. There is also no reference to research ethics in the Code of Ethics, with the exception of training sessions.

The Education and Examination Regulations state that cases of fraud are to be reported by the lecturer or fellow students with supporting documentation to the Academic Senate, which will validate the presented documentation and make a decision on the right, date and conditions under which a re-examination can be taken. The institution defines fraud as any act that involves misrepresenting an academic document or passing off as one's own work something that belongs to another(s). Where the institution receives allegations, in the first incidence the student (s) who is found committing fraud in a partial exam including practical work, presentation or any academic work that requires originality and individual work, will be given a grade zero (0) for the partial exam in question. In the second incident the student (s) who is found committing fraud a second time will directly carry a grade zero (0) in the corresponding module and must follow the recovery regulations. In the third incident the student is found committing fraud, they will be expelled from the institution without the possibility of being able to return to any of the study programmes. The panel found that the current regulations would benefit from enhanced clarity as the currently conflate complaints, academic appeals, extraordinary circumstances, resits and academic misconduct. The institution is recommended to refine, clearly delineate regulations and address nomenclature for complaints, academic appeals, extraordinary circumstances, resits and academic misconduct

- 8.7. The institution has made provision for academic tutors to support student progress as needed, as well as services for career development and psychological support. The needs of a diverse student population (including mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with special needs) has been taken into account when planning the student support services.

Panel's Findings:

The institution informed the panel that for each student cohort, a team of lecturers and academic coaches is responsible for the direct provision of student support. Support includes group-based lectures and individual tutoring sessions by a supervising lecturer and specialised lecturer. Each student will have an assigned coach for the development of professional and social competencies. The programmes will also actively promote the development of an (online) learner's community, peer exchanges and peer reviews during the learning process. The institution considers that this way students are stimulated to develop their own learning and professional alumni network in the longer term. As Scientia is yet to enrol a student cohort the panel was unable to verify the effectiveness of the approach but considered that it was fit-for-purpose for academic tutorial support in theory.

However, the Board informed the panel that currently the broader requirements in relation to student support services are guesswork until the student body is in place. Consequently, neither the Student Handbook for Doctoral Studies nor the website outline the institution's arrangements for student support as they have yet to be determined. The panel therefore considers it is both possible and desirable to model support services before accepting students and, therefore, the institution is recommended to expedite planning for its student support services provision.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

8.16. Online support resources contribute to the creation of real engagement between the staff and students; direct support provided through a virtual communication system, such as a forum, a live video session, email or pre-recorded videos, are considered contact hours.

Digital Peer's Findings:

Students will receive support through the synchronous online sessions with the professors and academic coaches. Other types of support include technical support and orientation sessions conducted with students. The provider will also be monitoring students' interaction in the VLE, where they will identify students at risk at an early stage.

Judgement: Partially compliant

Recommendations:

R42: The institution should further develop the website to include information required as part of the minimal indicator, specifically surrounding tuition fees, scholarships and student services.

R43: The institution should ensure the website, and in particular programme pages, contains a clear and explicit reference to the title of the academic award.

R44: The institution should ensure procedures regarding progression are clearly articulated in formal regulations.

- R45: The institution should refine and clearly delineate regulations and address nomenclature for complaints, academic appeals, extraordinary circumstances, resits and academic misconduct.
- R46: The institution should expedite planning for its student support services provision.

Standard 9: Learning resources and facilities

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

9.1. The premises dedicated for the educational and administrative activities of the institution are under the ownership or lawful possession (lease) of the institution.

Panel's Findings:

The institution intends to operate fully online; the expert panel did not have a chance to see any physical facilities related to the institution's operation.

9.2. The institution provides an adequate, attractive and well-maintained physical environment of both buildings and grounds. Facilities fully meet relevant Maltese legislation and regulations.

Panel's Findings:

The institution intends to operate fully online; the expert panel did not have a chance to see any physical facilities related to the institution's operation.

9.3. Appropriate provision for both facilities and learning resources is made for students and staff with physical disabilities or other special needs (such as visual or hearing impairments).

Panel's Findings:

In the SAR, the review team was able to identify some descriptions related to the general inclusivity principles, but there is no detailed description of accessibility measures for students with disabilities. There is no explicit reference to screen-reader compatibility, captioning, alternative formats, or accessibility features in the learning platforms. Interviews did not confirm any procedures or systems to support learners with special needs. There was no evidence of accessibility audits or dedicated support processes.

9.4. A library and other associated facilities and services are available for extended hours beyond normal class time to ensure access when required by users.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR states that the institution does not yet have an online library or access to academic databases. Reading lists in the programme description rely on publicly accessible sources. No subscription to digital libraries, journal databases or e-book platforms is described. During the interviews it was confirmed that the institution currently lacks an institutional online library. The management referred to plans for future subscriptions but could not specify timelines, platforms or budgets.

- 9.5. Up-to-date computer equipment and software are available and accessible for staff and students throughout the institution to support electronic access to resources and reference material.

Panel's Findings:

The institution does not provide its own computer equipment. Staff and students are expected to use their personal devices. Scientia only offers access to three online platforms: the institutional website, which serves as the main channel for public information; Google Workspace for Education, which supports all teaching and learning activities; and Smartsheet, which functions as the online student information system for records and grading.

- 9.6. Books, journals and other materials, including online databases, are available in Maltese, English or other languages, as required for programmes and research organised at the institution. The main literature listed in the syllabi is made available by the institution either in hard copy or electronic format.

Panel's Findings:

The programme description includes reading lists for each module, but the institution does not provide copies of these materials. No evidence of licensed journal access, e-book collections or subscriptions is presented. From the interviews it became clear that the reading lists depend largely on free-access publications which seems insufficient for doctoral-level work. Interviews with the management and other stakeholders acknowledged that the institution has not yet secured academic databases or a structured acquisition plan.

- 9.7. Technical support is available for staff and students using information and communications technology. Training programmes are provided to ensure effective use of computing equipment and appropriate software for assessments, teaching and administration.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR briefly mentions that Google Workspace provides stable digital tools, but it does not describe any technical support service for staff or students. There are no details on IT helpdesks, response procedures or training sessions. The interviews with the interested parties did not confirm the existence of structured technical support (there is a guideline chapter in the quality document, but no implementation procedure). Staff described general familiarity with the digital tools, but no training programme or support team was presented.

9.8. Institutions that offer digital education shall ensure that their digital infrastructure has:

- a) automated procedures to ensure continuity of service in case of failure of their equipment or software;
- b) backup systems, including real-time mirroring of data, full/incremental backups on site, and full/incremental backups offsite on physical data.

Panel's Findings:

The SAR states that the institute uses low-access online platforms, which limits the likelihood of communication difficulties, and the interviews confirmed the same. The SAR also explains that all assessments are asynchronous, so no synchronous real-time online assessment is required. Student records are stored on the Smartsheet cloud with regular backups archived in Malta for a 10-year period. According to the SAR, both Google and Smartsheet provide real-time data mirroring and backup functions, and the institution can download or print selected data for physical storage in Malta.

Additional indicators in the context of online provision:

9.13. Any third-party digital resources purchased by the institution are scalable (expanded or upgraded to cater for an increased demand), avoid vendor lock-in (by using established standards) and are covered by a service-level agreement for maintenance and support by the vendor.

Digital Peer's Findings:

According to the provider, "Scientia has subscribed to licenses for well-proven and easy scalable learning digital platform Google Workspace for Education and an online student information system Smartsheet.com." A service-level agreement for Smartsheet is provided.

- 9.14. Staff and students are able to access most of the institutional resources online without the need for being physically on campus; this is included in the orientation programme of new students.

Digital Peer's Findings:

Students may access the website and Google Workspace online. The provider does not provide a digital library which the panel finds a necessary source for learners at the doctorate level. The panel recommends that the provider develop their digital library with databases relevant to the students' field of study.

- 9.15. Students are able to access digital resources without the need to invest in high-end and expensive hardware and software. Resources are accessible on computing devices (both traditional laptops/desktops and smaller mobile devices like smartphones and tablets) with average specifications.

Digital Peer's Findings:

The programme does not require advanced software except for quantitative and qualitative data analysis if needed. It is not clear whether the provider will provide access to students for this software. Students' devices should be equipped with cameras and microphones to facilitate online interaction. The Accessibility and Inclusion Policy includes focusing on online learning.

Judgement: Non-compliant

Recommendations:

- R47: The institution should establish access to reliable academic resources, including online databases, journals and e-books, before enrolling students.
- R48: The institution should establish a formal IT support system and training sessions to ensure staff and students can use digital tools effectively.

Standard 10: Research, development and/or other creative activity

10.1. The institution includes in its strategic and priorities objectives pertaining to research, development, and/or creative work which are consistent with its mission.

Panel's Findings:

In Scientia's mission statement the research is mentioned, and the Scientia Strategic Plan 2029-2030 also pays attention to research. It is mainly in relation to students' research projects (dissertations) and publications derived from them in the course of the PhD study. The Internal Quality Manual states: "Scientia develops joint research projects between lecturers and students so that the institution builds up expertise and recognition in particular fields of research." (p. 36). Key performance indicators related to research explicitly state expertise in at least 10 research topics at the start of operations, at least 50 publications in the 5th year of operations, and application of the institution's ethical criteria to 100% of the research projects (Internal Quality Manual).

As for the research activity of the academic staff, Scientia welcomes it, however, explicit focus on developing stronger and specifically profiled research school(s)/lab(s) on which PhD research could be built are not in place. The same can be said to some extent about supporting mechanisms for research of the staff. Instead, a reliance on externally gained expertise of the invited/contracted staff prevails.

10.2. The institution has included in its budget a line dedicated to research/creative activity to enable the achievement of its research/creative objectives.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia has in its financial plan a sum allocated to publications and participation at conferences (Euro 15,000 in the first two years, Euro 20,000 in the third year, and Euro 25,000 in the last two years (2028, 2029)). Financial support of more complex research-related activities of the staff is not envisaged.

10.3. There are transparent and fair procedures established for the funding of research/creative objectives.

Panel's Findings:

At the moment, Scientia does not have established transparent procedures for the funding of research objectives. The institution only claims that it will seek, on a case per case basis, possibilities for collaboration with private sector partners interested in

proposed doctoral research. And it is planning to support publications and conference participation of the staff, as mentioned earlier in this report.

- 10.4. Sufficient financial, logistic, and human resources are made available for achieving the proposed research/creative objectives.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia claims that it will guarantee sufficient and regular access of students to lecturers and mentors. It also claims it will supply students with sufficient literature resources (mainly by initiative of the academic staff, but without access to online databases). As for financial resources – students will mainly be expected to cover their expenses themselves.

- 10.5. Expectations for academic staff involvement in research/creative activities are specified, and performance in relation to these expectations is considered in the individual performance review system and in promotion criteria.

Panel's Findings:

The main expectation of Scientia in this respect is that academic staff will be actively involved in the students' research activities. It also claims that "lecturers are expected to seek active co-publication of research results" (SAR, p. 48). And one of the KPIs mentions the publication outputs (without further specification). The emphasis is not put on independent, Scientia-related research activities of academic staff (academic staff will be contracted for individual engagement and often will be involved somewhere else at the same time).

- 10.6. There are clear policies, procedures, and relevant structural units to ensure the safeguarding of ethical principles in research/creative activities.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia claims that its research ethics will be grounded in the Best Practice Guide for Research Integrity, the document published by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. According to Scientia's operational plan, this "guide will be part of the curriculum for students and the code of conduct for the lecturers and tutors." (p. 26)

Judgement: Non-compliant

Recommendations:

- R49: The institution should draft a clear policy to develop a research basis on which PhD studies/research could be built, including explicit and effective support of research activities of the staff.
- R50: The institution should effectively support research activities of the academic staff.
- R51: The institution should make clear expectations related to Scientia-based research performance of the academic staff.

Standard 11: Institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation

Main Findings according to the criteria of Minimal Indicators:

- 11.1. The institution includes in its strategic priorities, objectives pertaining to institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation. There are clear indicators defining the institutional priorities in these areas.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia pays certain attention to the service to society in its mission statement. It also has aspirations to collaborate with industry and other partners, internationally, including by choice of dissertation research themes relevant for the local/regional/national contexts. One of the plans relates to the relations with institutions (in Uganda, for instance) which do not have access to PhD programmes and could supply Scientia with its MA graduates – this was proven during the interviews.

In its Internal Quality Manual, the institution stated performance indicators related to this area. They include: “2 university partner agreements in year 1 and 4 university partner agreements in year 5, 10 International Advisory Board members in year 1 and 20 members in year 5, 10 agreements with multinational companies by year 5, 100 students by year 5, <30 tons of greenhouse gas emission per year” (p. 42).

11.2. There are budgetary allocations dedicated to institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation to enable the achievement of its objectives in these areas.

Panel's Findings:

In the financial plan, for marketing and collaboration it is planned the allocation of Euro 15,000 in each of the next five years. Further specification is not provided.

11.3. Local employers and members of professions are invited to join relevant committees or other structural units considering study programmes and other institutional activities.

Panel's Findings:

Scientia declares it has a strategic priority in partnering with industry and universities, and South America, Africa and Europe (some countries of it) are mentioned as already pre-established partners, based on previous experience and work of key actors of Scientia. The aim is to sign at least two university partner agreements in 2026, and a total of four agreements in 2027, according to Internal Quality Management Policy. Key performance indicators in this area are formulated. The implementation of this is planned for the future.

Judgement: Substantially compliant

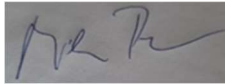
Recommendations:

Nil.

Panel Member Signatures

The audit report is compiled by the peer review panel:

Chair of Review Panel: Milan Pol

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'MP' followed by a stylized flourish.

Peer Reviewer: Tornike Khoshtaria

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'T. Khoshtaria' with a large, stylized flourish.

Student Peer Reviewer: Matthew Kitching

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Kitching' with a large, stylized flourish.

Digital Reviewer: Ghania Zgheib

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Zgheib' with a large, stylized flourish.

Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation of the IQA Document

Standards for Accreditation

Standard 1: Mission and strategic management

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 2: Governance, organisational structure and administration

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 3: Quality management

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 4: Integrity, accountability and information management

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 5: Teaching and administrative staff

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 6: Design, monitoring and review of programmes

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 7: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 8: Student administration and student support services

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 9: Learning resources and facilities

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 10: Research, development and/or other creative activity

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Standard 11: Institutional cooperation, service to society and internationalisation

Panel's Findings:

The institution provided relevant information in a timely manner, before the onsite visit.

Suggestions for Improvement: Nil.

Annex 2: Accreditation Visit Agenda

Date: 11th and 12th November 2025

Venue: Grand Hotel Excelsior, Floriana

Day 1	Meetings
8:30 (30 m)	MFHEA EQA panel preparation meeting for Day 1 of the institutional audit
9:00 (60 m)	Board
10:00 (15 m)	Internal Meeting
10:15 (60 m)	Senate
11:15 (15 m)	Internal meeting
11:30 (60 m)	QA
12:30 (60 m)	Internal meeting / Lunch break
13:30 (60 m)	Head of Institution
14:30 (15 m)	Internal meeting
14.45 (60 m)	Administration
15:45 (15 m)	Internal Meeting
16:00 (60 m)	IT
17:00	Close day 1

Day 2	Meetings
8:30 (30 m)	MFHEA EQA panel preparation meeting for Day 2 of the institutional audit
9:00 (60 m)	Lecturers
10:00 (15 m)	Internal meeting
10:15(60 m)	Students
11:15 (15 m)	Internal meeting
11:30 (60 m)	External Stakeholders
12:30 (60 m)	Internal meeting / Lunch break
13:30 (135 m)	Any other meeting for any clarifications Panel consultation
15:45 (15 m)	Presentation of initial findings
16:00	Close day 2

Annex 3: Review Panel Bio Notes

Chair of Review Panel:

Dr Milan Pol is Professor of Education and, in 2014-2022, he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic). At this faculty he is head of the doctoral programme of Educational Sciences. His professional interests are leadership in education and evaluation in education. In the field of evaluation, Dr Pol has been invited to evaluations arranged by ENQA and has been the head or the member of evaluating panels such as QAA (UK), FINEEC (Finland) and SQAA-NAKVIS (Slovenia). He participates frequently in institutional/programme evaluations in higher education internationally (Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, UAE, and more). In 2010-2016 he was a member of the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia. Dr Pol is author of numerous publications (<https://www.muni.cz/en/people/75-milan-pol/publications>) and works as editor-in-chief of *Studia Paedagogica*, a Scopus-databased journal. He is a former chair (2004-2005, 2022-2023) of the European Network for Improving Research and Development in Educational Leadership and Management (ENIRDELM). In 2023, Dr Pol was awarded with an honorary doctorate at the University of Latvia.

Peer Reviewer:

Dr Tornike Khoshtaria is an experienced higher education professional and marketing academic with extensive expertise in programme leadership, accreditation, and digital marketing. He currently serves as Programme Leader for the MSc Digital Marketing at QFBA Northumbria University in Qatar and is an active accreditation expert with several European and international quality assurance bodies. Dr Khoshtaria has published research in reputable Q1 and Q2 journals, focusing on topics such as artificial intelligence in marketing, consumer behaviour, and the digital transformation of higher education. He supervises both Master's and PhD students and serves as a reviewer and editor for Springer Nature books. His research interests include AI in marketing, digital transformation in higher education, and strategic branding. Dr Khoshtaria also leads innovative teaching initiatives that combine academic rigour with industry engagement.

Student Reviewer:

Mr Matthew Kitching is currently a PhD student in Higher Education at Lancaster University, focusing on international quality assurance and student leadership and development. Additionally, he serves as Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Buckinghamshire New University, where he oversees a broad range of student support services including advice, representation, sport, volunteering, and civic engagement. Mr Kitching holds board positions at several European quality assurance agencies, such as the European Council for Business Education, where he manages accreditation standards, site visits, and peer reviewer training, and EQ-Arts, where he acts as a researcher on a European-funded project examining urgent and emerging skills needs in the creative industries. Mr Kitching has extensive experience conducting programme audits for various quality assurance agencies across five continents and reviewing materials related to inclusive education programs, including serving as a panel secretary responsible for reports.

Digital Reviewer:

Dr Ghania Zgheib is the Chairperson of the Department of Education at the University of Balamand, Lebanon. She is also an Associate Professor of Instructional Design and Technology. Dr Zgheib has a PhD in Instructional Design and Technology and an MS in Educational Psychology from George Mason University. She also holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from USEK, Lebanon. Dr Zgheib has over 20 years of teaching experience in K-12 and higher education in the United States and in Lebanon. She served as faculty fellow for the Mason Online Center where she organised professional development sessions for online faculty and reviewed online courses using instructional design principles. She has also developed several online courses for different universities while working for iDesignEdu. Dr Zgheib has co-developed the Guidelines of Quality Assurance for Online Providers for the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority in 2021 and has acted as digital reviewer since then. She has conducted many workshops for teachers and university instructors to enhance their online teaching and technology integration into their courses. Dr Zgheib's research focuses on online learning and social media use in higher education and on teacher professional development.