

Evaluation_of_University_of_Agronomic_Sciences_and_Veterinary_Medicine

This report is the result of the evaluation of the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (UASVM). The evaluation took place during 2012 and 2013 in the framework of the project 'Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching' Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities', which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

Such evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the *2011 Education Act* and the various related normative documents. Whilst institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is being assessed by an independent team, under the authority of Institutional Evaluation Programme.

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Evaluators

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Virgilio Meira Soares, former Rector, University of Lisbon, Portugal (Chair);
- Aine Hyland, former Vice-President, University College Cork, Ireland;
- Ladislav Mirossay, Rector, Pavol Jozef 'afarik University, Slovakia;
- Fernando Galán, ESU Student Experts Pool, University of Cantabria, Spain;
- Jethro Newton, Emeritus Professor, University of Chester, UK (Team Coordinator).

The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the UASVM Rector, Professor Sorin Cîmpeanu, for the welcome and warm hospitality provided during their two visits.

Special thanks are also offered by the IEP team to Associate Professor Vasilica Stan, Vice- Rector (Education and Quality Management) and Chair of the self-evaluation team, for her excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process. The team wish to thank Aurora Bartha who provided interpretation services. Thanks are also extended to all those UASVM staff and external partners whom the team met for their preparedness to discuss relevant matters in a collegial, open and constructive way.

Self-evaluation Process

In accordance with the IEP methodology and guidelines, and in advance of the first visit, a 26- page Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of the university was sent to the evaluation team. The SER described the

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university's norms, values, and management processes and arrangements, and the 'SWOT' analysis undertaken in preparation for the SER. The SER was accompanied by appendices which included: institutional data; an organisation chart; information on committees; the university's Development Strategy (2009/2013); and information on UASVM's students, study programmes, and research activities.

The self-evaluation process was directed by a self-evaluation team appointed by the rector and chaired by the vice-rector (education and quality management) as evaluation coordinator. The evaluation team included representatives at a senior level from all faculties, and also student representatives. The SER was the product of a series of regular meetings and supporting activities, and included input and data collection from various sources across the university and a SWOT analysis. Deans were charged with responsibility for informing staff about the IEP evaluation and the self-evaluation process. The self-evaluation documentation was made available on the university's web pages. From meetings with staff and students it became apparent to the team that there was a reasonable awareness of the broad nature and purposes of the IEP team's visit to the university.

In its review of the SER the team formed the view that, while it provided an honest and helpful basis for the team to undertake their review activities, and contained much useful information and data, it was somewhat descriptive and lacked self-critical and self-analytical sharpness. The SER did not provide sufficient pointers to areas where the university wishes to improve, or on the university's capacity for managing change. That said, from meetings held with various groups, including senior managers, the IEP team was able to take advantage of a productive dialogue between the team and UASVM, and of the additional documentation and information provided to the team in advance of the second visit.

The self-evaluation report of the university along with the appendices was sent to the evaluation team in October 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to UASVM took place from 5 to 7 December 2012, and from 24 to 27 February 2013, respectively. For its second visit, the team requested some additional information and documentation regarding UASVM's strategic and operational planning, organisational structures and governance arrangements, institutional data, financial and budgetary matters, the operation and work of committees and councils, quality evaluation, teaching and learning, and research. Further clarification on a number of policy or procedural matters was also requested. These requests related to issues discussed during the first visit but which were either not fully reflected in the SER, or merited an update because of changes at the university or possible developments at national level. This additional information was provided in advance of the second visit and covered the issues identified by the IEP team in a helpful manner.

Reporting

Governance and Institutional Decision-making

more on Governance and Institutional Decision-making at UASVM

The IEP team noted that, as the largest and longest established university in the field of agricultural science and veterinary medicine in Romania, UASVM has shown itself to have strong and embedded traditions. The Rector's Academic Management Plan (February 2012) lists amongst the university's general objectives the desire to strengthen the institutional capacity of the university, and to provide an academic and scientific environment that is attractive to all the university's members. This is designed to support the effort to secure UASVM's position in the category of top advanced education and research universities, and to secure category 'A' status for all study programmes. The vision of UASVM is that of an entrepreneurial and vocationally oriented university underpinned by strong teaching and research. From the perspective of the IEP team the university is to be congratulated for the strength of its commitment in this regard. The academic element of the UASVM mission is focused on four domains: agricultural and forestry sciences; natural sciences; engineering sciences; and veterinary

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medicine. This profile is aimed at contributing to the development of the Romanian economy, and of knowledge-based agriculture in particular, and also supporting the university's competitiveness in the wider European context. The IEP team noted the new motto of the university: "Agriculture for life; life for agriculture?". This was adopted following the election, in 2012, of the present rector.

Teaching and Learning

more on [Teaching and Learning at UASVM](#)

The SER states that the university has full autonomy in strategic matters relating to educational activities, including course design at Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral levels. Even so, the IEP team noted that external requirements emanating from bodies such as ARACIS, in matters relating to curriculum design, remain quite stringent and play a significant part in how study programmes are described and constructed. The SER also highlights the vocational nature of the educational offer, and the significant steps taken since 1990 in improving the diversity and range of study programmes, and in efforts to meet labour market needs. Indeed, the IEP team noted a range of initiatives to improve the employability and continued academic achievement of UASVM graduates.

Research

more on [Research at UASVM](#)

In the documentation provided to the IEP team, and through discussions involving UASVM senior managers, academic staff, and researchers, the university made clear its strategic objective to extend its research profile. The SER states that the new management team accords high priority to research and knowledge transfer. The SER also indicates that goals will be set for research and innovation, and for internal and external collaboration, including multi-disciplinary research.

Service to Society

more on [Service to Society at UASVM](#)

The IEP team considered other aspects of the university's outward-facing activities, particularly the broader matter of how UASVM is positioning itself in relation to community engagement and service to society. The team enjoyed learning about the range of ways in which the university's contribution to regional and national society can be seen to have a positive impact.

Quality Culture

more on [Quality Culture at UASVM](#)

To assist their enquiries on the progress being made in the areas of quality management, quality assurance and quality evaluation, the IEP team met with various staff and student groups, including faculty members with direct experience of quality assurance processes. The team also met with key post-holders in the area of quality, including the vice-rector for education and quality management, the chair of the Senate Commission, which includes quality amongst its responsibilities, the head of the quality assurance department, and student representatives. Together with various items of documentation, this formed a good basis upon which the team was

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able to gain insights into organisational effectiveness in the area of quality management and quality assurance, and also progress towards the development of a quality culture.

Internationalisation

more on *Internationalisation at UASVM*

The IEP team learned of the importance attached by UASVM to the European and international dimension and view positively the university's aspiration to extend activities to support further internationalisation. In exploring these matters the team considered arrangements for the development, management and administration of international affairs.

Recommendations

Governance, decision-making and planning

- While noting the generally good opportunities for student representation and involvement in university processes, the IEP team recommends that arrangements should be put in place for student representation on faculty sub-committees and for the minutes of these bodies to be made available to all students.
- The IEP team advises that in all strategic and operational plans, progress against planning targets and indicators should be monitored through the use of quantifiable measures and values.
- To underpin the strategic direction of the university going forward, the IEP team recommends that the Senate and Rectorate should take steps towards securing greater collaboration across and between UASVM faculties on all matters of university policy and strategy.
- Further, the team recommends that the university ensures that strategic and operational planning are evidence-based and that use is made at all times of robust planning data and management information.

Learning and teaching

- The IEP team recommends that the university should be more proactive in the area of student-centred learning by making more effective use of an explicit learning outcomes approach to curriculum design, development and review, and ensuring that such an approach is aligned to student assessment and teaching methods.
- The IEP team proposes the establishment of a regular cross-University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Forum, to act as a focal point for the sharing and dissemination of good practice in all areas learning, teaching, and assessment, with representation from all faculties through the active involvement of faculty learning and teaching champions.
- In the view of the IEP team urgent action should be taken by the university to address the problem of high student dropout rates in some faculties.
- Further, the team recommends that the university takes steps to ensure that the Centre for Careers and Counselling is made fully operational and accessible to students.

Research and knowledge transfer

- The IEP team wishes to encourage the university to make early progress in establishing a Knowledge Transfer Office to work with faculties to improve the level of activity and income in this important area.
- While noting the existence of faculty level research strategies, the IEP team strongly recommends the development of an overarching university research strategy, and that this strategy should set clear directions for the future prioritisation and sustainability of areas of research strength and areas of potential

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growth such as business interface, and Third Mission and Knowledge Transfer activities.

- In order to protect, sustain and strengthen areas of research strength (both current and potential) in challenging circumstances, the IEP team advises the university, as resources permit, to consider the merits of introducing a degree of reallocation of resources, for example through using a 'top slice' mechanism.

Service to society

- The IEP team encourages the further development of the university's provision for meeting lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD) needs of society but, in doing, so we advise that care is exercised in selecting the most appropriate model and organisational arrangements for development and delivery of such provision.
- The team advises that the university build on existing good practice in areas such as

veterinary medicine by extending opportunities for internships, at all stages of students' involvement with UASVM.

- While noting the strong alumni links in some of the university's faculties, the IEP team proposes that consideration should be given to the potential benefits of establishing a 'UASVM Alumni Association' to promote the UASVM reputation and 'brand'.
- The IEP team advises the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business, and commerce, by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the rector and Senate on opportunities for promoting the regional, national and international interests of UASVM, and related strategic matters.

Quality culture

- When matters relating to responsibility for quality oversight at the level of the Senate sub-committees have been finalised, the IEP team strongly recommends that a robust and transparent accountability mechanism is put in place for ensuring that faculty quality reports are monitored effectively.
- While recognising the opportunities for students to provide anonymous feedback, the IEP team advises the university to reflect on the use made of teacher evaluation surveys, with a view to developing more analytical and action-focused summary reports, and also ensuring that mechanisms are put in place across the university, its faculties and departments, for informing students of actions taken to 'close the loop' in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.
- As the university seeks to encourage the ownership of quality processes and the development of a quality culture, the IEP team advises that the capability for selfcritical analysis of academic provision should be strengthened by the introduction of a procedure for the annual monitoring and evaluation of each study programme by study programme coordinators and their teams.
- While noting the use and implementation of an approach to quality management and administration based on the ISO 9001 model, the IEP team strongly recommends that as the University develops its proposed five-year quality strategy, it should broaden its focus on quality by developing a framework and set of principles for academic quality assurance and enhancement which draws on Part One of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Internationalisation

- The IEP team wish to encourage the continued development by the university of more extensive foreign language programmes and training, for both students and staff.
- The IEP team advises that the university should take urgent steps to ensure that clear and effective processes are in place for the recognition of the qualifications and credit of incoming foreign students and that support and publicity for this are effective.

Recommendations

Conclusions

The IEP team has enjoyed learning about the unique characteristics and distinctive role of UASVM as Romania's largest and oldest agronomic university. It has been a great pleasure to discuss with staff, students and external stakeholders the challenges faced by UASVM and the university's efforts to address constraints as well as exploring future opportunities. We believe the university has the potential to be successful in its next stage of development. The team would like to express its sincere thanks to the UASVM Rector, Professor Sorin Cîmpeanu, for inviting the IEP team and for the welcome and hospitality provided during their two visits. Special thanks are also offered to Associate Professor Vasilica Stan, Vice-Rector (Education) and Chair of the Self-Evaluation Team, for her excellent work in ensuring the smooth running of all aspects of the process.