Institutional Evaluation Programme

Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities Project

UNIVERSITY OF AGRONOMIC SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE BUCHAREST

EVALUATION REPORT

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1.   Introduction

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.

The 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 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1.   The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management;
- relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. Profile of the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (UASVM)

The University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (UASVM) has its origins in Romania's first agronomic school, the Agricultural Institute at Pantelimon, established in 1852 and situated on the outskirts of Bucharest. In the succeeding years, the progressive expansion of its portfolio led to the inclusion of veterinary education and forestry subjects, and by 1948 it had become the Agronomic Institute of Bucharest. By that time it consisted of four faculties. From 1952 the institution functioned as the Nicolae Bălcescu Agronomic Institute, Bucharest (NBAI), which eventually incorporated land reclamation amongst its faculties. In October 1992 NBAI became today's University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, and was recognised as such in 1995 under the order of the Ministry of Education and Science, no. 5590/1995. By 2000, with the addition of biotechnologies and management, economic engineering in agriculture, and rural development, UASVM had grown to today's seven faculties. The main faculty activities and administrative centre of UASVM are located at the University's Herăstrău Campus, while the main activities of the faculty of veterinary medicine are situated more centrally in Bucharest. Through the faculty of management, economic engineering in agriculture and rural development, the University also has two branches outside Bucharest, while the assets owned by UASVM enable its scientific research and didactic activities to benefit from locations in Buzău county and the Bucharest-Ilfov area.

UASVM functions in a higher education system that includes 112 public (state) and private higher education institutions, divided equally between each category. As a public university, according to Romanian higher education law UASVM is independent and autonomous. The university is therefore responsible for its own self-government, and for the implementation of its own strategies and development policies. However, this autonomy is exercised within the general provisions of national legislation, and with regard to any constraints or parameters imposed by the former Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport (MECTS), or the new Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research, or by the Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), or by the national accreditation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). In the view of the IEP team, in practice, this results in constraints on the autonomy of the university.

Under the provisions of the new National Education Law, adopted for implementation as from January 2011, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been classified into three groups: advanced research universities; teaching and research universities; and teaching universities. UASVM is one of twenty-nine HEIs in the first of these categories. In addition to the classification and diversification reforms, the university is subject to a new system for ranking study programmes and academic disciplines. In terms of the public financing of universities, the team understood that under the new legal dispensation state funding now reflects the 2011 institutional classification exercise and the programme ranking process, with funding streams consisting of core and additional funding, as prescribed by UEFISCDI criteria, and with extra funding possible for research-oriented universities.

Also at national level, the IEP team noted that Romania has been a signatory to the Bologna declaration since 1999. In 2004, legislation was passed in support of implementation of the Bologna Process, with national measures being adopted. Individual universities were required to take steps towards implementing the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process. Since 2005, higher education study programmes have been organised on the basis of three cycles (Bachelor; Master; and PhD/Doctorate) and aligned to the European Qualifications Framework. The ECTS system and Diploma Supplement have also been made mandatory for institutions.

1.3.   The 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 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.

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 Šafárik 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.

2.   Governance and institutional decision-making

Vision, Mission and General Context

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 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.

The IEP team is confident that UASVM will continue to play a leading role in Romanian society. However, from the perspective of the IEP team, this ambition needs to be viewed in the context of the considerable constraints placed upon the university by its operating environment, including financial unpredictability, a challenging socio-economic environment, and national legal reforms. The team formed the view that this will present UASVM with challenges and difficult choices as it plans for the future. This situation is acknowledged in the UASVM SER and SWOT analysis where the university identifies the principal constraints and threats as including: the low level of state funding, with limited recovery prospects; excessive Romanian and European bureaucracy; unstable and unpredictable national legislation; demographic decline; and poor economic forecasts.

From discussions with UASVM staff at all levels, the IEP team noted the various ways in which such constraints impact on the day-to-day operation and future planning of the university. The team therefore wishes to put forward its view that national bodies with responsibility for higher education should take full account of the impact that the unpredictability in the external policy and planning environment might potentially have on the ability of universities to plan effectively in key strategic areas of operation. In summary, the IEP team notes that this operational context will present UASVM with significant change management challenges and difficult choices as it plans for the future under its new governance arrangements. In

seeking to overcome these constraints and challenges, and as it builds towards the future, the IEP team encourages the university to be more outward-looking and to learn from best institutional practices elsewhere in Europe.

Addressing future challenges

In addressing future challenges, the IEP team identifies six strategic priority areas for the university:

- Governance, decision-making and planning;
- Learning and teaching
- Research
- Service to society
- Quality culture
- Internationalisation

Governance, management and academic organisation

The SER and other documentation made available to the IEP team provided an informative picture of the present governance, organisational management, and strategic planning arrangements at the university, together with helpful accounts of recently introduced changes. When combined with the productive meetings held with university managers, staff, and students, this enabled the team to understand the nature of these institutional arrangements and the use made of them.

The university's academic organisation is structured into seven faculties, each of which is divided into two or three departments. The faculties are: agriculture; horticulture; animal sciences; veterinary medicine; land reclamation and environment; biotechnology; and management and economic engineering in agriculture and rural development. The faculties' fifteen departments deliver a wide range of study specialisations, with a heavy emphasis on vocationally-oriented study programmes, at Bachelors and Masters levels, structured according to the Bologna cycles system. The university offers 24 programmes at Bachelors level, 26 at Masters level and six at doctoral level. There are two doctoral schools, of which one — the doctoral school for engineering and plant and animal resources management — is interdisciplinary. The other is the doctoral school for veterinary medicine. During the past fifteen years, the university has also developed a research institute and seven research centres, some of which have a degree of legal and financial autonomy and are formally accredited by the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS). The specialisms covered by these entities are: microbial biotechnologies; applied biochemistry and biotechnology; agro-food products; sustainable agriculture; integrated fruit growing; rural engineering and environment; comparative oncology; animal diseases; animal production; and the interdisciplinary laboratory for heavy metal study and food chain modelling. Together, the

research centres and the research institute are the principal focal points for generating income through research. The centres undertake multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary projects primarily, and are organised through drawing on the research expertise and laboratory facilities of faculties and departments.

The most recent student data made available to the IEP team in part reflects the overall demographic decline in Romanian society. The figures for 2012/2013 showed a total of 12,122 enrolled students, a significant decline from 2008/2009, when the number of registered students stood at 17,675. While numbers for full-time Masters and Doctoral student registrations are marginally up over that period, Bachelors registrations declined by around 1 500. For part-time registrations, Masters and Doctoral registrations have disappeared over the same five-year period, while Bachelors registrations have been approximately halved from a figure of 4 663 in 2008/2009. Registrations for foreign students, while low in any case, have declined from 105 to 78 over five years, and are largely at Bachelors level. On a positive note, the IEP team learned that UASVM has recently been awarded additional state-funded student places: 50 for Bachelor, 40 for Masters and 15 for PhD. Other data made available to the team revealed a drop in staff numbers from 880 to 848 between 2008 and 2012 and, within this, a decline from 808 to 694 of legally constituted teaching positions. The data shows a decline from 24.8 per cent, to 15.5 per cent, in tenured teaching staff under the age of 35. Associate teaching staff levels declined from 228 to 181 over the same period. The team was informed that part of the background to these changes is the situation arising from the 2008 financial crisis, following which restrictions were placed on staff recruitment.

Alongside the constraints and uncertain external environment described above, UASVM has managerial, administrative, and financial autonomy to manage and direct its own affairs. This autonomy is exercised under the provisions of the University Charter, and according to the regulations of the national education law of 2011. The latter regulates the conditions of the university's autonomy and public responsibilities. As the IEP team learned, financial autonomy is itself constrained by the national economic conditions of Romania and the wider region. The main sources of income for the university are the block grant it receives from the state according to criteria primarily based on student numbers. The institutional contract provides for core funding, for student scholarships, for the institutional development fund, as well as some funding of investment objectives. This income is supplemented by income from student tuition fees, and funding received through grants and research and project-related sources, both national and private, and through involvement in EU projects. The university also benefits from some income accrued from its ownership of various assets, including agricultural properties and businesses. The team learned that, in common with other Romanian universities, since 2009, when the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS) suspended competitive research and development funding, the university's financial environment, and the scope for generating extra income, has become even more challenging

and restrictive. For example, the SER estimates that for 2012/2013, income from research projects is not likely to exceed eight per cent of total revenue.

Since taking up his appointment in March 2012, the rector has worked within the new governance structures to carry forward the plans set out in his *Academic Management Plan* (February 2012), which forms the basis of his four-year mandate. As is described in the SER, the rector is the legal representative of UASVM, and is also responsible for the university's executive management. The senior management team, re-constituted following the appointment of the rector, includes four vice-rectors, approved by Senate on the recommendation of the rector. They hold responsibilities, respectively, for: education and quality management; research and innovation; students and internal and international relations; and assets management. The senior management team, which meets on a weekly basis as the Administrative Council, includes vice-rectors, deans of faculty, the general administrative director and the student representative.

Since 2012, arrangements for university governance, management, and decision-making are centred on the two principal bodies at the top of the organisation. These are the Administrative Council, as described, and the University Senate. The president of the Senate is elected by secret ballot. Membership of Senate, which meets on a monthly basis, includes representation from all faculties, and its composition makes provision for 25 per cent student representation. From the point of view of the functioning of the university's organisational structures and pattern of governance, the IEP team recognised the central importance of the UASVM Senate. Its powers are extensive, and its deliberations include discussion and approval of UASVM strategic plan, staffing matters, admissions and enrolment, external relations, and general academic affairs. A significant feature of the business of the Senate is the attention it gives to proposals received from the Administrative Council, regarding the strategic and administrative affairs of the university. Senate is assisted in carrying out its responsibilities through the work carried out by five Senate Commissions, or sub-committees. These commissions are responsible, respectively, for: regulations, decisions and records; education, research and quality; public image, and internal and international relations; students and trades unions; and heritage and economic activities. They are mirrored on the executive management side of the organisation by a group of councils, each one of which is chaired by the relevant vice-rector. The IEP team learned that the university's intention is for there to be efficient interfaces between these operational management bodies, and the deliberative and policy functions of the Senate Commissions.

In reflecting on these arrangements, from the IEP team's perspective, of particular importance for governance and management purposes is that according to the national legal reforms of 2011 the university's statutes require that the rector does not chair the Senate. Further, neither the rector nor the faculty deans are eligible for membership of Senate, though they may attend by invitation, as agreed by the President of the Senate. During

meetings and through reading institutional documentation, the IEP team explored the workings of these arrangements more closely. The team formed the view that, while on one level they provide for a deliberative role for the Senate and a management executive role for the rector and Administrative Council, in reality the situation is more elaborate than this. As the team understood it, as the rector is required to gain Senate approval for matters of strategy and policy, together with ratification of decisions and proposals made by the Administrative Council, this means that, in practice, the Senate is also able to act as a policy-making forum or legislature. In the judgement of the IEP team, the Senate is therefore able to influence management practices even though it has not been formed as a management body.

The team notes that these leadership and governance arrangements, including the position and responsibilities of the rector and the composition and responsibilities of the Senate, are still relatively new. The team had initial concerns that the new arrangements imposed by the 2011 national law may be a source of tension, including in the area of Senate/Rectorate relations. But in the view of the team, it is too soon for their impact to be fully judged. The balance of the team's view, however, is that to date these changes have been received well by the wider academic community of UASVM. In formulating this view, the team was advised that it is an expectation of the new law that the Senate will support the Administrative Council and the rector. Further, the team heard that Senate members (president, vice-president, and executive secretary) are invited to join meetings of the Administrative Council, and that good communication links are in place between that body and the Senate.

The IEP team also took the opportunity to consider the deliberative and decision-making bodies at faculty and department levels. Deans of faculty, who are appointed by the rector on the recommendation of the faculty councils, are supported by vice-deans, with responsibilities in each of three domains: education and quality; research and resources. The governing body of each faculty is the Faculty Council, which has overall responsibility for management of the faculty and each of its departments. These councils refer matters of policy, strategy, and resources to the Administrative Council, as and when appropriate. Department Councils are responsible for overseeing academic activities, research, and study programmes within the department, and for making proposals to the Faculty Council. The team noted that the Faculty Council includes representatives from each department in the faculty, and also student members. Faculty councils are responsible for faculty development and strategy, and appointments to teaching positions. They also have a responsibility for allocation of budgets and resources to departments. The team was advised that both of these bodies contain student representation in the same proportion as the higher committees, as described above.

However, the team noted that this requirement for student representation and involvement does not currently apply to the faculty permanent commissions, which act as faculty sub-committees to the main faculty council in areas such as teaching and research, student

affairs, and quality. This means that, while students are represented on the faculty councils they are not involved or represented on the permanent commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CQEA) at either faculty or department level. As a consequence, students do not have direct access to the discussions and formal deliberations where student-related issues and concerns are most likely to be raised. Nor do they have direct access to the minutes of these meetings. In the view of the IEP team, this is a matter upon which the university should reflect, with a view to rectifying this situation at an early opportunity. Therefore, 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.

In looking across the governance and management arrangements described in the foregoing discussion, particularly those at the top of the organisation, the IEP team took a close interest in future prospects for strategic thinking, the effectiveness and quality of decision-making, and the university's capacity to influence and manage change. Here, the IEP team formed the view that the future efficiency and effectiveness of the university's governance is dependent in no small measure on the extent to which Senate, the Administrative Council and the Rectorate, which includes faculty deans, are able to communicate and cooperate on strategic matters going forward. In connection with this, the team was conscious that UASVM faces difficult challenges and choices going forward. To be able to meet these challenges, effective strategic planning processes are essential to the success of the university. Further, from the IEP team's perspective, there is a distinct possibility that hard choices may need to be made regarding resource-related matters. These issues are discussed next.

Strategic planning and organisational development

With the foregoing observations in mind, the IEP team wished to give due consideration to arrangements for institutional and faculty strategic and operational planning, to the university's processes and mechanisms for monitoring progress in support of change management and to resource allocation processes. The team concluded that while there are encouraging features to these matters, there is room for improvement. The team has sought to reflect on this perspective in some of their recommendations. In doing so, team members fully acknowledge the challenges faced by UASVM in improving the quality of teaching, the level of research, and the university's external profile. The team recognises that given financial constraints not all aspirations can be met and that this will entail careful strategic decision-making and hard choices.

The IEP team noted that the Rector's *Operational Plan (2013)* and institutional strategic priorities for the immediate future due to be published in that document, were not available at the time of the team's visits. Therefore, the team were unable to assess fully how the

institutional development framework, and the extensive range of quite specific objectives set out in the Rector's *Academic Management Plan (February, 2012)*, would be taken forward to implementation and subsequent monitoring. The team was also interested in obtaining an understanding of the linkages between institutional-level strategic and operational planning, and planning at the faculty level. From the team's perspective, this was an important aspect of organisational coherence and cohesion in planning matters. This matter took on even more significance in view of the rector's stated commitment to securing a greater degree of devolution to faculties on operational matters.

On close examination of both institutional level and faculty level strategic and operational planning documentation, it was evident to the IEP team that although all such documents contained clearly stated objectives, and made reference to "measures", the targets that they referred to did not have attached to them any values against which actual quantifiable progress could in practice be measured. From the team's perspective, the ability to monitor performance is an essential ingredient of transparent and accountable strategic and operational planning. Therefore, while the underpinning processes observed by the team, whereby faculty plans were informed by input from the level of department and study programmes, and while the Faculty Council sought to monitor progress of the faculty operational plan on a three-monthly basis, it appeared to the team that the monitoring mechanism was incomplete. Similarly, though the team had been unable to make a full assessment of the Rector's *Operational Plan (2013)*, the evidence from the *Academic Management Plan (February 2012)* would appear to point to a similar difficulty. Here, while the university-level plan would be informed by inputs from faculty plans, the team was not assured that specific values were being attached to the extensive lists of targets that were, in practice, measurable only if they had values attached to them. On the basis of these findings, 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.

The IEP team reflected further on additional aspects of strategic and operational planning processes. The team heard that the university's strategic and annual operating plans are informed by input from each of the vice-rectors' domains of responsibility and from faculties' own strategic and operational plans. The Administrative Council plays a key role in drawing this work together through coordinated discussions about all education and research matters. The team noted that these discussions precede further discussion and approval by Senate. From the perspective of the IEP team, and in light of earlier observations regarding the desirability of close alignment in governance arrangements, it is essential that these bodies work closely together. Therefore, 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.

In reflecting on these planning matters, the IEP team wish to further encourage the greater attention that is now being paid by UASVM to the importance of robust and timely data for use in forward planning, at all levels of the organisation (for example, as is described in Section 4, the team note the intention to improve centralised data in the area of research). The team sought to assess the university's current capacity and capability for collecting data centrally, and for making such information widely available. The team gained the impression that to a large extent, data is currently largely faculty-based and is not aligned with central data needs. In the team's view, data should be collected, made available and used at all levels. Further, and in view of earlier observations on performance monitoring, there should be a greater focus on connecting data collection with planning, thereby resulting in strategic and operational planning which are more evidence-based and predicated on the use of data. Accordingly, 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.

Finance and resourcing

The team's enquiries in this area led them to the view that there is a strong measure of central oversight of budgetary and financial matters. This is exercised under the joint overall authority of the University Senate and the Administrative Council. The latter body regularly addresses finance and resource matters, including those raised by faculties, such as acquisition requests. Such requests are approved by the general administrative director. The team noted that annual budget allocations to faculties are largely based on historical allocations and are linked to student numbers. The team was informed that one faculty which is better placed financially can give loans to another faculty that is in need. Research centres that generate income for projects are able to access the relevant funds awarded to them. The team learned that the central university budget is used to support the library and other student-related services.

The rector, vice-rector (assets management), the Administrative Council, and the University Senate are supported on matters of finance and administration by the general administrative director. That post-holder is responsible for managing financial accounting and other resource-related matters. In budgetary matters, the Budget and Finance Commission is under the supervision of the vice-rector. As noted earlier, while it is the rector who is the university's legally recognised signatory in financial matters, for financial governance purposes the University Senate takes the main decisions regarding approval of the UASVM financial strategy, the annual budget, and the allocation of resources. The rector is responsible for managing the implementation of the Senate's decisions, and for ensuring that the financial activities of faculties are monitored. The team was advised that all financial

activities are subject to internal and external auditing, the latter by the Romanian Court of Accounts.

The financial year runs from January to December. While the budget is not finalised until the December meeting of Senate, in July of each year faculties make their budget requests for the following year. In early December, the Administrative Council draws up a draft budget for presentation to the Senate and conditional approval. This is submitted to the Ministry and until April the university operates with the provisional budget as approved conditionally in December. Should the university's expenditure profile in the first quarter exceed the final state allocation as confirmed in April, that overspend is deducted from the second quarter allocation to the university. The team was interested to learn that the university operates a "top slice" mechanism, whereby 15 per cent is deducted from each faculty's budget allocation for general management purposes and overheads. For the faculty of veterinary medicine, the proportion is seven per cent.

From the documentation and data made available to the IEP team it was apparent that the university's revenue budget had peaked in 2008 and has declined since in real terms. In 2009 there was a sharp drop in research income, and tuition income has also declined over the past four years. The university has also experienced a significant decrease in income from private sources in relative terms. Inevitably, these uncertain circumstances have an impact on the financial and wider strategic planning that UASVM undertakes. In the view of the team this uncertainty should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, in the team's judgement, if the university is to meet future challenges, particularly in a situation where the state-funded unit of resource continues to decline, and where opportunities for generating research income are becoming more competitive, it will inevitably be faced with difficult choices in terms of resource planning and budgeting. Accordingly, the IEP team considers that in its future institutional decision-making the university should explore opportunities to use the annual budgeting and resource allocation processes to steer change in relation to agreed strategic planning priorities, perhaps by making use of its "top slice" mechanism. This consideration informs the recommendation in section four regarding the future resourcing of research.

3.   Teaching and learning

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.

The incoming Rector's *Academic Management Plan* (February 2012) placed emphasis on educational matters and included an extensive list of objectives for achieving academic success, and for improving the quality of learning and teaching. The *Plan* also signals a desire to bring about change in teaching and learning through introducing a different approach to educational processes and a new institutional perspective on these matters. The IEP team took this to mean that traditional approaches would be complemented with more modern and interactive methods. However, as is noted in section 4, the team learned that while actions were in place to develop a new institutional research strategy, it did not appear that a similar strategy was to be developed for learning and teaching. Given that "taught" provision is so prominent in the university's academic profile, when compared to research, this appeared to the IEP team to be something upon which the university should reflect. Nevertheless, the team was encouraged to note that faculty operational planning documentation indicated that objectives are set for improving curricula and for the development of teaching and learning, including more student-focused strategies.

The team took a close interest in the way in which learning and teaching are reflected in the governance and management structure at senior management level, and in the committee structures at institutional and faculty levels. In the university's deliberative structures, oversight of educational matters is exercised by the Senate Commission for Education, Research and Quality Management. Senior management responsibility for educational matters lies with the vice-rector (education and quality management) who is also Chair of the Academic Council. This Council's responsibilities include curriculum matters, admissions, examinations and course content, but not learning and teaching enhancement it seems. The vice-rector also holds responsibility for departments, which include distance learning, teaching staff training and careers and counselling. The vice-rector is not, however, a member of the Senate Commission for Education. Bearing in mind the observations on these matters put forward in Section 2, in relation to the interface between the deliberative and management executive arms of the university's governance arrangements, in the view of the IEP team it remains to be seen how these arrangements will work going forward. From the

team's perspective it is to be hoped that any duplication, overlap or tension between the formal committee processes and the management functions in an area of such importance as learning and teaching enhancement, will be kept to a minimum.

In considering arrangements at faculty level, the team noted that academic leadership positions of vice-dean, department head, and study programme leader, and the respective responsibilities for learning and teaching allocated to these post-holders, reflect the priority given by the faculties to the curriculum and to academic affairs. Each faculty has in place permanent commissions for teaching and research, and for initiation, monitoring, and evaluation of curricula. All study programmes are represented on faculty and department councils. The team also considered matters relating to plans and opportunities for development of the curriculum portfolio. The team noted arrangements for initiating and seeking approval for new study programmes, and observed that at faculty level this process commences with the establishment of a commission for programme development. These procedures appear to work well. Further, the team learned that, in addition to a commitment on the part of the rector to develop provision for lifelong learning (discussed more fully in section 5), some UASVM faculties are exploring opportunities for the development of joint study programmes with other European universities, and this is discussed in section 7. Attention is also being paid by some senior managers to the opportunities for interdisciplinary programmes and the resourcing efficiencies that this may offer. The team noted that such proposals must come from a faculty or faculties for consideration and approval by the Administration Council and by Senate. The team was advised that the ARACIS national register shows that there are few interdisciplinary programmes in Romanian higher education. However, the team learned that consideration is being given by university authorities for a proposal to be made to the Ministry for an interdisciplinary programme in Biotechnology and Veterinary Medicine. This is an initiative, which the IEP team wholeheartedly endorses.

The team explored with interest the progress being made in addressing some of the requirements arising from the Bologna Process in the area of curriculum design and development, and learning and teaching more generally. Having assessed these matters, from the perspective of the IEP team there remains scope for further work in several areas. This includes student-centred learning, the use of learning outcomes, and also the sharing of good practice in learning and teaching. The team notes that progress on these matters varies between faculties and departments. In considering engagement with and awareness of the Bologna Process and associated principles, the team learned that structural changes had been introduced, and the duration of a Bachelor programme has been reduced from five to four years. Also, new disciplines and study plans had been introduced in recent years, student contact hours had been changed, and ECTS credit requirements addressed. The team was advised that all programmes accredited by ARACIS had been expected to meet Bologna curriculum reform requirements.

In connection with these matters, the team looked closely at how far use was being made of a learning outcomes approach to curriculum matters. From discussions with staff and students, and from considering documentation such as syllabus and discipline specifications, the team noted that while emphasis is placed on setting objectives and identifying competences, knowledge, and skills, this still falls short of a learning outcomes approach. Though increasing use is made of approaches for evaluating the application of knowledge and skills, there remains a tendency to assess knowledge at the expense of skills. Here the IEP team would draw the university's attention to the *Bucharest Communiqué* (April 2012), which urges the "meaningful implementation of learning outcomes" and the need to include attainment of learning outcomes in assessment strategies. The Communiqué also stressed the wider significance of a learning outcomes approach in the context of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, and recognition procedures. With this in mind, the team remained unconvinced that Bologna principles had been fully understood and engaged with across all faculties and departments. Therefore, the team notes that while the Bologna Process has had a positive impact on UASVM, there is more work to be done, not least because this entails more than just curriculum change, important though that is. 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.

In focusing on the broader question of student centred learning the IEP team took account of both staff and student views and experiences. While the team obtained a mixed picture, it was found that approaches to learning and teaching, and to pedagogy remained somewhat traditional and teacher-centred, with less emphasis on student self-directed learning than the team had expected. Further, some students appear to continue to be more teacher- and teaching-dependent than others who seemed more comfortable with newer methods and approaches. In assessing how far pedagogy had changed in recent years, the IEP team noted that while EU projects had facilitated increasing exposure to innovative approaches to learning and teaching, curriculum change tended to be more focused on content than on pedagogy or student learning. Therefore, while the team heard of some interesting initiatives and practices, such as the use of technology to enhance learning, there is scope to move further away from traditional approaches and to embrace and adopt more learner-centred pedagogies across all disciplines and to explore further the broader aspects of learning and teaching under the "Bologna" umbrella.

In reflecting on these matters, the IEP team formed the view that, at its present stage of development, and given the top-level commitment and ambition to move towards more innovative and modern approaches to learning and teaching, the university should assess how it can make best use of the good practices that are beginning to emerge. Here, the team

took account of the functions of the Training and Staff Development Department. However, in the view of the IEP team, while noting the good work being undertaken in its particular area of responsibility for the broader training of teachers, this department does not possess the necessary expertise to promote and facilitate enhancement in learning and teaching for university-level purposes. Currently therefore, the university does not have a centrally located staff development mechanism for enabling those staff from UASVM faculties who are exploring best practice in learning and teaching to be brought together for the purpose of exchanging ideas on student-centred academic practice. Nor do faculties appear to have in place individuals who might provide leadership in taking forward the desired innovation in this area. With this in mind, 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".

A further, more specific concern that came to the IEP team's attention was the high student dropout rates in several of the university's faculties revealed in institutional student data. The team took the opportunity to discuss this matter with staff, including senior managers and with students. From their experience in other higher education institutions and other national contexts, the team acknowledge that student retention and dropout present all universities with challenges, to varying degrees. Moreover, it is recognised that some factors, such as financial or personal matters, are less within the control of a university than educational factors. Even so, from the team's perspective, it is essential that formal arrangements and mechanisms are in place to monitor such problems and that these are supported, where possible, by swift intervention measures and by exit surveys. Accordingly, in the view of the IEP team urgent action should be taken by the university to address the problem of high dropout rates in some faculties.

During each of their visits to UASVM, IEP team members met with a range of students from various disciplines and from different levels of study. The team was particularly impressed with the enthusiasm and capability of students, and with the commitment and enthusiasm of teaching staff and professors. Students spoke well of the accessibility of teaching staff and professors, and the support they provide.

The IEP team also considered students' views and experiences of the various services and facilities provided or made accessible by UASVM to its students. Students were generally positive about their learning environment, and indicated that access to library, IT facilities, databases and laboratories was acceptable.

The team also considered arrangements for provision of scholarships and grants of various kinds and noted that these were available from both state and UASVM sources and were

awarded either on the basis of merit (for academic performance) or student needs (family or personal circumstances, or medical condition). Further, the team noted that arrangements for personal tutorials, covering students' personal or administrative needs, have been improved in recent times with the introduction of a group personal tutorial system. However, the team learned from the SER that the student counselling and careers centre, introduced in 2006, had not proved to be successful. In the view of team members, and having taken account of student views, a modern university should have in place a functioning service to provide both counselling and careers advice and support. Therefore, 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. In their deliberations on other support services, from the views expressed to them by students, team members formed the view that provision of health, welfare, and medical services is good, as are referral arrangements for accessing city services in these areas.

In reflecting on all of these matters, the IEP team wish to record the marked pride displayed by UASVM students and staff in their university. For the majority of students whom the Team met, UASVM was the first choice higher education institution.

4.   Research

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.

The IEP team formed the view that this is likely to present one of the biggest challenges for the university going forward. Indeed, the team noted that the university's track record in this area is still relatively recent, having been included amongst that group of Romanian universities permitted to undertake research and development as recently as 2008.

The IEP team paid close attention to the management, governance, and infrastructure arrangements in place at the university to support its work in the areas of scientific research. At senior management level, responsibility falls primarily on the newly created position of vice-rector for research and innovation. For governance purposes, the Senate Commission for Education, Research, and Quality Management is the principal deliberative body, functioning essentially as a legislative body in research matters. The team noted that under the current legal dispensation the vice-rector is not permitted to be a member of that Commission. However, this post-holder does chair the Scientific Council, a top-level management and operational committee, which includes representation from faculties, through the participation of vice-deans (research), and also has external membership. The Scientific Council makes proposals to the Senate Commission on matters relating to research development, policy and strategy. The team noted that each faculty operates through a Faculty Scientific Research Council, and that these bodies are responsible for ensuring that faculty and department scientific reports are completed on an annual basis for onward consideration by the higher committees. For quality monitoring purposes, the IEP team learned that arrangements were in place at several levels, including the research reports that are considered by department and faculty councils, the monitoring undertaken by project and scientific teams and directors, and the oversight exercised by the central administration.

The team was interested to learn that the vice-rector does not have responsibility for management oversight of the doctoral schools for veterinary medicine, and for engineering and management of plant and animal resources, respectively. The latter is a multi-disciplinary school, while the former is more specialised in the area of veterinary medicine. The schools fall under the remit of the recently established post of manager for doctoral studies, with that post-holder chairing the Council for Doctoral Studies. The team was advised that under current higher education legislation, the ministry requires that doctoral schools and doctoral studies should be organisationally independent of the vice-rector. Other features of

infrastructure to support research considered by the IEP team included the research and project management department. This office provides advice and administrative support, including on technical and financial matters, to faculties and research centres. The department also records research outputs and advises on legislative matters and new project funding calls and proposals.

Reflecting on all of these arrangements, the team noted that while some are well established, having been in place for some time, others are relatively recent and will take time to become embedded. To that extent it is too early for the IEP team to formulate firm judgements on their effectiveness. However, it was evident to the team that these arrangements – including the distributed nature of some of the governance, management and infrastructure arrangements – will be required to serve the university well if aspirations in scientific research are to be fulfilled.

In view of the important position of the doctoral schools in the university's research infrastructure the IEP team took the opportunity to look closely at their activities. Each school maintains records of PhD students and research topics, and provides the main point of contact with external bodies, including the ministry. The schools undertake the organisation and administration necessary to support doctoral activity. At the time of the IEP team's visits there were 167 full-time doctoral students registered in the multi-disciplinary doctoral school, of which 132 are state-funded and 35 are fee-paying. The school has 54 approved supervisors. The veterinary medicine doctoral school currently has 77 students, of which 59 are state-funded and 16 are fee-paying. Here there are 21 supervisors. A high proportion of doctoral students have progressed through from Bachelor and Masters studies at UASVM. The team considered the supervision arrangements and the research environment, each of which has an important bearing on the quality of the doctoral student experience. The students with whom the team met confirmed that their experience of facilities, space and library support was positive, and team members also found that relations between faculties and the doctoral school worked to the advantage of doctoral students. Meetings with students and with relevant staff suggested to the IEP team that supervision arrangements appear to work well. Students indicated that supervision is undertaken on a regular basis and arrangements for monitoring progress work satisfactorily. Supervision is undertaken by a Doctoral Commission of three members, with supervisors having allegiance to a faculty as well as to their doctoral school. For management purposes, each doctoral school is led by a director, who is jointly responsible to the relevant Deans and to the appropriate Doctoral School Board (CSD). The latter, which includes student representation, is responsible for overseeing doctoral regulations, and doctoral admission, supervision, and examining arrangements. From discussions with all relevant parties, the IEP team formed the view that the arrangements described here are working well.

The team learned of the range of research activities, including externally-funded research project work, undertaken by the academic staff of the university at faculty and department level, together with the track record of the UASVM research centres and research institute. In general terms, as was acknowledged by the university, while gradual improvements have been made, the level of internationalisation and degree of visibility in research is not high. Moreover, research outputs are largely national, rather than international. The team also noted that the profile and strengths in research, whether fundamental scientific research or applied, tended to vary from faculty to faculty, and from department to department. Amongst faculty members those not involved in funded project research are encouraged to undertake research in their own specialist field. While assessing the level of research activity at faculty and department level, the team considered whether staff research informs teaching and impacts upon the student experience. The team noted that those students with whom they met were aware of staff research activity, and that students in second and third years of study were able to be involved in research projects, where such opportunities presented themselves.

The team was advised that amongst the improvements the rector is introducing are a single, centralised database for all research, and the requirement for each faculty to put in place a web page to make research activity more visible. Improved indicators to monitor growth in research are also to be introduced. The team heard that, where possible, steps are taken to incentivise research, even if this is in modest proportions. Opportunities for promotion and financial rewards are available for active researchers, and the team was informed that there are also reputational and professional benefits for individuals. The university also makes efforts to encourage faculties in hosting national and international conferences in specialist fields, and such activities have increased over time.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the efforts described above, as the team learned, there is recognition at all levels that competition for funding is increasingly becoming sharper, as recent experiences with submissions to the FP7 programme have confirmed. In an effort to counter this challenging environment, more effort is being made by the university's faculties to develop inter-disciplinary research projects, through cross-faculty collaboration, and through working with research centres. The team observed that the reality is such that the university itself does not have its own resources to support research, that finance is indeed a major problem and that, to date, research has been dependent on generating external income.

The IEP team took a close interest in the university's research centres and its research institute. The team noted that research was heavily project-dependent and that project teams owed their existence to project funding generated externally. It was evident to the team that these centres were central to the growth of research at UASVM and are key to how research was viewed, strategically, going forward. Centres are not entirely independent since

they were created by the faculties themselves and have been closely linked with them historically. Moreover, links with faculties are close since that is where laboratories and facilities are located. Centres are accountable, in part, to the faculty dean. Directors of research centres are drawn from faculties and have close allegiance to them. Through exploring the differences between a "centre" and an "institute" the team learned that the latter enjoyed legal status, and a degree of autonomy not possessed by the former. Further, the university's institute had been established due to restrictions placed upon centres in competing for external funding at national level. The institute, therefore, has acted as an umbrella body enabling centres to seek project funding. Though not formally holding permanent status, research centres are, in practice, dependent on external funds for their continued existence. Indeed, faculty research budgets are themselves dependent on project funding obtained by the centres. Here, reinforcing earlier comments on stiffer competition for external project funding, the IEP team was interested to learn that the volume of projects had declined since the peak period of 2008-2010, and today that number stood at around 40.

The IEP team made further progress with enquiries on research matters by focusing on developments in the university's "third mission" agenda, and knowledge transfer and business interface activities. Observations from some external stakeholders, pointed to a perception that UASVM undertakes fundamental research, while applied research is done by external bodies, such as ministry departments. These external observers were unable to indicate examples where the university had been commissioned and funded to solve industry problems. During meetings with university staff, it was evident to the team that the impact and wider contribution of research, in terms of income generation, was quite low. The team was advised that while some departments and individuals could show impact on society this would not necessarily generate income. In their assessment of these matters the team formed the view that relatively little income is generated from industry, the private sector, or philanthropic sources, and that there are potentially untapped opportunities in this regard. The view on these matters at the level of top management at the university was quite unequivocal in recognising that more can and should be done and that in order to achieve more impact and to become more competitive in the future, there is a need for an office to support and direct knowledge transfer activity. The team was interested to learn that in the most recent government call for research proposals, economic and industrial partnership was a requirement, as was 25 per cent co-financing. In view of these considerations, 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.

In formulating their conclusions on research matters, the IEP team came to the clear view that central to all of the matters discussed in this section, are considerations relating to strategy. The team fully endorses the statement in the rector's *Academic Management Plan*, that a redefinition of the university's research strategy is required. The team also notes the

observation in the SWOT analysis included in the SER that the university lacks a strategy for research visibility. The team notes that, while faced with constraints such as the severe decline in research funding, the university includes in its SER some very bold commitments on introducing strategic measures in matters such as research organisation, resources, and in improving impact and outputs of research. However, in the view of the IEP team the university should proceed with caution in these matters, taking full account of prevailing organisational arrangements. In matters of research strategy the team perceived a possible tension between research strategy drivers at faculty level, and the top-level desire for a transparent research strategy at institutional level. In their investigations on where and how actual decisions were made on formulating research strategy, various responses were provided. The team's attention was drawn to various bodies and post-holders. While it was understood that faculty research strategies are approved by faculty councils, and that Senate formally approves university strategy, in the view of the IEP team, there is a degree of tension here, between the centre and faculties which will require careful management going forward if the university is to achieve the coherence in its research strategy to which it aspires.

In summary, while noting the strengths and distinctive nature of much of the research undertaken at the university, in its departments, faculties, and centres, the IEP team has noted both challenges and opportunities in this area and this is reflected in the team's recommendations, as set out below. In formulating these recommendations, particular attention is paid to university-level research strategy, and to matters relating to the sustainability of research. The challenges and constraints faced by the university have been outlined earlier in this section and are not re-stated here. However, prominent amongst these are funding and resources, the sustainability of current research strengths, and identification of potentially new areas of growth. In the view of the IEP team, the university faces hard choices going forward, and will need to develop clear and transparent mechanisms for prioritisation in research. The team also notes the acknowledgement in the rector's Academic Management Plan that some allocation of the university's own resources may be necessary. Here, the team calls to mind the possible use of "seed money" to stimulate new areas of research.

On the basis of these deliberations, the team makes two recommendations. First, 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 for areas of potential growth such as business interface, and third mission and knowledge transfer activities. Second, 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

5. Service to society

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.

In their enquiries the team noted the organisational arrangements to support community engagement and service to society, including the senior management responsibilities of the vice-rector who oversees external relations and who also supervises the activities of the public image and relations department, and Committee for Relations with Graduates. The university also has in place a Senate Commission for public image and internal and external relations amongst whose responsibilities is deliberative oversight of initiatives for promoting the UASVM image. The university's SER did not contain a great amount of information on current and future directions for service to society, but the team noted with interest that the SWOT analysis completed in preparation for the IEP evaluation indicated that the university took the view that it had not been sufficiently involved in collaborations with the business environment. Reflecting this acknowledged weakness, the team was encouraged to note that the Rector's *Academic Management Plan (February 2012)* identified objectives for strengthening relations with the university's external environment. Even so, while noting this, the team also observed that faculty operational planning documentation made available to them contained no references to service to society, or to engagement with business, industry, and other external stakeholders.

The IEP team therefore took the opportunity to follow up these matters in discussions with UASVM staff, and also with external stakeholders. With the latter, the team explored how stakeholders viewed the university, and how they feel they may be able to contribute to UASVM. There was general acknowledgement that it was important for the university to be involved, in particular, with the private sector. The team was especially pleased to be able to meet such a large group of external people who spoke with commitment and enthusiasm about their experiences and involvement with the university. They were able to describe a variety of ways in which the university reaches out to its wider environment, through project collaboration, internship arrangements, small-scale research projects and investigations, and employment links. Many such links were well established. The team met representatives from governmental departments and private organisations, the farming and agricultural industry, research bodies, and multinational companies. These stakeholders spoke well of their relations with the university, and of the quality and employability of UASVM graduates.

While bearing in mind these positive impressions and experiences, as is indicated later in this section of the report, the team's recommendations in this area provide encouragement to the university to take further steps to maximise the opportunities available for promoting the visibility and contribution of UASVM, regionally and nationally. In the view of the team, this can be achieved through the development of lifelong learning provision, through creating stronger and more formalised links with stakeholders, through enhancing the employability opportunities of graduates, and through developing greater civil engagement. In the last of these the team noted that there are significant untapped opportunities in the voluntary sector and NGOs for students to become more fully engaged in the wider community.

The team heard various examples from external stakeholders of how they have been able to provide input into the UASVM curriculum, including advice on the development of new study programmes. Though the strength of such links seemed to vary between departments and specialisms, the team endorses this as good practice. The team was particularly interested to note the rector's plans for establishing a lifelong learning department, and learned that this was an objective for September 2013. From the team's perspective, these proposals are to be welcomed. In the view of the team the development of lifelong learning provision, through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and training programmes is a valuable way of building and strengthening links between academic staff and the workplace. Further, it also ensures that academic staff are in touch with on going developments and changes in the world of work, and the needs potential employers of UASVM graduates. However, the team also believe that, while a central department be able to provide leadership, direction and an organisational focal point in this area, it is important that initiatives should come from academic departments and that this should be an intrinsic responsibility of each faculty and department. Accordingly, the IEP team wishes to encourage the further development of the university's provision for meeting lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD) needs of society, but in so doing we advise that care is exercised in selecting the most appropriate model and organisational arrangements for development and delivery of such provision.

Other aspects of external relations were considered by the IEP team. In connection with the external profile and contribution of UASVM, the team was informed that it is not possible to undertake postgraduate veterinary specialisation studies in Romania. From the team's perspective, as the first university to establish a veterinary school in Romania, UASVM should give consideration to seeking approval from national authorities for introducing such studies. On a more general level, the team noted that the university accepts that there is work to be done in the area of marketing, public relations, and public image, including development of the UASVM website. Further, the team was informed of the rector's determination to extend research partnerships with business and industry to support additional employability initiatives, and to develop more internships. Though the team heard that placement and internship opportunities are available to students, it was evident that availability and the level

of support varied between faculties and departments. Students with whom the team met indicated their desire to see more internship opportunities. Therefore, the team advises that the university builds on existing good practice in areas such as veterinary medicine by extending opportunities for internships, at all stages of students' involvement with UASVM.

In completing their deliberations in the area of service to society and community engagement, the team reflected on the extent to which external stakeholders and representatives from the wider region were involved in the governance and planning of the university and in strategic matters generally. The team noted that while relations with alumni and external stakeholders more generally appear to be extensive and fruitful and that alumni relations in some faculties are quite strong, such arrangements arise largely from individual professional links and are not reflected in the formal organisational arrangements and structures of the university. In the view of the IEP team, there are benefits to be gained by the university and its external regional and national partners if relations were to be strengthened by incorporating external input more formally into the university's processes. This is especially important if UASVM is to be responsive in meeting external stakeholder needs through adapting its portfolio and services going forward. Therefore, the team's recommendations on service to society encourage the university to take further steps to maximise the opportunities available for promoting the visibility of UASVM in the wider society. First, 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". Second, 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 the Senate on opportunities for promoting the regional, national and international interests of UASVM, and related strategic matters.

6.   Quality culture

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 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.

In overall terms, the IEP team was interested in assessing the stage of development reached in the area of quality at UASVM. The team noted that the university's SER identified "high quality education" as being amongst the draft goals drawn up under the rector following his appointment in 2012. The team also observed that the university wished its approach to quality assurance to cover all activities, both academic and non-academic. As is explained in this present section of the team's report, and as is acknowledged by the university, quality assurance practices, and hence quality culture, are not yet as well established or as well organised and embedded as the university would wish. While the team noted that steady progress is being made in several areas, it was evident that formal measures for quality assurance and quality control had been introduced relatively recently, in 2006. The implementation of the ISO:9001 model commenced in 2007. Though procedures for teacher evaluation and peer evaluation have been in use since 2008, these have been revised under the present rector for implementation from October 2012. Moreover, as is noted below, the university's quality procedures to date are largely influenced by external forces, and there is scope for being more proactive in evolving a "UASVM" quality philosophy and approach through the introduction of new or enhanced procedures.

On the basis of the foregoing, the IEP team identified five important areas of quality assurance and quality evaluation at UASVM that team members wished to explore in depth, including: the operation of quality procedures and processes at faculty and institutional levels; developments to support student representation and student involvement in quality processes, such as student evaluation of teachers; procedures for the evaluation and appraisal of teachers; and processes to support the self-critical internal review and evaluation of study programmes and academic provision. Underpinning and informing all of this, the team was also interested in examining the coherence of the university's approach to quality assurance and evaluation, and the extent to which an integrated approach to both

administrative and organisational quality management on the one hand, and academic quality on the other hand, was being achieved.

During the team's visits, consideration was given to the external parameters for quality assurance and accreditation, which are laid down by ARACIS, the national body responsible for the national programme of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation in Romanian higher education institutions. Each programme undergoes an ARACIS evaluation on a five-year cycle. UASVM completed an ARACIS institutional evaluation in 2010 and obtained "highly trusted" status. The team learned that ARACIS requirements and guidance plays a major influencing role in the university's approach to quality, at both institutional and study programme levels. For the former, there is an expectation that UASVM, in common with other universities, will have in place appropriate evaluation arrangements, while for the latter there are quite specific criteria, standards, indicators and guidelines for checking courses.

The ability to continue to meet ARACIS requirements is therefore a central consideration for the university going forward, as it develops its approach to quality matters. Accordingly, the team looked closely at the implementation of structures and quality processes that enable it to meet these external requirements. At the top of the organisation the vice-rector for education and quality management holds institutional management responsibility for quality matters, including supervision of the quality assurance department. That department undertakes the administrative oversight of the evaluation of teaching staff, including completion of summary reports upon which faculties are required to act. The department also contributes to quality assurance more generally, including support for the implementation of the ISO:9001 quality management system. The vice-rector also leads the Academic Council, which holds responsibility for academic affairs. However, the team noted that a key element of governance and management relating to quality is the role played by the Senate Commission that includes responsibilities for quality assurance and evaluation. Until 2012, this role had been performed by the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CQEA). In January 2013, responsibility was transferred to the Senate Commission for Education, Research and Quality Management, a body of which the vice-rector is not a member. Responsibilities of this recently re-structured commission are quite wide, and include overseeing internal processes for quality assurance and evaluation, and also undertaking an advisory role to Senate. The commission also undertakes periodic and annual evaluations of how effectively faculties are assuring quality, and introduces measures for improvements by academic departments, as appropriate. The team noted, however, that the Senate Commission does not contain faculty quality representatives. Given that key elements of these arrangements are still relatively new, and given the importance of effective interfaces between the operation of the Commission, on the one hand, and the leadership and direction on quality matters, including quality monitoring, that the vice-rector is required to provide on the other hand, the IEP team wish the university well in taking these arrangements forward.

The team also explored the operation of quality assurance, evaluation and monitoring at the levels of faculty and department. The team noted that deans of faculty, heads of department, and study programme coordinators each hold responsibilities for quality assurance and evaluation processes at their respective levels in the organisation. Faculty operational plans contain objectives relating to education and quality, but the principal mechanism for quality is the permanent Faculty Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CQEA), which is also mirrored at the level of department. The IEP team was informed that each faculty CQEA has in place mechanisms for checking quality problems, including student issues, across the faculty, and that they undertake annual evaluations of teaching quality with reports and action plans being forwarded to the Senate Commission. The team was advised that the CQEA is also responsible for ensuring that action plans from quality reports are implemented. At department level, each quality commission typically contains three members with responsibilities for quality assurance.

However, having considered all these arrangements, the team noted from the example provided that faculty annual quality reports focused almost exclusively on summaries of student evaluations of teaching. Other quality matters, such as student achievement data, assessment issues, staff development opportunities, or enhancement plans, did not seem to be addressed in these reports. This therefore led the team to question how the Senate Commission was able to exercise the necessary oversight of all aspects of quality monitoring at faculty, department and study programme levels. With this in mind, 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.

Other matters that drew the attention of the IEP team included the arrangements that have been put in place for teacher evaluation and peer evaluation, and also for student representation and the involvement of students in quality assurance processes. The team was encouraged to see such developments. Regarding student representation and involvement, however, while the legal requirement stipulates that students are entitled to 25% representation on the main governance councils, at institutional and faculty levels, as noted in section 2 earlier, the team learned that this entitlement did not extend to the permanent commissions at faculty level.

The IEP team noted that the university's peer evaluation scheme involves each member of teaching staff being evaluated on an annual basis by two colleagues of equal rank. The template invites comment on the teacher's pedagogic skills, scientific output, extra-curricular activities, and relationships with colleagues. Teachers are rated from "poor" to "excellent". Linked to this, teaching staff undertake self-evaluation, and evidence from these processes can be used for promotion purposes through consideration by the Promotions Commission.

The results of the evaluations are considered by the head of department for management and performance monitoring purposes. The head of department evaluates each academic and meets privately with each member of staff to discuss that individual's results. In this process, account is also taken of the outcomes of student evaluations of professors, the process for which is discussed below. The collated results of peer evaluations are also considered at faculty and department councils, while a summary report on all such evaluations is considered by the relevant Senate Commission. In reflecting on this peer evaluation process the IEP team noted that it was still relatively new. In acknowledging this, the team observed that the scheme is primarily focused on performance management. Team members took the view that, in due course, the university may choose to introduce a more developmental element to the process. In the view of the team this could be achieved through adding peer observation of an individual's teaching, where two colleagues might evaluate each other, on a confidential basis, and agree to share ideas about pedagogic good practice and student-centred learning.

The IEP team obtained further insights into the use made of quality evaluation by the university by focusing on the operation of the recently revised scheme for student evaluation of teaching. The team learned that all students who have an attendance record of over 50 per cent are able to provide anonymous feedback at the end of each semester and that response rates can be as high as 70 per cent. However, on examining the feedback form, the team observed that the requested evaluation focuses only on "teaching", the "course", and some student self-evaluation, but does not include student learning. From the team's perspective, and particularly in view of the importance attached by UASVM to the quality of the student learning experience, this is a matter upon which the university should reflect as it reviews the effectiveness of the template and the overall process. Information from the evaluations is received by the head of department and where student ratings and grades are lower than is acceptable, a meeting will take place with an individual teacher. Grades for each professor are also made public at meetings convened by heads of department. Overview reports are drawn together for consideration at faculty council and Senate levels, and information also feeds into the annual faculty quality report.

The team was especially interested in taking a close look at the use made of this procedure and the information it produces, including arrangements for providing feedback to students on the issues they raise, and to explore whether the objectives of the process were being fully met and how far this was being monitored by the university. Discussions with students and staff indicated that there were mixed views and experiences. A number of students with whom the team met indicated that they were not aware of what happens to the feedback they provided. Even where students indicated awareness of some contexts where feedback outcomes were considered, as noted earlier, students were neither involved nor represented in those discussions. Therefore, while there are procedures and steps taken to make summary reports available, such as on the university intranet, or through the proceedings of

faculty councils, and while some management actions are taken to address cases of poor teaching, it was not clear to the IEP team (or to students) how students are informed of actions taken on specific issues that affect them. Moreover, it appears that what students find out and how they do so, can be quite variable. Added to this, the team was unable to establish which, if any, institutional body (such as the Senate Commission responsible for quality matters), took steps to ensure that the feedback loop is closed or to ensure that the objectives of the process were being met. Therefore, 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.

The team's deliberations on the university's quality review and evaluation processes also took into consideration the extent to which procedures for annual monitoring and review of curriculum and learning and teaching matters was undertaken at the level of the study programme, or at the level of each student cohort. From quality reports referred to in the university's documentation, or from examples made available to the IEP team, it was apparent that most emphasis was placed on faculty or department level summary evaluations or evaluation focused at the level of the individual teacher. From the evidence made available, and through discussions with academic staff, the team formed the view that where annual or periodic review took place at the level of the individual study programme, this was driven for the most part by the criteria developed by ARACIS, and also by the quinquennial review and accreditation cycle of that body. While recognising the progress being made in the various evaluation processes discussed above, the team formed the view that the university should be more proactive in devising its own approach to annual monitoring and periodic review and that this should place emphasis on self-critical evaluation by study programme teams on matters such as learning, teaching and assessment, student-related data, student feedback and improvement plans. In the view of the IEP team this approach could accommodate the expectations of ARACIS while simultaneously reflecting the university's own needs for quality monitoring. Drawing on the experience of other universities, the IEP team puts forward the view that an effective system for annual monitoring and evaluation should incorporate evaluation by those nearest to the student experience, namely, all members of study programme teams. Therefore, 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 self-critical 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.

In completing their assessment of progress towards the development of a quality culture, the IEP team considered all of the steps taken to date in the development of quality assurance

processes. In reflecting on the need to ensure "fitness for purpose" of quality assurance arrangements in the context of UASVM, the team considers that there is a need to identify a framework for academic quality assurance and enhancement to complement it being developed in the area of organisational quality management. The team noted adoption of the ISO 9001:2001 quality model to assist improvement in organisational effectiveness, and acknowledge that such a model can bring benefits in the area of administration and general quality management. For example, the team was persuaded that this model is helpful to the university in preparations for ARACIS accreditation and evaluation where sound document control procedures are essential. Nevertheless, the IEP team notes that the application of quality models that have their origins in the world of business, commerce or industry, may not necessarily facilitate a clear focus on learning and teaching and the student learning experience, and may not entirely fit with all the requirements of a university.

Bearing these matters in mind in their discussions with staff at all levels of the university, the team members noted that there is very little awareness of academic quality frameworks such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, otherwise known as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Therefore, as it seeks to elaborate its quality philosophy, and as it works towards developing an integrated quality system that is fit for academic purposes, the university may wish to reflect further on the merits of Part One of the ESG. The standards and guidance contained therein, on matters such as the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards, the assessment of students, the quality assurance of teaching staff and student support may be useful as reference points for the vice-rector and her colleagues.

Therefore, 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.

7.   Internationalisation

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.

At senior management level, oversight of internationalisation is exercised by the vice-rector for students, internal and international relations. For administrative and operational purposes, he is supported in these matters by the head of international relations and the office of the public image and relations division. The team learned that while initiatives for international links and developments normally come from faculties and departments, the head of international relations undertakes the administrative and advisory work to formalise and underpin international arrangements. This includes Erasmus matters and agreements with international bodies. From institutional working papers and through discussions with relevant staff, the IEP team noted that in the UASVM deliberative committee structure, international matters are addressed by the Senate Commission for Public Image, and Internal and International Relations, while executive decisions on matters relating to international cooperation and mobility are taken by the Rectorate, acting through the Administrative Council. The vice-rector also leads a Council, with representation from faculties, which mirrors the areas addressed by the Senate Commission. Proposals for new partnerships, the monitoring of agreements with existing UASVM international partners, and requests relating to university participation in international networks for education and scientific research, are included in the business of faculty councils, with matters referred to Senate or to the Administrative Council for approval, as necessary. Matters relating to international students are also discussed by each faculty's Student Commission.

The IEP team also gave consideration to university policy and strategy in this area, and noted there is no dedicated strategy for international affairs. Further, in view of the important part played by faculties and departments in this area, team members were surprised to note that faculty operational planning documentation for 2013 made available to them contained no references to strategic or planning considerations on international matters, even though objectives were set in other areas of faculty activity. The team noted however, that in addition to an earlier strategic planning document from 2008 (*Development Strategy 2009/2013*), the current rector's *Academic Management Plan (February 2012)*, gave priority to internationalisation in the form of objectives to improve international relations and prestige. In raising these matters with the rector, the IEP team was assured of his concerns regarding the low level of international mobility, research links and other aspects of internationalisation. It was stressed to the team that since taking office the rector has signed several international agreements and that it was his intention that deans and faculties should be set targets for various dimensions of the university's international agenda. In reflecting on

these matters, the IEP team would concur with the view that if the university wished to bring about change in this area then clear planning targets need to be set at institutional and faculty levels, supported by transparent arrangements for measuring and monitoring progress.

Meetings with staff and students, combined with scrutiny of institutional documentation, enabled the IEP team to explore the range of international and wider European activities engaged in by various individuals, departments and project teams from the university. The team noted that these projects, academic links and partnerships, agreements, and involvement in networks, extend to both learning and teaching and research, although activity in the latter area is relatively low. The team was also provided with details of 33 current international bilateral agreements in 14 countries, including recently established links in Korea, Indonesia and China. All are approved at Rectorate level. It was evident to the team that when considered together, these activities bring benefits to the wider university and illustrate the potential for future development, if appropriately managed and if partners are carefully selected. In the view of the IEP team, if such arrangements continue to function on a sustainable basis they provide valuable opportunities for UASVM staff in terms of pedagogy and research experience. To date, however, the team was informed that no joint programmes had been developed but that efforts were continuing in this area to seek to achieve synchronisation and alignment with the curriculum structures and academic calendars of other suitable European partner universities.

Other matters of central importance to the university's internationalisation ambitions, and considered by the IEP, included mobility of both students and staff, on an out-going and incoming basis. The team was provided with recent data on Erasmus-related student mobility at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral levels. As is widely recognised across the university, the numbers are relatively low. Moreover, levels of incoming international students showed a slight decline between 2008/2009 and 2012/2013 from 105 to 78 respectively. Here, the figures show that by far the highest number is at Bachelor level, with relatively few at doctoral level. Each level contains both budget and fee-paying students. Further, the most recent data show that the number of outgoing Erasmus programme students for 2012/2013 stands at 48 (to nine destination countries). Outgoing staff numbers are noticeably small, with the most recent data showing six staff visiting four countries for visits of up to 10 days duration.

The team learned that a high proportion of outgoing Erasmus programme students came from only one faculty, and that not all faculties had students who took up these opportunities. While the team noted that appropriate selection procedures are in place, based on student academic performance, this variability between faculties is not easily explained. Though some students whom the IEP team met indicated that they would like to see more such opportunities, others pointed to the financial challenges of studying abroad.

Students confirmed to the team that they were aware of such opportunities and that the application process was not difficult. However, it was also apparent to the team that despite grant support (albeit at a low level), for many students the cost of study at a foreign university was a significant obstacle. Where opportunities appeared to be available, the team learned that not all Erasmus places were taken up by students. Nevertheless, students who had taken up such opportunities reported that support and communication from UASVM and the destination university had been good. Regarding staff mobility, as noted, numbers here are historically low, especially for incoming academic staff. While both Erasmus and the EU Human Resources Structural Fund had enabled some mobility, this remains an intractable problem for the university. The university's desire to improve this situation was made evident to the IEP team in various ways and as noted, new agreements have recently been signed by the incoming rector.

The IEP team gave full consideration to the challenges faced by UASVM in matters such as increasing mobility opportunities and attracting foreign students, and noted both the constraints and also the efforts being made to improve the level of incoming and outgoing mobility for staff and students, and the attractiveness of UASVM. However, the team formed the view that there remain steps that can be taken to make the university more attractive and accessible to international students and this is reflected in our recommendations. Further, as the university works towards meeting its aspirations in the important strategic area of international development, the team advises that measures are in place to ensure that existing resources are used and deployed effectively and that all students who come under the "international" umbrella get the level and quality of support they require. Two areas in particular attracted the attention of the IEP team. First, matters relating to language support and language training; second, the recognition and portability of credit and qualifications.

Regarding language provision, the team heard in various meetings of intentions to attract foreign students through providing study programmes in languages such as English and French. One faculty reported that its students can present work in English at Bachelor and Masters level, while another faculty indicated that it has imminent plans to commence delivery through the medium of the English language. The team also learned that the faculty of veterinary medicine will submit plans to ARACIS in spring 2013, for the first English-language study programme in veterinary medicine. The team welcomes this development. Nevertheless, it was apparent to team members that while some members of UASVM staff whom the team met have the enthusiasm and potential to make progress in this area in the future, the university does not currently have the level of expertise or organisational arrangements necessary for significantly developing capacity and capability in this area. Similar restrictions apply to both incoming international students and to Romanian students who may wish to benefit from language training in English, French, German, or indeed, for some, the Romanian language. Therefore, with these matters in mind 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.

In their deliberations on credit recognition, the IEP team learned that, to date, not all faculties were yet able to offer a Diploma Supplement. Further, from discussions with foreign students, the team noted that application and enrolment stages were hampered both by general problems of bureaucracy and by specific constraints relating to the processes for recognition of credit from an applicant's former university, and deficiencies in the UASVM website. Moreover, while the university is aware of the need for a University Centre for Credit Recognition, there are currently no plans in place to develop this. While the team heard UASVM managers describe the stages to be taken during the application process, including consideration of an application by a faculty commission, and approval and registration by the Ministry and by the UASVM Rector, it was evident that there are issues in this area to be addressed by the university if it is to attract more international and EU students. In summary, in the view of the IEP team, the university can be more welcoming to prospective international students. Therefore, 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 international students and that support and publicity for this are effective.

Conclusion

The recommendations of the IEP team relate to matters that have a direct bearing on the university's future success and strategic development and the aspiration of UASVM to continue to play a leading role in agronomic sciences and veterinary medicine in Romanian society.

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 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 self-critical 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 <u>academic</u> 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.

Envoi

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.