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## Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

### “Ion Ionescu de la Brad” University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Iasi

#### EVALUATION REPORT

April 2013

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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of "Ion de la Brad" University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Iasi. The evaluation took place in 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 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.



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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. "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine's profile**

"Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (USAMV) is located in the city of Iasi, a metropolis of 96 square kilometres positioned in the north east region of Romania. Iasi is the third largest city in Romania and until 1859 it was the capital of Moldavia. The main campus of the university is on the Copou hill in the north part of the city on an area of 15 hectares. There are five public universities and five private universities in Iasi that attract more than 80,000 students. A new higher education law was passed in 2011. The law introduced several important changes to the organisation of the universities. The impact of these changes on USAMV are discussed in this report.

USAMV is an autonomous public institution of higher education with a 100-year history, which functions according to the provisions of the Romanian Constitution, the legislation of education and the University Charter. In the academic year 2012-2013, 448 staff are employed at the university consisting of 169 teaching staff (69 of whom are women) and 279 auxiliary and administrative staff. The teaching staff consists of 32 professors, 29 associate professors, 68 lecturers and 40 assistants. From the total number of 269 teaching positions 169 of them are filled, which equates to an occupation level of 62.8%. Student numbers by study level are 3 508 undergraduate full-time, 480 undergraduate distance, 709 Master, 207 PhD and 50 post-graduate. The students are distributed across four faculties: agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and veterinary medicine.

## **1.3. The evaluation process**

A working party was established by the Board of Directors in May 2012 to coordinate the self-evaluation process and the development of the self-evaluation report (SER). The group consisted of nine senior academic staff (including two vice-rectors and a vice-dean from each of the four faculties), the Chief Operating Officer and two student members. It was considered that the work group should include professors in key positions from all the faculties, capable of assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each faculty, and consequently contribute to appropriate solutions for a future development strategy.



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The self-evaluation report of USAMV, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in October 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to the university took place from 15 to 16 November and 27 February to 1 March, respectively. In between the visits USAMV provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation as requested.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Christos Nikolaou, former Rector, University of Crete, Greece, team chair
- Professor Freddy Coignoul, Vice-Rector, University of Liège, Belgium
- Professor Ivan Leban, former Vice-Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Ms Leila Campos, student, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- Ms Donna Bell, Higher Education Consultant, Ireland, team coordinator

The team is most grateful for the hospitality shown by Rector Vasilu Vintu. Sincere thanks also go to the colleagues and students for the frank and open dialogue that ensued during these sessions. The team wishes to thank most particularly the university liaison person Professor Daniel Bucur for his active engagement and very efficient and gracious response to all requests, thus ensuring the best possible conditions in which to conduct the evaluation process.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

### 2.1 Mission, vision and strategic planning

The SER states that the vision of the university is “to become national leader in education and scientific research in the fields of animal and vegetal resources engineering, engineering and management, environmental engineering and veterinary medicine and to be among the prestigious European universities in the domain.” The mission of the university is that of “research and education through programmes of advanced study at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate training, in order to meet the challenges of a developing society”.

The rector was appointed in March 2012 as a result of an election by the entire academic community. Selection was based on the management plan presented by the successful candidate, which subsequently informed the strategic plan developed for the period from 2012 - 2016. The plan is based on a SWOT analysis of the three directions of activity (didactic, research and administration) across the four faculties.

The team was told that a major strategic goal is to reach the national level to be classified as a university of advanced scientific research and education. However, it is noted that the USAMV agrees with its current classification as a university of teaching and scientific research and acknowledges that there is work ahead to achieve that goal, with a focus on strengthening research capabilities. It was further stated that the relatively small size of the university supports the development, implementation and monitoring of the plan. The team also noted that the self-evaluation process had raised the issue that some aspects of the strategic plan are ambitious, emphasising the need for flexibility to accommodate changes, and to direct resources towards the achievement of the university's mission and goals.

It was noted that an annual operational plan (incorporating faculty plans) is used to support the implementation of the objectives outlined in the strategic plan. Progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives is monitored as an ongoing agenda item at Board of Director meetings and through the rector's annual report to Senate in March or April. An action plan is subsequently prepared to update the strategy as appropriate.

The team concluded that the university does not clearly comprehend the difference between long-term strategy that involves setting priorities with timelines and measurable steps towards each priority, and operational plans as a mechanism to monitor and review the strategic plan. It was noted that the strategic plan and the operational plan consisted of a series of objectives organised under sub-headings with no indication of priorities and timelines towards the achievement of objectives.



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In view of the previous analysis, the team recommends that:

- USAMV develops a more structured strategic plan with clear indications of priorities and timelines. The revised format would assist the university to monitor the annual operational plan more effectively.

## 2.2 Decision-making and university structures

Governance and management at USAMV is based on the principles of performance-oriented management and assuring the quality of the process of institutional governance (SER, p. 11). The University Charter sets out a governance and management structure which is in accordance with the law. The team was told that governance and management activities are in harmony with the university's strategy, incorporating faculty priorities as well as the general and international context.

It was noted that the governing structure of the university consists of the University Senate, Board of Directors and the Council for doctoral studies; at faculty level, the Faculty Council; at department level, the Department Council; at doctoral school level, the Doctoral School Council. The university Senate consists of democratically elected representatives from each faculty and department (academic staff 75% and students 25%), and decides on the major issues regarding academic activities and policies, financing, selection and promotion of the academic and administrative staff, students admission, the development of services for the society. Students are also represented on the Board of Directors and Faculty Councils. The staff and students with whom the team met gave positive feedback in relation to the opportunity to have input into strategic management and decision-making processes at central, faculty and departmental levels.

It was further noted that the organisational structure of USAMV comprises faculties, departments, institutes/centres and research laboratories, doctoral and postgraduate schools, continuous training centres and distance learning, teaching facilities, training areas, university veterinary clinics, training and information centre, micro production units and services, knowledge and technology transfer centre, library etc. Also included are the technical and administrative services for the current activities and for the previously mentioned structures. Since the new law of education has been enacted, the entire academic community has benefitted from the legal frame in electing its top management structure. All the members of the university managerial structures have been appointed using pyramid-like processes. For this, successive elections have been organised at department/faculty level, as well as in the university Senate respecting the provisions of the Law of education no.1/2011 and the procedures for appointing the university representatives, approved by the Senate.

The team was told that operative management is provided by the Board of directors which includes the rector, four vice-rectors, chief operating officer of the university, Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CSUD) manager, and the students' representative, each



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member being responsible for the specific managerial activities, according to the university's strategy and its organisational chart according to the regulation approved by the Senate. For activities related to research, policies, strategies and quality standards, the proposals come from the departments, research centres and laboratories and the academic council proposes the decisions which will be later validated by the Board of Directors.

The team concluded that management at the university tends to be reactive by nature due to the challenges imposed by a constantly changing external environment. The team supports the efforts of the university to take a more proactive approach to anticipating and managing the impact of external factors on its institutional management in order to more effectively promote its strengths.

### **2.3 Management of financial and human resources**

The team acknowledges the constraints under which the university is operating particularly in relation to under-financing through a reduction in public funding and legislative restrictions impacting on the recruitment and promotion of staff.

In relation to funding, the team was told that revenue is generated through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MECTS) and funds produced within faculties through sources including tuition fees, clinic activities and hiring of facilities. It was noted that while the budget has increased, the percentage of public funds has decreased. The current budget includes a 60% contribution from external sources including funds for research activities and the development of infrastructure. The university retains 30% of the MECTS funding to cover overheads. In a similar manner, 30% of the funds generated by faculties are returned to the university. Public funds include allocations for specific purposes such as scholarships, transport facilities and endowments.

The team notes that the university has developed an information system, which includes a process to request equipment and infrastructure. Under the current regime, the administration manager keeps track of salaries. Software options are being investigated to facilitate the integration of all aspects of the university's finances.

In relation to human resources, a major objective for the university is to encourage a favourable climate for developing and motivating human resources in order to create a working environment based on cooperation, trust and respect (SER, p. 11). Under the provisions of Law of education no. 1/2011 only one non-didactic staff member may be recruited for every seven vacancies. In the case of teaching staff no new appointments can be made. As stated in section 1.2 of this report, 62.8% of the available positions are occupied.

The team was told about a recent initiative to implement a merit system which allows 15% of the teaching staff to receive a bonus for five years equivalent to 25% of their salaries. The methodology used is based on a self-evaluation framework supervised by a commission. The





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framework comprises didactic, research, and social and professional activity. Research is the dominant element with a 60% weighting.

The team found that a five-year time period associated with the merit system is too lengthy. A shorter time period would make funds available on a more regular basis to allow other staff members to have the opportunity to compete, and would avoid the risk of complacency that could ensue when the bonus is allocated over a comparatively lengthy time period. The team was told that the time period for the bonus is prescribed by law. However, it is noted that the university favours a shorter period for the award.

In acknowledgement of the team's finding and the institution's support for that finding, it is recommended that:

- The university shortens the time period for the bonus payment associated with the merit award.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

The major strategic objectives in relation to teaching and learning are to develop and promote a partnership between the university and its students, supported by a modern educational process that is result-centred and based on professional knowledge. Other objectives include the development of fields and specialisations to meet the demands of the labour market, continuous improvement of curricula, and modernisation of student services to support the educational process. The team was told that the university implemented the Bologna system in the 2005 - 2006 academic year, and functions with three cycles of study (cycle 1 - undergraduate, cycle 2 - Master, cycle 3 - PhD).

It was noted that doctoral and postdoctoral studies are organised as part of two doctoral schools in the following fields: Agronomy, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine. The university reported that the doctoral studies are organised under the provisions of Law of education no.1/2011 and operate in accordance with the EU guidelines for PhD programmes but it was not made clear to the team which EU guidelines the university found itself compliant with. The emphasis is on preparing graduates within specialisations. Supervisors are selected through the Council of Doctoral Schools. It was confirmed that the average workload for each professor is 3.2 students.

Masters and doctoral activities as well as the postdoctoral studies are held in Research Centres organised near the faculties, in research laboratories accredited by the Romanian Accreditation Association (RENAR) or in course of accreditation, and in the Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research.

It is noted that investment has been made in the infrastructure to support teaching and learning. Improvements in the last two years include new equipment for laboratories, the modernisation of buildings and construction of a new library. The team supports the university's efforts to utilise ICT to support the learning process, such as the e-learning platform and 3D graphics and recommends that:

- USAMV continues to strengthen the use of new teaching and learning technologies.

The team also heard that the university's library is a founding member of the Balkan Library, a consortium of other universities in central Europe, together with France, Italy and the USA. The establishment of this body was made possible through a European endowment.

Meetings with the deans, vice-deans and academic staff from all four faculties validated a commitment to student-centred teaching with a focus on preparing students for work, and an emphasis on quality teaching and research. Discussions touched on the recruitment and promotion issues resulting from the national legislation. Major issues are the high teaching workloads due to the restriction on hiring staff and a shortage of technical and support staff to service farms and clinics. The team supports the efforts of the university to attract young



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staff by offering higher salaries of up to 30% as permitted by the legislation. A further initiative has also been implemented to employ young staff through the provision of 15 positions for teaching assistants on a one-year fixed term basis.

The team heard that professional development opportunities made available to teaching staff include training courses at national level, research contracts and partnerships, the Erasmus programme, lateral cooperation with other European universities, and post-doctoral studies. The university also provides courses through the Department of Continuous Training e.g. assistance with distance learning courses.

The team concluded that the practice of allocating courses to professors over lengthy time periods could inhibit the opportunity to update content and review approaches to delivery. It is therefore recommends that:

- USAMV considers the periodic reallocation of professors to courses as a way to promote the renewal of course content and teaching methodologies.

The team was told that there is a process in place for programme development consisting of a proposal, Senate endorsement and external evaluation by ARACIS. The emphasis is on new fields of study to respond to the labour market. Government-funded student places can be supplemented by students paying taxes (fees). It was noted that there is very limited flexibility to change the curriculum as 85% of content is governed by ARACIS regulations. It is further noted that study programmes are reviewed on an annual basis by the Quality Commissions in each faculty and department.

During the course of both visits, the team met with students across the four faculties and representatives from the students' league. The team was told that the majority of students studying at the university are drawn from the local and regional areas. The costs of studying at other centres, such as accommodation, cost of living and travel can be prohibitive. It is also interesting to note that many students complete their studies upon graduation with a Bachelors degree in order to gain employment, as confirmed by the student numbers presented in section 1.2 of this report.

Students were generally positive about their experiences at the university. They reported that teaching staff are approachable and modern teaching methods are used. The team was also told that the library suits the needs of students. Appreciation was expressed for the facility to extend opening hours during examination periods. It was noted that many students stay in dormitories because they are affordable and the facilities are reasonable. Indeed, demand for places exceeds supply. In terms of areas for improvement, the students expressed the desire to have access to cable in the dormitories. A further issue was raised in relation to having more practical time built into study programmes.



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The team praises the university for the concerted effort being made to move study programmes into A and B categories. The strategy of converting low-ranked study programmes into e-learning programmes was also noted. In this context, the team considers that there could be some instances where the option of closing down programmes may be appropriate in order to free up resources. In general, the team supports this strategy and recommends that:

- The university continues with the practice of converting low-ranked study programmes into e-learning programmes.



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## 4. Research

As noted in section 2.1, a major goal for the university is to strengthen research capabilities. Other strategic objectives related to research are:

- ▶ to increase the quality of the educational process and of the scientific research/expertise by providing the necessary conditions, and the use of the competitive system to obtain national and international research programs;
- ▶ the conservation, development, application and dissemination of scientific research in the University's areas of expertise;
- ▶ the continuous development of the research activities and increasing the performance by capitalising the universities' experience and that of the national and international research centres.

The team was told that the research strategy is approved by the Senate and proposed through the teaching departments. The aim is for a balance between theoretical topics and an applied focus. Activities are sought which will contribute funds through partnerships, for example. Among the types of research undertaken are: research in accredited laboratories, contract research through competitions (national/international) and student circles. The team concluded that an appropriate strategy would be to build on the university's existing strengths. It was noted that there is growing activity in the areas of cross-border emerging diseases, food safety and oenology. With this finding in mind, it is recommended that:

- The university concentrates its efforts on developing high-level research in areas of existing strengths, including building synergies across departments.

Discussions at university and faculty level confirmed that applications for benefiting from European grants/funds in research are supported through the Research Department and externally through consulting officers and partners. Professors are supported to attend conferences based on presentations and published articles. Internal competitions are held to facilitate ideas for patents. The team was told that professor's salaries can be increased by up to 30% based on their research records.

Although funding for research is still limited, access to EU research funding opportunities has helped activity levels. However, the team was told that competition can make these funds difficult to obtain. It was noted that research project funding is managed by the research team and the university takes a 10% overhead. The university also engages with private funding sources to conduct research according to economic needs.

During the first visit the team was informed about the financial difficulties experienced by PhD students on European scholarships due to the late receipt of funds. The university has assisted these students by supplementing the funding gaps, as well as providing financial support to PhD students who are not in receipt of European scholarships. The team is pleased to note that this issue has been resolved. However, during the second visit, the team was told



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about a further development to reduce the state funding available to universities for scholarships. The team wishes to praise the university for the action it took in this case to consult with the students before confirming a decision to retain the number of scholarships at a reduced rate of funding for each scholarship, and to top up the difference from university funds.

The team heard that teaching staff must be involved in research activity and that it is a major criterion in the evaluation process and to gain promotion. Overall it is important to keep a balance between teaching and research. In response to a question to teaching staff regarding the support available for EU funding applications, there was mixed feedback. While some staff responded positively, issues were raised in relation to the time needed to process applications and insufficient personnel in the research department to support staff in this activity.

The team was told that there are insufficient public funds available for research activities. As a result, a number of initiatives have been put in place by the university including:

- Opening a competition for PhD students using university funds to cover costs. A total of 16 grants have been made available to young researchers over the past two years.
- Grants made to young researchers through faculty funds to cover infrastructure and resource costs.

The team noted that the number of ISI publications has increased slightly and supports the strategies put in place by the university to accelerate the number of publications, such as support for researchers with ISI publications to attend conferences, and a requirement for PhD students to have at least one ISI publication as a prerequisite for teaching. The team was also pleased to note the change made to the teacher self-evaluation form following the first visit to incorporate consideration of publications on an annual basis. To further support these efforts, it is recommended that:

- USAMV continues to include research achievements such as ISI journal publications, patents and innovations as a strong criterion for academic staff selection and promotion.

The team supports the ongoing commitment of the university to invest in research infrastructure and equipment. However, it is acknowledged that the university is operating under funding constraints, and consequently there have been delays in construction and equipment procurement. The team was pleased to note the acquisition of a phytotron to be supplied in September 2013 at a cost of eight million euros, funded through an EU grant. The phytotron is a major research tool for agronomists and botanists, enabling all environmental parameters to be monitored for growing plants in controlled conditions. The team was told that it is expected that the income generated from the services provided by the phytotron will contribute towards maintenance and running costs.



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During the second visit, the team took the opportunity to visit the oenology laboratory, which is part of the Horticultural Research Centre. The team met with academic staff, PhD students and undertook a tour of the facilities and attended a presentation. It was noted that the university has access to land in close proximity to the laboratory which houses orchards and vineyards. During the tour, the team viewed a partly constructed cellar. It was noted that work started on the building four years ago, but has been stalled and equipment procurement for the building has also been delayed due to the funding constraints referred to in this report.

The team was told that the scientific competencies of the laboratory are production and conditioning technology and physical and chemical analysis for wine and other products, wine microbiology, and biological and health effects of wine. Research areas include the characteristics of Romanian and foreign wines, the influences of different wine-making technologies, wine maturation and the development of the oenological potential of cultivated grape varieties. It is noted that major new research directions include physical/chemical analysis for fraud identification and quality control of viticultural products.

The team was interested to note that Iasi is an important wine region in Romania and the status of the university as top ranking in oenology amongst the four Romanian agricultural universities. The team was pleased to note that the laboratory is participating in a research-based partnership with wine growers as a European project.



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## 5. Service to society

The major objectives in relation to service to society are an emphasis on a strategic role for the university in the economic, social, cultural, civic and moral development within the local, regional and national communities; and the development of relationships with graduates.

In accordance with its vision and strategy, the team heard that the university is a key partner of the local, regional and national communities. USAMV has an active role in drawing up local and regional strategies of sustainable development, is highly involved in the general effort of economic growth, and part of the community's life and the general direction of agriculture and rural development. Examples include developing continuous collaborations with the Agricultural Chambers, county school inspectorate, payment agencies and interventions in agriculture from the counties of the North East Development Region, as well as with other local entities. For several years, the university has been co-organiser of the Fair of traditional/ecological alimentary products, the International AGRALIM fair, wine and gastronomy fairs.

It was noted that the university plays a role in the local, regional and national social and economic environment by putting resources at their disposal, and promulgating the results of scientific research, knowledge and technology transfer. The collaboration partnerships between the academic staff and the economic entities represent an important component in the development of study programmes and research activities. USAMV also offers continuous education activities. The university also makes a contribution to society by accepting large number of students from underprivileged backgrounds.

The team met with nine representatives from the agricultural and horticulture industries, drawn from public and private enterprises, a research station and a research centre. Several of the participants were graduates of the university. Discussions validated strong partnerships with the university, particularly in relation to support for practicums, research activities and employment of graduates.

Examples of research activities undertaken with external stakeholders included:

- research opportunities for Masters and PhD students at the Agricultural Research and Development Station at Secuieni;
- the opportunity to publish articles in the Journal of Agricultural Research, through the Research Centre for Viticulture and Oenology.

It was noted that contacts tend to be informal and could be enhanced by a more formal mechanism to promote dialogue towards further strengthening collaborations and input into curricula. The team acknowledges the mechanisms already in place to involve external stakeholders at faculty level through commissions that discuss curriculum planning and a





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university committee to consider strategy. The comments made by teaching staff emphasising the value placed on the input of external stakeholders are also noted. However, the feedback given would indicate that there is scope for the university to intensify efforts to involve external stakeholders in a more formal way. In this context, it is recommended that:

- The university involves external stakeholders in a more systematic way, particularly in relation to curricula issues.

The team was pleased to note the feedback from teaching staff confirming the academic collaborations taking place, including the university's participation in the national USAMV university consortium and a consortium of four agronomic universities. Reference was also made to the excellent collaboration opportunities available, both in terms of professional development and research, and the opportunities to share good practice.

The team was told about the close contacts existing between the university and its alumni, with a focus on building close relationships that are of mutual advantage. The recent celebrations of the 100-year anniversary of the university attracted large numbers of graduates. The team supports the recent decision to establish an Alumni Association as a mechanism to further strengthen the links between the university and its graduates. It was further concluded that the Alumni Association could also provide an opportunity for the university to raise additional funding for specific purposes. In the context of this finding, it is recommended that:

- The university establishes an Alumni Campaign Fund that could support activities such as scholarships or the funding of buildings and equipment.



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## 6. Quality culture

The quality culture at USAMV is built on the principle of continuous improvement and alignment to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). It was noted that quality assurance is an integral part of the process for institutional development and an important element of the strategic and operational plans.

The team was told that quality evaluation practices are administered by the Quality Assurance Department, which reports to the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CQE&A). The commission is the interface between ARACIS and the university. There are also sub-commissions for quality evaluation and assurance at faculty, departmental and secretariat levels, responsible for the implementation of the quality management strategy across all areas.

It was noted that internal institutional evaluation is conducted on an annual basis by the CQE&A. All recommendations made by evaluators are incorporated into the Rector's Annual Report, which is subsequently used to update the strategic plan. As stated in the teaching and learning section of this report, internal evaluation of study programmes is carried out by the Quality Commissions for each faculty and department.

The team heard that ARACIS performs external institutional evaluation and is also responsible for the accreditation of study programmes. It was confirmed at the second visit that the next five yearly external evaluations is taking place in April 2013. The previous evaluation in 2007 resulted in the status of a university with a high level of trust. The team was also told that the university uses a management system based on EN ISO 9001:2000 and EN ISO 9001:2008 standards in the fields of patrimonial, financial and staff, social and secretariat services. The last audit was conducted in July 2012 with a positive outcome.

The team was told that the process for the internal evaluation of academic staff is based on self-evaluation, peer evaluation, student evaluation and managerial evaluation. The outcomes of internal evaluation play a major role in determining promotion and the award of incentives such as bonuses and merit pay. Peer evaluation is organised within similar disciplines. Student evaluation takes place each semester on an anonymous basis. Feedback occurs through subject reports present at Faculty Councils and follow up meetings with student representatives.

Of particular note is the strong belief of the students with whom the team met that their feedback is taken into consideration by the university. Where it is evident that improvements are needed, issues are prioritised through negotiation and resolved accordingly. The team was told that close relationships are fostered between the students' league, faculties and university management. Each study year has a supervisor and each student dorm has a representative to facilitate the resolution of issues.



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The team found that the processes for monitoring and review of the quality management system are working effectively. The major factor contributing to this outcome is the coordination role of the Quality Assurance Department and the integration of processes through the operation of sub-committees for quality evaluation and assurance at faculty, departmental and secretariat levels. It was also evident from the team's discussions that staff and students have the opportunity to contribute to quality assurance processes through committee structures and informally.



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## 7. Internationalisation

A major strategic goal for the university is that of promoting international mobility for students, teaching and administrative staff based on partnerships within the EU countries. Discussions with senior staff at university and faculty level confirmed the strategic direction to expand internationalisation, particularly in relation to EU projects and funding.

The team was told that collaborations have been developed with more than 30 universities from Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Republic of Moldavia, USA and Egypt. The university, as partner or collaborator, has developed and implemented various transnational projects, promoting pilot projects, obtaining significant results for modernising the infrastructure of technological transfer and international cooperation.

It was noted that for curricular and organisational harmonisation and for extending regional cooperation, the university is a member of the following organisations: the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), EUA, IAESTE Romania (The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience), CASEE (ICA Regional Network for Central and South Eastern Europe), RIFEFF (Réseau international francophone des Etablissements de Formation de Formateurs) and EAEVE (European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education). These collaborations assist with the development of university exchanges with the other member universities. Partnerships have also intensified due to projects financed by the EU e.g. funding of five million Euros has recently been secured to develop a modern agricultural facility). According to the SER, there are 87 international students studying at the university (predominantly at Bachelors level). The majority of students are from the Republic of Moldavia.

The teaching and learning section of this report includes international professional development opportunities made available to academic staff. The team was told that there is a constraint on staff mobility for extended periods due to the shortage of teaching staff. It was further noted that there is limited access for students regarding mobility opportunities. Major contributory factors are the incompatibility with the study programmes of partner institutions and financial constraints. The team heard from students that although they were keen to take up mobility opportunities, the high cost of living in other centres is not covered by the scholarships provided by programmes such as Erasmus. It was noted that the university does provide grants to meet these expenses based on the grades of applicants.

While acknowledging the support provided by the university for students and staff to enhance language skills, the team found that there is scope to further promote these skills, in order to support the strategic direction to expand internationalisation. The team concluded that the emphasis should be on English and French. English is a major prerequisite in life sciences in order to have access to international bibliographies and science texts.



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The team strongly supports the efforts of the university to expand internationalisation. To further strengthen these efforts, it is recommended that the university:

- provides academic and financial incentives to both students and teachers to enhance mobility;
- focuses on international cooperation that provides coherence with teaching and research strengths;
- provides additional resources (people and equipment) for strengthening the language skills of teachers and students.



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## 8. Conclusion

The team praises USAMV for its achievements so far, especially at regional level, despite the difficult national context. The efforts made to set up new governance structures and the processes for quality assurance and management are particularly noteworthy.

The team believes that the university has strengths that can be further developed to meet the challenging goals it has set; specifically in relation to improving the quality of teaching and research, strengthening links with society and the further expansion of internationalisation.

In summary, the team wishes to highlight the key recommendations in the following five areas.

### 8.1 Governance and institutional decision-making

- USAMV develops a more structured strategic plan with clear indications of priorities and timelines. The revised format would assist the university to monitor the annual operational plan more effectively.
- The university shortens the time period for the bonus payment associated with the merit award.

### 8.2 Teaching and learning

- USAMV continues to strengthen the use of new teaching and learning technologies.
- USAMV considers the periodic reallocation of professors to courses as a way to promote the renewal of course content and teaching methodologies.
- The university continues with the practice of converting low ranked study programmes into e-learning programmes.

### 8.3 Research

- The university concentrates its efforts on developing high level research in areas of existing strength, including building synergies across departments.
- USAMV continues to include research achievements such as ISI journal publications, patents and innovations as a strong criterion for academic staff selection and promotion.

### 8.4 Service to society

- The university involves external stakeholders in a more systematic way, particularly in relation to curricula issues.
- The university establishes an Alumni Campaign Fund that could support activities such as scholarships or the funding of buildings and equipment.

### 8.5 Internationalisation

- The university provides academic and financial incentives to both students and teachers to enhance mobility.



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- The university focuses on international cooperation that provides coherence with teaching and research strengths.
- The university provides additional resources (people and equipment) for strengthening the language skills of teachers and students.