

**EXTERNAL EVALUATOR'S
REPORT FOR ARACIS
UNIVERSITY OF AGRONOMIC SCIENCES AND
VETERINARY MEDICINE OF BUCHAREST
2021**

Introduction

I was appointed as a Foreign External Evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was consequently invited to join the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation process of University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest (UASVMB). The audit took place between Tuesday 8 June and Friday 11 June 2021. This evaluation process was conducted online. The evaluation team had a preliminary meeting (Webex) Thursday 3 June in the afternoon to discuss the main methodological aspects related to the institutional evaluation and establish the details of the visit. The evaluation process began on Tuesday 8 June at 9 a.m. at Webex platform with the meeting for the preparation and harmonization of the evaluation steps in the hybrid work mode both at institutional and study programs levels.

The evaluation team consisted of the following members, in addition myself:

Prof. univ. dr. Cristina GHIȚULICĂ (University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest) – Mission Director

Prof. univ. dr. Călin Ioan ROȘCA (Transilvania University of Brasov) – Coordinator of the Experts Evaluator Team

Prof. univ. dr. Cezar BIRZEA (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration) – Advisory Commission Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Adela SOCOL ("1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia) – Institutional Commission Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Costel SAMUIL (Iasi University of Life Sciences) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Lucica TOFAN (Ovidius University of Constanta) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Lavinia ȘTEF (Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Timisoara) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Iuliu Ștefăniță GUTIU (Technical University of Cluj-Napoca) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Ioan MAMALIGA ("Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Dana PUSTA (University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca) – Program Expert

Prof. univ. dr. Stejărel BREZULEANU (Iasi University of Life Sciences) – Program Expert

Mihaela BĂJENARU – Technical Secretary (ARACIS)

Paul-Sorin COTOI (ANOSR) – Student Evaluator

Ioan URSACHE (UNSR) – Student Evaluator

In my role as Foreign Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the whole university and therefore I asked for special meetings with quite a few representatives of different bodies at UASVMB (e.g. the International Relations Office; the Career Counselling and Orientation Centre; the professors who are responsible for bachelor or master programmes conducted in English at UASVMB; the Student organizations; the Commission for Quality Assurance and Assessment etc.).

I tried to attend most of the common sessions during the week as an observer, but at the same time, I asked for short English summaries about the meetings (e.g. meeting with the undergraduate students; meeting with representatives of the graduates; meeting with representatives of the employers) as they were conducted in Romanian language.

My findings are based on the "Institutional Internal Evaluation Report" (2019), the information I have gained from the websites of UASVMB and I have heard during the meetings and interviews. The meetings and interviews were conducted in three different platforms (Webex, MS Teams, Zoom).

General Statements

UASVMB is a public higher education institution, operates according to the Constitution, the laws that govern the higher education system in Romania and based on the University Charter and of its own internal regulations. UASVMB is the oldest and largest institution of agronomic higher education in Romania, its tradition extending almost 170 years.

In 2015 the institution was evaluated by ARACIS. As a result of the evaluation the institution was awarded the “High Degree of Confidence” qualification.

UASVMB has several BA (29) and MA (33) programmes according to the Institutional Internal Evaluation Report. The university is recognized as an institution with the right to organize PhD studies in two doctoral schools. UASVMB has 11251 students in 2019, out of which: 8737 undergraduate students, 2168 master’s degree students and 346 PhD students according to the Institutional Internal Evaluation Report.

Managerial Structure

The leadership of the university is organised in accordance with its legal obligations. The management bodies of UASVMB are the University Senate and the Administration Board.

The Senate is the main decision making body of the university, which consisted 49 members (36 academic staff and 13 students) in 2019. Each faculty of UASVMB has representatives in the Senate. Students’ associations delegate their own representatives in the management structures of UASVMB. The University Senate is run by the President and assisted by a Vice-president and a secretary. The Senate has several Standing Committees (the Board for Education-Research and Quality Management; the Board for Image and National and International Relations; the Board for Patrimony, Production and Microproduction; the Board for Students’ Union and Trade Union; the Board for Regulations, Decision-Making and Track Record).

The Administration Board of UASVMB ensures the operational management of the university's structures, as a management body with administrative decision-making power. The Administration Board of UASVMB is represented and run by the Rector who operates both as President and the budget manager of the university. The Administration Board consists of the Rector, the Vice-Rectors, the General Administrative Manager, the Deans and the representative of students’ associations. The Rector’s duties include the strategic leadership of the university and representing the university at judicial and public bodies.

The university is divided into 7 faculties (Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Horticulture, Faculty of Animal Productions Engineering and Management, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Land Reclamation and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Biotechnologies, Faculty of Management and Rural Development), which are further subdivided into departments (16). Each faculty has scientific research centre(s), with accredited several laboratories.

The faculty management is assured by the dean, two or three vice-deans, and the Faculty Council. Although decentralisation has not been completed, the faculties have autonomy in developing their own strategies, making strategic decisions and using their own resources. At the department level, the management is assured by the heads of departments, supported by the Department Council.

The administrative staff of the university is qualified according to the job requirements and has experience in the field. The position occupied through public open competition. The functional organizations of UASVMB are also well-structured and provide various services for the students and the staff.

The management activities are based on modern and integrated information systems, through the Internet as well as the Intranet.

Comment: UASVMB has a coherent, integrated, transparent management system, based on an efficient and effective administration.

Teaching Staff

In the academic year of 2019/20 there were 664 teaching positions at UASVMB from which 391 were filled according to the occupied job positions (including 78 professors, 99 associate professors, 178 lecturers, 36 assistant lectures) and 367 were the total number of auxiliary teaching staff. I would like to emphasize that the number of the young teaching staff is decreasing and the teaching staff having a PhD title shows the same tendency.

The structure of the teaching staff seems to be balanced; the university might encourage the experienced lectures to become associate professors and the experienced associate professors to become professors in order to maintain the academic quality. Every year the UASVMB evaluates the employees' performances. The Human Resources Department provides an accurate and complete evidence of all teaching staff's competition portfolios.

Comment: The human resource development plans were realized systematically. The transparencies of the personal records are clear. The quality of human resources and the scientific potential at UASVMB is on a good level. It is very important to provide to the academic staff the opportunities for development and retain a highly qualified staff.

Erasmus mobility programme would offer more opportunities for exchanging academic staff. The total number of the teaching staff exchange was very low in the last few years (2015-2019), although UASVMB has many ERASMUS partnership agreements.

Facilities

UASVMB has two campuses. Most of the faculties are situated in Agronomie-Herastrau Campus. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine located at the Veterinara Cotroceni Campus in the centre of Bucharest. Over 90% of the spaces that are used for education and research are in the patrimony of UASVMB.

UASVMB has 11 dormitories with 3163 beds provide accommodation for the students. These ensure the accommodation of over 45% of the total number of students who are studying full time, although they are on different levels. Also the canteens, the sports hall, the training fields are available for them.

The Central Library and the libraries of the faculties/departments offer an important amount of learning resources and they have a rich depository of books and access to databases. To provide access for all students to the learning resources, UASVMB has signed several collaboration agreements with scientific institutions that have their own valuable libraries, thus continuing the traditional scientific and academic collaboration. UASVMB has its own publishing house ("Ex Terra Aurum"), which ensures the printing of the lecture notes,

textbooks and of the necessary documents. UASVMB edits and publishes the annual volumes of scientific works of the faculties (Scientific Papers. Series A. Agronomy; Scientific Papers. Series B. Horticulture Journal; Scientific papers, series D. Animal Science; Scientific Works Series C. Veterinary Medicine; Scientific Papers. Series E. Land Reclamation, Earth Observation & Surveying, Environmental Engineering; Scientific Bulletin. Series F. Biotechnologies; Scientific Papers. Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development) and the scientific journal of the university (AgroLife Scientific Journal).

UASVMB provides complex teaching and experimental training facilities for both Bachelor and Master programmes (Moara Domneasca Teaching and Experimental Farm; Istrita Fruit-Tree Growing Farm and Nursery; Pietroasa Research Centre for Vine-Growing and Wine-Making; Bran Agritourism Practical Training Centre etc.).

According to the data presented in the Institutional Internal Evaluation Report, it seems that the financial situation of the university is stable.

Comment: UASVMB has enough place for didactic and research activities. The infrastructure is adequate. It seems that UASVMB invested in its physical infrastructure a lot in the last few years. It is important to realize the medium- and long-term investment objectives.

Students

Many study programmes (BA/BSc, MA/MSc and PhD) are available for the candidates at UASVMB. The university offers flexible and modern distance learning and part-time education forms. The total number of students have been slowly decreasing since 2015. While the number of master and doctoral students were increasing, the students at bachelor level were decreasing in the last academic years. The Career Counselling and Orientation Centre (2016) plays an important role to recruit future students. They organized events, like "Open Day" (virtual in 2020), missions to promote the education offer in high school etc.

I could not attend the online appointment with the undergraduate students, because I had another fixed meeting with the representatives for the study programmes conducted in English at the same time, but I had the possibility to talk with representatives (7) of the students' associations. They seem to be very loyal to their university and found most of the curricula and the academic staff very good. All of them are involved in different decision-making bodies on faculty or university level.

Wednesday at 1 p.m., we had an online meeting with the former students. I was present as an observer because it was conducted in Romanian, which I do not understand except a few words, and I did not want to make any interruption in the process. I asked for an English summary from a colleague of UASVMB, who was responsible to help my activity. The following subjects were tried to be explored during the meeting: their experience as students, the actual field of work, the details about the courses they followed, the activity of the Career Counselling and Orientation Centre, the membership of alumni-type organizations and suggestion on quality improvement. Generally, they seemed pleased with the university.

UASVMB students have several opportunities to take part in Erasmus+ Programme at the partner universities. Although the participation in the Erasmus+ Programme is low, the number of mobility increased in the previous years (2015-2019). Of course, the pandemic situation has been affected the mobility since the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020. UASVMB tried to adapt to the situation with applying blended and virtual exchange activities. The number of the participants in Erasmus Program could be more for the size of the university and the number of agreements.

International Relations Office responsible also, besides the Erasmus mobility, for the incoming international students who are taking part in programmes conducted in English or French. The first programme conducted in English was started in the academic year of 2014/15. Since then the number of programmes, which are available in English, have increased. Quite a number of Romanian students are studying in those programmes which are offered in English. I was informed that the total number of international students are less than 300, including also the Erasmus students.

Comment: When the restrictions will be over of COVID-19, it is recommended to increase the number of students taking part in mobility activities especially doing a traineeship

abroad. It will help the students to gain some practical experience abroad and it suits to EU recommendations too. Increasing the number of “real” international students would also be beneficial for the university.

Wednesday at 2 p.m., at the meeting employers I followed the same procedure, for the same reason, as I did it with representatives of graduates. The following questions were tried to be discussed during the meeting: content with the level of knowledge the graduates have, with the theoretical and the practical knowledge they gained during their studies at UASVMB; the collaboration with the faculties of UASVMB, the procedures of the collaboration; the scholarships and internships. They were very satisfied with those students who graduated from UASVMB and it was also mentioned that they have good cooperation with the university.

Research

UASVMB pays a special attention to scientific research and it is a fundamental component of the activity carried out by teaching staff and students. The UASVMB Scientific Board is in charge with the development of the scientific research strategy and the achievement of its objectives. The Scientific Research Vice-Rector is the President of the Board.

Scientific research in the university is structured into research centres, which are hosted at faculty level. There are 16 research centres at UASVMB. The research activity is conducted both in laboratories and in experimental fields. The students are involved in scientific activity mainly through the framework of the master and doctoral programmes.

Department for Scientific Research Projects Management and RDI Activities Support is the executive unit for the activities related to the technical and economic management of research projects. UASVMB ensures the scientific research resources and supports related projects. The nationally financed projects are predominant in all UASVMB faculties. Scientific research is continuously monitored and evaluated annually. Research activity at UASVMB is transparent.

The results of the scientific activities are partly disseminated in dedicated journals or publishing houses (e.g. Romanian Academy Publishing, Springer, Elsevier and Academic

Press etc.). Research is materialised also in: textbooks for didactic purposes, books and monographs, scientific articles published in specialized reviews. Every year the UASVMB faculties or scientific teams organize various scientific events like conferences, symposiums etc.

Comment: By creating different research centres at UASVMB the conditions for an increase in the quality of scientific research have been created by providing a high-level infrastructure. The scientific research performance should be balanced among the faculties.

Quality Management

The quality management system is well described in Institutional Internal Evaluation Report of UASVMB. The Quality Evaluation and Assurance Board of the university proposes improvement measures for quality management that are implemented by Quality Assurance Department and by each faculty and department. At all levels the university promotes the quality education by regular actions and meetings involving both teaching staff and students.

UASVMB has adopted the ISO 9001 quality management system.

Besides the transparent quality assurance structure of UASVMB, the university concentrate on the different fields of the quality assurance: quality assurance for management processes, quality assurance in teaching and scientific research.

Comment: I appreciate that the quality evaluation and assurance is a continuous process at UASVMB. Internal and external control of quality assurance is operated. I am happy to declare my full and complete confidence in the quality assurance processes at UASVMB, as well as the quality of its programmes.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to emphasize that UASVMB represents a high quality in the Romanian higher education system and the activity reach the requirement of the European standards

of education and scientific research. Only a little room for improvement can be found (e.g. clear action plan for internationalisation; make the information up to date on the websites; continue strengthening the connection between education and research; continue to invest in human resources and physical infrastructure etc.). The students' motivation, the staff (teachers, researches and administrators) commitments and professionalism are the basis of the success of UASVMB.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to leadership of UASVMB and all the university staff for the support during the evaluation process. Also thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

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