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University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca

**- External Institutional Evaluation Report
16-18 October 2024**

1. Introduction

As stated in the Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programmes and other provision.

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation of University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca (USAMV Cluj-Napoca). Prior to the site visit, I had studied the English version of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca and some other documents. During the visit, which was carried out on-site from 16 th to 18th of October 2024, I had a very good opportunity to build upon the information, I had received about the USAMV Cluj-Napoca and its operation.

The site visit started with a preliminary meeting of experts, who are the members of the evaluation team. At this meeting, a preparation and harmonization of evaluation stages was discussed. Then, there was a meeting with the leading representatives of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate in several plenary/group meetings with representatives of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca teaching staff, students, alumni and also the employers of graduates of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca. Besides, a series of individual meetings, as well as group discussions with representatives of various positions within the USAMV Cluj-Napoca and beyond followed during the site visit.

The Self Evaluation Report is comprehensive, very readable, and covers beyond areas and topics related to the accreditation process.

During the site visit, I received additional documents related to some aspects of the operation upon my request, which helped me to complete the image. Thanks to this, I had a chance to study materials related to leadership, management and governance, budgeting, study provision, research, internationalization, external relations, quality assurance and many other aspects of the operation of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca for the purpose of its evaluation. Since the visit was organized on-site, I also had a very good possibility to see the main premises of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Claudia Milea, an ARACIS officer, for his very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. I also benefited from a highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators, Evaluation director Prof.univ.dr. Daniela Lucia MUNTEAN Universitatea de Medicină, Farmacie, Științe și Tehnologie „George Emil Palade”. On the basis of the sources of information mentioned above, I herewith submit my report on the USAMV Cluj-Napoca’s institutional performance as I have perceived it. I am aware that this is a limited view by an external evaluator, and a much deeper insight would be needed to really catch the essence of some of the issues evaluated. My evaluation, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be understood as a collegial attempt to provide the USAMV Cluj-Napoca and ARACIS with opinions with the aim to contribute to possible improvements at the USAMV Cluj-Napoca and the quality assurance of the higher education in Romania.

2., General statements

Institutional Self-Assessment Report

The Evaluated Institution has taken the evaluation process seriously and carefully prepared a the Institutional Self-Assessment Report. This English pdf document was available as 137 pages in the ARACIS cloud, and I was able to access it easily, on-time and as often as necessary. To support information included in the Institutional Self-Assessment Report, the annexes were addressed as links to documents publicly available online in digital format.

Mission statement

The University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (USAMV) of Cluj-Napoca is the continuator of the prestigious Cluj School of Agriculture, founded 155 years ago. The University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca (USAMV Cluj-Napoca) is a public institution of higher education, with legal personality and own asset holder. USAMV Cluj-Napoca consists of six Faculties: Faculty of Agriculture; Faculty of Horticulture and Rural Development; Faculty of Animal Sciences and Biotechnologies; Faculty of Veterinary Medicine; Faculty of Food Science and Technology, Faculty of Forestry and Cadastre.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca operates on the basis of university autonomy, according to the University Charter and in accordance with the current legislation, the provisions of the Romanian Constitution, the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 with subsequent additions and amendments and the other regulations governing the education system in Romania.

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca Charter was issued in February 2024.

The study programmes at USAMV Cluj-Napoca operate, since the academic year 2005-2006, according to the study cycle structure established by the Bologna Process.

University Strategic Plan defines institutional Mission and Vision, as well as values and key Strategic Goals. The mission statement formulated clearly, it is sufficiently elaborated, ambitious and generally acceptable. In accordance with the provisions of the Charter, the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca (USAMV Cluj-Napoca) has as its mission advanced scientific research and education. In order to achieve its mission, the university is involved in the generation of knowledge through scientific research, development, innovation and technology transfer and university-level professional training.

The professional standards underlying the university curriculum are adapted to national and European values in the field, reflecting the current level of our university community as well as its development trends. As part of its entire academic activity, the university promotes the recognition of fundamental human rights and freedoms, respect and tolerance for opinions, ideologies and religions, respect for all living things and for the environment.

The actions aimed at achieving the mission and objectives are carried out in accordance with the University's Strategic Plan for the 2020-2024 period (<https://www.usamvcluj.ro/universitatea/programe-si-strategii/>- Programmes and strategies) (Annex I 04).

Academic freedom and academic integrity

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca aims to abandon the old approaches within an integrated educational process, this leading to the reduction of administrative costs, the members of the academic community benefit from more freedom to find, most of the time together with the students, creative solutions materialized in original bachelor's and dissertation papers.

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca operates in the conditions of academic autonomy, academic freedom, emphasising free and equal access and public responsibility and accountability. The respect to academic freedom concerns the staff, as well as students.

Within USAMV Cluj-Napoca, subordinated to the Rector, there is an Ethics and Academic Deontology Commission, functioning according to its own regulation. The Ethics Commission is the main body dealing with this agenda, its reports are published annually. The Ethics Commission seems to be functioning well and it has sufficient support from the USAMV Cluj-Napoca. The Research Ethics Committee is concerned with ensuring the general framework of ethics and academic integrity of research results in the form of articles, research projects, doctoral theses, dissertations and bachelor's degrees, research projects.

Overall, the bodies of the USAMV Cluj-Napoca seem to be in compliance with legislation and they provide the faculties with the respective academic freedom.

All study programs are accredited by ARACIS and evaluated at regular intervals.

The university uses an anti-plagiarism software to fight against intellectual frauds.

The public information can be found on the USAMV Cluj-Napoca site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. The English version of the website exists.

Recommendations:

- *Parallel with traditional roles, the university has to adapt to the new needs of the students where permanent improvement of quality has to be in focus; keep in mind that adaptation needs flexibility and continuous investment in human capital.*
- *University permanently has to develop its competitive factors and have keep the present role and the place in local and international market.*

3., Organisation and management

The management of USAMV Cluj-Napoca is conducted in the spirit of managerial and financial efficiency, public accountability and respect for university autonomy, ensuring quality, transparency and fairness, as well as the freedoms of students and academic staff. Representatives of student organisations and of the teaching and non-teaching staff union of USAMV Cluj-Napoca participate in the work of all governing structures of the University, either as elected members or as guests.

The organizational structures and subdivisions that ensure the USAMV Cluj-Napoca management system, as well as the relationships of hierarchical subordination that are established between them are specified in the University Charter. The USAMV Cluj-Napoca has a very clear distribution of duties and a delineation of the responsibilities of its administrative staff and governing bodies.

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca has a number of regulatory documents, which determine organisation and management processes in the institution. The University Charter is the key document in this respect. Both the University Charter and the regulations are periodically reviewed by the representative bodies of the University, in accordance with the legislation on higher education at national and European level.

The university uses information and communication systems such as the Internet and Intranet (e-learning platform) and the secretariat, which involve members of the academic community, including students, administrative personnel, as well as other beneficiaries and partners of the University, thus responding to public interests.

The University has a Student Restaurant, the USAMVCN Student Club and student dormitories.

The results obtained by USAMV Cluj-Napoca in all areas (teaching, research, investment in infrastructure and equipment), as well as the place occupied by our institution in the ranking of

universities in Romania demonstrate that the institution practices a high performance management and that it is sustainable in the future.

The Senate includes 49 members: 35 teachers and researchers and 14 students. The Senate is structured by specialist committees.

Students are represented in consultative, decision-making, and executive structures within the university. The university does not condition the status of a student representative by the level academic performance or attendance at courses, seminars, and work in laboratories.

Recommendations:

- *Equality of representation (e.g. gender, discipline, faculty) should be considered in all university bodies and functions.*
- *Consider the possibilities of providing management training to leaders at different levels of the university structure.*

4., Teaching staff

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca has a qualified staff to provide the current portfolio of educational programmes as well other relevant activities. The teaching staff of USAMV Cluj-Napoca carry out their activities on the basis of national legislation and internal regulations, namely the University Charter and regulations.

At USAMV Cluj-Napoca all teachers have a psycho-pedagogical training certificate, according to the legislation in force.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca offers equal opportunities, without gender discrimination or based on other criteria, to candidates for teaching positions. Leadership at USAMV Cluj-Napoca is highly-motivated and there have been significant improvements over the last years.

During the interviews, some representatives of the younger generation of academic staff expressed their well-balance workload between teaching and research.

The teachers carry out permanence hours and hours of consultations in which they are available to the students for guiding them during the academic year both for the activities arising from the teaching-learning process and for the activities related to the individual training program.

In order to validate the publication of the academic activity within the annual self-evaluation process, coordinated by the vice-rectorate for quality assurance, teachers are required to submit to the university library a minimum of 5 copies of the published teaching material.

Students and alumni were positive about the academic staff, as well as about the administration support.

Recommendations:

- *To promote the continuous professional training of teaching staff to acquire new skills, methods and techniques that can further improve their teaching activity.*
- *Explore the alternative tools to attract faculty in competitive disciplines that may include campaigns, special scarcity allowances, or tailored contracts to enable dual employment (in the company and at the university).*

5. Academic programs and student management

USAMV Cluj-Napoca offers equal opportunities to all candidates, regardless of their background, race, gender, or religious choices. The university provides students with social problems or disabilities with equal opportunities to study and even support to complete their studies.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca has, besides Romanian students, Romanian state scholarship holders, roma and foreign students enrolled in the two lines of study in foreign languages, English and French.

The admission procedure and criteria are clear and the rules related to the whole process of studies, including student examination and assessment (throughout studies as well as at termination), are transparent and are understood and accepted by students.

The academic offer of USAMV Cluj-Napoca includes 26 full-time undergraduate degree programs and 5 ID degree programs, respectively 30 master degree programs and 7 doctoral fields. There are two doctoral schools at USAMV Cluj-Napoca.

The academic programmes are in correspondence with the USAMV Cluj-Napoca's mission statement, as well as with international standards. The quality, range and academic aims of the curriculum may be viewed as appropriate for the awarded academic degrees, there is a combination of professional, as well as transversal knowledge and skills presented in the programmes. The nomenclature of the subjects of study in the educational plan, the number of hours by categories of teaching activities, as well as their classification in one category or another of disciplines are established according to the norms in force.

The rules related to the assessment of student results throughout all study phases are clear and publicly accessible too.

Students have access to a dedicated menu on the university's website, where all useful information is uploaded. The syllabuses and course outlines are linked on the faculty websites. The Career Counselling and Guidance Centre (CCOC) is part of the USAMV Cluj Napoca structure and operates in accordance with its own regulations. CCOC's mission is to provide psychological and educational counselling and career counselling services and support for labour market integration.

For student accommodation the University has 5 student dormitories with a capacity of 1600 places. USAMV Cluj-Napoca has a Student Restaurant with 120 seats, and the USAMVCN Club. Student support services seem to be provided sufficiently in most cases. Staff contact hours, tutors for each study group/year of study, and mentors are significant measures regularly implemented at the USAMV Cluj-Napoca.

During the site visit interviews, students voiced a positive view of the support they had been given by the university. Students that have attended a meeting with the evaluation team have confirmed USAMV Cluj-Napoca's dedication to providing quality services.

During the site visit we had a chance to meet very enthusiastic and talented students who were positive about the programs and USAMV Cluj-Napoca. Also, positive opinions about the university were expressed by alumni, who were graduates of different programs of the university.

Recommendations:

- *It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The USAMV Cluj-Napoca attracts lot of potential students and the university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies.*
- *To continue to consult external stakeholders in order to adapt its curricula in agreement to new labor market requirements.*
- *To consider authorization/accreditation of new study programs taught in international languages.*

6., Finance, infrastructure/space and equipment

Finance are centralized at the level of the university. There are several major sources of income: core revenue, special purpose funds, own private funds (tuition fees and other activities) and research.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca owns a campus totalling 26 ha, of which 21 ha are located in the central part of the university. All lecture halls are equipped with video projector, computer and projection screen/smart table. There is wi-fi internet coverage in all classrooms. The capacity of the teaching premises ensures optimal conditions for the courses and practical work. The existing equipment and fittings comply with the technical operating standards. USAMV Cluj-Napoca continues to invest in the rehabilitation and modernization of teaching areas, as well as in the construction of new ones.

The sports centre was renovated in 2017. USAMV Cluj Napoca has a Central Library.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca has research and production stations used for teaching purposes as well as Student internships.

The students' internship activity is organized by the Centre for the organization of student internships at USAMV Cluj-Napoca, which aims to coordinate internships within the undergraduate and master's degree programs, i.e. to keep in touch with internship partners by making agreements for internships in specialized firms or companies.

The ICT Centre provides the mechanisms for the implementation and development of ICT facilities within USAMV Cluj-Napoca, in order to increase efficiency in the areas of educational process management and academic management.

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca provides scholarship opportunities to the students. It has the responsibility for awarding scholarships and other forms of material support for students.

AcademicPres publishing house was established in 2001 and is equipped with high-performance digital equipment and has a qualified human resource for both editing and printing. Students are also to some extent supported to participate in research programmes, scientific events, student competitions, publication activities.

According to the self-evaluation report and the received information the research facilities are in good standing and they fulfill all recent requirements in terms of space distribution, allocated spaces, available complementary services, etc. In terms of research infrastructure, facilities are well equipped with state-of-the art equipment that can clearly help and motivate students to properly engage in their research activities.

The spaces dedicated for the didactic and research-related activities are owned by the university and meet the norms and legal requirements, the present capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations.

Recommendation:

- *To perform regular analysis of the results of research activity and setting up mechanisms to increase scientific production.*
- *Monitor the ratio of academic/teaching staff to students and benchmark with other reference universities within the country or abroad.*

7., Research activity

The scientific research activity at USAMV Cluj-Napoca is coordinated by the Research, Development and Innovation Council.

Currently, the research infrastructure of USAMV Cluj-Napoca comprises two research institutes - the Institute of Life Sciences and the Institute of Advanced Horticultural Research of Transylvania.

All degree programmes have their own research objectives, included in the strategic plans of the faculties and the university, and the research topics are part of the scientific area of the bachelor/master field.

The international dimension in teaching, research and the public reach at the USAMV Cluj-Napoca seems to be on a brilliant level. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process.

USAMV Cluj-Napoca funds research topics through internal projects.

The publication activity has continuously improved, in particular through an increase in the number of articles published in ISI-listed journals. The national recognition of research results published in scientific articles is also reflected in the large number of awards obtained for them. Awards for scientific research results are published on the website.

In order to encourage teachers and researchers from USAMV Cluj-Napoca to publish their research results in ISI listed journals, it was decided in the Administrative Board and Senate since 2017 to financially support the publication of scientific papers.

According to the National Metaranking report for 2023, which includes only 30 universities (28 state, two private) out of 89 in Romania (52 state, 37 private), USAMV Cluj-Napoca ranks 19th.

A number of 15 scientific journals are published under the aegis of USAMV Cluj-Napoca, on specific areas of interest.

The International Conference "Life Sciences for Sustainable Development" has been organized every year by USAMV Cluj-Napoca for 22 years.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intensive collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities, and state institutions. Students are permanently participating on contests, exhibitions, and conferences. Their ideas, knowledge and concepts should be an integral part of the future of the university. It is also important to point out that the concept of sustainability appears in many projects: this strategic orientation could help to prepare the next generations for the economic, social, and environmental challenges of humankind.

Recommendations:

- *Benchmark with similar institutions and compare key parameters (curricula, research, mobility numbers, etc.).*
- *Continue to seek partnerships with similar institutions within the same country or abroad to provide a framework for student and staff mobility.*
- *Continue efforts to direct the results of scientific research towards publications and other results with national and international relevance.*

8., International cooperation

USAMV Cluj-Napoca places a special emphasis on internationalization, as member of many prestigious international organizations. The Erasmus+ programme is part of the university's internationalisation strategy, which encourages outgoing and incoming mobility of teaching staff and students. Moreover, USAMV Cluj-Napoca has international agreements with 40 foreign universities, mostly in the European Union.

The University annually awards Doctor/Professor Honoris Causa titles to nationally and internationally recognized personalities who have made important contributions to the promotion of USAMV Cluj-Napoca and the title of Honorary Senator.

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational, and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of USAMV Cluj-Napoca these connections seem to be in an excellent level as national and international collaboration has been in develop.

Overall, the USAMV Cluj-Napoca seems to be well internationally networked and anchored and this contributes to the international profile of its main activities.

Recommendations:

- *Increase the membership with international organizations and associations.*
- *Expand the co-operation with other research groups in Romania and abroad.*

9. Quality management

In the Strategic Plan of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca, quality occupies a central place and follows a continuous process of improvement.

Since 2008, the Department for Quality Assurance (DQA) has been established in the university. In USAMV Cluj-Napoca there is a Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance (CEAC), with membership and attributions in the quality field, approved by the Senate. At the level of each faculty there are Quality Assessment and Assurance Committees for each study programme. The CEAC together with the DAC occupy a central position in the quality assurance system, being responsible for the development of quality assurance and quality assessment procedures/tools, the organisation of internal quality audit and assessment processes and the management of quality data. Within the DQA, since 2013, self-evaluation forms for teaching and research activities of teachers, researchers and PhD students have been implemented.

A major importance is granted to student evaluations. The evaluation of teaching activity by students is done every semester, based on a questionnaire.

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca highlights the positions of collective bodies and persons with responsibilities in the quality assurance system at various levels.

The Quality Assurance (QA) of the main processes is paid less attention to at the USAMV Cluj-Napoca. It can be defined as the set of organizational structures, responsibilities, regulations, standards, procedures, tools, and resources contributing to high quality educational services at all stages. An institutional quality management system is regulated and functions within the university.

Reviewing the structure and activities of the quality assurance of the university, these processes are well organised.

The nation-wide competitive advantages of the university justify the need for the continuous quality assurance: the institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes and improve the quality of teaching and research processes.

Recommendations:

- *Consider the possibility for a teacher to respond to individual student feedback in an individualized way (electronically).*
- *Further strengthen certain internal quality arrangements (e.g. benchmarking with comparable institutions).*

Final recommendation

The USAMV Cluj-Napoca well-established university with strong leadership, highly motivated staff, committed students and very favourable support.

I have confidence that the USAMV Cluj-Napoca will continue to contribute to the Romanian society through education, research and its great social engagement

Finally, the overall impression after the visit provides the trust that the leadership, and the university at large, possess the sufficient capacity for stable growth aligned with the national and international standards of academic quality and rigor.

I recommend providing the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca with „high trust” institutional accreditation.

Debrecen, 21 10 2024

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