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The IEP team formed the view that this is likely to present one of the biggest challenges for the university going forward. Indeed, the team noted that the university's track record in this area is still relatively recent, having been included amongst that group of Romanian universities permitted to undertake research and development as recently as 2008. The IEP team paid close attention to the management, governance, and infrastructure arrangements in place at the university to support its work in the areas of scientific research. At senior management level, responsibility falls primarily on the newly created position of vice-rector for research and innovation. For governance purposes, the Senate Commission for Education, Research, and Quality Management is the principal deliberative body, functioning essentially as a legislative body in research matters. The team noted that under the current legal dispensation the vice-rector is not permitted to be a member of that Commission.

However, this post-holder does chair the Scientific Council, a top-level management and operational committee, which includes representation from faculties, through the participation of vice-deans (research), and also has external membership. The Scientific Council makes proposals to the Senate Commission on matters relating to research development, policy and strategy. The team noted that each faculty operates through a Faculty Scientific Research Council, and that these bodies are responsible for ensuring that faculty and department scientific reports are completed on an annual basis for onward consideration by the higher committees. For quality monitoring purposes, the IEP team learned that arrangements were in place at several levels, including the research reports that are considered by department and faculty councils, the monitoring undertaken by project and scientific teams and directors, and the oversight exercised by the central administration.

The team was interested to learn that the vice-rector does not have responsibility for management oversight of the doctoral schools for veterinary medicine, and for engineering and management of plant and animal resources, respectively. The latter is a multi-disciplinary school, while the former is more specialised in the area of veterinary medicine. The schools fall under the remit of the recently established post of manager for doctoral studies, with that post-holder chairing the Council for Doctoral Studies. The team was advised that under current higher education legislation, the ministry requires that doctoral schools and doctoral studies should be organisationally independent of the vice-rector. Other features of infrastructure to support research considered by the IEP team included the research and project management department. This office provides advice and administrative support, including on technical and financial matters, to faculties and research centres. The department also records research outputs and advises on legislative matters and new project funding calls and proposals.

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

In view of the important position of the doctoral schools in the university's research infrastructure the IEP team took the opportunity to look closely at their activities. Each school maintains records of PhD students and research topics, and provides the main point of contact with external bodies, including the ministry. The schools undertake the organisation and administration necessary to support doctoral activity. At the time of the IEP team's visits there were 167 full-time doctoral students registered in the multi-disciplinary doctoral school, of which 132 are state-funded and 35 are fee-paying. The school has 54 approved supervisors. The veterinary medicine doctoral school currently has 77 students, of which 59 are state-funded and 16 are fee-paying. Here there are 21 supervisors. A high proportion of doctoral students have progressed through from Bachelor and Masters studies at UASVM. The team considered the supervision arrangements and the research environment, each of which has an important bearing on the quality of the doctoral student experience. The students with whom the team met confirmed that their experience of facilities, space and library support was positive, and team members also found that relations between faculties and the doctoral school worked to the advantage of doctoral students. Meetings with students and with relevant staff suggested to the IEP team that supervision arrangements

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appear to work well. Students indicated that supervision is undertaken on a regular basis and arrangements for monitoring progress work satisfactorily. Supervision is undertaken by a Doctoral Commission of three members, with supervisors having allegiance to a faculty as well as to their doctoral school. For management purposes, each doctoral school is led by a director, who is jointly responsible to the relevant Deans and to the appropriate Doctoral School Board (CSD). The latter, which includes student representation, is responsible for overseeing doctoral regulations, and doctoral admission, supervision, and examining arrangements. From discussions with all relevant parties, the IEP team formed the view that the arrangements described here are working well.

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

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

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

The IEP team took a close interest in the university's research centres and its research institute. The team noted that research was heavily project-dependent and that project teams owed their existence to project funding generated externally. It was evident to the team that these centres were central to the growth of research at UASVM and are key to how research was viewed, strategically, going forward. Centres are not entirely independent since they were created by the faculties themselves and have been closely linked with them historically. Moreover, links with faculties are close since that is where laboratories and facilities are located. Centres are accountable, in part, to the faculty dean. Directors of research centres are drawn from faculties and have close allegiance to them. Through exploring the differences between a 'centre' and an 'institute' the team learned that the latter enjoyed legal status, and a degree of autonomy not possessed by the former. Further, the university's institute had been established due to restrictions placed upon centres in competing for external funding at national level. The institute, therefore, has acted as an umbrella body enabling centres to seek project funding. Though not formally holding permanent status, research centres are, in practice, dependent on external funds for their continued existence. Indeed, faculty research budgets are themselves dependent on project funding obtained by the centres. Here, reinforcing earlier comments on stiffer competition for external project funding, the

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IEP team was interested to learn that the volume of projects had declined since the peak period of 2008-2010, and today that number stood at around 40.

The IEP team made further progress with enquiries on research matters by focusing on developments in the university's 'third mission' agenda, and knowledge transfer and business interface activities. Observations from some external stakeholders, pointed to a perception that UASVM undertakes fundamental research, while applied research is done by external bodies, such as ministry departments. These external observers were unable to indicate examples where the university had been commissioned and funded to solve industry problems. During meetings with university staff, it was evident to the team that the impact and wider contribution of research, in terms of income generation, was quite low. The team was advised that while some departments and individuals could show impact on society this would not necessarily generate income. In their assessment of these matters the team formed the view that relatively little income is generated from industry, the private sector, or philanthropic sources, and that there are potentially untapped opportunities in this regard.

The view on these matters at the level of top management at the university was quite unequivocal in recognising that more can and should be done and that in order to achieve more impact and to become more competitive in the future, there is a need for an office to support and direct knowledge transfer activity. The team was interested to learn that in the most recent government call for research proposals, economic and industrial partnership was a requirement, as was 25 per cent co-financing. In view of these considerations, the IEP team wishes to encourage the university to make early progress in establishing a Knowledge Transfer Office to work with faculties to improve the level of activity and income in this important area.

In formulating their conclusions on research matters, the IEP team came to the clear view that central to all of the matters discussed in this section, are considerations relating to strategy. The team fully endorses the statement in the rector's Academic Management Plan, that a redefinition of the university's research strategy is required. The team also notes the observation in the SWOT analysis included in the SER that the university lacks a strategy for research visibility. The team notes that, while faced with constraints such as the severe decline in research funding, the university includes in its SER some very bold commitments on introducing strategic measures in matters such as research organisation, resources, and in improving impact and outputs of research. However, in the view of the IEP team the university should proceed with caution in these matters, taking full account of prevailing organisational arrangements. In matters of research strategy the team perceived a possible tension between research strategy drivers at faculty level, and the top-level desire for a transparent research strategy at institutional level. In their investigations on where and how actual decisions were made on formulating research strategy, various responses were provided. The team's attention was drawn to various bodies and post-holders. While it was understood that faculty research strategies are approved by faculty councils, and that Senate formally approves university strategy, in the view of the IEP team, there is a degree of tension here, between the centre and faculties which will require careful management going forward if the university is to achieve the coherence in its research strategy to which it aspires. In summary, while noting the strengths and distinctive nature of much of the research undertaken at the university, in its departments, faculties, and centres, the IEP team has noted both challenges and opportunities in this area and this is reflected in the team's recommendations, as set out below. In formulating these recommendations, particular attention is paid to university-level research strategy, and to matters relating to the sustainability of research. The challenges and constraints faced by the university have been outlined earlier in this section and are not re-stated here. However, prominent amongst these are funding and resources, the sustainability of current research strengths, and identification of potentially new areas of growth. In the view of the IEP team, the university faces hard choices going forward, and will need to develop clear and transparent mechanisms for prioritisation in research. The team also notes the acknowledgement in the rector's Academic Management Plan that some allocation of the university's own resources may be necessary. Here, the team calls to mind the possible use of 'seed money' to stimulate new areas of research.

On the basis of these deliberations, the team makes two recommendations. First, while noting the existence of faculty level research strategies, the IEP team strongly recommends the development of an overarching university

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research strategy, and that this strategy should set clear directions for the future prioritisation and sustainability of areas of research strength, and for areas of potential growth such as business interface, and third mission and knowledge transfer activities. Second, in order to protect, sustain and strengthen areas of research strength (both current and potential) in challenging circumstances, the IEP team advises the university, as resources permit, to consider the merits of introducing a degree of reallocation of resources, for example through using a 'top slice' mechanism