

Service_to_Society_at_UASVM

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

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

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

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

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Other aspects of external relations were considered by the IEP team. In connection with the external profile and contribution of UASVM, the team was informed that it is not possible to undertake postgraduate veterinary specialisation studies in Romania. From the team's perspective, as the first university to establish a veterinary school in Romania, UASVM should give consideration to seeking approval from national authorities for introducing such studies.

On a more general level, the team noted that the university accepts that there is work to be done in the area of marketing, public relations, and public image, including development of the UASVM website. Further, the team was informed of the rector's determination to extend research partnerships with business and industry to support additional employability initiatives, and to develop more internships. Though the team heard that placement and internship opportunities are available to students, it was evident that availability and the level

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

In completing their deliberations in the area of service to society and community engagement, the team reflected on the extent to which external stakeholders and representatives from the wider region were involved in the governance and planning of the university and in strategic matters generally. The team noted that while relations with alumni and external stakeholders more generally appear to be extensive and fruitful and that alumni relations in some faculties are quite strong, such arrangements arise largely from individual professional links and are not reflected in the formal organisational arrangements and structures of the university. In the view of the IEP team, there are benefits to be gained by the university and its external regional and national partners if relations were to be strengthened by incorporating external input more formally into the university's processes.

This is especially important if UASVM is to be responsive in meeting external stakeholder needs through adapting its portfolio and services going forward. Therefore, the team's recommendations on service to society encourage the university to take further steps to maximise the opportunities available for promoting the visibility of UASVM in the wider society. First, while noting the strong alumni links in some of the university's faculties, the IEP team proposes that consideration should be given to the potential benefits of establishing a 'UASVM Alumni Association' to promote the UASVM reputation and 'brand'. Second, the IEP team advises the university to take advantage of the goodwill and expertise of prominent external stakeholders from industry, business and commerce by forming an Advisory Board that can provide advice to the rector and the Senate on opportunities for promoting the regional, national and international interests of UASVM, and related strategic matters.