

Internationalisation_at_UASVM

At senior management level, oversight of internationalisation is exercised by the vice-rector for students, internal and international relations. For administrative and operational purposes, he is supported in these matters by the head of international relations and the office of the public image and relations division. The team learned that while initiatives for international links and developments normally come from faculties and departments, the head of international relations undertakes the administrative and advisory work to formalise and underpin international arrangements. This includes Erasmus matters and agreements with international bodies. From institutional working papers and through discussions with relevant staff, the IEP team noted that in the UASVM deliberative committee structure, international matters are addressed by the Senate Commission for Public Image, and Internal and International Relations, while executive decisions on matters relating to international cooperation and mobility are taken by the Rectorate, acting through the Administrative Council. The vice-rector also leads a Council, with representation from faculties, which mirrors the areas addressed by the Senate Commission. Proposals for new partnerships, the monitoring of agreements with existing UASVM international partners, and requests relating to university participation in international networks for education and scientific research, are included in the business of faculty councils, with matters referred to Senate or to the Administrative Council for approval, as necessary. Matters relating to international students are also discussed by each faculty's Student Commission.

The IEP team also gave consideration to university policy and strategy in this area, and noted there is no dedicated strategy for international affairs. Further, in view of the important part played by faculties and departments in this area, team members were surprised to note that faculty operational planning documentation for 2013 made available to them contained no references to strategic or planning considerations on international matters, even though objectives were set in other areas of faculty activity. The team noted however, that in addition to an earlier strategic planning document from 2008 (Development Strategy 2009/2013), the current rector's Academic Management Plan (February 2012), gave priority to internationalisation in the form of objectives to improve international relations and prestige. In raising these matters with the rector, the IEP team was assured of his concerns regarding the low level of international mobility, research links and other aspects of internationalisation. It was stressed to the team that since taking office the rector has signed several international agreements and that it was his intention that deans and faculties should be set targets for various dimensions of the university's international agenda. In reflecting on these matters, the IEP team would concur with the view that if the university wished to bring about change in this area then clear planning targets need to be set at institutional and faculty levels, supported by transparent arrangements for measuring and monitoring progress.

Meetings with staff and students, combined with scrutiny of institutional documentation, enabled the IEP team to explore the range of international and wider European activities engaged in by various individuals, departments and project teams from the university. The team noted that these projects, academic links and partnerships, agreements, and involvement in networks, extend to both learning and teaching and research, although activity in the latter area is relatively low. The team was also provided with details of 33 current international bilateral agreements in 14 countries, including recently established links in Korea, Indonesia and China. All are approved at Rectorate level. It was evident to the team that when considered together, these activities bring benefits to the wider university and illustrate the potential for future development, if appropriately managed and if partners are carefully selected. In the view of the IEP team, if such arrangements continue to function on a sustainable basis they provide valuable opportunities for UASVM staff in terms of pedagogy and research experience. To date, however, the team was informed that no joint programmes had been developed but that efforts were continuing in this area to seek to achieve synchronisation and alignment with the curriculum structures and academic calendars of other suitable European partner universities.

Other matters of central importance to the university's internationalisation ambitions, and considered by the IEP, included mobility of both students and staff, on an out-going and incoming basis. The team was provided with recent data on Erasmus-related student mobility at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral levels. As is widely recognised across the university, the numbers are relatively low. Moreover, levels of incoming international students showed a slight decline between 2008/2009 and 2012/2013 from 105 to 78 respectively. Here, the figures show that by far

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the highest number is at Bachelor level, with relatively few at doctoral level. Each level contains both budget and fee-paying students. Further, the most recent data show that the number of outgoing Erasmus programme students for 2012/2013 stands at 48 (to nine destination countries). Outgoing staff numbers are noticeably small, with the most recent data showing six staff visiting four countries for visits of up to 10 days duration.

The team learned that a high proportion of outgoing Erasmus programme students came from only one faculty, and that not all faculties had students who took up these opportunities. While the team noted that appropriate selection procedures are in place, based on student academic performance, this variability between faculties is not easily explained. Though some students whom the IEP team met indicated that they would like to see more such opportunities, others pointed to the financial challenges of studying abroad.

Students confirmed to the team that they were aware of such opportunities and that the application process was not difficult. However, it was also apparent to the team that despite grant support (albeit at a low level), for many students the cost of study at a foreign university was a significant obstacle. Where opportunities appeared to be available, the team learned that not all Erasmus places were taken up by students. Nevertheless, students who had taken up such opportunities reported that support and communication from UASVM and the destination university had been good. Regarding staff mobility, as noted, numbers here are historically low, especially for incoming academic staff. While both Erasmus and the EU Human Resources Structural Fund had enabled some mobility, this remains an intractable problem for the university. The university's desire to improve this situation was made evident to the IEP team in various ways and as noted, new agreements have recently been signed by the incoming rector.

The IEP team gave full consideration to the challenges faced by UASVM in matters such as increasing mobility opportunities and attracting foreign students, and noted both the constraints and also the efforts being made to improve the level of incoming and outgoing mobility for staff and students, and the attractiveness of UASVM. However, the team formed the view that there remain steps that can be taken to make the university more attractive and accessible to international students and this is reflected in our recommendations.

Further, as the university works towards meeting its aspirations in the important strategic area of international development, the team advises that measures are in place to ensure that existing resources are used and deployed effectively and that all students who come under the 'international' umbrella get the level and quality of support they require. Two areas in particular attracted the attention of the IEP team. First, matters relating to language support and language training; second, the recognition and portability of credit and qualifications.

Regarding language provision, the team heard in various meetings of intentions to attract foreign students through providing study programmes in languages such as English and French. One faculty reported that its students can present work in English at Bachelor and Masters level, while another faculty indicated that it has imminent plans to commence delivery through the medium of the English language. The team also learned that the faculty of veterinary medicine will submit plans to ARACIS in spring 2013, for the first Englishlanguage study programme in veterinary medicine. The team welcomes this development.

Nevertheless, it was apparent to team members that while some members of UASVM staff whom the team met have the enthusiasm and potential to make progress in this area in the future, the university does not currently have the level of expertise or organisational arrangements necessary for significantly developing capacity and capability in this area.

Similar restrictions apply to both incoming international students and to Romanian students who may wish to benefit from language training in English, French, German, or indeed, for some, the Romanian language. Therefore, with these matters in mind the IEP team wish to encourage the continued development by the university of more extensive foreign language programmes and training, for both students and staff.

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In their deliberations on credit recognition, the IEP team learned that, to date, not all faculties were yet able to offer a Diploma Supplement. Further, from discussions with foreign students, the team noted that application and enrolment stages were hampered both by general problems of bureaucracy and by specific constraints relating to the processes for recognition of credit from an applicant's former university, and deficiencies in the UASVM website. Moreover, while the university is aware of the need for a University Centre for Credit Recognition, there are currently no plans in place to develop this. While the team heard UASVM managers describe the stages to be taken during the application process, including consideration of an application by a faculty commission, and approval and registration by the Ministry and by the UASVM Rector, it was evident that there are issues in this area to be addressed by the university if it is to attract more international and EU students. In summary, in the view of the IEP team, the university can be more welcoming to prospective international students. Therefore, the IEP team advises that the university should take urgent steps to ensure that clear and effective processes are in place for the recognition of the qualifications and credit of incoming international students and that support and publicity for this are effective.