

# **BANAT'S UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE „KING MICHAEL I OF ROMANIA” TIMIȘOARA**

## **EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT 2021**

### **Introduction**

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the online institutional evaluation process of the Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine “King Michael I of Romania”, Timișoara (BUASVM) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The online evaluation took place between Tuesday 5 October and Friday 8 October 2021. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of BUASVM focusing on the main points of the improvement of quality, and the present and future development challenges of the university. Before the online visit I received the self-evaluation report of BUASVM. During the evaluation, with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to collect information about the operation of the BUASVM. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

### **Background**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine “King Michael I of Romania”, Timișoara (BUASVM) is operating as an education and research institution having the mission of forming professionals in the field of agriculture and veterinary medicine in Romania. The university has 6 faculties, offering Bachelor, Master, and doctoral study programs on the fields of agriculture and veterinary medicine. In the 2020/2021 academic year, the total number of students was 5837, of which 4498 were undergraduates and 1339 students were learning in master's programs. At the same time, the university had 188 doctoral students in two doctoral schools. With its traditions BUASVM has a significant role in Timișoara and in the country: the experience, the prestige, and the competences of BUASVM show the importance of this institution in the internal and international environment.

## **Legal and Organizational Framework, Missions and Objectives**

Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania", Timișoara is a public higher education institution, with legal personality and autonomy, in accordance with the provisions of the Romanian Constitution, the education legislation and the University Charter. The Charter of the institution is the basic document that provides the guidelines regarding the structure, strategy, and principles of functioning, development, and regulations. The charter provisions have been harmonized with both the Romanian legislation and the principles of the European Space of Higher Education.

The main mission of the institution is to train specialists on the field of agriculture and veterinary medicine that meets the needs of the students and the labor market as well. According to the self-evaluation report, and the other strategic documents of the university, the vision of the BUASVM is consistent with the main principles related to the higher education included in the development strategy of the European Union for the period 2021-2027. The connections and collaboration with other higher education institutions, the innovation and digitalization, the importance of the scientific research, the steps of fight against climate change can be found among the main priorities of the institution and also appear among the aims of the BUASVM. The knowledge transfer role and the capitalization and dissemination of results of research is also in focus in BUASVM.

The annual operational plans at university level and at the level of faculties contain the above-mentioned priorities for the period 2020-2024. Among these objectives there are objectives regarding the didactic activity and quality management, objectives for research, innovation and technology transfer, objectives regarding human resources, objectives focusing on the partnership with students and graduates, objectives that could lead to the increase the visibility of the institution and objectives in connection with the patrimonial consolidation. The university has a strategic plan for the next years (2020-2024); the annual plans are based on this plan. This plan contains the vision and

mission of the university, the proposed strategic objectives, and the main dimensions of the allocation of the available human, material, and financial resources.

The Charter of the BUASVM is the fundamental document which states the principles, functions and objectives and ensure the academic and the institutional frame of the university. According to the Charter, the University Senate is the main decision-making body of the institution, and it is led by the President of the Senate. The Senate includes 39 senators, and 25% of the members are students.

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of BUASVM have proper competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the three faculties of the university, departments, and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. Overall, the mission and the strategic goals of the university are suitable to manage the higher education activities in the fields of agriculture and veterinary medicine, to train high-skilled specialists, develop, and improve professional competences, improve constantly the education process and scientific research.

### **Educational Programs, Teaching Staff**

The university is offering Bachelor and Master and doctoral study programs. Currently, the BUASVM includes 6 faculties (Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry, Management and Rural Tourism, Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resource Bioengineering, Food Engineering) and 29 undergraduate study programs of which 25 programs are in Romanian (23 accredited programs and 2 programs authorized by ARACIS provisionally) and 4 programs are in foreign languages (1 accredited programs and 3 programs authorized by ARACIS), as well as 31 Master programs (28 programs in Romanian, 3 programs in English and 1 program in French). In the institution there is a Department for Teaching Staff Training (DPPD) and 2 doctoral schools (Plant and Animal Resource Engineering and Veterinary Medicine). According to the present number of the students, the educational programs of the university are quite popular, and these numbers are definitely good. The present number of the international students

is not significant yet, so the internationalization of the educational supply could be an important priority of the institution in the future,

The teaching staff of the BUASVM consists of 294 teachers, of which: 71 professors, 75 associate professors (professors and associate professors 49.65%), 116 assistant professors and lecturers, 32 assistants that meet the legal requirements for occupying the positions in the fields of Agronomy, Horticulture, Veterinary Medicine, Animal Husbandry and Food Engineering. From the total number of 509 teaching positions at university level, 57.76% (294) of them are covered by full-time teaching staff and 42.24% (215) are vacant. Of the total number of full-time teachers in the university (294), 97.95% have a doctorate (288). The number of tenured teaching staff is balanced in terms of gender, respectively 166 women and 128 men, as well as in terms of age ranges: the age structure and the academic composition is good, and the university pays great attention to the training the new generation of teaching staff as well. According to the received documents and information, the titular teaching staff in BUASVM has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and training processes. The teaching staff of BUASVM enjoys national and international recognition and appreciation as well.

Although the present number of students is at a good level, due to the permanently changing higher education environment, needs and expectations of the students, it is very important to pay attention to the changes in the demands of the potential students. The internationalization also should be an important priority in the future, the institution has to make steps to grow the numbers of students who attend foreign language programs and may develop new educational programs that reflect appropriately for the changing needs and attract new groups of potential students.

According to the received information, during the virus crisis, despite the special features of the training, the university has managed the online education quite well. It is also important to emphasize that some parts of the online education should be kept after the

COVID situation is going to be over: from the feedbacks of the students, it seems that some of them prefer certain online practices.

### **Material assets**

According to the received information, the material resources are well suited for the educational and teaching process. During the last years, there has been a permanent investment in infrastructure and material assets to modernize the teaching spaces and build new spaces. BUASVM has made constant efforts, year after year, to acquire the equipment necessary for the teaching process, and scientific research, as well as for the administrative activity. The existing equipment and the facilities are in accordance with the technical standards and meet the needs of the students and the academic staff.

The capacity of the educational spaces (amphitheatres and classrooms, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the technical, safety and hygienic-sanitary norms. The five student dormitories (15552 m<sup>2</sup>) with 435 rooms offer appropriate accommodation for 1610 students. According to the report, student dormitories were rehabilitated, the rooms were furnished with new furniture, laminate flooring and ceramic tiles, and the sanitary areas were brought to high standards. There is Internet connection in each dormitory room. The university has a canteen (1895 m<sup>2</sup> and 1,500 dining places) as well. The BUASVM sports base located on the university campus, and it was modernized in 2008 (5900 m<sup>2</sup>). The sports base consists of outdoor sports fields, gym, and locker rooms. BUASVM also has a student dispensary, having in its composition a general medicine dispensary and a dental office, the medical services being provided by the Timișoara City Hall. The general medicine office benefits from the services of a specialist doctor and is equipped with modern equipment, serving both students and staff of the university.

The university also has large agricultural lands in various locations and categories of use with an area of 2984.3837 ha (of which 173729 m<sup>2</sup> are located at the BUASVM Campus, where most teaching, and scientific research activities take place) Most of the campus buildings have been rehabilitated in recent years; these buildings offer very

good conditions for study, teaching and research. As the part of the BUASVM, the Didactic Resort Timișoara (SDT) with a total area of 2870.62 ha and includes horticultural crops and zootechnical farms, where students carry out some of their practical activities and specialized practical trainings as well. The zootechnical farm, the didactic base "Young Naturalists" (STN), the technological hall for sturgeon breeding and the Voiteg Agricultural School also serves the education and research activities of the university. The BUASVM also has a large library and an own publishing house (Agroprint Publishing House).

Overall, the university meets the demand of European standards. It is also important to point out that from last year, due to the COVID situation, the university, just like other higher education institutions, has started to organize the educational activities online. According to the received information, the university managed to cope with this atypical situation quite well. On one hand, because of the online solutions, the current use and utilization of the infrastructure is certainly lower than the previous periods, but the university must pay permanent attention to maintain and develop the infrastructure of education and take advantage of some online opportunities.

### **Financial activity**

As a nonprofit institution, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. During the present virus crisis, the expenses have become certainly lower although the maintenance of the built infrastructure results a permanent fixed cost. On the other hand, the good reputation of BUASVM attracts a lot of applicants and the number of students has been rising in the last five years. Parallel with this, the university should continuously focus on finding other outside resources, extra budget incomes, grants and projects that help to keep a well-balanced financial performance. The good reputation of BUASVM 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. There is also a financial assistance for students as they could apply for scholarships and other forms of financial supports.

## **Students**

According to the number of students in the last 5 years the growth is remarkable and clearly shows the permanent interest, and the university attracts large number of students from year to year. Students also benefit from Erasmus+ mobility at 107 partner universities in the EU and have connections with other higher education institutions from other countries of the world. In these programs, parallel with the student mobility there was also an intensive teacher mobility until the virus crisis. In Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with these universities from abroad, even during the COVID period and permanently increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities in the future.

In 2012, a Center for Psychological Counseling and Career Guidance was established in the university, and it is operating right now under the name BUASVM Center for Career Counseling and Guidance (CCOC). To facilitate the relationship with the work market, but also to be aware of the employers' requirements, a "Job Fair" is organized twice every year, as well as thematic visits to see the activities of various companies and presentations of companies for the university. Large share of the students manages to find their place in the world of work.

There are also scholarships and other forms of material or financial support for students approved by the BUASVM Senate, and it is made public on the BUASVM site ([www.usab-tm.ro](http://www.usab-tm.ro)). There are also great numbers of social and cultural services provided by the University to the students, many cultural and professional initiatives have taken place. The Excelsior Alumni Foundation is a well-defined structure that attracts and rewards former university graduates who have had notable achievements in their professional careers and who add value both as visibility and as an example for current students. As the part of the evaluation process there were online meetings with the present students, graduates, and employers as well. Students and graduates were very loyal to their university and have paid a lot of attention to their studies, and they were satisfied with the university and the educational processes.

## **Research activities**

BUASVM plays an important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. 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. Scientific research is one of the biggest challenges in the strategy of the university. Due to the complexity and diversity of research areas addressed by members of the university academic community, the research areas of the BUASVM include both fundamental and basic research, with a greater international impact, with more significant publications and applied research, with a more extensive practical emphasis on business and industry. It should be noted that, in the context of the reduction of state funding for research, the university seeks to conclude research projects in the socio- economic environment, with direct and immediate application, based on an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving demanded by economic agents in the country and abroad.

The BUASVM collaborates with partner universities in the country and abroad as well. The university focuses its research-innovation strategy towards research activities that provide results which have economic relevance. The priority research areas of the BUASVM are focusing on bioeconomics, biosecurity and food safety, energy, environment and climate change, eco-nanotechnologies and advanced materials, smart agriculture and smart technologies, management of critical infrastructure elements, management of emergency situations, by developing strategies for combating bioterrorism and biohazard. The research infrastructure of the BUASVM is included in the framework Research Institute for Biosafety and Biotechnology, consisting of the Interdisciplinary Research Platform, the “Horia Cernescu” Research Laboratories Complex, as well as 17 other research laboratories.

It is important to note that in the period 2015-2020, more than 50 national and international research topics were developed in the BUASVM, over 100 with the economic environment and a further 41 topics were declared eligible for national and international competitions, but unfunded. The scientific research activity carried out in



the period 2015-2020 at university level resulted in the publication of over 2166 articles and scientific papers. Also, over 364 books have been published in prestigious publishing houses in the country and abroad. Technology Transfer Center within the university ensures the transfer of research results to the socio-economic environment. Because of the geographical location of the Banat region, the university is involved in many cross-border projects.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual and student level as well. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, and collaboration with organizations, universities, and state institutions. Students are permanently participating on scientific events. Their knowledge, and performance clearly show the role, importance, and good performance of the institution.

### **International Relations and visibility**

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific and educational fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. BUASVM pays more and more attention for collaboration with universities, or other institutions in Europe and all over the world. To manage these connections effectively relies on the available financial background, the level of intention to establish and manage real partnerships and cooperation from which the partner institutions could benefit and finally, how much work is invested in managing these relationships properly, if partner institutions have the same level of interest. In case of BUASVM it seems that there is strong intention that parallel with managing the present international directions, establish new partnerships to raise the level of international visibility and collaboration of the institution. This strategic orientation could be an important part of the internationalization of the university. With the participation of the colleagues of the partner institutional connections, it is an important priority – even in the online world – to organize scientific conferences and academic events. Students and teachers also have a wide range of possibilities to participate in mobility programs. It is important to point out that even in the period of COVID, when the personal contacts

have been changed, the institution must pay attention to find the appropriate management of its contacts if the present situation drags on and the online world lasts longer.

## **Quality Assurance**

According to the self-evaluation report, BUASVM has a set of operational structures, the infrastructure, and has developed the policy and strategies to generate the institutional framework for quality assurance and its continuous improvement, to consolidate the quality culture and update its internal quality standards in accordance with national reference standards and performance indicators for evaluation and quality assurance in higher education. In the BUASVM, quality assurance actions are coordinated by the Quality Assessment and Assurance Commissions (CEAC-U), established by Senate decision. CEAC-U is subordinated to the rector, who is directly responsible for the quality of education provided by the BUASVM. The operational management of CEAC-U is ensured by a coordinator appointed by the Rector. CEAC-U reports to the Quality Assessment and Assurance Commissions at the faculty level (CEAC-F). CEAC-F are led by a quality assurance officer (RAC-F) and are made up of quality assurance officers from the teaching departments (RAC-D), responsible for quality assurance of the study programs (RAC-PS). These commissions (CEAC-F) have responsibilities pertaining to the quality of the study programs they manage. At the level of the two doctoral schools, persons in charge of quality assurance (RAC-SD) are designated and they are coordinated by RAC-IOSUD.

Establishing a results-oriented quality assurance policy to identify measures for continuous improvement of the quality management system, focusing on developing the organizational quality culture, as well as involving all the staff in continuous quality improvement and increasing responsibility for quality assurance for all employees, students, and employers, are among the constant concerns of the top management of the BUASVM. The quality assurance policy of the BUASVM emphasizes student-centered education. Therefore, the aim of all organizational structures is to create a database that highlights the number of students and the success rate, the success of

graduates on the work market, the level of students' professional satisfaction, the efficiency of the faculty, socio-demographic structure, learning resources and their cost. Students are important partners in all evaluation processes and have legal representatives in the evaluation and quality assurance commissions established at all organizational levels.

Reviewing the structure and activities of quality assurance of the institution, these processes seem to operate well, but it is important to point out that the main principle and objective has to be that quality assurance become an integral part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus permanently.

### **Public information**

The BUASVM ensures the public transparency of data and information, in printed form and in electronic format, regarding all qualifications and study programs, the timeliness, correctness and validity of this information. The public information can be found on the BUASVM site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian and foreign languages. Although there is much information can be found on the website in foreign languages, if the internationalization is going to be a priority in the next years, the foreign language contents should be developed intensively.

On the BUASVM website <http://www.usab-tm.ro>, updated and correct quantitative and qualitative information and data are presented about qualifications, study programs, diplomas (diploma supplements are offered free of charge), teaching and research staff, admission, facilities offered to students and other aspects of interest to the public. The Internet (<https://www.usab-tm.ro/>) and Intranet ([intranet.usab-tm.ro](http://intranet.usab-tm.ro)) information and communication systems involving members of the university community a BUASVM, including students, administrative staff, as well as other beneficiaries and partners of the

university, thus responding to public interest. All employees have an institutional email address.

Internal websites are also organized at the level of faculties and departments, which provide data on undergraduate, master's, doctoral and postgraduate studies, the structure of the academic year and other information for students. A special section is allocated to the admission, at the level of each faculty, which presents data regarding the number of places offered for competitive application, the situation of the registrations and the results of the admission.

The BUASVM has developed internal policies and procedures for attracting candidates to university admission. Promoting the university in terms of faculty structure, number and content of the accredited study programs, student accommodation facilities, scholarships and other forms of material support are achieved through collaboration protocols between the university and the County School Inspectorates. These protocols enable the access of university teachers in the pre-university educational institutions to ensure an information service regarding the educational offer of the university. The university also addresses students in the final years of high school to make choices appropriate to their skills, interests, and personality traits (presentations such as “Open Days”) and for informing and advising them on the educational options available within the university curriculum and the transferable credit system at university level. Annually, the university publishes an Admission Brochure, which provides potential candidates with all the information regarding the organization of the admission process for the current year. The university also organizes online admission registration. Collaboration relations are established with different local TV and radio stations, as well as with the editorial teams of some regional and national dailies.

## **Conclusion**

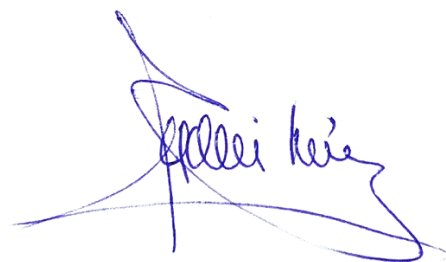
My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have read and what I have heard before and during the online visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the

university management in the process of permanent improvement. Overall, BUASVM is on the right path and meets the needs of educational and professional training standards, the social and economic development needs of the community and European standards of education and scientific research. I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, changing educational conditions in the online world during the COVID period),
- The university permanently has to keep the present role and the place in local and international market,
- 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 investment in human capital,
- BUASVM should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow,
- If the present pandemic situation drags on for longer time, BUASVM, just like other higher education institutions, has to pay intensive attention for taking the possible advantages of it and might keep some parts of the online methods when the virus crisis is going to be over,
- The university permanently has to manage its existing national and international partnerships and should establish new partnerships with institutions and organizations,
- Due to the nature of the institution, the teaching of sustainability and sustainable development knowledge elements and competences should be an important priority in the future: generations who attend educational programs are probably going to face with the growing sustainability challenges of humankind much more intensively than the present generations.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector and all the University staff for the support during this online evaluation. At last, but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

Pécs, 10-21-2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Iván Zádori', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Dr. Iván Zádori PhD  
Associate Professor  
University of Pécs  
Hungary