![IEP — EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme]

Sakarya University, Turkey

Final Report

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Sakarya University (SAU), Turkey which took place in March and April 2016.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:
- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Sakarya University's profile

1.2.1 Sakarya University (SAU) has its origins in the establishment of the Sakarya School of Engineering and Architecture in 1970. SAU was confirmed with its current title by national law in 1992. The main, and by far the largest, university campus is located on the edge of Sakarya city centre. It is situated on a high promontory above the city and the campus has been developed with sympathy to its surrounding area and with a clear desire to offer a pleasant environment for its student and staff communities. Other sites, mostly for vocational schools, are located in the surrounding area mainly to the

north and south of the city. Travelling times between the main campus and other sites can be up to 40 minutes although there is a good local transport network that allows students and staff to access all sites relatively easily. SAU also benefits from being in relatively close proximity to Istanbul. The region provides a well established and thriving commercial and industrial environment for the work of the university, with the automotive industry being one of its key strengths.

1.2.2   There is a strong sense of the corporate identity of the institution but faculties and vocational schools are used to devolved responsibilities and accountabilities; an important consideration given the size of the university and the fact that it operates on a number of sites. At the time of the evaluation there were 16 faculties, 5 schools, 15 vocational schools, 5 institutes (i.e. graduate schools) and 15 research and application centres.   The faculties vary in size in terms of student numbers from the largest (engineering; arts and sciences; political sciences) with between 7,000-8,000 students to others with around 3,000-6,000 students (natural sciences; management; education) and smaller faculties with under 1,000 students (fine arts; law; communication). The vocational schools follow a similar pattern, while the institutes range from the very small (health sciences – 220), to the very large (social sciences – 6,311). The research and application centres embrace areas such as Balkan studies; intelligent systems; and Turkish education. The subject range is wide-ranging and merits SAU being described as a *comprehensive* university.

1.2.3   The total number of students as stated in the self-evaluation report (SER) is **86,595** (as at the date of the Report, January 2016). Figures in Appendix 4 of the SER show this total figure broken down in the key areas as follows: 72,295 enrolled in first cycle studies; 11,791 on second cycle studies and 1,909 on third cycle studies[1]. The size of the student population, and its continued growth, is one of the defining issues and challenges for the university.   Indeed the growth of student numbers, without matching staff and other resources, is understood to be a sector wide problem in Turkey.

1.2.4   The university recruits in the region of 21,000 new students across all cycles each academic year. These students come largely from the Marmara region of Turkey but also include recruits from other parts of the country. Around 3,400 international students (all years) are enrolled in the 2015/16 academic year with the largest numbers coming from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Syria, Afghanistan and Kosovo. The complete range of countries involved in sending students to SAU is very extensive. When asked why they chose SAU some home students responded by saying that it was an easy commute while others referred to the fact that SAU was more student oriented than more traditional universities, which tended to revolve around academic staff needs rather than the student experience. The international students that the team met offered a range of reasons for choosing SAU, including siblings already studying in Turkey and cultural similarities to their home country. However, a key factor for a number of them was the availability of a full scholarship from the Turkish Government.

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[1] The SAU website currently shows a slightly different figure for 2016 with a total student population of 84,535 (Fast facts section).

1.2.5 Government legislation on higher education involves a strong controlling influence over a number of areas of activity, particularly in the area of finance. The SER provided a helpful grid outlining the boundaries of autonomy for SAU.

1.3 The evaluation process

1.3.1 The self-evaluation process was undertaken by:

Asst. Professor, Dr Tuba **Canvar Kahveci** (Chair)
Assoc. Professor, Dr Ahmet **Ozmen**
Alev **Sevincli (**Head of Strategic Planning)
Assoc. Professor, Dr Filiz **Ertugral**
Asst. Professor, Dr Gokham **Ergen**
Assoc. Professor, Dr Hakan **Tunahan**
Assoc. Professor, Dr Mehmet **Bayrak**
Asst. Professor, Dr Nermin **Akyel**
Assoc. Professor, Dr Nese **Guller**
Enes **Aktas** (student)

A core team of Tuba Canvar Kahveci, Mehmet Bayrak, and Hakan Tunahan prepared the SER. The report was then reviewed by the Rector and the university Senate. The team was informed that the SER remained substantially unchanged following this review process.

1.3.2 The SER*,* together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in February 2016*.* The first and second visits of the evaluation team to the university took place on 13-16 March 2016 and 17-20 April 2016 respectively. In between the visits SAU provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

1.3.3 The overall coverage of the documentation sent to the IEP team was comprehensive, well-organised and professionally presented. It included both qualitative and quantitative indicators and all documents had been translated into English.

1.3.4 In a meeting with the team, the Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) emphasised that they saw their response to the core IEP questions as a way of helping to better manage the institution. The university had established four key pillars within their process model: education and training; research and development; application and social services; administrative and support services. In preparing for the IEP evaluation they had built on existing approaches to process management. The team was told that SAU was well developed in this respect because details of processes were well documented and transparent, not least through publication on the university's website. It was acknowledged, however, that reaching students in connection with the IEP process had been problematic. This was explained in part as being as a result of the size of the institution.

1.3.5 The team was advised by the SEG that the SWOT analysis included in the SER built on an earlier analysis that formed part of the development of the university's Strategic Plan 2014-2018. As part of the self-evaluation process, the SEG had undertaken

further site visits to academic units and, on the basis of those visits and associated analysis, had updated the earlier SWOT. The team asked how far the SER had been the product of consultation with staff and students and was told that, in addition to the meetings in the academic units, there had been full discussion in the Senate and the Student Senate. There had also been coverage through student groups and clubs. During the meeting with the SEG it was clear that the IEP process had helped student representatives learn more about quality processes and how they affected students. This had been an important learning curve for students.

1.3.6 The university's most senior management stressed that engagement with external benchmarks was a central plank of SAU's quality strategy. It was a way of managing progressive change and there was now an empirically based belief that the model at SAU coincided with the key tenets of quality systems found in higher education institutions across the world. Strategic aims at SAU were comparable, for example, with those in Pakistan and Malaysia. As further evidence of this approach SAU was also seeking accreditation in the United States (through the Higher Learning Commission based in Chicago). The team commended the university's commitment to the IEP evaluation; but felt that the focus on processes in the SER did result in it being somewhat inward looking and perhaps lacking in self-reflection and critical analysis, in particular in the SWOT analysis.

1.3.7 Even though it is a relatively new university, SAU has become an experienced institution in terms of external scrutiny. Leadership from the top of the organisation is clearly the driving force behind this commitment to external evaluation and accreditation (at both the institutional and programme level). Such an approach, it was suggested to the team, supported the university's ambition to compete in a highly competitive global market and one that no longer recognised national borders. Such external scrutiny of quality systems was also seen as an essential response to business and economic pressures that demanded highly qualified, motivated and competent graduates.

1.3.8 The team was impressed by the commitment of the university's senior leadership to assuring and enhancing the quality of its education through peer review processes such as IEP. In conversations with staff and students there was evidence of general awareness of the IEP evaluation, although the close engagement of staff and students was, as previously mentioned, somewhat limited due to the size of the institution.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:
- Professor Henrik Toft Jensen, former Rector, Roskilde University, Denmark, chair
- Professor Simona Lache, Vice-Rector for University Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Professor Jean-Pierre Gesson, former President, University of Poitiers, France
- Ms Olena Rusnak, student, National University of "Kyiv –Mohyla-Academy", Ukraine
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, UK, coordinator

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1   Sakarya University is a state higher educational institution and, as such, is regulated by national higher education laws. There are 180 universities and academies in total in Turkey, 104 being state universities. The team was advised that SAU was ranked 34th in Turkey and the aim was to improve that position to 20th.

2.2   In the SER the mission of the university is described as:

   'To educate entrepreneurs who contribute to the commonly shared core values of humanity and to produce information, technology and service with a universal appeal'.

   The vision of the university is said to be:

   'To become a university that shapes the future of its stakeholders both in Turkey and in the world by means of its universally accepted information and the technology produced'.

2.3   The most senior academic body is the Senate (61 members), chaired by the Rector; executive management is through the Rector's Board (26 members, plus Secretary General as 'reporter'). The team found the overall structure of governance in the university to be coherent and effective. Staff and students understood the principles of this governance model and seemed reassured by the checks and balances that it offered through the interaction between the executive and the deliberative forums of the university, especially the Senate. This was supported by a highly committed and driven institutional leadership that provided a clear focus for meaningful decision-making in support of the university's mission, vision and strategic aims and ambitions. The team felt that it was of critical importance that this driving leadership was sustained in the medium to long term.

2.4   Students are represented on the university Senate (2 members) and are involved in the management direction of the university through a Student Senate (44 members), although the team noted that this included only a very small number of women. The university was aware of the lack of representation of women on the Student Senate and stated that it was working with students to address that imbalance. While the Student Senate is clearly an important vehicle for the student voice it is not entirely independent as it is chaired by the Rector or a Vice-Rector or a Dean.

2.5   In its meeting with members from the Student Senate the team heard that this forum had only been in existence for a few months and that its introduction had been a management initiative. Prior to this, student views tended to be channelled through the Student Council. Some students commented that the Student Senate was more representative and less bureaucratic than the Student Council and the team was advised that it was made up of: 'successful' students; faculty representatives; international students; those with a disability. There was a concern voiced by some students that the Student Senate was something of a PR exercise for management. However, representatives on the Student Senate also noted that the university leadership had stated that it wanted SAU to be a world class university and that to

further this ambition it wanted to hear from students about what was good and what was negative about the institution so that those opinions could be used as an instrument for change and improvement.

2.6   Students indicated that, for the time being, the Rectorate was being supportive and communication was good. They felt that it was important to see whether such high level management support continued after the IEP evaluation had been completed. The university also highlighted in the SER the importance of the role of Dean of Students and the Student Council as mechanisms for supporting student interests. However, students that the team met from the Student Senate were reserving judgement on the post of Dean of Students as it was another relatively new initiative that needed to be tested.   The team was impressed by the university's willingness to encourage the student voice in the development of SAU and found the introduction of a Student Senate - said to be the first of its kind in Turkey - an interesting innovation.   Ideally, the team felt, there should be greater representation for students on the university Senate; *and the team recommended that the Rectorate investigate the possibility, within the boundaries set by national law, of increasing the number of elected student representatives on the university Senate.* At the very least, the team felt, there was scope for inviting more students to be 'in attendance' at university Senate meetings so that they could observe and understand better the work of the senior academic body at SAU.

2.7   Alongside this, the team saw the potential value of a separate Student Senate, particularly given the significant size of the student body. In this respect, the Rectorate *should continue to develop the participation of the Student Senate in the decision making processes of the university*. It was important, however, that the Student Senate should concentrate on educational matters rather than matters which could be handled by service departments. In time this might lead to students taking full responsibility for the functioning of the Student Senate, including the selection of their own Chair. In the broader context of student involvement and engagement with the improvement of their learning experience and wider learning environment, the team believed that it was important for the university *to support students in understanding internal processes and their role in ensuring that they have proper representation in the university*. This could be viewed as an element in their *training in democratic culture*.

2.8   The Rector has been in post since 2010 and has a further two years to serve in his second (and final) term of office. The view from the Rectorate was that SAU had fewer problems than many other state universities and this, in part, was the result of the discipline of their process management model and the concomitant focus on goals and targets. Accordingly, it was a matter of concern to the university's management that the national government did not allocate the national higher education budget on the basis of success indicators although it was hoped that this might change in the future. The student-staff ratio was seen as a very significant management challenge and this concern was echoed in meetings with staff and students, not least because (1) the university had no control over the placing of undergraduates at the university, this being determined by the state run Student Selection and Placement Centre (OSYM), and (2) there were not enough well qualified academics in Turkey to fill the available staff posts.

2.9   At the executive level the Rector, Vice-Rectors and General Secretary meet for one hour every Monday. Significant discussions also take place in the Rector's Board. One senior manager commented to the team that the management team had been working together for many years and that there had been an important development in collegiate culture following the earthquake in the region in 1999. The team also noted comments that the Vice-Rector roles were helpful in managing a very large institution and agreed that it was sensible to link their roles with the four key pillars of their process model. In discussions with Deans, Vice-Deans and Directors of Vocational Schools there was a broad level of support for the way in which the university worked. Arrangements at faculties and vocational schools largely mirrored central university structures, with Executive, Faculty, and Academic Boards, which was set down by the legal framework for state universities. In practice much of the day-to-day work was undertaken in the departments. The team found sound evidence of effective institutional decision-making through the executive structures and, in particular, was impressed by the sense of working together that emerged from the meetings it held with staff from all parts of the organisation. Good internal communication and information was at the heart of this collegiate approach. In summary, the university gave the strong impression of being an institution that operated with few walls and barriers, something that the team regarded as an important feature of the culture of any successful organisation.

2.10   The university's current Strategic Plan covers the period from 2014-2018. The key critical success factors set out in the plan, as highlighted in the SER, are:

- Student Centredness
- Academic Achievement
- Innovation and Creativity
- Empowering Information Technology
- Encouraging the Use and Sharing of the Information Produced
- Change Management
- Development and Motivation of Staff
- Team Work and Governance

2.11   The team noted that both the mission and vision statements had changed from the previous Strategic Plan (2009-2013) and that there was now a particular focus on entrepreneurship and information/information technology.

The Rectorate stressed the importance of being goal oriented and this was reinforced by comments made by the SEG. Members of the SEG commented that the previous Strategic Plan had concentrated on education and training. There was now a need to do more in relation to research and development and this had been prioritised. Equally, external factors and stakeholders in the country were creating pressure points on universities to focus on employability and applied education. This has been part of a cogent debate within the university which had led to the development of the current Strategic Plan.

2.12   The team found that the Strategic Plan had been well developed and fitted appropriately with SAU's mission and vision. There was, however, some feeling amongst team members that the list of strategic priorities was rather too extensive and that this could present difficulties in prioritisation and monitoring. In response, senior managers commented that the university had adopted a well-developed process management model that was evidence based and that this was robustly underpinned by a sophisticated management information system (SABIS).   The team took some reassurance from this response and indeed saw a range of outputs that emphasised the strength of information, statistics and indicators that were available to management at various levels across the university. The team also noted that these were supported by appropriate action plans.

2.13   The concentration on quantitative measures and outputs should go hand in hand with the qualitative achievements of the university. Clearly it was important for the leadership to challenge managers to respond to specific targets and the team saw sound evidence of how, for example, faculties reported their performance against the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. There was, however, a tendency to set broad goals such as 'to increase', 'to improve' or 'to enhance' which, without a degree of context and informed debate and discussion, might mislead its audience as to the extent of the improvement/enhancement or the specific value of the increase. The team had no doubt that such discourse was taking place in the university but, in its' view, it was important to provide a balance between quantitative and qualitative based scrutiny of the work of the university. Managers and the wider staff and student body needed to be reassured that where they had added value to the work of their department, vocational school or faculty it was recognised in an appropriate way. In other words, the greatest increase might not equate to the greatest value added, particularly in areas relating to pedagogy and the learning environment for students.   Equally it was vital that, in the rush to meet quantitative targets, academic standards were not compromised. Staff in leadership roles needed to act as gatekeepers to ensure that there was balance in the measurement of achievements. In summary, the team felt that the university's senior leadership should ensure that *focus and concern be given also to qualitative aspects of the management model.*

3. Teaching and Learning

3.1   First, second and third cycles of studies are delivered at Sakarya University. The teaching activity for 336 first cycle study programmes is delivered through the vocational schools and faculties. First cycle studies are available in full-time and part-time modes. In 2016 there were 179 study programmes at the second cycle and 91 at the third cycle.

3.2   The total number of first cycle students enrolled in 2016 is 71,388. The number of postgraduate and doctoral students enrolled on programmes is 11,251 and 1,896 respectively. The trend in first cycle numbers is of significant growth (from 57,706 in 2012) while the increase in second cycle numbers over the same period is even more remarkable - close to 100%. Third cycle numbers have moved from 1 347 to 1 896.

3.3   Programmes conform to Bologna requirements, including ECTS and the university was keen to emphasise that it had achieved ECTS 'labels'[2] on two occasions - 2010 and 2013; it was also stated to be the only university in Turkey to recognise prior learning.

3.4   The SER sets out the following aims for all programmes:

- "Ensuring compliance with stakeholder views and expectations, international and national developments in the field on higher education
- Sustaining management and support activities to effectively conduct education and training activities in accordance with pre-defined goals
- Allowing students to gain pre-defined knowledge, skill and competence at associate, undergraduate and postgraduate levels; in order to guarantee that, choosing the most suitable teaching method among alternatives and teaching the subjects in accordance with plans announced earlier; and in all these processes evaluating learning outcomes with a variety of output measurement methods
- Providing students with opportunity to gain technique and practical experience in business life and allowing them to transform their theoretical knowledge into practice and experience."

3.5   The team regarded these aims as offering a sound basis for the delivery of a high quality educational experience for students and commended the university's commitment to practical learning through 3+1 and 7+1 programmes. This was augmented by an established routine of curriculum development that involved local stakeholders. In particular, the vocational schools were seen as providing an important focus for the development of practical, work-based skills and experience that were vital to the local and regional economy. To some extent this practical orientation had been aided by the university's attention to learning outcomes. The development of learning outcomes for modules and programmes had been at the

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[2] The ECTS Labels are honorary distinctions and are awarded to higher education institutions that demonstrate the correct implementation of ECTS principles and requirements.

forefront of education and training goals since 2009, alongside a target for each undergraduate programme to achieve external accreditation. External accreditation was seen as being of particular value in benchmarking both the content and learning outcomes of programmes. The team was impressed by this important focus on learning outcomes; clearly this was part of best practice in programme development and delivery and conformed to the precepts set out in the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The team did, however, want to stress the importance of a balance between enhancement of the curriculum and the measurement of learning outcomes.

3.6   The SER states that study programmes consist of compulsory and elective modules (courses); elective modules can be taken from a university-wide list or selected from a list of optional courses for the individual programme. Double major programmes and, from 2016/17, major-minor programmes are also available to students and these can be taken across faculties. First cycle students took five modules per semester; previously this had been ten per semester but numbers had been reduced to improve quality and efficiency. Class sizes were now restricted to 50 as a result of a Rectorate decision although the team did hear, anecdotally, that there were occasions when this rule was breached. This restriction did, however, create some problems with lack of physical space.

3.7   Faculties and departments were the key players in decisions about programme offerings and the team supported this aspect of local decision making in relation to the development of the academic portfolio. Opening a new programme requires at least five members of academic staff and the appropriate resources. Programme closure can result from a lack of student numbers but the university is dependent on central government control of admissions. All programmes or programme closures have to be approved by the Senate and then the national Higher Education Council and this offered an appropriate level of strategic scrutiny both internally and, given national requirements, externally as well. The team was pleased to see that the university's information system (SABIS) held extensive details of all programmes, including learning outcomes.

3.8   As is noted above (2.10) *student centredness* is regarded as one of the critical success factors in the Strategic Plan. When this area was raised by the team a number of the staff responses related more to the prominence of the student voice, issues of representation on university bodies and non-academic matters such as accommodation and catering, rather than on student-centred learning delivered through the curriculum. Some student comments also reinforced this position with references to the large number of student clubs and the fact that each Faculty Dean would meet with the heads of student clubs once a week. Equally, students stressed the importance of being able to communicate easily with the university authorities - the example of being able to contact the Rector via Twitter was raised on a number of occasions. Faculties and vocational schools provide an orientation programme for new students and each new student is allocated an adviser that can support them in academic or personal matters. In addition, current third or fourth year students provide peer mentoring for the first and second year students. There was also evidence in the vocational schools that external stakeholders were participating in

induction meetings with new students, giving them an important early exposure to the world of work.

3.9   When discussion was steered more directly to pedagogical matters, responses were somewhat uncertain with comments such as 'students and teaching staff come together at the end of each semester to check on learning outcomes'. Assessment methods were said to match learning outcomes. One Vice-Dean also commented that learning approaches would be changed if students were not satisfied. During the team's meetings in faculties some students commented that academic staff used a variety of teaching methods and that assessment instruments included presentations and group work. Some students had felt that their programmes were too theoretical in nature and following discussion with teaching staff they had secured more practical sessions. Some academic staff stated that they were now focussing far more on their interaction with students. In one case, for example, it had become clear that students were struggling with communication and analytical skills and there had been a shift towards assessment tasks that involved more case studies and presentations. One staff member commented that they were trying to create an environment in which students felt as motivated and as engaged as possible. The team therefore recommend that there should be g*reater institutional focus on the student experience of learning and teaching and the role of student-centred learning.* This might be aided *by enhanced support for pedagogical research and the dissemination and sharing of best practice in learning and teaching.* This, in turn, would allow *consideration of new approaches to curriculum delivery*.

3.10   The team recognised that academic staff were dedicated in their desire to provide an effective learning experience and environment for their students and this was even more commendable in that many took on an extra teaching load to counter-balance the impact of the large number of staff vacancies. The team noted that, notwithstanding this high teaching load, academic staff remained positive and largely satisfied with their position. Equally, given the time constraints on staff, the team was impressed by the widely articulated student view that it was easy to gain access to staff, that office hours were well observed and that responsiveness to electronic communication through a variety of media was, on the whole, very attentive and timely. There was, however, a concern from the team that the heavy teaching load would not be sustainable in the medium to long-term. It was clearly already having an impact on staff capacity to undertake research, including in the area of pedagogy. It might also be a factor in some of the higher *drop-out rates* that existed in certain areas of the university, something that the team felt *demanded further and closer analysis*.

3.11   The SABIS system includes support for learning through an internally developed virtual learning environment (VLE). This allows students online access to learning materials such as lecture notes, presentations and assessment tasks. However, the

team wondered how far an internally developed VLE could match some of the more sophisticated functionalities of proprietary VLE software such as Moodle and Blackboard. Certainly from discussions with staff and students the internal VLE was currently being used in a relatively narrow way and staff acknowledged that some of their colleagues did not engage with the VLE even to upload course materials and lecture notes. This reinforced the team's recommendations (see 3.9 above) that more work is needed to support teachers in facilitating student-centred learning and technology aided learning. The SABIS system is also used for communication between students and lecturers and both parties found this useful. Again this confirmed a view found above (3.10) that the relationships between staff and students were based on effective and supportive communication.

3.12   The university's senior management did stress to the team that it understood the importance of improving student-centred learning and that it saw this as a central plank of the university's development. In turn, they recognised that this demanded a change in mind set by some academic staff. The team was told that this needed to be facilitated by staff mobility schemes outside the country so that academic staff could experience a variety of approaches to learning and teaching. The team endorsed this view; however, it also wanted to stress to the Rectorate that this was not a sufficient pre-requisite to deliver change and improvement in the area of teaching and learning. In the context of SAU there was also a requirement to *recruit more well qualified academic staff* and, notwithstanding the known difficulties with suitably qualified candidates, the team urged the university to redouble its efforts to reduce the number of current vacancies.

3.13   Students appear generally content with their learning experience with some commenting on how SAU offered a more rounded approach to learning, with approachable staff and a curriculum that was up-to-date and relevant. Most student concerns related to the physical infrastructure, with comments that classrooms needed updating, that faculty-based libraries would be of benefit as would upgraded social facilities. Students mentioned a number of areas of satisfaction: 24/7 library opening; free laptop service; low cost sports science facilities; a modern and well-equipped congress and cultural centre with daily events taking place; a large mosque on campus; and the benefits of the Continuing Education Centre with access to lectures from international lecturers.

4. Research

4.1   The description of research in the SER is dominated by reference to process; research is managed through three key areas: Knowledge Creation; Project Support and Incentive Evaluation and Monitoring; and Research and Application Centre Management. And perhaps more than any other area of activity in the university, the team found the research environment to be dominated by the measurement of outputs and a focus on international rankings. This was a demanding environment for researchers and one that was driven with considerable vigour by the university's top leadership.

4.2   The team understood that research activity had perhaps suffered in the past because of the focus on education and training in the 2009-2013 Strategic Plan. The current Strategic Plan therefore prioritises research and development and includes eleven strategic goals, including:

- Increasing the proportion of publications, research and creative activities per academic staff member
- Increasing the proportion of national and international projects per academic staff member
- Improving the efficiency of collaboration with stakeholders to enable an increase in R&D development activities at SAU
- Increasing the number of scientific studies aimed at Sakarya and the Marmara region.

These strategic goals were then translated into faculty and departmental action plans. At the level of individual staff members there was a clear expectation that their personal goals would specify the achievement of research outputs.   The Rectorate was conscious that this was a very demanding agenda but stressed that there were some significant financial incentives for staff to undertake research. Over 700 staff members were supported in international activity with priority being given to those with above average publication records. While there were arrangements for research active staff to receive some relief from teaching, there was an expectation for all staff to engage in research so that the university's position in the international research rankings could be improved.

4.3   There were strong indications that this challenging approach by management was meeting with success. All staff members had a record of publication either at the national or international level. International publications cited in the Web of Science had grown from 73 in 2003 to 630 in 2015. 90-95% of these publications were in English, with others produced in German, French and Spanish. The team regarded these as impressive outputs and they ran counter to the impression given during some conversations that there was a 'publications problem'.   What the team took from the debate around publications was (1) the majority of staff clearly have to focus on teaching and often use their free time to pursue their research interests (2) publications in the Turkish language - a service to society - were sometimes perceived

in a less favourable light because they did not contribute to international rankings (3) motivation to undertake research was both self-driven and pragmatic in that promotion opportunities relied on the demonstration of research outputs. It was also the case that academic staff presented themselves as remarkably satisfied with the support they received for research - something that is often a point for criticism in many other institutions.

4.4   The team was therefore keen to see the c*ontinuation of initiatives to support research*. This extended to greater *support for writing applications for national and international projects* either through the Sakarya Technology Transfer Office or in other ways; and, given that English was overwhelmingly the primary language for publications and projects, the team recommended *better incentives for English language proficiency* for those in the research community. This was the more important because there seemed to be an acceptance by staff that the pressures to both take on a heavy teaching load and undertake productive research were part and parcel of working in a state university. From the team's perspective it was admirable to hear of the degree of self-motivation that underpinned staff research activity; however, SAU also had a responsibility to consider the longer term impact on research of a teaching load that, in the view of the team, could not be sustained by simply paying existing staff to do more. It recommended, therefore, *that the extra teaching currently absorbed by existing tenured staff be reduced through the recruitment of additional, well qualified academic staff*. This twin track approach of incentivising research and providing staff with dedicated time for research through a reduction of the teaching load was seen by the team to be an essential basis for the development of a sustainable research base in the university.

4.5   In organisational terms, the team was interested to explore the relationships between research and application centres, institutes and faculties. On the surface it appeared a slightly disjointed arrangement, with institutes (graduate schools), research and application centres and faculties overlapping in some of their responsibilities. For example, third-cycle students are attached to institutes for bureaucratic reasons while teaching staff remained attached to their faculties. All three entities report to the Rector and yet the Vice-Rector for Research and Development is responsible for developing research strategy. The team heard that the institutes stood between teaching and research and development and that discussions on research strategy took place in meetings involving the Rector, Vice-Rectors and the Heads of Institutes.

4.6   Notwithstanding this explanation, the team did have some concerns that there was insufficient prioritisation of research activity and that the existence of 34 research and application centres was symptomatic of a tendency to value quantity over quality. The impact of the research centres was also distorted as staff research outputs were being set against research centres even though the staff researchers themselves were based in faculties. This resulted in a diminished and distorted picture of research in faculties. The team had no wish to suggest direct organisational change but it did

question whether research centres, as presently constituted, were the most helpful structure for enhancing research when resources and staff time were so constrained. Clearly it was important to engender a research ethos across the university and, no doubt, the large number of research centres played a part in doing that by supporting a wide range of research interests. However, at a strategic level there was a need to provide a clearer focus for the research community - it was not possible to sustain in any meaningful way areas of activity that lacked a critical mass. The team therefore recommended that the university *identify and develop centres of excellence* as a way of signaling, both internally and externally, the key priorities of its research agenda.

5. Service to society

5.1 The SER briefly refers to the university's location as offering great potential for industry, trade, agriculture and tourism. This picture of its potential wider local and regional relationships is not developed with specific examples. However, as with other strategic goals, the university has developed a process - Application and Social Services - that 'covers all the activities conducted to increase the university's social impact and…effectiveness…'

5.2 Senior management clearly understands the pressures in the external environment to better prepare its graduates for the world of work. As mentioned previously this has been reflected in re-formulated mission and vision statements that stress entrepreneurship and competence in the use of information and information technology. Staff also commented on their practice of engaging local stakeholders in the development of programmes and this was confirmed by some of the external stakeholders that the team met.

5.3 The team was able to meet with only a small group of external stakeholders (including from the university's Technocity) during the evaluation visits. When asked about the standing of graduates from SAU one stakeholder commented that the general profile of graduates was good - given that the university had no control over admissions and that, annually, between 2 and 2.5 million students enter the national examination for entry to university. Other stakeholders had varied views ranging from SAU graduates being better than the market average to students in civil engineering not demonstrating the relevant knowledge and competencies for the industry. One stakeholder divided SAU graduates into two categories (1) those with an academic orientation who wanted to progress to postgraduate study and a possible career in university teaching (2) those looking to go directly into employment. Those in the first category found it difficult to adapt to the world of work. Another comment was that there was insufficient pressure on graduates to obtain work and that many wanted to be scientists rather than industrialists. The team regarded these as important points made by external stakeholders, not least as a key service to society for any university was the production of well-educated graduates and researchers with relevant skills and motivation. Indeed the team met a number of PhD students whose stated primary ambition was to become teachers in higher education rather than entry to industry or commerce. At the same time the team noted the efforts going into providing elective courses in entrepreneurship for undergraduate students and the university's general strategic thrust towards entrepreneurship, as signs that it was responding to the expectations of business and commercial employers.

5.4 The university also had arrangements in place at both central and faculty/school level to support graduates in their search for employment or further study opportunities.

Some students that the team met confirmed that their faculties used their contacts with local employers to provide information on work opportunities. As might be expected, students in vocational schools were far more focussed on career progression; and the team found that senior managers and staff in those schools were very conscious of the university's mission to help students to contribute to society and also to do so, where possible and appropriate, in an entrepreneurial manner. The 3+1 programmes delivered through the vocational schools, which involve a one semester practical placement, were clearly an important factor for students when applying to programmes at SAU. Students saw the value of testing themselves in a work environment and gaining valuable experience, often using the latest techniques and equipment. Student recruitment was almost entirely from Sakarya or neighbouring cities. Importantly, there was strong evidence in some of the schools of a high take up of employment at the end of programmes (around 75% in some areas). Such graduates generally retained their link with their home city both during practical training and afterwards through local employment; and this was often with the same organisation where they had undertaken their semester's internship. Feedback from placement employers was generally positive and in some areas, for example, health sciences, organisations were looking for additional numbers. However, the ability of vocational schools to respond to such demand was limited by national quotas and to some degree by physical space and resources, particularly in relation to technical equipment. Some of the problems created by the latter were mitigated by collaboration with related faculties. This was the case with the Vocational School of Health Services and the Faculty of Medicine. However, the team did detect some feeling in the vocational schools that internal resource allocation tended to favour the faculties rather than the vocational schools.

5.5   The team did note, however, that there was some variability in the outcomes achieved across the vocational schools. In part this was because SAU was unable to determine the entry requirements for those entering the vocational schools and this resulted, in the case of some students, in low levels of motivation. In this context, however, it was encouraging for the team to hear that vocational schools used social activities based in the community as a way of encouraging greater personal responsibility. This might involve visiting the elderly, planting trees in the countryside and, on occasion, these social activities were organised by the students themselves.

5.6   In terms of links with local industry and business, the team heard that prior to 2013 various efforts towards technology transfer had been made via faculties and the Rectorate. This approach had had limited impact. Since 2013, Sakarya Technocity had become the sole focus for these developments. This had led to more professional relationships being developed with industrialists and there was now a list of over 80 contracted projects worth around 70 million Euros. There were also financial incentives for start-up businesses.

5.7   There was, however, no room for complacency as academic staff understanding of the needs of SMEs required considerable improvement. The most common problem was that industry did not understand the language of academics; equally there was a large gap between what was needed in the world of industry and the university's ability to deliver on that need.   The team was impressed by the rapid development of Technocity and, indeed, this had been recognised externally in 2015 when it was awarded 'The Second Most Developed Technocity in a Year' by the Turkish Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology. There was also strong evidence of faculties such as Computer and Information Sciences working closely with the management of Technocity and encouraging their students to become part of this engagement. The benefits of the university's relationship with business and industry could also be seen in a very tangible way by the construction of a new building for the Faculty of Computer and Information Sciences entirely paid for by industry. Two major motor manufacturers had offices in the building and this resulted in students having a direct relationship with the companies.

5.8   The concept of the 'green campus' is now well embedded in the higher education sector in Europe and beyond.   It plays an important part in an institution's social responsibility and the team was pleased to hear that an initiative relating to the environment, waste and energy management at SAU had been developed into a draft action plan overseen by the Rectorate. The draft action plan included*, inter alia*: measuring and monitoring the carbon footprint of SAU; improving energy conservation and efficiency; renewable energy applications; environmental consciousness and awareness activities and the implementation of a cyclists' campus project. The team was conscious that this more holistic environmental policy was in its early stages and therefore wanted to encourage the implementation stage and signal the need to *promote the 'Green Campus' policy* as widely as possible to students and staff alike.

5.9   In terms of a broader commitment to social responsibility the team noted that SAU was developing a range of open courses and conferences. This was very much 'work in progress' and the university's senior management was aware that these initiatives required nurturing and a degree of faith and patience before they became embedded in the wider culture of the university. The team wanted to encourage these steps; in particular it wanted SAU to *develop and promote initiatives and projects in the region demonstrating the social responsibility of students and staff.* One quick win might be to *open the university's main campus to the wider population* for example at weekends or during the summer vacation.

6. Quality culture

6.1   As with other areas of activity, quality assurance at SAU operates within a Total Quality Management Framework (TQM) and much emphasis is placed on implementing the specific model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The team received a full listing of reporting mechanisms and reports which demonstrated a comprehensively planned, well-managed and disciplined approach to quality control. There was a tangible desire to improve quality culture in both teaching and research.

6.2   External benchmarking is achieved at the programme level through the relevant nationally approved agency e.g. MUDEK for engineering. The SER lists accredited programmes for a number of faculties and indicates that other faculties are either undergoing accreditation or preparing their applications for accreditation. Academic Boards in faculties undertake analysis of study programmes and the quality of the teaching process at the beginning and end of each semester with reports submitted to the Senate on an annual basis. Data from the SABIS system is used as part of this monitoring process and staff appeared to have a high degree of confidence in the output from that system. However, the monitoring process did not extend to the comparison of results across faculties or departments and this might be something that the university could consider in the future.

6.3   Student surveys, conducted on a semester basis, are said to be integral to this monitoring approach; staff advised the team that students had to attend at least 70% of a module to submit a questionnaire on staff performance. The team also heard some conflicting views on how effective such surveys had been. In discussions with the Rectorate, for example, the team was told that the university was moving away from online student surveys as they were prone to manipulation by some students. SAU was therefore looking to organise face-to-face surveys in all departments facilitated by an external evaluator. However, in the meetings that the team had with faculty staff and students, the approach they described was still one of online surveys, augmented by some hard copy surveys, which allowed students to evaluate their professors. In one meeting with students - mostly postgraduate - there was some scepticism about the main questionnaires because of the restrictions of the multiple choice format. It was also suggested that many students did not attach enough importance to their responses because it was unclear to them how the university acted on their concerns. Students indicated that academic staff did receive feedback from these surveys but that this was channelled through the Dean of Students rather than the faculty management structure. Staff members indicated, however, that they could see the results of student responses via their personal staff box on SABIS.

6.4   In the team's opinion, the approach to cultivating student and staff feedback was in need of further reflection and potential rationalisation. There were a plethora of surveys - on employment satisfaction; leadership; administration; peer evaluation and, in the case of students, numerous module (course) questionnaires that all

arrived at the same time and seemed to ask the same familiar questions. The team understood that this was often the inevitable consequence of needing to elicit opinions in a systematic, consistent and fair manner and then analyse the data in a timely manner. However, perhaps there were also opportunities for the university to *refresh feedback methodologies* and gain important 'customer' intelligence from a slightly different approach, for example students might find it interesting to build iteratively on fellow students' comments (pass the baton); equally in terms of staff there were surely opportunities for collegial supervision to play a greater role in the evaluation of academic staff performance. Student opinion on the value of questionnaires and feedback confirmed the initial sense of a boring exercise; however, seeing a positive impact from the comments provided resulted in a greater acceptance of the value of completing questionnaires or using other feedback mechanisms. This reinforced the team's view that creative solutions to feedback fatigue were an important part of the on-going engagement with the student voice.

6.5   It was mentioned to the team by senior management, that academic staff have 88 different performance indicators but the university's ability to deal with poor performance was in practice quite limited. In these circumstances the following sequence for tackling poor staff performance was described to the team by a senior manager: (1) ask why (2) listen to students (3) try to find a solution and (4) if no solution could be found, change the professor. The university provided workshops to support improvements in academic staff delivery but these were not compulsory. At the other end of the spectrum, the university was rewarding good teachers through a points system, although the monetary reward was quite limited.

6.6   The team was left in no doubt about the level of senior management support for an all-embracing quality culture at SAU. In many ways this senior commitment was encapsulated by SAU's hosting of the 2015 International Conference on Quality in Higher Education (ICQH) and the involvement of several members of staff, including the Rector, in the Organising Committee for the conference. This presence on the international quality stage was complemented by a large number of external evaluations and accreditations at SAU through which the university opened itself to peer scrutiny and judgement. All this was facilitated by a dedicated office – Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Coordinatorship - which worked very closely with the Rectorate. The team found ample evidence, therefore, of a clear central direction and management of quality assurance; and a large team of centrally coordinated quality envoys supported staff in faculties, schools and departments with the various quality requirements and initiatives determined by the university. If anything, this produced something of an imbalance of responsibilities and accountabilities across the university. Central direction in this can easily lead to passive acceptance or lack of real ownership of a quality culture rather than the enthusiastic championing needed from each and every member of staff. Clearly there is a balance to be found but, at this moment in

time, the team recommended that *more information, knowledge and responsibility be given to the decentralised units* as a way of *developing a wider quality culture* in SAU.

7.   Internationalisation

7.1   International engagement at SAU starts with the leadership's absolute commitment to learning from best practice and peer review. This is drawn from a wide range of higher education organisations and partners across many parts of the world. As has been mentioned previously, the university's involvement in the IEP process is testimony to the openness with which it allows external international scrutiny and interaction.

7.2   The team also heard a very compelling rationale for the importance of developing internationalisation at SAU. The Turkish Government was continuing to stress the country's position at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and the Middle East. In terms of higher education there was an opportunity to draw on European norms and present opportunities to both Turkish and international students studying in Turkey to engage with the wider European higher education space. Given this position it was essential that the university built on existing work to present SAU in the best possible light. The team met a number of international students that were wonderful advocates for the university. As part of its international recruitment strategy, therefore, SAU should inform prospective students of benefits of studying in Turkey and, in particular in Sakarya. This could be aided, in the first instance, by those benefits being made more visible on the university's website. This was of particular importance if the university was to grow its international student body from 3,400 to 10,000 as highlighted in the Strategic Plan.

7.3   Arrangements for international mobility are managed through the International Relations Office (part of the Department of Student Affairs) and are very much geared to coordinating three key mobility programmes - Erasmus, Farabi (specific to Turkey) and Mevlana (world-wide). There are clear ambitions for greater student and staff mobility and the team was keen to acknowledge the university's efforts to support international mobility of academic staff. However, there was a general acceptance that shortcomings in foreign language capability amongst staff and students acted as a considerable barrier to some of the ambitious targets set out in the Strategic Plan and more widely in progressing internationalisation. The team found a considerable level of enthusiasm for international collaboration when meeting staff from the International Relations Office and there was also clearly a high level of knowledge and expertise among the staff. However, despite this commitment, the team noted a very low number of incoming Erasmus students, notwithstanding the impact of current external factors in terms of students selecting Turkey as a destination for academic exchange. In the view of the team, this needed some further analysis especially as the SER indicates that there are already 255 bilateral Erasmus agreements in place.

7.4   Only a small number of study programmes are delivered completely in English and while this encourages some recruitment of foreign students, the International Relations Office acknowledged that it needed to develop more such courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels to improve overseas student recruitment. In addition, the Continuing Education Centre (SAUSEM) manages the International Education programme and has links with three UK universities (Leeds Beckett; West of England; Hertfordshire). 94 students are currently enrolled on these double diploma programmes. The team endorsed the university's view that *more programmes/courses needed to be taught in English if the university is to meet its stated targets*. Alongside this, it was also important to put in place arrangements to support the *improvement of foreign language skills across the university*.

7.5   Ultimately the team took the view that activity and performance at the 'micro' level in respect of internationalisation had developed reasonably well at SAU. Staff in this area - coordinators and administrators - were diligent, and international students were reasonably well supported. However, at the 'macro' level, the university manifestly lacked a detailed internationalisation strategy. Equally the international banner was not prominent on the SAU organisational diagram. The International Relations Office is hidden in Department of Student Affairs - with a reporting line to the Secretary General. While internationalisation is part of the remit of one of the Vice-Rectors it struggles to receive the necessary level of senior management engagement. Given, therefore, the importance of internationalisation across all areas of activity in the university, the team encouraged the Rectorate to *consider developing a specific senior manager post to drive forward internationalisation strategy and support the coordination of exchange programmes*.

8.   Conclusion

8.1   Sakarya University is a very self-aware institution with a high level of knowledge of what the university is trying to do and of the results of efforts by its staff and students. It is also an ambitious and outward looking university that is used to external engagement and which has in place well developed systems and processes for governing and managing the institution.   There might be some scope for refining organisational arrangements but often the team heard that certain forms of change were constrained or prevented by higher education laws in Turkey.

8.2   The university set out to the team in some detail the various mechanisms involved in the delivery and enhancement of a quality culture. This was often based on set piece reporting - sometimes at great length and with centrally delivered information and data that was sometimes difficult to assess. Notwithstanding these comments, SAU gives the strong impression of being an extremely well lead and managed institution that plans carefully for the future. The team found an eager staff body and students and a visionary leadership.   In particular, SAU seeks external confirmation of its standards both at an institutional and programme level. In the view of the team the university could develop further by *adding qualitative reflections and initiatives to the high level of knowledge based on quantitative data and the application of the management system*.

8.3   To sum up, the team has the following positive impressions of Sakarya University:
- We realised that Sakarya University is a very self-aware institution with a high level of knowledge of what the university is trying to do and of the results of efforts by staff and students
- We have met students with high levels of satisfaction
- We have met a hard-working and positive staff body committed to their mission
- We have met a well-informed leadership supported by evidence based systems
- We have seen a high level of internal communication and information - a university with few walls and barriers
- We have seen an extensive desire to improve quality culture in both teaching and research
- We have seen a well managed university and faculty/vocational schools
- We have seen an attractive campus
- We have seen an eager staff body and students and a visionary leadership.

9. Summary of Recommendations

Governance and Institutional Decision-Making

1 Give more focus and concern to for qualitative aspects of the management model
2 Continue to develop the participation of the Student Senate in the decision making processes of the university
3 Support students in understanding internal processes and their role in ensuring that they have proper representation in the university (training in democratic culture)
4 Investigate the possibilities of increasing the number of elected student representatives on the university Senate

Teaching and Learning

5 Put greater focus on the student experience of learning and teaching and the role of student-centred learning
6 Give enhanced support for pedagogical research and dissemination and sharing of best practice in learning and teaching
7 Consider new approaches to curriculum delivery
8 Analyse the drop-out rate
9 Try to recruit more, well qualified staff

Research

10 Continue initiatives to support research, including giving greater support for writing applications for national and international projects
11 Identify and develop centres of excellence in the university
12 Provide better incentives for English language proficiency
13 Reduce extra hours in teaching through recruitment of more, well qualified academic staff

Service to Society

14 Develop and promote initiatives and projects in the region demonstrating the social responsibility of students and staff
15 Open the campus to the wider population
16 Promote the Green Campus policy

Quality Culture

17 Support the development of a wider quality culture
18 Explore the use of new feedback methodologies, for example 'pass the baton'; collegial supervision

19   Give more information, knowledge and responsibility to the decentralised units rather than relying on central direction of quality initiatives

Internationalisation

20   Inform prospective students of the benefits of studying in Turkey and, in particular in Sakarya, for example by flagging the benefits more visibly on website
21   Offer, more programmes/courses taught in English
22   Support the improvement of foreign language skills across the university
23   Consider developing a specific senior manager post to drive forward internationalisation strategy and support the coordination of exchange programmes.

University Culture

24   Add more qualitative reflections and initiatives to the high level of knowledge based on quantitative data and the application of the management system.

Thanks

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