



EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

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**AFYON KOCATEPE UNIVERSITY**

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***EVALUATION REPORT***

*June 2010*

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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Afyon Kocatepe University (AKU) - Turkey. The preliminary visit took place on 15 - 18 March 2010 and the second and final evaluation on 1 - 4 June 2010.

### 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 distinctive features of the IEP 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 it know it works?
  - How does the institution change in order to improve?

### 1.2 Afyon Kocatepe University and the National Context

Higher Education (HE) in Turkey currently comprises 139 State and Foundation (private) universities. Afyon Kocatepe University (AKU) was created as a State university in July 1992 although its history dates back to 1974 as the Afyon Finance and Accounting High School. Since then, new faculties have been developed, whilst others have been separated out, to form part of Uşak University.

In 1981 a Higher Education Council (YÖK) was established in Turkey to undertake the regulation, planning, coordination and oversight of higher level education within the context of the Turkish constitution and relevant laws. The YÖK has a considerable and direct influence on the daily



operation of the University including manpower planning, staff appointments and remuneration, the creation of new faculties, departments and centres and the establishment of new programmes of study including the number of students on those programmes annually.

Other bodies outside the University also influence the direction and operation of the University. YÖDEK provides the framework for academic quality assurance processes. Government ministries such as Health, Industry and Commerce, National Education and Agriculture play an important role in the life of the University. The Ministry of Finance is of key significance in agreeing the detailed budget against income and expenditure heads.

Legislation dictates organisational structures and committees (their functions and membership). The law limits the degree to which the University can exploit research and development opportunities in cooperation with the private sector. (Private universities are not subject to these same restrictions). It was stated however, that YÖK now had a more realistic view about university relationships with private enterprise but the Ministry of Finance had yet to liberalise the regime under which the State universities operate.

A number of senior management posts within the University are determined, or strongly influenced, externally. Faculty Deans are appointed by YÖK on the recommendation of the Rector who proposes three candidates for each position. The Rector is appointed by the Turkish President following the nomination of three candidates by YÖK (following the submission of six names elected by Assistant, Associate and Full Professors of the University). The Rector and Deans are able to appoint their own Vice Rectors/Deans. The Rector is appointed for 4 years, renewable for a second term. Deans are in place for three years.

It is also a State requirement placed upon AKU (and other universities) to be responsible for a number of two-year sub-HE Vocational Schools operating in parallel with the higher education provision. AKU has 12 such schools. These are essentially treated as a separate operation from that of the University's higher education establishment.

Thus many external factors impinge upon the autonomy of the University in terms of its structure, organisation, processes, finances, research and development capacity, curriculum, staffing and student body. Its capacity for autonomous change is therefore limited.

### **1.3 The IEP Evaluation Team**

The self-evaluation report of AKU, along with the appendices was sent to the IEP Team in February 2010. The visits of the evaluation team took place in March 2010 and June 2010. In between the visits the University provided the evaluation team with additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Carles Solà (Chair) Professor of Chemical Engineering, and former Rector, University Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.



- Professor Edward Jezierski, Member of the Main Council of Higher Education, Poland, former Vice Rector for Education and Professor of Automatic Control, The Technical University of Lodz, Poland.
- Professor Dieter Timmermann, Professor of Economics of Education, and former Rector, University Bielefeld, Germany.
- Ms Rahel Imobersteg, Secretary General, Swiss Association of Student Unions, ESS-UNES-USU, Switzerland.
- Professor Robin Smith (Team Coordinator), Director of Arethusa Projects Ltd. and former Vice Rector, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom.

#### **1.4 The IEP Process**

The Team wishes to thank the Rector and his Rectorate team and members of the academic and support staff of the University for the work undertaken in preparing for the visits and in developing the documentation (especially the Self Evaluation Report and follow-up material) that enabled the evaluation to take place. They also acknowledge the contribution of all staff and students who engaged in the commendably open and frank discussions that took place.

Although primarily aimed at providing an objective and supportive mechanism to facilitate the strategic development of the University, the visits also benefitted the IEP Team members themselves, through the exchange of views with staff and students.

Over the course of the two visits the IEP Team was able to meet all senior members of the University including the Rector, the Vice Rector, Professor Belkis Özkara (responsible for strategic planning and quality), the Vice Rector, Professor Fatma Aktepe (responsible for research), the General Secretary, Professor Sefa Çelik (responsible for all areas of administration). Professor İbrahim Demirhan (Director of the International Office) and Assistant Professor Durmuş Yörük (Vice-Director of the International Office) played a key role in the evaluation process as liaison person with the Team. The IEP Team visited six faculties:

- Arts and Sciences
- Economic and Administrative Sciences
- Engineering
- Education
- Medicine
- Veterinary Medicine

and had an opportunity to talk to their Deans and Vice Deans, academic staff and students separately.

In addition the IEP Team met the group responsible for the production of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) as well as representatives of the Senate, the quality assurance committee (ADEK), Heads of Department, Finance, Personnel/HR, Registry, Student Affairs, the International Office (including the ECTS and Bologna coordinators – who also played other roles) representatives of the research community and members of the Student Council. They were able to visit the Library and IT facilities, the student village, and various laboratories.

The IEP Team also met external stakeholders from local commercial enterprises, the public and voluntary sectors and the Deputy Chairman of the Governing Board.

In addition to the SER, the IEP Team had an opportunity, prior to the second visit, to consider

- the full Strategic Plan 2009 - 2013
- the AKU Performance Programme ( dated August 2009)
- documents providing statistical information on student recruitment, drop outs and staff gender balance
- a detailed budget statement clarifying all expenditure and income streams, especially in relation to research, and including information on the distribution of finances and the operation of the 'revolving fund'.

### **1.5 The Self Evaluation Process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a group of nine senior staff led by Vice Rector, Professor Belkis Özcara. These staff sit on a number of University committees which enabled a wider influence to bear on the development of the SER. Senior posts operate on a matrix basis so the Self Evaluation Report Group also represented faculty staff from Veterinary Medicine, Arts and Sciences, and Economic & Administrative Sciences. Other key roles in the University were drawn into the processes including Vice Rectorships, the Director and Vice Director of the International Office, the ECTS Coordinator, the Vocational Schools Coordinator and the Bologna Coordinator. In addition the Directors of the Strategic Development Office and Registrar's Office were part of the team.

Other groups were involved in the process including: the AKU Academic Bologna Coordination Committee (BEK), the AKU Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Board (ADEK), the Office of Student Affairs, the Office of Strategic Development, the International Relations Office and the School of Foreign Languages.

The SER Group saw the development of the documentation for the IEP visit and the SWOT analysis, as far from routine. It provided an opportunity for focussed internal debate. Some staff, it was stated, saw the document as overly pessimistic but the group felt it to be realistic and an accurate reflection of the current position of the University. The Senate concurred.

It was noted that students did not play a significant role in the development of the SER. Beyond the one non-voting member of Senate, students were not directly engaged in the process. Although some of the students who were met by the IEP Team claimed knowledge of the SER, many did not, and those who did, appeared to have been informed just prior to the visits. This lack of engagement of students in the procedures and policy development of the University became a major theme in the course of the evaluation.

The SER Group explained that the report had been distributed to the faculties undergoing the visits from the IEP Team and that a meeting had been held to brief Senate (although it was confirmed



that the SER had been discussed and agreed by Senate). However, many faculty staff, even at a relatively senior level, appeared to be somewhat distanced from the development of the SER. All were aware that the routine faculty annual monitoring reports (which are a national requirement) had been used in the development of the SER but many had no direct involvement in the SWOT, or debate about outcomes.

Having said this, the IEP Team was of the view that the SWOT and documentation prepared by the group, and submitted through Senate and the Rector, were commendably honest and had identified many of the pertinent issues facing the University. Staff, at all levels, were prepared to engage in a frank and open dialogue with the IEP Team and this was greatly appreciated.

## 2. Vision and Strategy

The University provided the IEP Team with a Vision Statement, Mission Statement and a fuller statement of Aims, Strategies and Objectives. These were:

*Vision Statement:* 'To be an internationally recognised university which acts as a centre for excellence for projects focusing on national and regional challenges, generates knowledge and technology in the light of universal scholarly guidelines and educates generations ready to face global competition'(SER p. 9).

*Mission Statement:* 'To offer quality educational services under the guidance of contemporary teaching theories and by monitoring stakeholders' needs; to carry out scientific and scholarly research publications and consultancy; to render services to the community and humanity (SER p. 10).

*Aims, Strategies and Objectives* were developed in detail in Appendix 17; a key aim being Aim 1: 'To provide educational services recognized in (*sic*) international level' SER p. 45).

These statements and especially the desire *to be an internationally recognised University, carrying out scientific and scholarly research and consultancy, providing educational services recognised at international level* formed the key element of the discussions throughout the two visits.

The Rector and Vice Rector for Strategic Planning reinforced the view that the University wished to be internationally recognised. There was strong evidence of unity across the University in this desire since the vision was confirmed by the SER Group, Senate representatives, Deans of the faculties and the academic and administrative staff body in general. Currently the focus was mainly on the need to provide students with the skills to operate in a global context. The emphasis was changing however, towards internationally recognised research.

## 3. Strategic Planning



The process of strategic planning for the period 2009-2013 was undertaken. It was started, by a group representing faculties, vocational schools and students. The University's vision, mission, and values were identified and faculties asked to interpret these in the context of their activity. General objectives were made more concrete by identifying goals against which performance indicators could be established.

The Rectorate recognised that in this process there were paradoxes in that, by tradition, Turkish universities tended to be executively driven and that whilst greater participation was now being encouraged, staff often interpreted this as bureaucracy and units sometimes engaged only at a surface level. Staff also recognised that the University had only limited influence over the strategy since State legislative and policy requirements dominate. This influenced the degree of engagement. The University has introduced a programme 'Educating the Educators' with a view to increasing engagement but it was stated that participation in this has also been low.

The University Rectorate and SER Group recognised the significant problems confronting the University in its desire to develop in the direction proposed (especially in becoming an internationally recognised university across its whole provision). These difficulties were reflected in the SWOT to a large degree.

- i) Firstly, there are growing resource pressures as YÖK increases student numbers at a faster rate than the allowed increases in staffing.
- ii) Secondly, the demographic profile of Turkey is weighted towards the young and this creates a pressure on universities, through YÖK, to recruit more undergraduates. AKU is optimistic, however, that over a ten-year period, with the growth in the number of universities and the achievements made by AKU in the development of research (especially in the natural, veterinary and medical sciences) progress in the direction outlined in the Strategic Plan will be made.
- iii) Thirdly, key decisions, which impact on the University's ability to develop and execute policy, are controlled by external stakeholders who can undermine any strategy identified by Senate and the Rectorate. There was optimism that in future the State would seek to align funding more effectively against strategic plans. The Ministry of Finance aimed to achieve greater harmony. It was expected, therefore, that by 2013 there will be a greater relationship between the strategic plans of universities and the resources available to support them.

The IEP Team identified certain tensions surrounding the proposed Aims, Strategies and Objectives. On the one hand, the University had ambitions which included the expansion in the staff base, departments and programmes, together with the development of research on an internationally comparable basis and recognition as an international university. On the other hand, the national context places severe constraints on the autonomy of the University, its ability to generate income and innovate in comparison with many European institutions. The Team queried how realistic it was to generate the capacity to become both an internationally recognised institution with an emphasis on research across the board and to develop the learning infrastructure to the degree suggested to meet local and regional needs, whilst still maintaining quality, on the time scales identified in the Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013.

The current Strategic Plan is, in the view of the IEP Team, extensive and ambitious. Thus, for example, against a backdrop of centralised control through YÖK, financial constraints, and limitations on the Rectorate to implement change and innovate, the University has emphasised an ambitious programme of internationalisation, increased research capability, expansion of faculties, graduate and undergraduate provision, a 10% growth in staff year on year, a building programme of 75,000m<sup>2</sup> and much more. Whilst the Strategic Plan was well formulated with explicit costings and time-lines, it nevertheless contained such a large number of proposed developments (apparently of equal weighting) and accompanying performance indicators and measures that its usefulness was perhaps limited as a document to steer the University towards its broader objective, in the context of the high number of external constraints operating upon it. The IEP Team noted that the SWOT did not penetrate down to the level of the faculties and departments and this, in the view of the IEP Team, militated against the development of a more focussed strategy. They welcomed, however, the intention to focus upon certain local and regional employment sectors and to give emphasis to programme and research prioritisation in the areas of medicine, veterinary medicine, animal husbandry, food production, marble production/mining and geothermal energy and tourism. The University was, for example, in the process of getting certain laboratories, such as marble and food processing, accredited by national/state organisations.

There remained, however, mixed and somewhat contradictory messages in the strategy, reflecting both this ambition to lever up the whole University simultaneously and to give priority to certain key areas of strength. The IEP Team concurred with the University's assessment of its current strengths as reflected above and recommended that in developing the next strategic plan, post 2013, a more focussed approach might be pursued. The University might wish to consider identifying other institutions in Europe with profiles similar to the one aimed for by AKU, against which it could benchmark itself.

It was further recommended that the University use as internal developmental models those areas of success already identified by both the University and the IEP Team as having potential for further and immediate exploitation.

In making these recommendations the IEP Team considered that the strategy of developing on a broad front was ambitious (especially on the time scales envisaged and with the constraints operating upon the University). A more focussed approach might, in the long run, bring greater resource benefits and enhance its reputation thus facilitating a further widening of research accomplishments more generally.

#### **4. Governance, Management and Leadership**



It was explained that the Rector was able to select his own Vice Rectors and that they worked well as a team and remained in place during his period of office. He had less control over the appointment of Deans.

The Rector saw himself as being in the position to prioritise goals which can then be evaluated through the Senate and its committees. The latter, together with feedback through Heads of Departments and Deans, allowed for ideas to develop from below as well. This was confirmed through discussion with representatives of the Senate and faculties.

Deans and Heads of Department, who are major recipients and users of the budget, are very significant in the process of implementing the strategic goals of the University. It was commendable that they were uniformly aware and supportive of the strategic direction contained within the Strategic Plan and as interpreted by the Rector and his senior colleagues.

The Rector and his Vice Rectors presented a unified team fully cognisant of the difficulties attendant upon the severe constraints operating in the Turkish State system of higher education (at least in comparison with many European systems). The Rectorate is to be congratulated for developing and maintaining a vision for the University in a context which makes innovation and change difficult. However, the short term and political nature of the appointment of the Rector and Deans (common to all State Universities in Turkey) could be seen to operate to the detriment of a coherent and long term strategy for the University.

The Student Council constitution, which is governed by external statute, appeared to limit the involvement of students and the role they played in the University. They were not defined as full members of the University, as they are in a European context. In a university aiming to enhance its reputation and take its place internationally, students would be expected to seek and acquire greater engagement in the decision and policy making processes.

The University might wish to find creative ways of empowering the students and providing them with development opportunities, whilst maintaining adherence to Turkish law. Involving students in the consultation and decision making processes of the University through genuine participation would, in the view of the IEP Team, facilitate more appropriate engagement, the resolution of student issues and effective feedback. The IEP Team therefore recommends that consideration be given to how best to develop a more formal and effective way of involving students in the consultative and decision making processes of the University.

## 5. Organisation and Structure

The University operates on 3 campuses comprising 8 faculties, 3 Graduate Schools (sometimes referred to as Institutes, 15 Research Centres, 4 four-year vocational schools and 12 two-year vocational schools. Each University department is unique, so, for example, there is only one Mathematics department in the University which services other departments where necessary and appropriate (although inevitably there was some duplication of teaching identified by staff between



different faculties). Students and staff are aligned to departments. The four-year vocational schools are equivalent to faculties but in applied areas of study. The IEP Team found the structure to be somewhat complex especially since certain parts of the University structure (such as Research Centres) did not themselves have any staff base – (see section 7) and in other cases some units were defunct. It was suggested by the IEP Team that it was important for a University seeking an international reputation that it communicates a clear, precise and understandable image of itself to the outside world.

The presentation of the University as one with international characteristics is made more difficult by the University's involvement with the two-year vocational schools. AKU has some 30,000 students but these are divided almost equally between the higher education (HE) students and two-year vocational students. The two-year vocational schools operate at sub-degree level across the region. (There are some 260 nationally). Such schools are located within the State university sector as a legal requirement and AKU cannot therefore determine its own policy in this respect. The IEP Team were interested to understand how the University could operate as an organisation with two very different educational enterprises. It seemed to make the goal of the University to gain an international reputation with a research focus even more difficult. It was explained that the University could be seen as two almost separate institutions although the vocational schools remained part of the larger mission. The Vocational Schools were not overseen by the YÖK, but by the Ministry of Education. Staff were entirely differentiated (although occasionally HE staff are called upon for support) and the impact on the budget is small. Students from the Vocational Schools did not get automatic progression into bachelor programmes at AKU but were required to undertake the national examination for entry purposes.

IEP Team members identified a clear and distinctive mission for these schools which aimed to provide a local and regional service for industry, supplying well qualified workers in specific areas of vocational engagement. The Team was satisfied that there was no significant impact on the resources of the higher education part of the enterprise as a result of the position of these schools in the University and appreciated the commitment to the University's mission by the representatives of the vocational schools who met the team.

However, these schools are atypical in a university context. This appears especially so for a university seeking to develop its research profile and enhance its reputation: aiming to take a place within the wider international community of universities.

## 6. Quality Assurance

The University has established a quality assurance committee (ADEK) which is a requirement under Turkish law. The committee includes the Rector, the Vice Rector (who chairs the committee in the absence of the Rector) and the General Secretary, but also representatives of all significant parts of the University including the Student Affairs Department. The Student President is a non-voting member. It had been decided that this body would also undertake strategic planning (not a legal requirement) across the University. In addition ADEK is responsible, *inter alia*, for: the preparation

and monitoring of the University's *Performance Programme*, the evaluation of academic and administrative services, and the preparation of the University's Academic Assessment and Quality Development Reports. Guidelines on quality assurance have been published nationally by YÖDEK and the University itself has published procedural guidance designed 'to plan, evaluate and improve the quality of University education and research activities and administrative services'.

IEP Team members noted that, currently, programme based questionnaires are not yet systematically distributed to students but are dependent upon the individual tutors' decisions to use them. ADEK representatives stated that the University was re-establishing a teacher evaluation process using questionnaires but in the past students tended to rate the quality of the learning experience in terms of whether they liked the professor rather than the effectiveness of the teaching. An attempt will be made to get students to understand the importance of Learning Outcomes and to measure the effectiveness of their experience on a programme against these. Individual academic staff activity was also reviewed by their Dean on an annual basis following the presentation of a short report on research and teaching activity which formed the basis of a synoptic report to the University and ultimately YÖK. However, this was factual in nature and not evaluative.

The Strategic Development Unit collected data systematically from across the University in order to send information to YÖK. A generic questionnaire, the use of which is a requirement for the receipt of assessment results by students, is analysed centrally but both staff and students appear to think that feedback loops are very ineffective. In addition the informal feedback processes for students are not considered as helpful by students as the University believes them to be.

No Quality Assurance Unit exists to support ADEK or the Rectorate to oversee 'quality circles' or to help develop a quality culture across the University. ADEK representatives felt that such a unit might, ironically, marginalise quality assurance activity but in any case the shortage of administrative staff in the University made the establishment of such a unit difficult (see section 10). Reliance had to put on localised teams, Heads of Departments and Deans.

There was limited use of external peer review in the development of new, or the modification of existing, programmes. The curriculum is updated annually *via* departmental committees. New courses are initiated *via* departments and approved through Faculty Boards and finally Senate. (The latter being a rubber stamp). No external resources are drawn upon to validate programme content although professional body and other forms of accreditation such as the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) are sought. There is no Alumni system to enhance the quality assurance processes by getting feedback on the impact of programmes once students have left the University and in employment.

It was not clear to the IEP Team which criteria are used by the University to assess the quality of its provision but the *procedural* guidelines were lengthy, indicating at least on paper, an extensive array of quality management processes. The IEP Team concurred with the ADEK representatives that staff often appeared to feel the processes to be bureaucratic and marginal to their activity and it was unclear how the guidelines would in reality lead to enhanced quality.



The IEP Team noted variation between staff in the faculties as to the degree of engagement with quality processes. It appeared that there was yet to be embedded a 'quality circle' across the University as a whole with a common definition of quality, the systematic use of common instruments to identify quality (such as questionnaires and peer review), effective feed back loops, clear incentives to pursue the quality agenda, and related and specific monitoring processes leading to measured quality enhancement. However, this was clearly work in progress for the University which the Team would wish to encourage.

The IEP Team congratulated the University on the clear and explicit willingness to adopt quality mechanisms in accordance with Bologna principles but there was still some way to go. The University might wish to consider how best to accelerate the development of a secure and effective quality culture involving both staff and students. This can be done *possibly* through the support of a specialised Quality Unit which should not be seen as a means of collecting data, but as a way of developing policy, maximising effectiveness, improving feedback to staff and students and monitoring the development of a quality culture. However, the mechanisms to be adopted are a matter for the University to determine after a wider discussion.

## **7. Research, Consultancy and Technological Transfer**

Members of the IEP Team had the opportunity to meet a number of local representatives from commerce, the professions, the voluntary sector and the local administration including the Deputy Mayor. Relationships with these external groups appeared to be cordial. Weekly early morning discussions were held on a range of topics which are well attended and an opportunity was given to the IEP Team to attend a debate on EU membership. External stakeholders were able to itemise a number of projects undertaken with staff of the University as well as applauding the considerable impact that students had made in the voluntary sector.

A close relationship with the Afyon commercial and public community could become an important part of the University's strategy to generate more research income and to engage in knowledge transfer. Whether this can lead to a 'step change' sufficient to underpin the development of an international reputation is a moot point especially whilst legal constraints hinder relationships with private organisations including those overseas.

The IEP Team welcomed the opportunity to meet the Vice Rector responsible for research (newly in post) and representatives of the research community from Research Centres and Graduate Schools (Institutes). The SER appendix 17 stated that Aim 2 was 'To develop academic knowledge through scientific researches and publications' (SER p. 46). Staff outlined the funding available from external sources (such as TUBITAK – currently funding 18 projects) and explained the role of the University's Research Committee in overseeing research development and in the distribution of the 'Revolving Fund' (monies received by the University - predominantly the Medical Faculty – for services undertaken) of which 5% were allocated to research across the University according to a formula. (5% of this was allocated equally and 95% based on discipline areas and staffing - including the proportion of Assistant, Associate and full Professors). Although the overall size of funding was a



known, there was a competitive bidding process via faculties to the Research Committee. In this way a qualitative dimension was introduced. The average project attracted the equivalent of approximately 15,000 Euros through the Revolving Fund.

There was an enthusiasm for research, it was stated, because the University was relatively new with a young staff who were developing careers which required research publications to meet Turkish professorial requirements. This accounted for the dramatic increase in publications post 2005/6. The strategy of the University is to increase the number of staff publishing in national and international journals with the objective of increasing publications in internationally indexed journals by 10% per year. Additionally, the intention was to 'commercialise outputs of research' (S3 p46) through the encouragement of patent acquisition, increasing the effectiveness of research and application centres and the establishment of a 'techno-park to improve collaboration between University and corporations directed to support regional industry'. The SER Group felt that progress was being made especially in the natural sciences, medicine and veterinary medicine.

Developing as an internationally recognised research-focussed university was seen by the IEP Team to be an ambitious aim for the University in its current context. There appeared to be a number of *major* inhibiting factors:

- i) The first of these is finance which, based on OECD comparators, appeared to be relatively small.
- ii) The second factor is the degree to which the University can earn income from engagement in research and development work in partnership with private companies. This appeared to be curtailed through current legislation and Ministry policy.
- iii) The third is teaching load. Whilst it was recognised that promotion from Assistant to Associate to full Professor required *inter alia* a track record of publication in refereed journals of an appropriate standing, nevertheless teaching load requirements for staff were high. Personal remuneration policies (outside the control of the University) provided incentives for overtime rather than the pursuit of research.

The IEP Team concurred with the University's partial recognition that this ambition to develop research and internationalise the University's output could be achieved by greater prioritisation based on local and regional specialisations around areas like marble, geo-thermals, medicine, food technology and veterinary sciences. It was clear to the Rectorate where the real strengths lay. The University however, remained ambivalent about whether to lever up the whole University and thus strengthen weaker areas or to strengthen already stronger areas with a view to making them internationally excellent and to provide a model for other parts of the University. The intention here needs to be made more explicit in the Strategic Plan. It was notable that the otherwise commendable SWOT did not contain an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual faculties in these terms. Keeping *all* units within the University research active was stated as an important goal.

This ambivalence is exemplified through the Research Centres. There were sixteen Centres (some inactive) and it was not clear how they represented the optimum number and profile necessary to meet the objectives of AKU, given that some focussed on areas outside those identified as currently

spearheading development. It was unclear how Research Centres were identified and formed (beyond being approved by Senate and YÖK) and what explicit criteria were used to agree their establishment. They did not have any staff but drew upon the staff within departments who operated on normal staff teaching contracts and reported through Heads to Deans. Research Centres reported direct to the Rector (something which was seen to be advantageous since it facilitated rapid growth and more effective funding). Thus there is a very complicated structure supporting research with Centres, Institutes, Faculties and Departments all involved in the research enterprise. It was difficult therefore to identify any unit within the University which might be considered to have the critical mass to produce the step change necessary to become internationally recognised.

The University did not have a research office to support the younger staff in the development of their research careers and especially to provide professional support in writing research bids for funding. In terms of EU funding the International Office provided what support there was.

There is clearly an extensive and active commitment to research across AKU. However, the IEP Team were of the view that currently the research profile of the University remained unfocussed. The University structure for research and the roles and responsibilities appeared complex, making it difficult to communicate to the wider international academic community and obfuscating the research policy and philosophy of the University. This needs to be made more explicit at University level in context of the Strategic Plan and the external constraints (legal and financial) which challenge institutional development.

These issues might be alleviated through the University considering further its research management in order to achieve a more focussed, effective, coherent and co-ordinated implementation of strategy. It needs to ensure the development of the critical mass necessary to exploit particular strengths. The University might also wish to exploit more explicitly the opportunities available to further develop more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research projects.

In parallel it might wish to make more systematic use of sabbaticals as part of the strategy of developing an internationally recognised institution. In addition it should consider the publication of an annual research report in order to demonstrate its development as part of the international community and to indicate the key strengths of the University.

## **8. Bologna and Europe**

Representatives of the University's International Office (including the Bologna and ECTS Coordinators) outlined the strategy adopted to pursue the strategic aim of becoming internationally recognised as a university through the implementation of the Bologna processes. Follow-up discussions were held with faculty staff and students.

### **8.1 International Exchanges and Partnerships**



The University had for some time operated a credit based system and in 2006 the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was adopted. Diploma Supplements were introduced in 2007. However, with the exception of veterinary and medical programmes, courses at the University were not yet modular.

The pursuit of international recognition included running ERASMUS, Leonardo Da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes. The University stated that it had some 125 bi-lateral relationships including 79 bi-lateral Erasmus agreements with different European universities by the end of 2009. Joint Bachelors programmes were also being designed with overseas institutions, the latest being with a UK University. There had been a steady rise in staff and student mobility representing some 244,300 Euros by 2009/10. The University stated (SER p. 19) that the number of outgoing students had risen steadily from 14 in 2005/6 to 80 in 2009/10 and those coming to study at AKU increased from 3 to 25 over the same period. This increase was also reflected in staff movement. Incoming academic staff rose from 3 in 2006/7 to 15 in 2009/10 and outgoing from 7 to 50 over the same period (SER, Appendix 22). The IEP Team felt that the University had made a good start on the development of staff and student exchanges but there was still some way to go given its aim to become internationally recognised.

Students re-entering AKU did not have any difficulties with credit recognition since there was a carefully conceived system which required departments to sign off requirements prior to exchanges. ECTS points were decided at departmental level with central guidance. The intention was that eventually credit would be related to workload. The University concurred with the view of the IEP Team that this was not yet uniformly the case. It was noted that development work had now reached a point where a more systematic analysis of credit outcomes could be undertaken to assess progress across the University. The recent publication of national competencies provided the opportunity to adjust programmes to these *via* the vehicle of Learning Outcomes and to move towards equity across the University and nationally.

A Bachelors and Masters structure was in place in 1995 although not fully implemented in all areas and IEP Team members felt that, whilst the University is in a good position with regards to the structure of Bachelor/Master, PhD programmes were in need of further development.

IEP Team members noted that students appeared to appreciate programmes where the curriculum was delivered in English. University representatives recognised that at present the capacity of the University to expand this facility was limited and that second language teaching will remain poor until suitably qualified staff can be recruited to develop language skills amongst staff and students. Given the vision and mission of the University it might need to prioritise its consideration of how best to facilitate more confident use of foreign languages (especially English) amongst both staff and students.

## 8.2 Teaching and Learning



It was noted that the University, in keeping with its Bologna focus, now aimed to have a more integrated assessment process moving from examinations at the end of semesters to the use of mid term assessments (of which there must be at least one) projects, quizzes and course work. The precise detail was determined by individual members of academic staff. In addition it was noted that the University did not have a single and consistent system for the assessment of students (sometimes referred to in the University as the *evaluation* of students). Hence some professors used norm-referenced marking schemes (described as the bell curve system) and others criterion referencing more appropriate to the Learning Outcomes approach underpinning the Bologna process. Such differences in approach occurred within faculties/departments as well as across the University as a whole. As a result there was some variation in the impact that Bologna had made on individual programmes and students.

Approaches to class contact time also varied considerably. During faculty visits some staff and students claimed that the predominant teaching mode was through lectures and tutor contact time which in some cases appeared high. More student-centred activity was in the minority. This was sometimes explained as being for practical reasons and sometimes, allegedly, by reason of conservatism amongst both the staff and students. (Some professors, for example, were reluctant to introduce electives). In addition reduction in contact time was perceived to have a direct impact on salary payments for overtime which made the introduction of a student-centred learning outcomes strategy more problematic. Thus, discussions with staff and students in the faculties demonstrated clear variation across the University in teaching and learning strategies and the implementation of Bologna processes.

### **8.3 Bologna Conclusions**

The IEP Team considered that the University had made good progress to date on moving towards fulfilment of Bologna processes and welcomed the adoption by the University of these. In addition, an effective start had been made on both student and staff exchanges and bi-lateral relationships. The International Office was proactive and the IEP Team would wish to encourage staff in the direction they were taking. However, there was still some way to go both in terms of implementing the Bologna processes and in reaching the goal of becoming internationally recognised. The University was not yet fully modular, and the credit system was not yet fully based on Bologna principles relating to workload. Approaches to student-centred learning were variable at individual staff and departmental levels. The University does not have a Staff Development Unit to facilitate an understanding of, and practice in, the principles underpinning the Bologna process, such as learning outcomes, student centredness, credit transfer, assessment etc. The Team therefore recommends that the University consider the best means of introducing effective internal processes to support the university-wide introduction of Bologna processes.

Whilst staff and student exchanges were developing they were not yet high enough to support a claim for an international reputation and indeed widening the exchange programme is not in itself a strategy for international recognition. The IEP Team would advise that, based on the benchmarking mentioned above (see section 3) the Rectorate develop and adopt a more focussed internationalisation strategy as part of its strategic planning processes beyond 2013.

## 9. Students

### 9.1 Engagement

The IEP Team had an opportunity to meet and talk to a number of students from all years across the faculties visited and to the President and Student Council members. Generally speaking students were content to be studying under the staff of the University, but more critical of other aspects of University life.

Students elect departmental and faculty representatives who sit on relevant Boards but they do not have voting rights. In addition there is a Student President on the Senate but again without voting rights. The Student Council/President had no independent budget. Where money is required an approach is made to the University usually through the Sport and Culture Centre. Thus, for example, should the Student Council wish to take an initiative on the implications of the Bologna process for students, they had no ready money for publicity and marketing purposes. Students had mixed views about the effectiveness of clubs and societies. It was normal for a member of University staff to 'sponsor' each organisation but they varied in their degree of involvement. Council members were all full-time students operating on a voluntary basis. The Council did not have an organisational structure paralleling that of the University and therefore responses to University initiatives and consultations tended to be on an *ad hoc* rather than a systematic basis. Student representatives, however, seemed well informed about significant issues relating to the Strategic Plan and were supportive, although they recognised the restrictive context within which they operated and questioned the University's apparent lack of real student engagement.

Generally speaking, both senior staff and students recognised that the system did not maximise the opportunity for students to contribute to the effective governance and policy development of the University which belied the statements of Aims, Strategies and Objectives (appendix 17) that emphasised 'consultation', student centredness and 'improving the sense of belonging to the University'. The committee structure was not seen by students as the means to resolve issues. The Student Council did not appear to figure prominently in the minds of students.

Individual issues tended to be handled informally, on a one to one basis, with professors or up the chain to Heads of Departments and Deans and possibly the Rector. However, whilst this was seen as effective in some cases, certain students were reluctant to bring issues to their professors. The 'open door' policy identified by some staff was not perceived as such by all students. Some professors were described as very approachable whilst others were thought to be less so, especially since professors were responsible for the assessment of the students.

Bigger issues, which possibly affected cohorts or the wider student body, appeared to have no systematic means of discussion or resolution. A number of issues, raised through student discussion, such as transport links, the relationship with the City, its alleged lack of student-oriented facilities



and internships, could be confronted successfully through the effective partnership that the University has established with the local commercial and public community. Given these good relationships, the IEP Team would encourage the University to engage with these influential local decision-makers, together with students, in order to enhance the reputation of the University with the student body with a view to improving the facilities and cultural life to the benefit of students and City alike. Students from the University make a considerable impact on the City economically.

Feedback was not considered to be effective by students and the role played by the Student Council unclear. There was no student ombudsman or similar role to put their case effectively and objectively. Much depended on a paternalistic and hopefully benign management culture.

Although programme-specific questionnaires were not systematically used across the University to enhance the quality of the learning and teaching process, students did complete a generic questionnaire. This was obligatory in order to access assessment results on-line. Some felt that as a consequence the questionnaire was not always taken seriously by the students.

Nevertheless the University must be congratulated on providing the IEP Team with detailed results of the student questionnaire. This indicated considerable dissatisfaction amongst the student body in certain aspects of University life. Generally speaking the University was not the first choice for students, who were selected *via* a national selection process. The 'voluntary' drop out rates indicated a level of dissatisfaction which required further examination.

## 9.2 Languages

Language skills across the student body (and indeed staff) varied considerably. They were generally poor, especially in spoken English. Students themselves identified the need for better provision across the whole of their undergraduate programmes rather than being limited to the first year. Given the University's Vision Statement which seeks to educate 'generations ready to face global competition' and the aims to internationalise the perspective of the students, to be student-centred and to encourage more international exchanges, AKU might wish to consider how best to facilitate more confident use of foreign languages, especially English.

## 9.3 Internships

A number of HE students were concerned that it was difficult to get internships within the locality around the town of Afyon in order to gain practical experience. To some degree this was borne out by discussions with external stakeholders. There appeared to be some anxiety that internships could threaten commercial confidentiality and therefore businesses especially the smaller more traditional family run companies which were reluctant to engage on this basis. However, the two-year Vocational Schools of the University were apparently very successful in organising approximately 16,000 internships per year for their students, so some experience within the University could usefully be drawn on. It was noted that where internships took place there was no certification by the University. This is something that might be considered.

## **10. Resourcing**

### **10.1 Staff**

The Strategic Plan sought to increase the staff base by 10% annually. However, it was noted that there are currently a substantial number of vacant posts at both academic and administrative levels across the University. Such vacancies are beyond the control of the University since staff recruitment is undertaken by a central national committee. Where possible, students are used as a 'stop gap measure' and staff stated they coped as necessary. However, this represents a serious under-resourcing of the University which militates against its effective operation and the achievement of its goals (in for example quality enhancement and research development).

Associate Professors and above have tenure but Assistant Professors and below work to limited renewable contracts. Mandatory teaching hours for all levels of professor is 10 hours and for lecturers and Instructors it is 12 hours per week. Above these hours, academic staff can earn additional income. There is remission for managers such as Deans and Heads of Department.

Thus staff benefit directly when required to undertake or seek 'overtime' (and this is common given the pressure on staff/student ratios). In some areas this was seen as a disincentive to engage in research activity although many staff who were personally motivated claimed to engage in research in private time. There is no sabbatical system to facilitate scholarly development of this kind. This is something the University might wish to consider.

### **10.2 Finances**

By law the faculties were the main spending unit of the University and Deans had authority over the budgets allocated to them, although there were restrictions on how the money was spent and the degree of permissible transfer between expenditure heads. Although Deans claimed that budgetary allocation was done by the Rector on the basis of need, much of the budget was predetermined, in effect, by a formula based on staff salaries and student numbers. The Rector therefore has little opportunity to steer the implementation of policy through financial mechanisms once salaries, equipment requirements and essential services have been taken into account.

### **10.3 Facilities**

IEP Team members had an opportunity to tour the main and some specialist libraries, the student village and dormitories, specialist laboratories and computing facilities.

The University's main campuses are spacious and attractive with modern buildings which were fit for purpose and in good order. The University's Strategic Plan included the ambitious development



of the sites which would require engagement with, and the support of, YÖK and the Ministry of Finance. This included the development of an Emergency and Trauma Hospital, and extension to the animal hospital. The IEP Team was informed that a new Library had been approved and would be completed within the next couple of years, thereby increasing both the Information Technology and Library provision. The latter, although modern and in exceptionally good order, currently appeared cramped. The specialist Library facilities for the Veterinary School appeared very limited and study space severely restricted.

Students had variable views on the effectiveness of the IT and Library facilities. Those living on-site had good wireless connections but those off campus had no VPN access (and there were no plans to facilitate this). The student village is not run by the University but is State-controlled and many students sought accommodation in the City due to cost.

The Strategic Plan emphasised the further development of the campus. Currently there is no campus bookshop, shop and other facilities common to many out of City campuses.

## **11. Conclusions and recommendations**

Turkish State Universities are subject to a host of legal and regulatory requirements. As a result, AKU's capacity to change and innovate is limited. In this it is no different to other State Universities in Turkey. However, it has ambitious plans and its aim to develop on a fast track, an international reputation, and recognition for its research and scholarly activity emphasises the need for it to be creative in its response to the multiple external controls which impinge on vital parts, activities and functions of the University.

AKU is a young institution, currently with a dynamic group of staff under sound leadership. This gives some confidence that the aspirations set out in the vision and mission statements will be met at some point in time. The IEP Team recommends a number of strategies which aim to enhance the University's prospects in that direction.

### **11.1 Strategy**

- i) In developing the next Strategic Plan, post 2013, greater specificity might be pursued. The University might wish to consider identifying other institutions in Europe with profiles similar to the one aimed for by AKU against which it could benchmark itself.
- ii) In aiming to lever up *all* parts of the institution simultaneously with the intention of becoming internationally recognised, it is proposed that the University use, as internal developmental models, those areas of success identified by both the University and the IEP Team as having potential for further and immediate exploitation.

Alternatively in order to fulfil this ambition, a more focussed approach might, in the long run, bring greater resource benefits and enhancement to the University's reputation which might facilitate a further widening of research accomplishments more generally.

### **11.2 Quality**

The University might wish to consider how best to make continued progress and accelerate the development of a secure and effective quality culture involving both staff and students – as detailed in section 6 of this report and elsewhere.

### **11.3 Research**

- i) Consideration could be given to the effectiveness of the University's research management in order to achieve an effective, focussed, coherent and co-ordinated implementation of its strategy.
- ii) The University should seek to foster greater inter-disciplinarity in the research projects it supports.
- iii) AKU might consider the use of sabbaticals as part of the strategy of developing an internationally recognised institution.
- iv) Consideration should be given to the publication of an annual research report.

### **11.4 Students**

- i) Consideration should be given to seeking more formal and effective means of involving students in the consultation and decision making processes of the University.
- ii) The University should seek to encourage a culture of participation in these processes.
- iii) The University might wish to consider the certification of internships.
- iv) The University should engage with local influential City representatives, together with students, with a view to improving the facilities and cultural life to the benefit of students and City alike.

### **11.5 Internationalisation**

- i) The University should consider further the best means of introducing effective internal processes to support the University-wide introduction of Bologna processes.
- ii) AKU might wish to develop and adopt a more focussed internationalisation strategy as part of its strategic planning processes post-2013.
- iii) Consideration should be given to how best to facilitate more confident use of foreign languages (especially English) amongst both staff and students.



**11.6 Teaching and learning**

i) The University should consider the introduction of a common and agreed system of student assessment based on principles in line with Bologna processes.

ii) An investigation of the causes of the high rate of voluntary drop out should be undertaken with a view to alleviating them.