

ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT

May 2013

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of Istanbul University (IU). EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated IU in 2010. The IEP team submitted its evaluation report to the university in November 2010. In 2012, the current Rector of IU, Professor Dr Yunus Söylet, requested that IEP carry out a follow-up evaluation.

1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme and follow-up evaluation process

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).

In line with the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme as a whole, the follow-up process is a supportive one. There is no prescribed procedure, and it is for the institution itself to set the agenda in the light of its experiences since the original evaluation. The institution is expected to submit its own self-evaluation report, which will describe the progress made, indicating possible barriers to change.

The rationale is that the follow-up evaluation can assist the institution in evaluating the changes that have been made since the original evaluation: What was the impact of the original evaluation? What use has the institution made of the original evaluation report? How far has it been able to address the issues raised in the report? The follow-up evaluation is also an opportunity for the institution to take stock of its strategies for managing change in the context of internal and external constraints and opportunities.

As for the original evaluation, the follow-up process is also 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 The self-evaluation process

The *Istanbul University Self Evaluation Report for IEP follow up (2013)*, henceforth referred to as the *IU Self Evaluation Report (SER 2013)*, was prepared by the self-evaluation group chaired by Professor Dr Cigdem Kayacan, and included representatives of faculties, students, academics and administrative staff.

The *IU Self Evaluation Report (2013)* was structured according to the recommendations given in the *IEP Evaluation Report (2010)* and gave an excellent overview of the change process of IU from 2010 to 2013. A complementary document to the *IU Self Evaluation Report (2013)* was the *IU Strategic Plan 2009-2013*.

The *IU Self Evaluation Report (2013)*, which the IEP team refers to, provides a comprehensive overview of the university and its developmental work accomplished since the IEP evaluation in 2010. The progress in various areas was significant and the IEP team congratulate IU on the improvement in almost all of the areas mentioned in its 2010 recommendations.

1.3 The evaluation team

The follow-up visit of the IEP evaluation team took place from 24 to 27 March 2013. The IEP follow-up consists of one visit (three days), including interviews with different groups of staff and students and an oral report on the last day of the visit, followed by a short written IEP follow-up report.

The IEP evaluation team (hereinafter the team) consisted of:

- Professor Dr Kenneth Edwards, former Rector of Leicester University, United Kingdom, chair
- Professor Dr Thierry Chevaillier, University of Burgundy, France
- Mr Fernando Galan, student, University of Cantabria, Spain
- Professor Dr Airi Rovio-Johansson, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, team coordinator

2. IU and its national context

Changes in the national and institutional context

Today Turkey has 176 universities and academies out of which 103 state universities and 66 foundation and private universities, four Military Academies and one Police Academy (www.yok.gov.tr/en/index_en.htm). Among the state universities there are five Technical Universities, two Institutes of Technology and one Fine Art University.

The language of instruction in the universities is Turkish. In IU, about 30% of programmes offer part of their courses in English, which allows it to receive foreign students, but still means that those wanting to study a whole programme are, in practice, required to learn Turkish. As a result, in terms of internationalisation, IU is rather open to students from the Middle East because they learn Turkish more easily.

In February 2011, a New Higher Education Law (No. 6111) was introduced in Turkey, which changed the Higher Education Law (No. 2547) by removing all time limits for the students to complete their higher education studies. The new law allows those who have previously dropped out from their studies to enrol again to continue their studies by paying tuition fees, and in general provides students with more flexibility in terms of the length of their study period. While this means that the number of students in the university may potentially increase, at the same time the level of tuition fees has been lowered considerably and thus might potentially result in a decrease of university funding in the long run.

IU's strategic priorities

At IU, the rector's prioritised strategic areas in 2012-2013 are the implementation of: (1) Quality assurance system; (2) IT-technology for administrative tasks in order to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency; (3) Lifelong learning opportunities for society; (4) New strategies to enhance internationalisation efforts in the entire IU.

In the academic year 2012-2013, IU has 12 campuses and 20 faculties including the Faculty of Open and Distance Education, Faculty of Nursing and Faculty of Health Sciences (IU self-evaluation report 2013, p. 5 and 20). IU also has two medical hospitals, 17 higher education institutes (graduate level programmes), three high schools (with four-year programmes), seven vocational schools (with two-year programmes) and 20 research centres. IU counts 108,000 students of which 15,000 are distance-learning students, and 93,000 students are actively on campus. IU also counts 5 500 academic and research staff and 12,500 administrative staff.

In spring semester 2013, IU offered 220 different undergraduate programmes, 547 graduate programmes. PhD programmes are offered by seven faculties.

IU has bilateral agreements with 58 countries and 549 bilateral Erasmus agreements with 23 EU countries and Switzerland (IU self-evaluation report 2013, p. 63 and 66). There is an estimation of 350 incoming students in 2012-2013 and the number of outgoing Erasmus students is 20 (IU self-evaluation report 2013, p. 65).

“The research and development policy for the University is to increase the university’s research resources, to strengthen the scientific backgrounds of the researchers in the University and to promote the quantity and quality of the studies carried out in the University” (IU self-evaluation report 2013, p. 12). A scientific research projects unit (BAP) offers IU’s researchers the opportunity to apply for internal research grants at IU. BAP also includes the Patent Office established under the roof of, "Patent Institute Information and Documentation Unit" (IU self-evaluation report 2013, p. 12).

3. The team's findings and recommendations

3.1. Governance, strategic planning and institutional management

The development of organisation in IU since the IEP evaluation in 2010 has demanded a number of internal trainings of staff, for instance in the area of quality assurance. The efforts of IU to implement a university information management system are not yet finished, nor is the implementation of the following programmes finished such as "ISKOP (IU Institutional Automation Project) and ISHOP (IU Hospitals Automation Project) projects, Student Affairs-, Personnel- and other Administrative Office-Automations, Chattel Automation and Electronic Document Following System" according to the *IU Self Evaluation Report 2013* (p. 2).

According to the *Istanbul University Strategic Plan 2009-2013* (p. 1), the vision of the IU is to establish itself as "one of the world's leading universities", and its mission is: "Being the bridge between both the East and West and the past and future, Istanbul University is the leading university which creates valuable knowledge both for Turkey and the world, and bring-up competent individuals. Within the frame of this mission, Istanbul University's principles are:

- Protecting and extending the principles of Atatürk and the achievements of the Republic
- Participation
- Respect to nature and people
- Compliance with ethical values"

Although the new law aims at increasing university autonomy, by transferring certain prerogatives in decision-making from the Turkish Council for Higher Education (YÖK) to the university, it in fact sets more constraints for the universities by reducing their funding and autonomy as to how to spend the funds at their disposal. Further, IU is still lacking a clear framework for decentralised decision-making within the university. In order to fulfil its vision and mission, the IEP team recommends (**Recommendation 1**) that IU should continue to implement a decentralised decision-making approach in IU and include student representation at all decision levels. Improvements in this area have been made, which the team acknowledges.

During the meeting with the management, IU's SER was discussed. The team pointed out that the SER was missing a SWOT analysis in the strategic plan. The team explained that a SWOT analysis is expected to contain a coherent summary of the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats produced in a

form which can be readily understood by all members of the university. The team recommends (**Recommendation 2**) the institution to develop a SWOT analysis as well as an action plan including clear milestones to be added to the future *Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.

The team acknowledges the improved IT system and data handling at IU.

3.2. Quality and Quality Management

Since 2011, ADEK (Institutional Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Committee) prepares the documents concerning IU's Integrated Quality Management System. These documents are (*IU Self Evaluation Report 2013*, p. 5):

- Istanbul University Integrated Quality Management Handbook
- Istanbul University Hospitals Integrated Quality Management Handbook
- Istanbul University Quality Policy
- Istanbul University Hospitals Quality Policy
- Process Descriptions
- Mandatory Procedures
- Process Management Plans

The team acknowledges the university management's awareness of the importance of implementing quality assurance among the academic staff; IU and TSE (Turkish Standards Institution) have signed a protocol in order to establish a quality management system (TS EN ISO 9001:2008) in IU.

As a consequence a lot of effort has been put into making this quality management system a functional one. In 2012 ADEK organised thematic seminars in IU on Integrated Quality Management System for 6 839 academic and administrative personnel (2 263 academic, 4 576 administrative personnel) in all units of Istanbul University (*IU Self Evaluation Report 2013*, p. 5). The team finds this a good practice and encourages (**Recommendation 3**) IU to continue to offer staff training programmes focused on systematic quality work in order to obtain a quality culture encompassing the entire IU.

While supporting this general initiative, the team has a concern that there are dangers in applying quality practices that are primarily designed for management and administration to teaching and learning. Teaching and learning activities require specialised procedures to ensure quality assurance and therefore need sensitive adaptations of any general methods. For example, since 2011, satisfaction surveys for students, academic and administrative personnel have been carried out by ADEK,

but they seem to focus on compliance with the external requirements and satisfaction of students, not so much on improvement of teaching.

In this context, and keeping in mind the general European trends in quality assurance, the team recommends **(Recommendation 4)** that IU gives special attention to quality assurance for teaching and learning.

Having said this, the IEP team acknowledges the IU's work towards obtaining the accreditation of a number of its recently created faculties (*IU Self Evaluation Report 2013*, p. 6).

Despite extensive training efforts for academics and for administrative staff, the team was left under the impression that a genuine quality culture is still missing in IU. While the processes are in place, the commitment for quality and a shared understanding of how the processes are related to quality were not in place. The team noted that the recent efforts have clearly contributed to the development of a corporate culture and a stronger sense of belonging among the staff and that the university members seem to cooperate well for achieving common goals.

The team believes that the IU could capitalise on this progress made in recent years through the development of a quality management system and the team recommends **(Recommendation 5)** IU to include and prioritise the development and implementation of a quality culture in IU in the new *Strategic Plan 2014-2018*. This would be a shift in priorities, because, as the team noted, quality assurance does not have a prioritised theme in the Istanbul University Strategic Plan 2009-2013 (p. 1), but it would be the next natural step in the light of recent efforts in this field.

3.3. Finance and budget

IU's funding consists of state funding, student contributions in form of tuition fees and revolving funds (self-generated money mainly from the hospitals). An important decrease in IU's funding is expected following the changes in the Turkish National Law of Higher Education and the reduction of student fees for day students. Furthermore, in IU many students who had previously dropped out from their studies, have now chosen to return to their studies. The university fears that this increase in student numbers will negatively impact the student support services currently offered, which would further translate into a reduced capacity to provide cheap food and accommodation for students on the university campus and to finance the participation of Turkish students in international activities (*IU self-evaluation report 2013*, p. 4).

Considering this expected decline in funding coming from the IU's traditional funding sources, the IEP team recommends **(Recommendation 6)** IU to try to obtain external funding from stakeholders and private research foundations to compensate for the financial loss.

3.4. Research

Since the IEP Evaluation 2010, a new Scientific Research Project unit (BAP) has been established, which offers IU researchers the opportunity to apply for research grants for external research funds and external research money as well as support to write research applications. The team noted that any research grants awarded (whether through external or university's internal funds) were based on the quality of projects and supports this practice.

The university receives on an annual basis a budget from the government for funding its research, but grants awarded through this scheme are rather small in size. For example, in the Faculty of Science the largest grants obtained come from the government, while in numbers 83% of the research projects are funded by the university, 14% by the government and 3% through international funds.

The team found that the number of research projects since the evaluation in 2010 has considerably increased. In the Medical Faculty, the team met researchers from the Faculty of Health Science involved in interdisciplinary research projects focused on public health. These researchers wanted to increase the collaboration with the Institute of Social Sciences in order to further enhance this research area. Foreign researchers, whom the team met, also wanted to initiate more multidisciplinary research in IU. The team recommends **(Recommendation 7)** IU to stimulate interdisciplinary research and to support BAP activities in order to further increase research activities and the number of research projects in IU.

3.5. Teaching

The IEP team acknowledges that progress has been made with regards to the implementation of the Bologna system and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Since November 2009, great efforts to restructure education following the three-cycle system (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate) have been made. The National Qualification Framework developed by the Turkish Council of Higher Education has been used as a framework to evaluate the programmes and courses, to restructure curricula, to implement student-based learning related to various teaching methods and assessments methods for knowledge, skills and general abilities (*IU Self Evaluation Report 2013*, p. 7).

Since the IEP evaluation 2010, IU has greatly improved the internal computer-based infra-system on student data. The plan is to expand this system to include a student evaluation questionnaire system and hand-outs and slides from teaching opportunities available for students.

Some courses at IU have been transformed following the ideology of the Bologna Process and ECTS credits have been allocated. However, the team learnt during the site visits that there still are some barriers for students in choosing elective courses

from different faculties such as: (a) distance (between faculties); (b) overlapping schedules due to lack of coordination among faculties; (c) different grading systems among faculties.

According to the academic staff the team met, the teaching load is felt to be too high for running and finishing research projects within expected time frames. For instance, in the Faculty of Science, the average teaching load is 22 hours/week.

In the field of medicine, the university is facing a particular challenge in terms of organising teaching and learning because the medical academic staff was allowed, until now, to work partly in the university hospital and partly in a private hospital. According to the new law they are required to work full-time on the university campus (namely the university hospital) which caused a migration of two thirds of the medical academic staff to the private sector for one of their medical faculties and a migration of half of the academic staff for the other medical faculty. As a result, the student groups at the moment are too large. For instance in “small” work groups or laboratory groups, there are at least 20-25 students.

The students also pointed out the lack of foreign language education in the faculty. According to the students, about 70% of the students are not able to speak a second language. Considering that the university has an international profile, which it wishes to increase, the team recommends **(Recommendation 8)** IU to offer all students at least one free language course during their study programme, in order to enhance students’ possibilities to apply for the ERASMUS exchange programme, providing them with opportunities for creating partnerships with regional or international stakeholders.

The team reminds IU of **recommendation 4** concerning the need to develop appropriate quality assurance procedures for all teaching and learning activities.

3.6. Internationalisation

According to the few foreign researchers and students the team met, they encounter some challenges in terms of integration to the university due to the language barrier – with most of the courses and official material being in Turkish – and lack of specific support structures designed for them. In order to overcome the language barrier, the IU does offer Turkish language courses to foreign students and researchers, which was appreciated. However, the students pointed out that more courses and teaching material in English would be desirable.

Since internationalisation is a prioritised area in the coming Strategic Plan 2014-2018, the team recommends **(Recommendation 9)** IU to resolve the shortcomings mentioned above and to take steps to recruit more foreign students, researchers and teachers, support exchange programmes for students and academics, enhance

international networking and give more possibilities to take part in international conferences and international research projects.

3.7. Service to society

The external stakeholders the team met were positive about cooperation with IU. However, the stakeholders underlined that there is a need for deeper affiliation with the government institutions and better language training for IU students. They also underlined that there is a lack of cross-disciplinary skills among IU graduates which the university should compensate for through “more training based programmes”.

It seems to the team that IU’s credibility is very important for the stakeholders and it is a driver for developing partnerships with the university. As a result the team concluded that the IU’s corporate image improved over the past three years.

Among other external stakeholders, the team met representatives of Istanbul Technopark, which was established in 2010 and has as a main function to provide the industrial companies that intend to pursue R&D activities with support services such as consultancy, training, laboratories or clustering and act as an interface with the aim of exploiting the resources of the university. The team became convinced that this initiative has potential to increase and consolidate the university’s corporate image. The team recommends **(Recommendation 10)** IU to support Istanbul Techno Park with equipment and broaden the content of lifelong learning programmes in order to reach more people in society.

The team also acknowledges IU’s efforts to work together with the health directorate and medical faculty and to offer free health education services to home care professionals and elderly people in society.

However, the team noted that while the university works with external stakeholders regularly, there did not seem to be a coherent institutional strategy in this regard, the various initiatives were mainly based on individual activism. Therefore, the team recommends **(Recommendation 11)** IU to reflect on how to create a mechanism to coordinate the interests of the range of external stakeholders and so ensure maximum support from the stakeholders for the development of the institution.

4. Summary of recommendations

The team recommends IU to:

- Recommendation 1

Continue to implement a decentralised decision-making approach in IU and include student representation at all decision levels.

- Recommendation 2

Give special attention to improving the SWOT analysis and the action plan in the New Strategic Plan 2014-2018.

- Recommendation 3

Continue to offer staff training programmes focused on systematic quality work in order to obtain a quality culture encompassing the entire IU.

- Recommendation 4

Give special attention to quality assurance for teaching and learning.

- Recommendation 5

Include and prioritise the development and implementation of a quality culture in IU in the new *Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.

- Recommendation 6

Find external money among stakeholders and private research foundations to compensate for the financial loss.

- Recommendation 7

Stimulate interdisciplinary research and support BAP activities in order to increase research activities and the number of research projects in IU.

- Recommendation 8

Offer all students at least one free language course, during their study programme, in order to enhance students' possibilities to apply for the ERASMUS exchange programme, to build a network with students in different countries.

- Recommendation 9

Make sure that steps will be taken to recruit more foreign students, researchers and teachers, support exchange programmes for students and academics, enhance international networking and give more possibilities to take part in international

conferences and international research projects, since internationalisation is a prioritised area in the coming Strategic Plan 2014-2018.

- Recommendation 10

Support the Techno Park with equipment and broaden the content of lifelong learning programmes in order to reach more people in society.

- Recommendation 11

Consider how to create a mechanism to coordinate the interests of the range of external stakeholders and ensure maximum support from the stakeholders for the development of the institution.

5. Envoi

The team would like to conclude by congratulating Istanbul University on the progress made in response to the original IEP report and by hoping that this follow-up report continues to be helpful.

The team would like to thank Rector Professor Dr Yunus Söylet, the Vice-Rectors, the liaison officer Professor Dr Cigdem Kayacan, the self-evaluation group, the SWOT group, deans, department heads, academics, students, executive officials, administrative staff and external representatives for useful discussions, their kindness and interests during the visits at IU.

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