SAKARYA UNIVERSITY

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT

December 2020

Team:

Tatjana Volkova, Chair

Simona Lache

Marija Vasilevska

Raymond Smith, Team Coordinator

Contents

1. Introduction

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of Sakarya University. European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated Sakarya University in 2016 with the report submitted to the university in June 2016. The university requested that IEP carry out a follow-up evaluation when it submitted its original registration for the programme in 2015.

1.1   *Institutional Evaluation Programme*

IEP is an independent membership service of the EUA that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. 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 IEP philosophy 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, possibly indicating 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, all aspects of the follow-up process are also guided by four key questions, which are based on a "fitness for (and of) purpose" approach:

1   What is the institution trying to do?
2   How is the institution trying to do it?
3   How does the institution know it works?
4   How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 Sakarya University's profile

When an IEP team first visited Sakarya University in early 2016, it found an institution that comprised 86 595 students spread across a wide range of faculties, schools, vocational schools, and graduate schools. In the following two academic years, according to figures presented in the university's self-evaluation report (SER) (appendix 4.4), student numbers grew to a total of 94 327. The original IEP report noted that "the size of the student population, and its continued growth, is one of the defining issues and challenges for the university". On evaluating the university in this follow-up process, the IEP team has been presented with a significantly different institution, not simply measured by the size of its student population (52 965) but by the fact that a partition had taken place in May 2018 which resulted in the creation of a new and separate state university: Sakarya Applied Sciences University. For Sakarya University this meant that, as it states in the SER, "a great majority of vocational schools and some faculties affiliated to Sakarya University were assigned to the newly founded university."

The university has recently finalised its strategic plan for 2020-24, and the university continues its outward looking approach by maintaining a strong culture of external accreditation which

complements the national system for higher education oversight. And while the transfer of most of its vocational schools to the new university has, no doubt, had an impact on some aspects of its relationship with business and industry, Sakarya University retains a pivotal position in partnering and co-operating with local and regional industries, especially the automotive industry.

The re-balancing of academic programmes and provision away from vocational education has encouraged a renewed focus on research and, at the time of the team's on-line dialogue with the university, it was confirmed that an application has been made to the national higher education authorities for Sakarya to be designated a research university.

During recent years, as with other universities in Turkey, Sakarya has been exposed to a period of national budgetary constraint and this has impacted on its ability to initiate new capital projects, especially relating to additional buildings and the enhancement of learning, teaching and research facilities.

1.3 The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process at Sakarya University was taken forward through weekly meetings of a newly established committee chaired by the Vice-Rector for Learning and Teaching. The committee included various members of the central units, academic management, and staff representatives from a range of faculties and one student member.[1] A smaller core group of the committee met more frequently to ensure appropriate progress in the evaluation process and the finalisation of a draft self-evaluation report by the required deadline. This draft was considered by staff in faculties and units, with feedback taken into account before final scrutiny and approval of the document by the university's Senate. The approved SER was sent to all stakeholders and published on the university's website. It has also been produced in a Turkish language version.

The self-evaluation report of the Sakarya University, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in February 2020. Given the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, the physical site visit by the IEP team due to take place in March 2020 was unable to go ahead as planned. Subsequently, the university agreed with IEP that the evaluation should take place through a series of on-line meetings. The on-line meetings took place on 14 October and from 20-23 October 2020. Given the passage of time since the production of the original SER, the university sent the team an updated version of the report in early October. The team was also sent a link to an on-line virtual tour of the main university campus.

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

- Professor Tatjana Volkova, former Rector, School of Business and Finance, Latvia, team chair
- Professor Simona Lache, Vice-Rector for University Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
- Marija Vasilevska, student, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, North Macedonia
- Dr Raymond Smith, former Academic Registrar, London Metropolitan University, UK, team coordinator.

---

[1] The full membership of the Committee can be found on page 2 of the SER

The team thanks the rector, Professor Fatih Savaşan, for his commitment to the IEP process and his involvement in a number of meetings during this visit.

The team also thanks the vice-rectors for their involvement and in helping the team to understand the operation of the university. In particular, the team thanks Dr Naciye Güliz Uğur, our institutional liaison and her Sakarya University colleagues for the arrangements that helped to make the evaluation run smoothly and efficiently in the virtual meeting environment.

Finally, the team expresses its gratitude to all participants in this IEP evaluation for their openness and willingness to discuss various issues concerning the university.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1   By any standards, the partition of the university in 2018 is a decision of considerable significance. In some ways, however, that decision did not present itself as a critical challenge to the university's higher-level governance and institutional decision-making structures. The team was advised that the partition of the university was determined by national government as part of a wider restructuring of the university sector in Turkey. It was not, therefore, considered as a principled decision by the university.

2.2   The senior leadership and middle management staff that discussed the issue of partition with the team appeared relatively sanguine about the outcome of that national policy decision; and indeed, some saw benefits from the separation of vocational education from undergraduate and postgraduate education, most especially in the ability for the university to develop a renewed focus on research. And in some ways, this externally driven decision on partition allays some of the concerns expressed by the IEP team in 2016 relating to the size of the institution and the ability of key decision-makers to manage the institution's growing scale and complexity. A number of students commented to the team that they felt the university had become too large and that their experience was better following partition. All that said, Sakarya University remains a large and multi-stranded organisation which requires robust governance and institutional decision-making mechanisms to drive forward and effect its stated ambitions.

2.3   The team notes that, in broad terms, the instruments for governance and institutional decision-making at the university have remained largely unchanged in the post-partition period. The SER comments that the number of Senate members has been reduced from 61 to 40, but the organisational diagram for the university bears a strong resemblance to that found during the 2016 IEP visit. In terms of the main differences from that time, there are now three vice-rectors rather than four; there has been a slight reduction in specialist boards/commissions; and there has been a rationalisation of research centres. Given the general burden of the operational imperatives of the partition, the team finds it appropriate that there has been a large degree of continuity in the strategic level governance arrangements for the university. It is, of course, also the case that some of these arrangements are determined by the national legal framework for higher education in Turkey.

2.4   In terms of strategic oversight, the appointment of a new rector, following the normal cycle, occurred in 2018, and this resulted in the establishment of a completely new senior rectorate team. The SER notes that there had been a delay in appointing a new rector, but it was suggested to the team that, while this had had some technical disadvantages, mainly connected to the appointment of staff and some financial matters, the university had continued to operate securely and efficiently in that short interregnum.

2.5   Given the recent publication of the Strategic Plan 2020-2024, the team decided that it would be appropriate to take some time during its meetings to explore the development, approach, and content of that central institutional document. Indeed, the strategic plan review process had been one of the first tasks for the new leadership team. The team notes that this new strategic plan provides a significant degree of continuity with the strategic direction and policies set out in the previous one. In other words, there are no fundamental shifts in strategy and policy, although there are some additional explications of education and training policy, research and development policy, client satisfaction policy and a responsible university policy that extends beyond purely environmental concerns.

2.6   The mission and vision statements have been amended slightly to emphasise the education of "entrepreneurial individuals" with "lifelong learning skills" and the role of the university in shaping future events through producing "knowledge, technology and social service in a universal quality". The university has clearly decided to continue its strategic focus on entrepreneurialism linked to graduate attributes. However, given the global parameters for all forms of business, industry, and creativity, it does strike the team as somewhat incoherent that there is no explicit reference to internationalisation in either the mission or vision statements. This might be regarded as somewhat limited in ambition, especially as there is a stated strategic desire to "spread internationalization". And this inconsistency seems to be reinforced by the lack of an internationalisation policy in the list of policies articulated in the strategic plan. In some ways, this is also at odds with the emphasis on internationalisation as one of the critical success factors for the new planning period, and indeed, in a different way, with the university's active engagement with this IEP follow-up evaluation. So, while the team does not wish to suggest changes to the current mission and vision statements, it does *recommend that a clear internationalisation policy be developed* and that this could usefully be inserted in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 alongside the other policy statements.

2.7   In terms of the wider approach and content of the new strategic plan, it is heavily geared to the quantitative measurement of goals through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This is an approach that was evident during the original IEP visit in 2016 and, as is highlighted in the current SER, this reflects the central importance of SABIS (Sakarya University Information System) to the university. SABIS is described as "one of the primary tools to implement new policies, spread information, and monitor the implementation processes of the policies..." The team recognises that SABIS is reflective of a good technical infrastructure and an associated staff expertise. As a sign of those strengths, the team was impressed that specialist software for distance education processes has been exported to fifteen other Turkish universities as part of the wider domestic response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The team, however, while accepting that the university's information systems are capable of gathering large data sets, believes that more can be done by way of the utilisation of data analytics to inform and assist understanding and decision-making. The team has no doubt that this could be implemented with relative ease and it may be that this already forms some part of normal practice. This, however, was not apparent to the team from the information it received or from the discussions that took place with university staff. In this context, the team *recommends that, in its strategic planning, the university place a stronger emphasis on the qualitative analysis of data as well as the visual representation of data, for example, trends analysis, charts, etc.* This recommendation mirrors the one suggested by the 2016 IEP team in its report.

2.8   The team found that the priorities for further strategic development were well acknowledged by university staff, especially in relation to research ambitions. However, while the strategic plan offers a comprehensive list of goals and related performance indicators, there are other elements relating to monitoring that are not highlighted in the document. In particular, there is little evidence of benchmark targets or why such benchmarks should be regarded as significant. In addition, it became clear from the team's discussions with those closest to the strategic plan monitoring process that target setting is largely developed on a year by year basis and not for the whole period of the strategic plan. This strikes the team as something of a lost opportunity and makes medium to long term resource planning far more problematic than it might otherwise be. It can also inhibit a clear sense of strategic direction and undermine the motivation to achieve longer term goals by the university's stakeholding communities. The team, therefore, *recommends (a) that strategic plan targets be established for the whole strategic planning period and (b) that a focus be placed on measuring the critical areas for development and reducing the number of KPIs.*

2.9   As has been noted above (paragraph 2.5) the strategic plan has added a number of policy statements since the last strategic planning exercise. The team views this as a positive development. The omission of an internationalisation policy, as this report makes clear, is an unfortunate lacuna. However, the policies that have been included are presented as a series of high-level bullet points. This is, perhaps, understandable as a way of presenting a relatively brief, almost synoptic, strategic plan. The downside to this approach is that various audiences are only given a partial picture of those policies and lack the more detailed context to evaluate their appropriateness. The team *recommends elaborating further the current policy statements by establishing them as broad guidelines informing decision-making*. Thus, for example, in relation to Education and Training Policy, key principles and goals relating to the competence-based education model should be fully articulated: how this will be represented in the development of the curriculum at each of the levels of study, how consistency will be ensured across subject disciplines, what the relationship between knowledge and competence will be, and so on. The same process would be true across all the headline statements in the various policies. Other principles should also be covered. For example, in education and training, it should be clear what the policy is in relation to feedback on assessed work (coursework and examinations). This further detail would then allow for better defined goals in support of policies.

2.10   The team notes the on-going efforts to ensure a broad involvement of students in the governance of the university, particularly through the Students' Senate and Student' Council. At the time of the first IEP visit in 2016 this was a focus of attention, and a number of recommendations were made in this area of governance. In 2016 the arrangements for student engagement in decision-making were in the process of being embedded, and there was perhaps a degree of hesitancy amongst students in becoming involved. In 2020 some of the underlying barriers to a comprehensive buy-in by students in these arrangements are still evident. Students whom the team spoke to in the on-line meetings were not always aware of the particular responsibilities of the Student Senate and the Student Council and how they differed from each other. Some saw the main purpose of student representation as dealing with practical concerns i.e., non-academic matters, while others seemed relatively uninterested in the potential of their representative forums to influence university decision-making. It seems to the team that students at the university are largely interested in micro level, often personally orientated issues, and these might be addressed through their department or faculty. The macro level interventions are few and far between and perhaps speak to the general passivity of students in steering the future direction of their university. As ever, there continues to be an imperative for the university at all levels — leaders, middle managers, academic and administrative staff — to make the case for the fullest engagement of students with their university. As was stated in the 2016 report this deficit can, in part, be addressed by systemic training for students in democratic culture and highlighting the importance of them having a say in the strategic direction of the university as well as the day-to-day running of their courses and programmes.

2.11   In terms of wider governance and decision-making structures, the team notes that there is an appropriate focus on quality through Quality Commissions (at both central and faculty level) and a co-ordinating central quality office that is linked to the rectorate. In discussions with staff, however, it was not always clear to the team, from the responses given, that there was a full and widespread understanding of how ownership of particular quality projects was established and the inter-relationship between executive and deliberative decision-making. There was some evidence of external stakeholders' involvement in a formal advisory capacity in some faculties, which the team viewed as a positive addition to the decision-making processes of the university. More often, though, such relationships are engaged with on an informal basis, especially around programme teams. The team hopes that more faculties might go down the route of establishing formal arrangements for receiving and considering external stakeholder comments and advice. Equally, the team sees real

benefit in the university considering how it might receive external advice and input on a more strategic level, something that has become a feature of the way many universities enhance their horizon scanning and decision-making. The team, therefore, *recommends the establishment of a university level Advisory Board, including international representatives, to help steer the future development of the university.* Such a board can provide important perspectives from the wider HE community, help with understanding how to bridge the gap between the desire for change and the instigation of that change, and provide an element of continuity and support when shifts take place in the senior leadership team.

3. Quality culture

3.1   The team found a welcome belief at the most senior levels of the university that, amidst a rapidly evolving and changing internal and external environment, the quality of education and research has to remain a core constant factor. As was established during the 2016 IEP visit, the university adopts an external quality/excellence model as the central mechanism to support the assurance of quality in all its dimensions: the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). This sits alongside the involvement of other nationally based external accreditation agencies, linked largely to programme evaluation, and the established internal mechanisms for quality assurance overseen by quality commissions at faculty and central levels. EFQM in the university is supported by a comprehensive process handbook and the on-going training of staff involved in operating the model.

3.2   Clearly, the university has a considerable commitment to, and investment in, the quality excellence approach provided by the EFQM model. The SER notes, for example, that in 2018 the university was awarded two awards under the EFQM Global Excellence Awards framework: one relating to developing enterprise capabilities and the other in adding value to customers. In discussing these various external and internal quality arrangements, the team was informed that they operated in a complementary way, often bound together by their links to the SABIS system. Thus, the capture of data via the EFQM processes (or ISO processes which are also used in some aspects of the university's work) is uploaded on SABIS, and this has greatly aided quality analysis. Equally, the range of surveys conducted by the university — for students, staff, leaders, alumni, and partners — are developed online so that the results can be visible through SABIS. Where open-ended questions are included in the surveys, such as the student questionnaires, some responses might only be made available to the appropriate manager, for example, the dean of a faculty. The SER notes some of the shortcomings of on-line surveys, particularly as the release of student results is dependent on their engagement with the survey process. One mechanism used by the university to counteract the skewing of information is to supplement the on-line questionnaires with face-to-face surveys for a representative sample of the student body.

3.3   The team is confident, therefore, that quality monitoring takes place, and it was interested to hear that innovative methods, such as text mining using specialist software, were utilised to gain a greater understanding of responses provided in open-ended questions. However, the examples provided to the team of areas where this might generate action tended to be in more practical areas, such as improving the campus environment, rather than in relation to the learning experience or pedagogical matters. What seems to be missing from this approach is any systematic trend or time-series analysis that could be related to the key performance indicators. The team believes that this form of analysis is critical to the effective implementation of enduring quality enhancement measures. In other words, it helps move the institution away from a reactive culture built around a series of individual actions to embedding a broader quality enhancement culture that tackles core themes and concerns in a more systematic way. The team *recommends that more attention be paid to the effective implementation of quality enhancement by embracing more fully trend and time-series analysis, complemented by processes that capture the more qualitative aspects of the stakeholder experience*. The advice to introduce more qualitative measures of quality follows the recommendation made by the IEP team in the 2016 report.

3.4   In both the SER and during meetings, the university has emphasised the notion of student centredness as a key feature of quality culture. This is manifested in a number of ways. In the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 it is listed as one of the critical factors for success; in governance terms it is reflected through the activities of the Students' Senate and Students' Council; and there are examples of

student engagement in the quality processes of the university through quality commissions and programme self-evaluation commissions in the faculties. However, as is noted earlier in this report, some of the structures for student engagement are either not as well understood or as effective as they should be and, in other areas, such as on programme self-evaluation commissions, student participation seems to be irregular or subject to local faculty decision-making.

3.5 The team understands, of course, that some students can appear to be largely passive or uninterested in taking up these opportunities for shaping the learning, teaching and wider experiential aspects of their university education. This is what makes the team's earlier commentary (paragraph 2.10) on the systematic training of students in democratic culture so pertinent. The true measure of student centredness is not simply the enabling of forums for engagement but the active participation of the widest body of students in these opportunities for influencing decision-making. This also means that the university should do all it can to facilitate those increased levels of engagement. Perhaps one symbol of this re-invigorated engagement might be to arrange for the chairing of the Student Senate to be undertaken by a student rather than by the Dean of Students. This could help engender a greater sense of student ownership of quality culture across the university as opposed to the rather narrower concept of client satisfaction. The team recommends, therefore, that (a) *the university ensure broader student involvement in quality governance structures on a regular basis and (b) that self-assessment at programme level be extended to all faculties on a systematic basis, with a particular focus on the involvement of external stakeholders and students/alumni in that process.*

3.6 One important consideration in developing and sustaining a healthy quality culture is the role of a vibrant and diverse academic staff body. Amongst other things, this embraces the refreshing of the academic staff base, regular and open opportunities for academic advancement, and appointments from outside the university, especially from the wider international community. All these elements contribute to the development of fresh views and insights, the challenging of the *status quo* and the prospects for wider creativity in learning, teaching and research. Together, these are key drivers in support of a positive and productive quality culture. The team discussed with various staff groups the fact that the majority of academic staff at Sakarya University are recruited from within its own ranks. These staff members have often progressed through their undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the university and then achieved their first academic appointment, without experiencing any significant external influences that might help to enhance their pedagogical or research skills. In terms of academic promotion opportunities, there was a common view put forward by teaching staff that changes in promotion criteria that were now occurring on an annual basis, for example, an increase in the number of publications required to be eligible, is causing concern among the academic community and undermining staff morale. This 'rush to publish' does not always lead to higher quality and should not, in the view of the team, be embedded in promotion practice. In the context of staff recruitment and advancement and its impact on quality culture, therefore, the team *recommends that greater efforts be made to attract new staff members from outside the normal internal university pool and that, when considering advancement, more attention be paid to ensuring consistency in the promotion criteria for the academic staff.*

3.7 As is usual with IEP evaluations, the team was given the opportunity to meet with a group of external stakeholders, mostly connected with business and industry. Their interaction with the university provides added value on a number of levels and can often be seen in the impact on teaching and learning. These organisations and their representatives, however, perform a broader role and their sense of, and perspectives on, quality imperatives can be a welcome addition to internal debates. The team found some evidence that this experience and expertise was being harnessed at the faculty level, with some faculties having established formal external advisory boards. This initiative, however,

was very much at the discretion of the faculty dean and, more often, the practice is to utilise external expertise on a programme or individual staff basis. Clearly, such contact performs an important function. However, in a more strategic sense a formal advisory structure can focus quality developments in a more systematic and less fragmented way. The team recommends *that the university support the sharing of best practice on the benefits of establishing formal external advisory boards at the faculty level.*

4. Teaching and learning

4.1   Following the 2018 partition, the teaching and learning landscape of Sakarya University has clearly changed in significant ways: the downsizing of overall student numbers, the move away from vocational education, and adjustments in teacher-student ratios. However, the recommendations from 2016 relating to teaching and learning still remain valid. And, notwithstanding the structural changes to the university, it is clear from the commentary in the SER that the broad pattern of activity relating to learning and teaching remains the same. Thus, the number of new entrants to undergraduate programmes continues to be determined by the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) while postgraduate admissions and quotas are managed entirely by the university. Programme development is conducted through internal quality assurance processes and then sent to YÖK for sign-off. Increasingly, however, the university is also choosing to gain external accreditation of these programmes through nationally recognised professional bodies.

4.2   From the outset of its meetings with senior university leaders, the team noticed that a particular focus for the institution's learning and teaching strategy is to ensure that its programmes, courses, and curricula meet the needs of industry in a rapidly changing external environment. In this respect the university has already invested time and resources in developing programmes such as 7+1, involving a combination of theoretical and applied courses, with the opportunity to spend one semester prior to graduation in a work placement or internship in industry. This is now a relatively common approach in higher education, especially in the sciences and technology, but it can extend to a range of other disciplines including business, the arts, and social sciences.

4.3   Sakarya University has chosen to augment this approach by introducing what it describes as 'sector courses' which have been offered for the first time in the 2019/2020 academic year. As is stated in the SER "in this series of courses, an industry offers a course whose content aims to fulfil its needs. [An] assigned co-ordinator from the university staff and experts […] from industry execute the course together...". Examples of these courses include 'Industrial Engineering Applications', 'Satellite Technologies' and 'Financial Information Technologies'. These courses are delivered mostly at undergraduate level.[2] And while the total number of students currently involved is relatively small, these courses do demonstrate the university's willingness to involve stakeholders in the delivery of the curriculum to support the employability of its students. The team also understands that the university intends to grow the number of sector courses over the coming academic years, including as part of the postgraduate curriculum choice.

4.4   A further element to these employability-related initiatives is the encouragement to be offered to students (from 2020/21 onwards) to gain project skills so that they can adapt quickly to the different styles of working when they are employed. This initiative (Project of Student R&D Adaptation) is restricted to a limited number of students who can demonstrate high levels of academic achievement but, in principle, it could be extended to a wider group of students as part of the university's commitment to improving graduate employment prospects. In many ways, this approach fits with the university's stated education and training policy where there is a strong emphasis on the adoption of "a competence-based innovative education model to equip students not only with professional skills but also with qualifications and lifelong learning skills...". However, while the team is in no doubt about the university's commitment to student academic competencies, discussions with staff, students, and external stakeholders did not provide any real evidence of the embedding of lifelong learning/soft skills in the day-to-day learning experience of students. In particular, external

---

[2] Details of the 12 courses offered in the 2019/20 academic year can be found in Appendix 4 of the SER (table 4.11).

stakeholders were clear that their expectations in relation to English language (or other second language) proficiency and soft skills are not being met in a systematic way. This, of course, is not an uncommon complaint from business and industry employers. The team does, however, believe that more attention should be paid to this aspect of learning and teaching and, in particular, *it recommends that soft skills development be embraced in a more comprehensive way in programme and course curricula, including through the assessment of learning outcomes*. Interestingly, as part of its SWOT analysis, the university comments that foreign language learning outcomes are generally restricted to practice in departments and that there is a need for this to be developed more widely and intensively, and then systematically implemented. The team agrees with this assessment and therefore *recommends that the university set measurements for the improvement of English language proficiency for students and academic staff and provide appropriate support for reaching those targets*. The team emphasises that this type of initiative should be one that embraces both students and academic staff.

4.5   In its Strategic Plan 2020-24, the university establishes one of its key policies as being "to conduct practices to encourage successful students by constructing a student-centered education model". The development of such a model in the university is clearly an on-going process and, despite the ubiquity of the term student-centred learning (SCL) in higher education, the precise conceptualisation of SCL is not always straightforward. In part, this is because the term can mean different things to different people. However, the following would normally be present in any well-developed SCL approach: "a reliance on active rather than passive learning; an emphasis on deep learning and understanding; increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student; an increased sense of autonomy in the learner, an interdependence between teacher and learner; mutual respect within the learner teacher relationship; and a reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both teacher and learner." It its broadest terms SCL stipulates that "education provision and all its aspects are defined by the intended learning outcomes and most suitable learning process, instead of the student's learning being determined by the education provided".[3]

4.6   The current emphasis that emerges from key documents and discussions that the team had with staff and students is on the university being a broadly based student-centred institution. This ambition is, of course, an important one, but this characterisation perhaps obscures the particular importance of focusing on students and their relationship with their teaching and learning environment and experience. There is, the team believes, evidence that internal stakeholders understand the concept of student-centred learning. This is not as pronounced as it needs to be, however, and mechanisms for addressing this deficit seem to the team to be partial and fragmented. The SER refers to training available to improve lecturers' active learning techniques through the Education Support System. This platform can also operate as a means of sharing best practice. However, such opportunities appear to be geared to self-help rather than to systematically enhance pedagogic skills relating to SCL. And indeed, the university recognises through its SWOT analysis that "further institutional focus should be placed upon student experiences in learning and teaching and its role in student-centered learning". To further this institutional focus the team *recommends that the university build a broader understanding of the concept of Student-Centred Learning, drawing on best practice from the wider HE community*.

4.7   The importance of learning outcomes in SCL is highlighted above (paragraph 4.5), and it is clear to the team that the concept of learning outcomes is widely known and understood in the

---

[3] *Student-centred learning: approaches to quality assurance (2019),* Gover, Loukkola and Peterbauer (EUA publications)

university. What requires further attention, however, is the way in which the concept is put into practice and the way that learning outcomes are formulated and articulated at both the programme and course levels. The team received links to a small sample of course outlines in both the sciences and the humanities and, on reading these outlines, found some systemic problems with the way the concept of learning outcomes has been applied. In particular, there is a real lack of differentiation between learning outcomes presented within years of study at undergraduate level, and then between first, second and third level cycles. In some cases, the programme outcomes for master's and PhD studies are exactly the same. At the level of course learning outcomes these were found to have been defined in a very heterogeneous way, and in the vast majority of cases the links between learning outcomes and assessment methods have not been well established or described.

4.8   There seems to be an awareness in the university of some of these shortcomings as the SER refers to the "need for in-service training on teaching and assessment methods that […] can be used to gain program learning outcomes" and also of the need to strengthen "the balance between the measurement of learning outcomes and curriculum development". This is very much an area to which the university needs to devote more time, especially in bringing greater institutional scrutiny on the quality processes in the faculties and in the staff training provided for this activity. Ideally, more resources should be dedicated to participation in training that is offered outside the institution so that fresh insights and understanding can be shared. The team *recommends that the university pay much closer attention to a wide range of issues relating to learning outcomes, including (a) the appropriate use of language in programme and course descriptions of learning outcomes so that differentiation both within, and across cycles, can be clearly seen and (b) the explicit description of links between learning outcomes and assessment methods*.

4.9   As is to be expected following the partition, the number of academic staff employed by the university has fallen from a peak of nearly 2000 in 2017 to just under 1600 in 2019. Interestingly, the number of full professors has increased in that period by around 12% while the number of associate and assistant professors has fallen by around 20%. The fall in the number of senior instructors is far higher, but it is assumed that this reflects the move of most vocational programmes to the new university. In terms of staff/student ratios these are now generally lower than in the pre-partition period, and this applies across the various academic titles apart from Senior Instructor. This trend perhaps explains some of the positivity amongst staff and students for the current configuration of Sakarya University. The team did, however, hear some concerns from academic staff about the rather high teaching load in some faculties and how this impacted their ability to pursue research activities. This, of course, can have an impact on staff morale and the ability of staff to provide optimal support for their students. It can also undermine the important link between teaching and learning and research.

4.10   The students that the team spoke to during the on-line meetings were, on the whole, very supportive of the quality of the learning and teaching experience provided by the university. A significant number of these students were undertaking postgraduate studies, and they attested to the regular contact they had with their lecturers and the willingness of academic staff to respond to their comments on the curriculum, assessment methods and requests for additional learning materials. Learning outcomes were seen as being accessible via the SABIS system, although this did not seem to be complemented by any in-class introduction to learning outcomes at the beginning of courses. Students said they were familiar with the university's student satisfaction surveys and engaged with these on a regular basis, although some were less clear about the impact their views might be having on future developments. The team touched on the subject of peer communication during its meetings with graduate students, and it emerged that such discourse is rather patchy, especially outside the

central campus. Peer discussions and engagement can be an important way for students to enhance their learning experience and the team *recommends the university support the establishment of a range of forums for sharing experience among graduate students, especially doctoral students*.

4.11   The student experience of the transition to university wide online education due to Covid-19 was generally said to be positive and this reinforces the team's impression that this major task was accomplished seamlessly. In the updated SER, the university provides an additional section on the way the university adapted its educational practices to the circumstances of the pandemic. The team was also able to meet with staff from the Distance Education Center who were at the forefront of providing guidance to academic staff in using the materials available to support on-line learning. As was noted during the 2016 evaluation, the university has a well-developed virtual learning environment via the Perculus and Perculus+ educational platforms. This investment in in-house software development, together with the functionality of the SABIS, has enabled Sakarya University to 'export' on-line learning processes to a number of other universities in Turkey (cf. paragraph 2.7 above).

4.12   The university's commitment to an educational model that emphasises connections to business and industry and employability is to be commended. This is highlighted through initiatives such as applied training and internship arrangements (7+1 and 3+1), the delivery of sector courses, and the pending introduction of the Project for R&D Adaptation. In addition, the team is impressed by the start of the 'social transcript' initiative as a means of encouraging students to record their activities in the cultural, sporting, and artistic arenas. This is a formalised system that involves university boards assessing these activities and endorsing them before entry on to the SABIS system. This innovation clearly provides a broader and more holistic picture of student development and achievement for future employers and, notably, it is also finding favour at other universities in Turkey. Other initiatives supporting employability to which the SER refers include PIKDER (the Human Resources Professionals Association) — an external body which has created a small base in the Business School at the university — which provides a mentorship programme for senior students in their career advancement. Students commented to the team that their career prospects depended very much on their subject discipline. Computer science students were generally confident of their career prospects, believing that the university has a good reputation and benefits from being relatively close to Istanbul. More widely, however, students did not seem to feel as well supported in their post-graduation employment search. The team *recommends that the provision of enhanced access to professional careers guidance for students, including the benefits of postgraduate study, be given greater priority at both the central and faculty levels of the university*.

5. Research

5.1 It is noted earlier in this report that the higher education sector in Turkey is facing material constraints on budgets and capital expenditure. In this context, it was encouraging for the team to hear from the university's senior leadership that the Turkish Higher Education Council is seeking to place greater emphasis on research activity in universities, often as a support to regional development. One of the university's key strategic responses to this external financial environment has been to press forward with an application to YÖK for designation as a research university. If successful, this designation offers the university the opportunity to grow its budget through an improved positioning with the country's research councils and also to have greater flexibility in the appointment of research staff. This strategic impetus for research development now sits alongside the focus on entrepreneurship in education. Senior managers were keen to emphasise that the outputs from research activity would need to be measured in national and international terms. The team found the benefits of becoming a research university to be widely acknowledged and appreciated by the stakeholders, not least through the inclination of industrial and business sectors to form partnerships with universities that have this research 'badge'.

5.2 In moving ahead with its application to YÖK,[4] the university undertook a comprehensive gap analysis of its research profile that helped establish priority areas, emphasised the need to push ahead with the commercialisation of research (KTT) and improve the infrastructure supporting research centres and individual researchers. The SER lists the university's research priorities as follows: light and superior materials and energy storage systems for the defence and automotive industries; cybersecurity; the medical materials and agriculture (tissue culture) sector; Islamic Economics and Finance, Turkish world, and Turkish diaspora research; and Middle East and Ottoman Studies. These priorities are seen as being highly responsive to provincial, regional, and national needs and also reflect internal strengths in terms of outputs in publications and the capacity and profile of researchers. The external buy-in to these research priorities is also seen to be critical to the future sustainability of Sakarya University.

5.3 The clear prioritisation of research activity is an important development that was flagged in the 2016 IEP report. And it is very apparent that the university's senior leadership is strongly committed to enhancing the institution's research base through these flagship activities; this in turn is appreciated by the research and academic staff communities and forms something of a virtuous circle. There are, of course, always 'winners' and 'losers' in research particularly at times of constrained resources. Even so, it is important to demonstrate that the research culture at Sakarya is an inclusive one. This is crucial in ensuring that the morale of researchers is maintained across the subject spectrum and, in institutional terms, that investment in potential growth areas is not overlooked. This all adds to the sustainability of the core research base and also offers opportunities for future flexibility, not least through interdisciplinary projects. The team *recommends, therefore, that senior leaders ensure that the research agenda and culture embrace all parts of the university and not simply those areas which are defined as strategic priorities*.

5.4 While the application for institutional research designation is potentially of great significance to the university, the current standing of research is open to some significant threats. Not least of these are the decrease in public funding and government support through Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology programmes, such as the Industrial Thesis Program (SANTEZ). In these circumstances the national competition for research funding becomes even more intense, and the

---

[4] At the time of the team's on-line visit the university had not heard whether its application had been successful.

team's discussions with staff indicate that other universities in Turkey have a clear competitive edge, not least those that have already been designated as research universities. This competitive disadvantage also seems to extend to the superior levels of staff expertise found in other universities in tendering and bidding for public funds. Nevertheless, the university describes in the SER a wide and varied range of opportunities for research and development. It must be said that the key opportunities seem to be offered through government or government agency funding. Some of the university's priority area strengths are seen to coincide with the government's Supreme Council for Science and Technology (SCST) 2023 Vision and there are also a range of funding possibilities through the programmes of the Turkish Research Council (TÜBİTAK).[5] The SER provides some examples of diversification of income streams for conducting research, and, in this respect the university's Research and Development Application and Research Center (SARGEM) plays a prominent role in carrying out studies in "characterization, lithium-ion battery systems, energy-automotive and seismology". Industry collaboration is also pursued at the faculty level, for example, with the automotive industry. This is obviously very much a work in progress, and the university openly shares concerns that the internal mechanisms and platforms for generating non-university funds are insufficient. In part this is seen through shortcomings in the relationships with external stakeholders and a view that those stakeholders are not convinced of the university's ability to deliver the outcomes they require. More broadly, the SER notes that the university needs to improve the quality as opposed to the quantity of applications for external funds.

5.5   The team is only too aware that achieving any step-change in improving access to external funds requires a clear strategic focus through the university's leadership as well as a considerable commitment from faculty managers, heads of research centres and individual researchers. It is encouraging for the team to hear that renewed efforts are being made in relation to the commercialisation of research and that dedicated central offices for knowledge and technology transfer are playing a full role in evaluating potential patents and projects and then determining whether they should receive university financial support. In addition, Sakarya University is the main shareholder in the newly established Technocity which serves as a key vehicle of knowledge transfer from the university to the wider local and regional society. There are some encouraging signs for the university in this area, with a growth in the number of staff participating in projects in Technocity. However, there has been a levelling off of staff running a company in Technocity, and overall project numbers and number of patents have been relatively flat in the years 2018 and 2019. The commercialisation of patents is very weak. In the view of the team, Technocity provides a very useful platform for technology transfer. There is, however, a need to build on the early progress of this initiative and the team *recommends that fresh impetus be given to technology transfer, including the establishment of spin-off companies*.

5.6   A common theme in discussions with research staff and research students was that the international dimension of research needs further development. Some research staff commented to the team that there is a particular need for the university to increase the number of EU projects and that this is hampered by a lack of experience and expertise in relation to the EU's research funding processes. There was also a view expressed that international collaborators needed to see a well-developed research infrastructure and that at Sakarya University this is not always visible enough to encourage mutually beneficial research co-operation. A further issue raised in discussions was the level of English-language competence needed amongst staff researchers to engage with international

---

[5] TÜBİTAK acts as an advisory agency to the Turkish Government on science and research issues and is the secretariat of SCST, the highest science and technology policy making body in Turkey.

projects and interact with multi-national companies where the common language of discourse is English. This language deficit was acknowledged by university leaders but, as was pointed out to the team, it is not a problem that is exclusive to Sakarya University. However, it does have impacts across the research spectrum, and success in publications in high-impact journals are equally hindered if language skills competency in English does not feature prominently in research strategy. Indeed, the team was informed that in 2020 the university has seen an increased rejection of publications because of shortcomings in English language presentation. There is a hope, however, that efforts to build up a university publications office might offer some support in this respect; attempts are also being made to recruit new academic staff with good language skills. There is no one obvious panacea for extending the university's reach in the international arena but the team does *recommend that the university explore opportunities for international partnerships in research projects and provide greater support for researchers in applying for funding from international sources*. In general, the team believes that there is *scope for developing further the international dimension of research and also for presenting the social and economic impact of its research.* This type of impact analysis can provide useful leverage when articulating the research footprint of the university to a wider international community.

5.7   During its meetings the team met a number of experienced and successful researchers. For these researchers, the systems of support work well, and their initial externally funded projects had been encouraged by the university's leadership in terms of physical and material resources. Success then tended to breed success. For younger researchers, the picture is, of course, different: their priorities have to be linked to establishing their research vision and then showing how it meets regional needs. This can lead to support from the university for small-scale seed projects. The team was also informed about incentives, both financial and non-financial, for researchers. The SER describes how high-achieving research centres are 'positively discriminated' by receiving additional infrastructure support. They are also congratulated by the rector and receive a diploma of recognition. In 2018 the university, working with external companies, established research awards across all subject areas. These financial bursaries are part of the attempt to improve the bridges between industry and staff. These are encouraging initiatives and the team feels that they can be augmented by a concerted attempt to *attract new researchers from outside the university*. All this, however, must be set against the significant challenges facing the research community. In some ways this is illustrated by data provided in the SER which shows a significant reduction in research projects in the period between 2016 and 2019, and corresponding reductions in income and projects per member of academic staff. This, of course, is as much a challenge for the university's leadership and senior management as research centres and individual research staff. One of the policy aims for research and development set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 perhaps encapsulates how this needs to be taken forward at the senior levels of the university: "to ensure the use of the resources and infrastructure in line with the corporate objectives through the integrated management of research and development activities at the corporate level".

5.8   Student engagement with research at both undergraduate and masters levels of study is a feature of the research landscape at the university. Research staff commented that they encourage undergraduate students to become trainees in laboratories and that there is also a national congress where final year undergraduates can present their research projects. Master's students often become involved in funded research projects. From discussions, the team found PhD students generally positive about their research experience. They regarded supervisors as respectful and responsive to their needs, often willing to involve students in larger projects. Resources are, on the whole, felt to be sufficient, particularly in the engineering field, and the university's relative proximity to Istanbul and Ankara means that more specialist equipment or learning resources can always be accessed if necessary. Some research students thought that the university's research environment could be

improved by greater collaboration with universities from outside Turkey and that more regular contact with industry would benefit their employment prospects. The team, therefore, recognises that the university provides a supportive infrastructure for research students and that reasonable opportunities for building project experience are readily available, albeit mostly in the science and technology disciplines. The team does note, however, that registered PhD numbers have fallen in the last two years (as have master's degree numbers) and that completions of PhDs are also in decline. The team understands that many PhD students continue with their studies while also in employment, and this is having a negative impact on completion times. These trends need careful monitoring by the university and proactive actions taken to achieve the goals set.

6. Service to society

6.1   In the SER the university suggests that service to society can be classified "as educational activities open to the public and support/research activities conducted with local organisations". This is a perfectly acceptable baseline for exploring the university's relationships with its wider communities. Interestingly, however, the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 includes a policy on 'Responsible University' which applies much broader principles that can be regarded as being in support of service to society. These include: "to develop social, environmental, and cultural awareness by educating individuals who are respectful to social values an environmental issues and have a high sense of responsibility" and "to pursue the principle of conscious consumption of natural resources, reduction of inequalities and to consider the disadvantaged groups in corporate practices and services". These elements of policy are then developed into specific goals and performance indicators. This, in many ways, is a very useful way of focussing attention on, and monitoring, the university's commitment to its wider societal setting. As mentioned earlier in this report when discussing institutional decision-making, there is perhaps a missing element of qualitative measurement in the ways such goals and performance indicators are presented. However, they do help to reinforce and bind together the narrative on service to society presented in the SER.

6.2   The team notes an impressive list of projects and programmes to support service to society, for example, Technocity, business incubators and the Green Campus initiative. In particular, the Green Campus initiative shows the durability of some of these activities as it was a notable feature of the university's work when the earlier IEP visit took place in 2016. There is strong evidence, too, of the university's visibility in the regional community. It often organises activities with interested stakeholders and co-operates with local and municipal government on projects relating to natural disasters and environmental protection. In addition, the distance learning platform, SAUX, provides educational services to the wider community through a number of open courses.

6.3   The growing use of campus facilities by partners such as the Turkey Red Crescent Society and a range of other NGOs is to be commended. It is also encouraging for the team to read of direct interventions that support and sustain local communities in the areas of health care and the history and traditions of those living in Sakarya. These connections between the university and Sakarya's communities have become even more important during a time when normal human relationships have been made far more difficult and the team *recommends that staff and students be encouraged to continue exploring activities in service to society during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic*. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the team commends the national level support Sakarya University has been offering to other Turkish universities through the sharing of distance learning modules within the scope of Digital transformation project.

6.4   From the student perspective, the introduction by the university of the social transcript offers an ideal mechanism both to encourage volunteering and also record those endeavours, presenting them to future employers who, when differentiating between candidates for recruitment, often look to 'value added' elements in their education. The team found a reasonable level of awareness amongst students of the value of the social transcript but there is, it believes, scope *for increasing student awareness about the benefits of engaging with the social transcript, both in terms of their contribution to society and in increasing their chances of meaningful employment*.

6.5   The university is clearly seeking to respond to the challenges of promoting graduate employment at a time of downward pressures on national and international economies. As has been noted earlier in this report, developments involving sector courses and project experience are now becoming embedded in the learning environment. The connections between business and students

are helped through association with organisations such as PIKDER and the Independent Industrialists Association (MÜSİAD), the latter offering specific opportunities for international students registered at the university. This international dimension is also seen in the university's membership in the Platform of Western Black Sea Universities, a grouping of 13 institutions that provides a platform for careers fairs and employer-candidate alumni meetings. This complements the work of the internal Coordination Office of Career and Talent Management which automates contacts between companies looking to recruit graduates and those alumni registered on the university's Graduate Information System. These initiatives are particularly important at this juncture; however, student awareness of these efforts is not optimal, and the team is, therefore, *keen to see both the visibility and scope of these initiatives enhanced and expanded.*

7. Internationalisation

7.1   The university's approach to internationalisation is presented in the SER as one that is defined, on the one hand, by student recruitment and, on the other hand, by student and staff mobility programmes and opportunities. The desire to provide greater focus for these two strands of activity is reflected in the fact that they now have distinct administrative structures to support them: an International Student Center and an International Relations Office. In addition, the SER states that the International Student Center has been provided with enhanced resources "to increase the number and quality of international students" studying at the university. Both offices report to the Vice-Rector for Learning and Teaching.

7.2   In many ways this appears to the team to be a somewhat narrow approach to internationalisation. As has been noted earlier in this report, there is an absence of an international policy in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024. In that strategic plan, internationalisation is regarded as one of the critical factors for success, yet when the reader comes to the section on strategies it is presented in a very under-developed way with a brief reference to a broad ambition to "spread internationalization". There is then a single linked goal —" to form international coordinated programs to increase the number of international students and lecturers, to benefit from international exchange programs and to increase the number of English lessons and programs" — and a set of performance indicators, all associated with quantitative measurements. In this context, internationalisation has not been developed in its fullest sense. Interestingly, the university's Erasmus Policy Statement shown on its website provides a more typical summary of some of the key elements often linked to a wider international policy. That policy starts by stating that "internationalisation is one of the spearheads of Sakarya University policy, not only as a goal in itself but as an essential component of the instruction and research process. International cooperation is expected to improve the quality of the primary processes. Cooperation with so many institutions under the framework of EU Programmes testifies to this goal". Indeed, the university has other parts of its international operation that seek to articulate a wider meaning to internationalisation. The International Student Center has developed mission and vision statements[6] which are helpful in focussing attention on the core ambitions of that unit. There is no doubt that a range of ideas exists around what determines internationalisation in the university, but these can appear somewhat fragmented and lacking in clear institutional ownership. The team, therefore, *recommends that senior leaders work to increase awareness of a wider understanding of the concept of internationalisation amongst all stakeholders and that this is reflected in corporate strategy and policies*.

7.3   The university has well-established student and staff mobility exchange arrangements in place, including ERASMUS, MEVLANA and FARABI, but, as is noted in the SER, some elements of these exchange programmes are hindered by the small number of 'English-medium programs and courses' offered by Sakarya. Incoming student and staff numbers on ERASMUS exchanges are very low given the size of the university, although there is some encouragement in a small growth in student numbers in 2019/20. Outgoing student numbers for ERASMUS are also shown to be in general decline, while there is a small increase in staff exchange numbers in the same period. The other exchange programmes tend to show a greater interest from incoming students, probably because those exchanges have a worldwide reach. It is notable, though, that outgoing student interest in these other

---

[6] On the university website, the Center describes its Mission as being: "to help international students studying at Sakarya University in their social integration as well as their academic development; to adopt a proactive attitude for the highest quality students from different geographies of the world to choose Sakarya University; to encourage the participation of students in research and development activities and to contribute to Sakarya University's internationalization process". Its Vision is said "to be the first university [international students] want to study…in Turkey".

exchange programmes is shown as being in low numbers. The university recognises that this reflects a less than encouraging picture of the university's interaction with its international peers and that this requires some urgent attention. It has, therefore, established a specific strategic goal[7] to increase internationally co-ordinated programmes, numbers of international students and staff, and the number of English courses and programmes. As with other areas of the strategic plan, the performance indicators for this goal are expressed in a general way, that is, 'the number of…'. This did not allow the team to explore specific target numbers for each performance indicator on a year to year basis, consider whether the scale of any improvement is appropriate, and assess the level of commitment and resources that would need to be applied over the strategic planning period. As part of this general focus on numbers relating to international activity, the team also notes that there are large numbers of partnership agreements in place, particularly through ERASMUS and MEVLANA (483 and 84 respectively), although an extrapolation from agreements to student/staff numbers does suggest that many of these agreements are currently inactive. The concentration on numbers of agreements may, therefore, provide an inaccurate snapshot of the health of this strand of activity with all the implications it might have for other initiatives to grow exchange numbers or international registrations in mainstream programmes. In these circumstances the team *recommends that the university monitor the activities of concluded partnership agreements so that the necessary qualitative assessment can be made alongside the number-driven indicators.*

7.4   The team was able to have an on-line meeting with staff from the main administrative support structures for internationalisation such as the International Student Centre and the International Relations Office. The separation of roles between these two offices, one focusing on international student recruitment activity and the other on mobility processes and practices, has allowed a degree of greater ownership for those separate arrangements. The team is encouraged by their willingness to respond positively to some significant challenges. However, the lack of specific performance indicators is something of a hinderance to their work. Equally, for all the commitment of staff in these separate offices, the team does believe that there needs to be a more holistic approach to internationalisation as discussed in paragraph 7.2 above. This could be achieved by having a dedicated senior manager, reporting to the vice-rector, overseeing internationalisation as recommended in the 2016 IEP report, or it could be tackled in other ways within the university's decision-making structures.

7.5   In 2019-20 the SER indicates that the university had just over 3000 international students registered across all levels of study. It is clear from the strategic plan that there is an ambition to make significant progress in growing that number and improving the quality of the students that are accepted. The breakdown of country of origin for these students shows a heavy preponderance coming from Eurasia, the Middle East and southeast Asia. However, the university welcomes students from over 100 countries, and this can present particular challenges to the structures designed to support those students. Many of these students will use English as their second language, and the team found some evidence that the lack of English language proficiency amongst administrative staff was acting as a barrier to successful communication with them. The team *recommends that further support and encouragement be provided for administrative staff to help with the improvement of their proficiency in the English language*. In terms of the wider international student experience, there will always be a range of issues that these students will need to discuss with staff as they seek to orientate themselves to their new learning environment and adapt to the cultural differences between their home and host countries. This requires a particular skills set for the university staff involved with those support mechanisms and, in turn, the university needs to support their on-going development and the

---

[7] This is H.1.4 found in Appendix 6 of the SER, and there are 19 associated performance indicators listed, all starting 'the number of…'.

building of their expertise. This is of particular importance in light of the university's ambition to focus on an expansion in international student recruitment as one of the central pillars of its international strategy. As with the issue of English language skills amongst support staff, the team learned from some students that they had struggled to receive support and advice that was appropriate to their circumstances. The team *recommends, therefore, that training for the staff in international student support services be broadened to meet the wide and varied expectations of such a diverse study body, and that this should include the improvement of general communication skills in addition to language proficiency*.

7.7   As it seeks to influence an ever widening group of interested stakeholders from outside Turkey, the university has to be more conscious than ever of the power of its on-line voice. The university's website is a critical tool in this endeavour and, as in 2016, the IEP team has some reservations as to whether its international reach is as effective as it might be, particularly in the way it caters for those viewing the site in the English language. The team recognises that work has been undertaken to improve and strengthen the English dimensions of the website; however, navigation of details relating to international study, including programme content, or research activities that relate to the international domain is often elusive. This can be a significant disadvantage as the time and patience invested by on-line visitors to the site can be limited. The team *recommends that the university progress its investment in developing website content, targeting international students (existing and potential), researchers and partners*.

8. Conclusion

8.1   Since the IEP visit in 2016, Sakarya University has faced a period of significant change, mostly determined by external factors. Partition in July 2018 produced a shift in size and composition of the institution with all that entails for the leadership, management and direction of the university's strategy, policies, systems, and processes. Matters relating to structural change on this scale often have a profound impact on all stakeholders, and the required adjustments can extend over a considerable period of time. In addition, from 2018 the university welcomed a new senior leadership team, and it was its task to reassure all staff, students, and external partners that the quality of learning, teaching and research would remain undiminished in the new-found circumstances of the university. That senior leadership team also faces a hugely competitive higher education sector at home and in the wider international space. The university has used the development process for its new strategic plan as a key way of addressing this challenging environment and senior leaders, and managers believe that the plan offers a solid platform for taking the university forward over the next four years. From the perspective of the IEP team, the plan appears to have buy-in from staff, students and external stakeholders, and this will be critical to its success. In this context, the team has made some recommendations relating to governance and institutional decision-making that it believes can support the future development and sustainability of the university.

8.2   Sakarya University is a self-aware and innovative university that is building on its traditions in delivering education and research that extend over half a century. It is reinforcing aspects of entrepreneurship and employability in the curriculum across all levels of study and, with its recent application for designation as a research university, showing its research ambitions, a direction that has the support of its whole community. As the university has noted in its SER narrative, this offers a very wide range of project and partnership opportunities both within Turkey and across international boundaries. The team commends this ambition and, from its conversations with staff, students, and external stakeholders, has gained the clear impression that this challenging change agenda will be met with   commitment,   innovation,   agility,   resourcefulness,   and   inclusivity.

9. Summary of the findings / recommendations

Governance and Institutional Decision-Making

9.1   A clear internationalisation policy should be developed.

9.2   In its strategic planning, the university should place a stronger emphasis on the qualitative analysis of data as well as the visual representation of data, for example, trends analysis, charts, etc.

9.3   Strategic plan targets should be established for the whole strategic planning period.

9.4   Focus should be placed on measuring the critical areas for development and reducing the number of KPIs.

9.5   The university should elaborate further the current policy statements by establishing them as broad guidelines informing decision-making.

9.6   A university level Advisory Board, including international representatives, should be established to help steer the future development of the university.

Quality Culture

9.7   More attention should be paid to the effective implementation of quality enhancement by embracing more fully trend and time-series analysis, complemented by processes that capture the more qualitative aspects of the stakeholder experience.

9.8   The university should ensure broader student involvement in quality governance structures on a regular basis.

9.9   Self-assessment at programme level should be extended to all faculties on a systematic basis, with a particular focus on the involvement of external stakeholders and students/alumni in that process.

9.10   Greater efforts should be made to attract new staff members from outside the normal internal university pool and, when considering advancement, more attention should be paid to ensuring consistency in the promotion criteria for the academic staff.

9.11   The university should support the sharing of best practice on the benefits of establishing formal external advisory boards at the faculty level.

Teaching and Learning

9.14   Soft skills development should be embraced in a more comprehensive way in programme and course curricula including through the assessment of learning outcomes.

9.15   The university should set measurements for the improvement of English language proficiency for students and academic staff and provide appropriate support for reaching those targets.

9.16   The university should build a broader understanding of the concept of Student-Centred Learning, drawing on best practice from the wider HE community.

9.17 The university should pay much closer attention to a wide range of issues relating to learning outcomes, including (a) the appropriate use of language in programme and course descriptions of learning outcomes so that differentiation both within, and across, cycles can be clearly seen and (b) the explicit description of links between learning outcomes and assessment methods.

9.18 The university should establish a range of forums for sharing experience among graduate students, especially doctoral students.

9.19 The provision of enhanced access to professional careers guidance for students, including the benefits of postgraduate study, should be given greater priority at both the central and faculty levels of the university.

Research

9.20 Senior leaders should ensure that the research agenda and culture embrace all parts of the university and not simply those areas which are defined as strategic priorities.

9.21 Fresh impetus should be given to technology transfer, including the establishment of spin-off companies.

9.22 The university should explore opportunities for international partnerships in research projects and provide greater support for researchers in applying for funding from international sources.

9.23 The university should develop further the international dimension of research and also present the social and economic impact of its research.

9.24 New researchers from outside the university should be attracted.

Service to Society

9.25 Staff and students should be encouraged to continue exploring activities in service to society during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

9.26 Student awareness of the benefits of engaging with the social transcript, both in terms of their contribution to society and in increasing their chances of meaningful employment, should be increased.

9.27 The university should expand and enhance initiatives to support students 'employability, such as the Western Black Sea universities platform and the Coordination Office of Career and Talent Management.

Internationalisation

9.28 Senior leaders should work to increase awareness of a wider understanding of the concept of internationalisation amongst all stakeholders and this should be reflected in corporate strategy and policies.

9.29 The university should monitor the activities of concluded partnership agreements so that the necessary qualitative assessment can be made alongside the number-driven indicators.

9.30 Further support and encouragement should be provided for administrative staff to help with the improvement of their proficiency in the English language.

9.31   Training for the staff in international student support services should be broadened to meet the wide and varied expectations of such a diverse study body, and this should include the improvement of general communication skills in addition to language proficiency.

9.32   The university should progress its investment in developing website content, targeting international students (existing and potential), researchers and partners.