

**ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY**

***FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **1. Introduction**

This report is the result of a follow-up evaluation of Istanbul Aydin University. The acronym “IAU” will be used for the institution throughout the present report. The European University Association’s (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) originally evaluated IAU in 2013 with the report submitted to the university in November 2013. In 2016, the university subsequently requested that IEP carry out a follow-up evaluation.

The follow-up evaluation was undertaken by IEP. The evaluation team (later the team) was composed of the following members:

- Sijbolt Noorda, Prof. Dr., former President, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as team chair
- Mar Campins, Prof. Dr., former Vice-Rector for International Policy, University of Barcelona, Spain
- Melanie Gut, Master student, ETH Zurich, Switzerland
- David Oliva Uribe, Prof. Dr., Head of the Council for Doctoral Education, European University Association, as team coordinator

Professor Sijbolt Noorda was Chair of the IEP evaluation team that conducted the initial evaluation of IAU in 2013.

### **1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme and follow-up evaluation process**

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 (SER), 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 with 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:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## **1.2 Istanbul Aydin University's profile**

Istanbul Aydin University was founded in 2003 by the Anatolian Educational and Cultural Foundation (hereafter the foundation), under the leadership of Dr. Mustafa Aydin. IAU is a foundation university recognised and accredited by the Turkish Council of Higher Education (CoHE). It originally began operations as Anadolu BIL Vocational School of Higher Education offering 12 associate degree programmes. In 2007, it became Istanbul Aydin University. The initial educational offer comprised bachelor programmes next to the Vocational School, which offered associate degree programmes. Master and doctoral programmes were added in 2010. The main characteristics of IAU were described in detail in the original evaluation report.

At present, IAU is organised into 11 Faculties, 2 Schools of Higher Education, 3 Vocational Schools of Higher Education, 3 Graduate Institutes and 26 Application and Research Centres. The Faculty of Medicine has only recently opened and received its first student intake in 2016. The growth of IAU since the initial evaluation is significant: 26,806 students were enrolled in 2013, and the intake increased to 35,285 students in 2016. In terms of staff, there are currently 763 full-time and 376 part-time academic staff.

Since the initial evaluation, the strategic vision of IAU has been reshaped and a new strategic plan was adopted by the IAU Senate in 2016. The recommendations made by the IEP evaluation team were taken into consideration, and the university's mission and vision were reviewed, aligning them to the labour market demands and sectorial developments.

A significant effort has been made to expand the technological infrastructure and physical spaces, allowing IAU to better accommodate new operations and substantially increased numbers of students and staff. The teaching and learning activities aim to prepare accomplished students, not only to have immediate access to the labour market upon graduation, but also to encourage lifelong learning. Moreover, IAU aims to become a main centre of attraction for national and international students and academics in Turkey.

## **1.3 The evaluation process**

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by an executive committee composed of academic and administrative staff from IAU's quality assurance and international relations offices; vice-

rectors; and advisors to the Board of Trustees. Prof. Dr. Zafer Aslan, who coordinated the first evaluation in 2013, was the coordinator of the committee.

### ***The Self-Evaluation Report***

The executive committee prepared an informative 25-page Self-Evaluation Report. The SER reflects the developments and progress made by IAU in relation to the recommendations addressed in the report of the initial evaluation. The SER made references to the Strategic Plan adopted in 2016, of which the team received a printed copy during the site visit. Another additional relevant document given to the team during the visit was the Internal Evaluation Report issued on 15 June 2016.

The team express their appreciation for the dedication and the thorough work done in preparing the SER. The team considered it to be a fair and self-critical analysis of the current situation and of the developments since 2013. It was mentioned in the SER and in several meetings that the first evaluation process was considered an important guide for IAU; most of its recommendations were followed, shaping its development over the last years.

### ***The follow-up visit***

The team's site visit to IAU took place from 15 to 18 May 2017. During the visit, the team had the opportunity to meet many of the key actors at IAU as well as the main stakeholders, namely:

- institutional leadership;
- the self-evaluation group;
- members of the staff of the central office;
- the Quality Assurance Unit;
- representatives of the Academic Senate;
- academic leader and staff of two faculties and one vocational school;
- representatives of industry, society and local authorities;
- national and international student representatives.

During the visit, a number of informative, intense and in-depth discussions took place with the Rector of the university, Prof. Dr. Yadigâr İzmirli. All meetings and discussions were efficiently arranged by Prof. Dr. Zafer Aslan, who was the liaison person for the evaluation team. The overall logistics of the follow-up visit were well organised and the evaluation team received all the support they needed from Ms Irem Arman, Ms. Ayşe Deniz Özkan and Ms Pinar Elbasan. An external translator was provided for the entire visit.

On the last day of the follow-up visit, the Chair of the evaluation team, Professor Sijbolt Noorda, presented the team's oral report to an audience made up of the leadership of the university, together with some members of the university community who had participated in the meetings with the team during the follow-up visit. The oral report summarised this evaluation report.

The team would like to thank the university, in particular its founder and President, Dr Mustafa Aydin; the Rector, Professor Dr Yadigar Izmirli; and Professor Zafer Aslan as coordinator of the self-evaluation team, for the thorough preparation of the follow-up visit, and their dedication, flexibility, and openness during the evaluation process. In addition, the team recognises the efforts made by the university since the initial evaluation and the care and attention they have paid to following the recommendations outlined in the original evaluation report.

## 2. Governance and institutional decision-making

As mentioned in the initial evaluation report in 2013, decision-making and governance are tightly regulated by national legislation through the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK). IAU is governed by a strong leadership of the President and a Board of Trustees composed of seven members, which is the highest decision-making body, in accordance with the law on foundation universities. This body is responsible for the university budget and the university's financial and institutional strategies, as well as for appointing the Rector.

The Senate is the leading academic body that takes institutional decisions regarding teaching and research. The Executive Board is responsible for the implementation of institutional decisions. The Rector is responsible for academic and administrative tasks. The current Rector, Prof. Dr. Yadigar Izmirli, was appointed for a second four-year term in 2015. She is supported by a team of three vice-rectors (one for teaching, one for research and one for quality assurance), a Secretary General responsible for administrative and staff affairs, and three vice-secretaries (one for financial management, one for public communications and promotion and one for university regulations). The initial evaluation report recommended that the rector be more engaged at the strategic level as executor of the new vision of the university and to focus less on administrative tasks.

### The Strategic Plan IAU 2016

The Senate adopted a new strategic plan in 2016. The strategic plan has a multi-stakeholder structure. The implementation of the strategy has resulted in IAU being in a constant process of change. Therefore, it is necessary to review and update the strategic plan periodically to ensure adaptability to the current dynamic environment. The strategic plan includes a two-step process: Strategic Plan Preparation Process and Implementation of the Strategic Plan. The main components are (quoted from the IAU Strategic Plan):

#### *Mission*

*To be an institution equipped with constantly updated technological infrastructure providing top level of education, training and basic, applied and interdisciplinary research in order to bring professional competence to the fore for the facilitation of transformation of information into products serving the community*

#### *Vision*

*A higher education institution where individuals are trained through ever renewed education programs to be equipped with skills to transform knowledge to products for the enhancement of quality of sustainable living.*

- *To prepare students, considering their individual differences, as professionally competent individuals to operate in a globally competitive and culturally diverse environment by providing a campus with an infrastructure accommodating different cultures and international elements,*

- *To establish collaborations with academia, business world and NGOs at national and international level,*
- *To encourage the society and individuals for lifelong learning,*
- *To be an attraction centre for national and international students and academics.*

#### *Values*

- *To be innovative,*
- *To think freely,*
- *To have an interdisciplinary approach,*
- *To serve the society,*
- *Lifelong education,*
- *To train skilled workforce,*
- *Student Centred Education,*
- *To have participatory management approach,*
- *Communication with all parts of the society,*
- *Tolerance for different thoughts,*
- *Respect for ethical rules.*

Based on the vision, mission and values, the plan includes a series of objectives, goals and a SWOT analysis. These elements have been translated into an action plan containing many new actions and initiatives, but also continuing earlier priorities, for instance, enhancing the international presence of IAU. The team would recommend reviewing the current action plan to define clear priorities. Change processes benefit from a well-structured route map (including milestones and relevant actors) rather than a long list of individual actions.

Both the SER, and discussions during the visit, indicate that the Rector is still highly involved in managerial tasks, but it seems that the support team allows the Rector to focus more on strategic decisions than previously.

During the visit, it was positively observed that IAU has a restructured and stabilised governance and administration process, making IAU an institution that is able to realise its plans. Since 2013, there has been a continuous growth in student numbers, both national and international. In addition, the number of academic programmes has grown. Its pragmatic, business-like approach allows IAU to operate effectively. The facility expansion plan for new facilities has been successfully realised and the number of staff has also increased.

Although many positive efforts have been made over the last years, IAU realises that there is still room for improvement. During the interviews, the staff and the leadership recognised that *“We have established trends, now we have to make them sustainable”*. This shows the ability and willingness of IAU to carry out a proper reflection on its institutional development processes and act accordingly.

The SER shows that a policy for staff development has been adopted, which includes offering training programmes for the administrative staff. Additionally, the human resources (HR) management carries out exit interviews with the staff members who leave the university in order to identify the main reasons for their leaving IAU. The HR team has also started to work



on drafting proposals on HR Status and Ethics Guidelines. These efforts should be continued and expanded. Although progress has been made, the team believes that IAU can do more to make job conditions more attractive and increase staff retention.

The SER also indicates that student representatives have been given an active role in the university governance. Moreover, IAU encourages students to express their views, wishes and complaints by contacting their academic advisors, Department Chair, Dean, and even the Rector. The team found during the multiple interviews with students and student representatives that their voices are heard, but that their roles in the decision-making bodies are not clear and/or are very limited in scope. Therefore, the team's advice is to provide the students with a more prominent role in decision-making bodies. Another regular request from the students which the team heard was the need for more facilities for student community activities. As student engagement is a clear hallmark of IAU campus life it deserves to be supported and facilitated.

According to the SER, IAU carries out satisfaction surveys with a view to strengthening university identity and institutional commitment. During the visit, the team asked the students if they receive feedback from the survey results. It appeared that the students are not aware of the results or how these results are used. This may explain why their motivation to complete the surveys is relatively low. In order to address this issue, the team encourages IAU to give feedback to the students on the use made of the outcomes of the surveys so as to increase their involvement.

As a general observation, the team recognises that IAU has a hybrid institutional profile with strong external relations, as already observed in 2013. This profile remains a very valuable asset for the institution and deserves to be carefully protected and strengthened.

It is clear to the Team that IAU is able to realise its plans and attract a large number of students, nationally and internationally. The Team advises that the energy that has been spent on growth to date should now be directed towards enhancing quality and institutional academic culture. In line with the self-assessment “We have established trends, now we have to make them sustainable”, IAU should keep working on the development of its long-term vision. The institution needs to develop a stronger academic and institutional culture, with continuous quality-driven policies. The Team encourages IAU to focus on the core of the long-term vision, which is the enhancement of the human resource policy. In this context, important specific topics to be addressed are gender equality, international skills, a balanced age distribution, and career development opportunities for staff.

Regarding the role of students in the governance processes, the Team recommends giving students a more prominent role in the decision-making bodies, and to close the feedback loop on student surveys. IAU should, in addition, provide appropriate facilities for student community activities.

### **3. Quality culture**

The evaluation team of the initial evaluation in 2013 stressed the need for IAU to find ways to clarify its internal quality assurance structures. The creation of a unit to coordinate all the efforts in quality assurance within IAU was recommended.

At the national level, the CoHE established a new independent Council for Quality Assurance in April 2016. This Council provided the universities with new guidelines and launched institutional evaluations in which all higher education institutions needed to take part. The evaluations cover teaching, research activities, financial and administrative management, and internal and external quality assurance of services.

IAU has put in place internal processes of reporting and established a Quality Assurance Organisation (QAO), which complies with the CoHE's guidelines. The QAO has separate units for national and international quality activities (e.g. national and international accreditations). In addition, several academic programmes have been accredited by external accreditation bodies recommended by CoHE (SER, Table 3.1). The team could see that quality assurance and development remain a central concern for IAU and observed during the interviews with the responsible staff for quality assurance that the efforts made by IAU are in line with the Strategic Plan.

The team reviewed the SWOT analysis included in the Strategic Plan and found that although good efforts have been made to list all the items, there is still room for improvement and recommends prioritising the listed items.

The evaluation team recognises that IAU has made very good progress in promoting a quality culture. A Quality Assurance Organisation has been established and several programmes have been accredited, with more programmes to be accredited in the near future. As a next step, the team recommends the university to invest in institutional research which can, for instance, take the form of benchmarking with similar institutions, and to carry out data collection and analysis, in order to provide an evidence base for strategy and improvement. As mentioned in the previous section, the team's key message is that the energy successfully spent on growth should now be directed to enhance quality and institutional academic culture.

#### **4. Teaching and learning**

The 2013 evaluation report noted that as the university grows, it should pay particular attention to teaching conditions, such as class sizes and teaching load of academic staff, so as to keep up standards and assure quality in the teaching and learning.

The SER provides an account of actions taken to improve the satisfaction of the academic staff. For instance, the teaching load of the full-time academic staff has decreased from 24 hours to 18 hours, due to the recruitment of new academic staff. By June 2016, there were 1139 academic staff in total, of which 763 were full-time and 376 were part-time. Additionally, IAU has increased the number of incentives so to encourage staff to produce academic publications and take part in national or international projects. The improvement of campus facilities and teaching infrastructure is also noticeable and has had a positive impact on the satisfaction levels of the academic staff.

The team conducted interviews with the academic management and staff from two different faculties and one vocational school. During the interviews with members of staff, the team observed that the retention time of the staff is rather short. Some staff members expressed a need for better working conditions with more variety in their tasks, the possibility to have flexible working hours, and a fair reward for good performance. They recognised the efforts made by the leadership to decrease the teaching load, but still found it to be very high, and the same comment applies for the student/teacher ratio. These observations underline the demand for an appropriate human resource policy to create attractive working conditions and support career development programmes for academic staff, as well as for the administrative staff, which was discussed in Chapter 2 above.

For students, the SER identifies IAU's on-the-job-training and internships as its distinguishing feature. These are organised through the Career Centre's Placement Unit. The SER reports that through its many industry partnerships, the Career Centre has placed more than 11,000 students in companies to carry out an internship during the academic year 2015-2016 alone. The students interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the internship programme, but added that the current way in which it is run (i.e. one day per week) is not optimal. This means that the number of companies ready to welcome students remains limited, since for many employers a one-day-per-week trainee does not bring very much added value, and in many cases, requires more effort by the companies to manage the interns.

The Team recognises IAU's efforts in teaching and learning. However, it is still advisable to decrease the teaching load, and improve the student/teacher ratio. Furthermore, IAU should implement policies towards better staff retention and more career development opportunities. The nature of the academic work demands a certain level of flexibility in the working hours and the variety of tasks. It is recommended to establish a system with fair rewards for quality performance of academic staff and to improve the training programmes so as to upgrade the teaching abilities.

In addition, the Team recommends experimenting with new internship models with different time formulas, aiming to attract more companies, and evaluate a possible expansion to provide a similar offer to graduate programmes.

## **5. Research**

During the initial evaluation in 2013, it was found that research activities at IAU were primarily industry testing, technical analysis or problem solving, following a model of applied research found in many universities of applied sciences. The evaluation report stated the importance of building research capacity and ensuring that doctoral programmes are embedded in an active research environment. This should be done by the development of an appropriate research infrastructure. In this regard, IAU was advised to encourage and enable staff to expand their research engagements, and to attract internationally qualified academic staff with excellent research credentials.

During the follow-up visit, the team learnt that research activities at IAU were indeed expanded and conducted under two main pillars: scientific R&D activities and university-industry collaborations. The policies introduced and actions taken since the initial evaluations have resulted in significant progress, with the number of interdisciplinary projects, industrial/sector based projects and publicly funded projects (such as those supported by HORIZON 2020, TUBITAK and Development Agencies) having increased (SER Table 5.1).

The team takes note of the substantial increase in the number of research activities and research centres developed since 2013. The team recommends that IAU should focus its research expansion on selective fields, in line with the mission and profile of the university, aiming at a sustainable growth in its research capacity. The team highly recommends introducing quality assurance and performance measurements for research activities.

## **6. Service to society**

The SER provides a comprehensive description of the IAU activities supporting its societal commitment. IAU provides a broad offer of services to society and encourages the social interaction of its staff and students. The academic staff participate in this work in different ways, such as interviews for TV programmes, think-tank groups, and participation with NGOs and business companies. At the municipal level, IAU conducts several projects to support immigrants and refugees. IAU plays a pivotal role in the education of Syrian refugees, and between 2015 and 2016 provided either Turkish language classes or vocational certificate programmes for more than 500 refugees. The student clubs also play an important role, for example, by visiting elementary schools around the country, delivering clothing, books, and other supplies for schools in need.

As reported in 2013, IAU has shown a strong commitment to build educational and research activities that would be of service to society as well as to train graduates with a strong dedication to service to society.

During the visit, the team confirmed the firm and continuous commitment of IAU to be an institution with a strong social conscience. The credibility and reputation of IAU allow it to maintain an intense cooperation network with private and public external stakeholders.

As indicated above in the Governance section, the team found that proper facilities for student community activities should be provided. This will reassure the commitment of the student clubs to support the strategies of IAU in this area.

## **7. Internationalisation**

Internationalisation is a high priority for IAU. Its aim is to increase continuously the number of cooperation agreements with higher education institutions abroad and mobilise students to go abroad. At the institutional level in 2008, IAU launched the Eurasian Universities Union-EURAS, which is a cooperation network aiming to create a strong higher education system through globalisation, research, accreditation and quality assurance.

The key actions to enhance the internationalisation activities were included in the strategic plan in 2016. The International office was renamed as the Directorate of International Relations (DIR) and reorganised, in order to provide better support for the different areas of the institution.

During the initial evaluation, it was found that the English language competence of students and staff were not of a sufficiently high level for international communication and it was recommended to improve this as a highest priority. According to the SER, since 2013 IAU has implemented different strategies to improve English language competences, for instance, the School of Foreign Languages redesigned curricula for follow-up general English and professional English courses, which are compulsory in the first year of studies.

The SER also lists the support services offered by the DIR team to international students, from administrative assistance such as residence permit applications through to learning support. In addition, the Rector holds regular meetings with international students to hear their problems, with the aim of increasing their level of satisfaction. The goal of IAU is that 10% of the total student population would be international students.

The Team found out during the visit that, despite of IAU's numerous efforts to improve English language competences among students and staff, there is still much room for improvement in this area. It is important that IAU keeps working towards becoming a bilingual university through training programmes and hiring policies. The lack of a good English language competence is currently limiting the university from taking full advantage of programmes such as Erasmus+.

The international students appreciated the offer of English-taught programmes at IAU. However, there are no clear trajectories in English, for example, there is no English PhD programme available after an English Masters in Business. This reduces the possibility to retain students for several cycles of higher education.

An interview with international students also revealed that the services offered by the DIR are highly appreciated but the capacity of the staff is limited and could be increased to match the current number of international students.



The team recommends increasing the staff of the DIR, in order to provide the necessary support services for international students, according to the clear growth ambitions of IAU.

IAU should work towards becoming a bilingual university through training programmes and hiring policies. This includes a review of the current implemented strategies to enhance English language skills among the students and the staff.

In order to increase the attractiveness of IAU as a real international university, the team recommends the implementation of full study trajectories in English for selective fields of study, to give international and national students the possibility to study and do research in English from Bachelor to PhD levels.

## **8. Conclusions**

To conclude, the team would like to highlight some key issues that have been explained in more detail earlier in this report. A summary of the team's recommendations is provided in the subsequent section.

The team encourages IAU to redirect the spent energy on growth to reinforce actions in quality assurance and create a proper institutional academic culture. The Team would like to remark on the importance of improving the role of students in decision-making bodies. The Team recognises the significant advances in teaching and learning, research and internationalisation, but would like to stress that in order to assure the sustainability that IAU is looking towards, the development of a long-term enhancement plan is necessary. This long-term plan should include the promotion of actions to improve the quality of job conditions of the staff, a strategic planning of future research activities and their correspondent quality evaluation, and measures to assure an institutional effort to work towards becoming a bilingual university.

### **Summary of the recommendations**

This section summarises the recommendations presented in this report.

- We recommend IAU to keep working on a long-term vision on the development of the university's academic qualities. The institution needs to develop a stronger academic and institutional culture, with continuous quality-driven policies. The Team encourages IAU to make the enhancement of the human resource policy the core of its long-term policies. In this context, important specific topics to be addressed are gender equality, international skills, a balanced age distribution, and career development opportunities for staff.
- We recommend IAU to give the students a more prominent role in the decision-making bodies.
- The feedback cycle on student surveys should be closed by providing the students with information on the outcome and the consequences of the survey.
- We recommend IAU to provide appropriate facilities for student community activities.
- We recommend IAU to invest in institutional research which could take the form of benchmarking with similar institutions and to carry out data collection and analysis, as an evidence basis for strategy and improvement.
- We recommend IAU to further lower the teaching load, and improve the student/teacher ratio.

- We recommend IAU to implement policies to promote staff retention and career development. The nature of the academic work demands a certain level of flexibility in the working hours and the variety of tasks, and fair rewards for quality performance of academic staff.
- We recommend IAU to improve training programmes to upgrade the teaching abilities.
- We recommend IAU to experiment with new internship models with different time formulas, aiming to attract more companies, and evaluate a possible expansion to provide a similar offer to graduate programmes.
- We recommend IAU to focus its research expansion on selective fields, in line with the mission and profile of the university, aiming at a sustainable growth in its research capacity.
- We recommend IAU to introduce quality assurance and performance measurements for research activities.
- IAU should increase the staff of the DIR, in order to provide the necessary support services for international students, according to the clear growth ambitions of IAU.
- We recommend IAU to work towards becoming a bilingual university through training programmes and hiring policies. This includes a review of the current implemented strategies to enhance English language skills among the students and the staff. Attention should be given to study trajectories in English for selective fields of study, to give international and national students the possibility to study and do research in English from Bachelor to PhD levels.