

ANKARA UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF ADVISORS 2nd MEETING REPORT

Esteemed International Advisors, dear participants

On behalf of Ankara University, I would like to greet you all with respect and thank you for your participation in this important meeting. Founded in 1946 as Türkiye's first institution of higher education, our university is today one of the most prestigious universities in Türkiye and is recognised worldwide for its contributions to science and education.

As Ankara University, one of our main goals is to be in a leading position both nationally and internationally and to continuously improve our research and education quality. We continue our education and research at our university with 19 faculties, 14 institutes, and 49 research centres. We aim to contribute to global innovations with the projects we carry out especially in the fields of health sciences, science, social sciences and engineering.

The main goal of today's meeting is to determine the strategic steps to further Ankara University's research-oriented vision, to strengthen our international collaborations and to adapt to global standards in line with the experiences and perspectives of our esteemed advisors. The mission of Ankara University is to progress as an institution that brings contemporary scientific approaches to society and carries out research on an international scale. Our vision is to develop projects that will contribute to humanity by maintaining its leadership role in science.

I think that this meeting will be instrumental in the emergence of important ideas that will contribute to the future success of our university. I appreciate your participation and support and hope for a productive meeting.

Prof. Dr. Necdet ÜNÜVAR

Rector of Ankara University

Esteemed International Advisors, dear participants

The second meeting of the **Ankara University International Board of Advisors**, held on **13 March 2025**, was extremely productive in terms of shaping the strategic roadmap to increase the scientific production capacity and international visibility of our university. The meeting was organised with the contributions of esteemed external advisors working in different universities around the world, with the aim of further advancing Ankara University's position in the global academic arena.

During the meeting, the current research infrastructure, centres of excellence, internationalisation strategies and education and training practices of our university were discussed comprehensively; the participants shared their valuable opinions on the need to focus on strategic areas with new cooperation models that will increase our research impact, exchange programmes that will encourage mutual student and academic mobility.

During the discussions, it was emphasised that the unique knowledge and potential of Ankara University in interdisciplinary research areas such as rare diseases, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, biobanking and environmental health should be made more visible on international academic platforms. In addition, suggestions such as the establishment of mentoring systems for young researchers, structuring researcher support programmes on a performance basis and improving ethical approval processes were among the prominent topics of the meeting.

We as Ankara University, accept each and every opinion expressed in this meeting as a strategical recommendation and aim to benefit from these contributions to the maximum extent in the development plans of our university. These contributions, based on the knowledge, experience and vision of the International Board of Advisors, strengthen not only academic quality but also our focus on social contribution.

In this context, we have entered a new period of work in which the outcomes of the meeting will be followed up and transformed into concrete actions. With the strategic guidance of its international advisors, Ankara University resolutely pursues its goal of becoming a pioneer in science, integrated with society and a globally respected research university.

Prof. Dr. Kaan ORHAN
Ankara University Dean of Research

In line with the goal of strengthening Ankara University's position in the global academic arena and deepening international collaborations, the meeting with the members of the International Board of Advisors focused on three main questions:

1. **What steps should be taken to strengthen the position of our university in the global innovation ecosystem?**
2. **What suggestions do you have for making student and academic exchange programmes more effective?**
3. **What are your long-term recommendations to ensure the sustainable growth of our university in the fields of research and innovation?**

The views shared at the meeting reflect a common understanding that institutional development should be carried out with a multi-dimensional, evidence-based and contextualised approach. The content obtained from the contributions of the members of the Board of Advisors was subjected to a systematic content analysis and structured around the following three main themes and sub-themes:

A. Strengthening the Position in the Global Innovation Ecosystem

- **A1. Strategic Source Allocation:** Effective and efficient use of internal resources with a focus on departments and research groups with proven success.
- **A2. Accreditation and Quality Standards:** Increasing institutional prestige and competitiveness by obtaining national and international accreditations (e.g. AVMA).
- **A3. Research Impact and Return of Investment (ROI):** Increasing the visibility of university research by measuring its contribution to the local community.
- **A4. National Unique Strength Areas:** Establishing unique academic niches in health and science fields specific to Türkiye (e.g. Behçet's disease, tuberculosis).

B. Increasing the Effectiveness of Exchange Programmes

- **B1. Programme Design and Configuration:** Configuration of interdisciplinary, bilateral and joint degree programmes.
- **B2. Target Determination and Observation:** Determining measurable targets for the annual exchange of students and academics and observing the process.
- **B3. Mutual Recognition and Bilateral Agreements:** Establishing sustainable collaborations by utilising the academic connections of the Turkish Academics abroad.

C. Sustainable Growth in Research and Innovation

- **C1. Mentoring and Skills Retention:** Establish mentoring programmes with international academics and develop performance-based support mechanisms.
- **C2. Interdisciplinary Research and Joint Use of Infrastructure:** Joint use of research infrastructures by strengthening cooperation between faculties.
- **C3. Biobanks and Sampling Infrastructure:** Establishing resources such as biobank and clinical sample repository to increase participation in global research.

- **C4. Systemic Barriers and Approval Processes:** Facilitating research processes by reducing bureaucratic obstacles such as ethics committee processes

Table 1

Steps to be Taken to Strengthen the Position of our University in the Global Innovation Ecosystem

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Advisors /Participants	Participant Remarks
A. Strengthening the Position in the Global Innovation Ecosystem	▪ A1. Strategic Source Allocation	T2 - Martin Michel	It is proposed to strategically direct internal resources by focussing on departments and research groups with proven success. (Martin Michel)
	▪ A2. Accreditation and Quality Standards	T3 - Levent Dirikolu	It has been proposed to introduce board-approved programmes and international accreditations (e.g. AVMA) to improve the quality of education and institutional reputation. (Levent Dirikolu)
	▪ A3. Research Impact and Return of Investment	T1 - Kari Franson	It was stated that international visibility should be increased by measuring the impact of research on the local community. (Kari Franson)
	▪ A4. National Unique Strenght Areas	T6 - Gökhan Mutlu	It has been proposed to focus on diseases specific to Türkiye (e.g. Behçet's disease, tuberculosis), to develop unique research areas on a global scale and to establish biobanks. (Gökhan Mutlu)

As can be seen in Table 1, in the evaluations made for the theme of ‘Strengthening the Position in the Global Innovation Ecosystem’, the opinions of the consultants are grouped under four sub-headings.

Firstly, in sub-theme **A1. Strategic Source Allocation**, it was emphasised that in order for the university to use its existing resources more effectively, it should focus on research groups with high levels of success. In this framework, it was suggested that instead of distributing resources equally to all departments, academic departments with concrete achievements should be prioritised (Martin Michel). This view stands out as an important strategy in terms of both increasing the quality of academic outputs and ensuring efficiency in resource utilisation.

Under the second sub-theme **A2. Accreditation and Quality Standards**, the necessity of obtaining internationally recognised accreditations in order to improve the quality of education and institutional reputation was expressed. It was stated that accreditations such as AVMA should be targeted especially for the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (Levent Dirikolu). This approach is

considered as a strategic step to increase the visibility of the university in world rankings and to create an element of trust in student preference.

In the evaluations made under the sub-theme **A3. Research Impact and Return of Investment**, it was emphasised that the research conducted should focus not only on academic publications, but also on social impact and return of investment. Measuring the impact of research activities on the local community and making this impact visible will increase the international recognition of the university (Kari Franson). In this context, it has been argued that research performance should be assessed not only in terms of numerical outputs but also in terms of social benefit.

Lastly, in sub-theme **A4. National Unique Strenght Areas**, it was stated that research focusing on health problems specific to Türkiye (e.g. Behçet's disease, tuberculosis) would bring uniqueness to the university. In this context, the establishment of biobanks and specialisation in areas specific to Türkiye such as rare diseases were suggested (Gökhan Mutlu). This view emphasises Ankara University's potential to create unique spaces in global scientific competition and offers an important perspective in terms of strategic positioning.

Table 2

Recommendations for Increasing the Effectiveness Student and Academic Exchange Programmes

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Advisors /Participants	Participant Remarks
B. Increasing the Effectiveness of Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B1. Programme Design and Configuration 	T5 - Faculty of Medicine Rep.	Joint degree programmes in areas such as medical schools and structured programmes involving academics in exchange processes have been proposed. (Faculty of Medicine Representative)

▪ B2. Target Determination and Observation	T3 - Levent Dirikolu	Student and faculty exchange targets should be set for each year and these targets should be monitored. (Levent Dirikolu)
▪ B3. Mutual Recognition and Bilateral Agreements	T4 - Asghar Zaidi	It was suggested to establish links with the Turkish Academicians abroad and to develop mutual exchange and cooperation programmes. (Asghar Zaidi)

Table 2 The consultant opinions on the theme of Increasing the Effectiveness of Exchange Programmes point to the need for a more systematic, target-oriented structure that prioritises international cooperation.

Firstly, under the sub-theme **B1. Programme Design and Configuration**, it was suggested to develop dual diploma and joint degree programmes, especially in disciplines such as medical faculties, and to actively involve academicians in these programmes (Faculty of Medicine Representative). It is emphasised that these structured exchange programmes will increase the international academic mobility of both students and faculty members, thus strengthening the global visibility of the university.

Secondly, under the sub-theme **B2. Target Determination and Observation**, it is stated that quantitative targets for the exchange of students and academics should be determined on an annual basis and these targets should be monitored with traceable indicators (Levent Dirikolu). This approach is based on the idea that change programmes should not be left to individual initiatives, but should be carried out within an institutional policy. Thus, the effectiveness of the programmes can be measured and sustained.

Lastly, in sub-theme **B3. Mutual Recognition and Bilateral Agreements**, it was stated that the establishment of systematic collaborations, especially with the Turkish Academicians abroad of Turkish academics and researchers abroad, would contribute significantly to the international exchange capacity of the university (Asghar Zaidi). It is emphasised that such relations should be developed to include not only student mobility but also academic partnerships and projects. This proposal offers a remarkable opening in terms of strengthening the international ties of the university and establishing sustainable relationships with external stakeholders.

Table 3

Long-Term Recommendations to Ensure Sustainable Growth of the University in Research and Innovation Areas

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Advisors /Participants	Participant Remarks
C. Sustainable Growth in Research and Innovation	▪ C1. Mentoring and Skills Retention	T7 - Mehmet A. Turan	Mentorship programmes should be established with international academicians and support should be based on performance. (Mehmet A. Turan)
	▪ C2. Interdisciplinary Research and Joint Use of Infrastructure	T9 - Özcan Esen	It was suggested that the use of research infrastructures through inter-departmental collaborations should be encouraged. (Özcan Esen)
	▪ C3. Biobanks and Sampling Infrastructure	T6 - Gökhan Mutlu	Establish biobanks and human specimen repositories to strengthen global research collaborations. (Gökhan Mutlu)
	▪ C4. Systemic Barriers and Approval Processes	T7 - Mehmet A. Turan	It was emphasised that bureaucratic obstacles such as the slowness of ethics committee approvals should be eliminated. (Mehmet A. Turan)

As can be seen in Table 3, evaluations on the theme of Sustainable Growth in Research and Innovation are concentrated on human resource policies, interdisciplinary collaborations and strengthening the technical infrastructure to support the long-term development of the university.

Firstly, under sub-heading **C1. Mentoring and Skills Retention**, it was suggested to support successful researchers, to establish a mentoring system by matching young academics with experienced professors and to provide performance-based support. (Mehmet Alparslan Turan). This proposal is important in terms of developing a structural culture that will increase not only research capacity but also academic productivity.

Secondly, under **C2. Interdisciplinary Research and Joint Use of Infrastructure**, it was emphasised that the high level of research infrastructure available at the university should be made more widely known and the joint use of this infrastructure by different faculties should be encouraged (Özcan Esen). This suggestion indicates that synergy within the university can be enhanced by utilising research facilities in a multidimensional way and not limited to specific fields.

Thirdly, under the theme **C3. Biobanks and Sampling Infrastructure**, it was stated that biobanks should be established and human sampling infrastructure should be established in order to increase the scientific research capacity of the university (Gökhan Mutlu). Thanks to this infrastructure, the university's participation in international collaborations and project production capacity will be strengthened, especially in niche research areas such as rare diseases.

Lastly, under **C4. Systemic Barriers and Approval Processes**, structural problems at the system level such as the difficulty of ethics committee approvals and the slow progress of bureaucratic processes were pointed out (Mehmet Alparslan Turan). Solving these problems is considered to be a critical step in accelerating research processes and increasing researcher motivation. In this context, it has been revealed that the university should review and improve not only its physical but also its managerial capacity.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

The opinions expressed at the Ankara University 2nd International Board of Advisors Meeting revealed that the university needs to develop sustainable strategies in critical areas such as internationalisation, research capacity, quality in education and exchange programmes. The opinions were subjected to a systematic content analysis and structured around three main themes and sub-themes related to these themes.

A. Under the theme of **Strengthening the Position in the Global Innovation Ecosystem**, the importance of strategic allocation of resources based on success, obtaining international accreditations, social impact-based evaluation of research, and the importance of specialisation in health fields specific to Türkiye are emphasised. These recommendations support the university not only to increase its position in global rankings but also to become a research university that responds to national needs.

B. Under the theme of **Increasing the Effectiveness of Exchange Programmes**, it is stated that structured joint programmes should be established, annual target setting and monitoring processes should be systematised, and relations with the Turkish Academicians abroad should be evaluated at the institutional level. In this context, it is suggested that exchange programmes should be reconstructed in a way that will both increase academic mobility and pave the way for international collaborations.

C. Under the theme of **Sustainable Growth in Research and Innovation**, it was suggested that systemic improvements such as the establishment of mentoring systems to support researchers, sharing interdisciplinary research infrastructure, establishing biobanks and accelerating ethical approval processes are needed. At this point, it was suggested that researcher support mechanisms should be reorganised as well as structural reforms.

FUTURE STEPS

The following concrete steps should be taken in line with the recommendations of the members of the Board of Advisors:

1. Ankara University should share with international advisors detailed information on its current student and academic exchange programmes and objectives.
2. The University should make available to counsellors opportunities for internal and external funding sources and facilitate access to funding mechanisms.
3. International advisors should provide written recommendations and strategic reports to improve the university's position in the global innovation ecosystem.
4. The University should establish a based cooperation programme with Turkish academics abroad.
5. Opportunities for co-operation with US universities in the field of clinical pharmacy education should be evaluated.
6. The University should develop a mentoring programme to match junior academics with senior academics.
7. In order to improve bureaucratic processes such as ethical approval, the functioning of ethics committees should be reviewed and restructured if necessary.
8. By organising international congresses, the University should both increase its academic visibility and strengthen its collaborations.
9. Opening the University hotels to counsellors for physical meetings and work camps will increase face-to-face cooperation.

In the light of these assessments, Ankara University's review of its current strategies and the transformation of consultant contributions into policies and practices will strengthen its institutional capacity and contribute to increasing the competitiveness of the University in the international arena.