

# Bilkent University Strategic Plan in Transition

Based on

“Bilkent University Strategic Plan A World Class Academic Community 2016 – Approved by Senate: 20 Sept 2017 Submitted to the Board of Trustees: 28 September 2017 Ankara, Turkey”

## Scope

The Strategic Plan lays down the framework of priorities for the University, its divisions, departments and auxiliary units.

The “Strategic Plan in Transition” is a shortened version of the “Strategic Plan 2016”, which is intended to bridge the Strategic Plan 2016 to Strategic Plan 2024.

## Part I: Mission, Vision, and Values

### 1 Mission

Bilkent University aims to serve the humanity and peace by cultivating an environment of progress encompassing science, technology, art and philosophy.

### 2 Vision

University’s vision is to be a world-class academic community of students, educators, support staff and alumni which is capable of defining the state of the art, delivering the best practices and leading the society to improve the welfare of humanity.

### 3 Values

Toward its Mission, upon the essential values of humanity, University considers ‘a strict adherence to scientific ethics’, ‘full participation of all stakeholders’, ‘financial independence’, ‘dedication’, ‘perseverance’ and ‘avoidance from inaction’ as its core values.

## Part II: Strategic Enablers and Action Plan

Focusing on the roles of individuals that make up the Bilkent community, this Part describes the recommended actions for students, faculty and administrative staff.

During the transition from Strategic Plan 2016 to Strategic Plan 2024, this part will be re-written using the analytical outputs of Part III. Below, the actionable fields and actions plans are merely taken from Strategic Plan 2016 in order to guide the Strategic Plan Establishment Committee (SPEC).

## 4 Educational Excellence

### 4.1 World-Class Students

Bilkent's strategy for undergraduate education is set to provide that top exam scorers to choose Bilkent, they do so regardless of financial support available, they receive an education beyond and above that provided by other universities and they get an education to be the global citizens of tomorrow.

### 4.1.1 Educated Professionals

Preparing Bilkent students as educated professionals will require periodic re-examination of curricula to ensure that students continue to acquire a deep knowledge of their disciplines. Each curriculum should encourage creativity and innovation. A wide array of extracurricular activities is seen complementary to curricular ones.

**Action Plan:** A working group will be appointed to develop actionable recommendations for a core curriculum for all Faculties that will enhance the preparation of Bilkent graduates. Recommendations are also sought on how to enhance inventive, innovative and entrepreneurial capabilities of students through formal and informal curricula and how to overcome difficulties brought about by second-language education. Considerations will include means of making it easier to introduce new courses without having to shop" them to be included in various elective lists.

### 4.1.2 Differential Capabilities and Accomplishments

Taking into account the differential levels of educational backgrounds and capabilities is an important agenda item at all times.

**Action Plan:** Examine observed adverse consequences of having students with differential capabilities in the same classes. One example is Introduction to Economics.

**Action Plan:** Each Faculty will identify the courses that pose difficulties to large numbers of students and determine the root causes and possible approaches for mitigation, e.g., remedial support.

**Action Plan:** Develop University working groups to identify support mechanisms, particularly use of technology such as iTunes Academy or Khan Academy engaging COMD and other FADA faculty with those from the discipline of the courses. Approaches may also include weekend boot camps.

**Action Plan:** A task force will be formed to consider the need for special programs for high (and low) achievers, how to implement them, and what consequences such programs may have. The task force would also determine if it is suitable to have multilevel courses as practiced elsewhere.

**Action Plan:** Faculty representatives will examine the role of advising as practiced and determine if stronger advising, mentorship, and/or apprenticeship programs are warranted.

### 4.1.3 Science of Learning

As student profiles change, technologies advance, and access to information becomes easier, how students learn takes on a special significance. For an effective education, a better understanding of the science of learning is important.

**Action Plan:** A task force of faculty will be formed to recommend what actions, if any, Bilkent should take regarding the science of learning.

#### 4.1.4 Advanced Education & Training Programs

Provision of advanced education and training in a wide-range of disciplines is essential. Some of these programs are designed to educate teachers and future faculty and others target specific professions. A large segment of graduate education is associated with research and creative activities.

**Action Plan:** Develop a plan for a series of self-sustaining Master's and Executive Master's Programs similar to those in Intellectual Property Law, Economics and Law, and Energy Policy.

There is a perceived need for faculty at High Schools and Universities in the fields of Education and Philosophy.

**Action Plan:** Develop a PhD program in Philosophy with the intent of educating future faculty members for universities in Turkey.

#### 4.1.5 Graduate Education

Graduate education, particularly at the PhD level, has become an intrinsic part of the research enterprise at most universities around the world. This trend risks shifting focus from educating PhDs to exclusively conducting research. While approximately one-third of PhD graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields join academe in the USA, the ratio is thought to be higher in Turkey. Of particular interest to Bilkent is the high ratio of PhD students in US universities drawn from other countries including Turkey, and this ratio is also increasing in European and several other Asian universities. An immediate consequence of this trend is that Bilkent faces stiff competition for the best graduate students from Turkey and elsewhere. Further, students are inclined to obtain an MS degree at Bilkent and then apply for PhD studies in the US or elsewhere.

Bilkent's strategy is to be known for its world-class PhD education and research activities and accomplishments, even if in select areas. This, in turn, will attract graduate students, researchers, and funding. For the near term, recruitment and retention of graduate students must be improved, and provide these students with the possibility of pursuing their own research agenda with strong mentorship. At the same time, new research models that do not wholly depend on graduate students must be considered.

**Action Plan:** A task force will be formed to develop best practices for recruitment and retention of graduate students in the near term and make recommendations to Provost's Office.

**Action Plan:** A task force will be charged with examining formal and informal curricula to offer particularly for doctoral-level graduate students paving their path towards Renaissance PhDs.

Advanced graduate courses are essential to research and further thinking of subject matter, whereas graduate level introductory courses, with coordination among department, can also help to encourage collaboration among the disciplines. To date, however, low critical numbers of students preclude offering some of the advanced courses on a regular basis.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will appoint a task force to review and develop guidelines for course budgets," the number of courses offered by departments.

Time to complete PhD degrees varies across the University, with several programs requiring an excessive amount of time.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office is reviewing individual programs and their respective quality vs. time-to-completion relationship to make recommendations to reduce the times.

Increasingly, post-doctoral research fellows are considered as an integral part of research programs. While some view such positions as stepping-stones for academic positions, others choose to continue on a research track. Bilkent needs to develop policies to accommodate post-doctoral researchers in both tracks.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will develop policies that make it attractive for post-doctoral researchers to choose research programs at Bilkent in which they can develop their skills for academic careers.

#### 4.1.6 English Language Proficiency

English language standards at Bilkent are known to be demanding. Bilkent seeks for even higher levels since high proficiency in spoken and written English is essential in an increasingly globalized and connected world.

**Action Plan:** A task-force will be appointed to review the present approach at BUSEL and make recommendations for improvements or alternative ideas. Specifically, suggestions are sought on innovative and effective means of teaching/learning the English language and communication.

**Action Plan:** A data-driven study of the correlation, if any, between unsuccessful students and other parameters such as disciplines they choose or entrance examination scores, and take action accordingly.

#### 4.1.7 Ethics Education

In response to cases reported and concerns expressed anecdotally in media and among public, Bilkent University is considering studies on its causes as well as how to reduce such ethical violations in academia across the country. Changes in CoHE regulations for handling such cases also make it burdensome for faculty to take disciplinary actions. One approach is to reduce the opportunities for cheating and plagiarism to the extent possible.

**Action Plan:** Establish a working group to make recommendations on how to prepare examinations/questions that would not be amenable to cheating.

**Action Plan:** Consider constructive alternative measures, such as requiring homework and oral examinations as a penalty for cheating.

**Action Plan:** Consider classes for students on stress management, how to study, conflict resolution, and other relevant topics.

There is some concern that cheating cases are not treated uniformly across the University. Two students accused of the same infraction may not always receive the same disciplinary action.

**Action Plan:** We suggest short training sessions to brief faculty members involved in disciplinary actions.

#### **4.1.8 Internationalization: Recruitment, Exchange Programs, and International Participation**

Bilkent has agreements with a large number of universities around the world that focus primarily on student exchange. These programs are reasonably popular with Bilkent students, who outnumber the incoming exchange students. It may serve us better to develop strong relationships with a select few universities with a focus on scholarly activities of faculty members, which should then attract student participation as well.

Exchange programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels can bring added value by increasing the diversity of viewpoints in the classroom and on campus as well as preparing global ambassadors for Bilkent.

**Action Plan:** The University will develop a plan for recruitment of exchange students.

Bilkent has started a recruitment program to increase its international student population. It is worthwhile to examine the consequences of increasing international students not only in classes, but also on campus life. Still, a common concern relates to heterogeneous concentration of international students across departments. The University would be better served to balance the number of new international students with department-specific quotas.

**Action Plan:** The University will develop a plan for the recruitment of international students with diverse backgrounds and interests.

Finally, participation of Bilkent students in international contests and exhibitions can help increase visibility of Bilkent internationally.

**Action Plan:** Each Faculty will be asked to compile a list of international student competitions and exhibitions that they find suitable for their students and develop plans and budgets for such activities.

Bilkent sends students to other universities through exchange agreements. When this mobility is not reciprocated, the agreements become void, preventing Bilkent students from exchange practices.

**Action Plan:** Bilkent University will explore means to provide meaningful and substantive international experience to Bilkent students.

## **4.2 World-Class Faculty**

### **4.2.1 Faculty Recruitment**

Faculty members represent the intellectual strength of the university. As Bilkent continues to add new disciplines and research areas to its portfolio, new faculty members will be recruited. Also, as many of the faculty who joined Bilkent in its early days begin to retire, plans need to be in place for their replacements.

Recruitment will focus primarily on the research and creative capabilities faculty candidates can bring to the University. The University will also recruit teaching-track faculty for their excellence in teaching and for their contributions to educational endeavors of the University. Bilkent's recruitment strategy will be three-fold:

- Recent graduates for junior faculty positions;
- Senior faculty members with commensurate accomplishments and those who can assist in the development of new programs, mentor younger faculty or provide leadership; and
- Short-term visiting faculty who can contribute to our programs through short courses, master classes, or research and creative projects.

**Action Plan:** Each Faculty and Department will have a continuous recruitment plan that identifies potential senior recruitments, universities where successful faculty candidates are educated, and means of attracting candidates to Bilkent. The Provost's Office will work with each Faculty on hiring of faculty members, particularly senior faculty. These plans will be reviewed at least annually in June.

### **4.2.2 Hiring Process**

Hiring decisions traditionally have been managed in the Provost's Office, usually between a Dean (or, in many instances, a Department Chair) and an Associate Provost, who prepares and communicates the final confidential offer to the candidate.

Three primary considerations go into hiring new faculty: the needs of the department, the quality of the candidate, and the budgetary constraints. Discussions with departments and faculties suggest a perceived lack of clarity on how many faculty members should be in a particular department. A more contentious issue relates to the differences in judgment about the quality of candidates.

Significant variation in recruitment practices exists among the departments. While many of the units are able to recruit and attract top flight candidates, there are units that are not able to do so. A common scenario is to select the best" from among applicants without the benefit of a serious international search.

**Action Taken:** To assist departments in identifying and recruiting faculty candidates and developing new faculty, the University has developed a process. Annually, early in the summer, the Provost's Office meets with each department chair and dean and together they establish the numbers and expected attributes of faculty positions to be recruited. While there may always be unexpected opportunities or needs, these annual plans should expedite the search process.

Many departments are in acute need of senior faculty who can provide vision and guidance to the department and mentor younger faculty. In such cases, hiring of senior faculty is given priority and, if possible, hiring of junior faculty is postponed. Once senior faculty are hired, they may provide input in hiring of junior faculty.

**Action Plan:** Restart the orientation program that used to be in place for new faculty to introduce them to the university and their department is suggested. Orientation will include information on promotion, mentorship, teaching expectations, and resources. A welcome reception for new faculty is organized at the Rector's Residence" (Building 49) in early Fall to acquaint new faculty with administration and other colleagues.

#### 4.2.3 Next-Generation Leadership

Bilkent will provide opportunities and encouragement to faculty members who show interest and ability in becoming academic leaders. As individuals move through committee memberships and chair positions, more experienced faculty can help mentor them. Balance must be maintained between presenting opportunities to particularly younger faculty and burdening them with committee" work, which is not the intent. Part of the plan for academic excellence is to fill leadership positions for shorter periods in an effort to bring in and circulate new ideas.

**Action Plan:** Appointments for all administrative positions will be made for three years and renewable following a review that includes feedback from peers.

#### 4.2.4 Faculty Development & Mentorship and Support

Hiring faculty and helping them to reach their potentials are the most important tasks and investments of a university. Each Department and Faculty needs to prepare a plan for each new faculty recruit to reach his or her goal. These plans should be reviewed by a senior faculty, if available, who can act as a mentor. Often, department chairs or deans will fulfill this role. Annual Faculty Reviews do not adequately address individualized goal plans for faculty, but do provide formal feedback from the Provost's Office to all faculty.

**Action Plan:** Each department, with the support of the dean or chair or mentor, develops a career plan for faculty members at the time of their hiring. These plans will identify their goals and what support they need to accomplish these goals. Similarly, each Assistant and Associate Professor will also be encouraged to prepare a career plan. Departments need to include in such plans types of course assignments and expected departmental committee work. These plans will be reviewed by the respective deans and the Provost's Office, and will then be used as part of the Annual Faculty Review to help monitor and assist in their progress.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will work with the Deans to develop a sample template for career plans. These plans may be tailored to meet specific needs.

#### 4.2.5 Annual Faculty Evaluations

Annual Faculty evaluations are conducted jointly by the Dean, Department Chair, the Provost, and Associate Provosts. The purpose of the evaluation process is to become acquainted with faculty members' activities and accomplishments, recommend an intra-rank promotion (with a step increase in salary) if they are eligible, and discuss those faculty members who exhibit prolonged inactivity in their scholarly and creative pursuits and performance and teaching performance of faculty. Department Chairs and deans have the responsibility of communicating the Provost's Office's evaluations of Annual Faculty Surveys (AFSs) with each faculty member, with particular attention given to those with inactivity.

For a segment of the faculty, the annual evaluations and subsequent short letter are mysterious and somewhat meaningless. In part, they find the letters pro forma and unresponsive, particularly in those cases where the faculty member has included comments and recommendations.

**Action Plan:** Now, more care is exercised in trying to align the letters sent following the AFSs according to expectations from the promotion process. To this end, AFS letters have been more diversified. It seems that there is still room for improvement. [Actions taken where suitable and responded to each faculty.]

**Action Plan:** Investigate the possibility of personalizing AFS letters. At a minimum, there should be a response to those who have taken the time to include comments in the AFS forms. [Completed]

**Action Plan:** AFS forms will be web-based effective Fall 2016. Instructions will be developed by the Provost's Office for implementation by the Bilkent Computing Center. [Completed]

Bilkent traditionally has emphasized creative output of faculty for intra-rank promotion and annual merit raises that are awarded separately from the inflation-adjusted increases. As in most well-regarded universities, Bilkent ties merit raises to quantity and quality of faculty publications as measured by the importance of the publication determined from various metrics. Proliferation of publication outlets as

well as reported manipulation of simple metrics are thought to weaken the correlation between the quality or value of publications and their outlets. A byproduct of this result occasionally appears during the promotion process during which experts in the field examine a candidate's publications.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will examine evaluation methods of faculty members' creative activities at other similar universities and make recommendations.

There is concern that the annual evaluation of research and creative activities may have an adverse effect on significant potential accomplishments, such as books, that typically require more time.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will develop an evaluation plan regarding creative activities of faculty and make recommendations to better balance accomplishments and activities including retroactive recognition of such accomplishments under unusual circumstances.

#### 4.2.6 Faculty Promotion Process

**Intra-Rank Promotion:** There are two types of promotion at Bilkent. Aside from the well-known promotion from one rank to the next, there are intra-rank promotions, called step increases within a rank. Each rank has ve steps. The practice has been to award the step promotion during the annual evaluation based on advances a faculty member has made in the previous one or two years, with weight placed on creative and scholarly activities. Lack of written criteria or guidelines may have given the process an appearance of informality. Because step promotions are separate from regular rank promotions, there have been occasions where the message" received through step promotions has been contradicted by the regular promotion decisions.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will develop a process for step increases.

**Promotion to the Next Rank:** Promotion continues to be a concern to faculty for its apparent lack of transparency. This perception is exacerbated when Bilkent's promotion process is compared with the promotion processes elsewhere in Turkey, where promotions are based by and large on number of publications, presentations and other quantifiable academic activities. Bilkent's promotion system is based on creative and scholarly contributions of the faculty that leave a footprint," recognized by experts in the world.

**Action Plan:** A checklist has been prepared that outlines steps of the promotion process and responsibilities at each step.

**Action Plan:** Annual town-hall meeting for all assistant and associate professors to explain the promotion process and expectations. [Implementation has started.]

#### 4.2.7 Teaching expectations

Among the concerns expressed regarding teaching duties, several themes emerge:

- There is a common preference for less teaching in order to have more time for other creative activities or research. There is a lack of enthusiasm for the required preparation of course folders annually requested by the Provost's Office as part of the annual faculty evaluation process.
- Courses are spread over most of the week, which does not allow two or three days set aside for research.
- Administration and faculty disagree about the workload of courses that involve laboratories and projects.
- There is discontent about the new grading policy, which places a cap on the value of final examinations in determining final grades.
- Service requirements (e.g., committee work) are often viewed as burdensome.

Reducing teaching assignments for faculty would mean increasing the class sizes and/or size of faculty in those areas. While the latter is desirable for a number of reasons, resources that would be required are beyond the University's current financial capabilities.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will study the feasibility of teaching load adjustment and equitable distribution, and their potential consequences.

Course folders are used both for accreditation and for annual evaluations. Several Faculties undergo accreditation by their respective professional organizations. Such processes normally require details of courses taught, including those taken from outside the department and school. The University also has plans to go through accreditation, which requires a significant self-study and a detailed report outlining how the courses support a particular educational goal.

Conventional wisdom about how much students learn during a course suggests that a multi-mode evaluation process is more effective than a single examination. A comprehensive oral exam may be an alternative but the preference is a distributed diagnostic. While the University's general policy is to allow faculty to determine the process and final evaluation, the University also has an obligation to the students to offer a uniform policy of grading, without disadvantaging anyone intentionally or unintentionally. The policies established are primarily to even the playing field among the students.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will work with the Deans to assure a viable multi-mode evaluation process throughout the University. A committee will be appointed to develop an evaluation process that also describes the rationale for multi-mode evaluations.

Service provided by faculty either within the University or outside (reviews, refereeing, etc.) can at times be overwhelming. Faculty members at Bilkent are generous and enthusiastic about moving the University forward and accept requests to serve on committees quite willingly. There is a need to recognize such efforts as well as to regulate the average effort and time required of faculty in the context of all other contributions they make.

**Action Plan:** A working group will be appointed to formulate means by which to recognize exceptional service.

#### 4.2.8 Teaching Skills

Teaching skills of faculty can always be augmented using new approaches and/or technologies. The teaching traditions embedded in different disciplines vary from information memorization to critical thinking, and in some cases to an emphasis on the experiential. However, established best practices often are welcomed by new faculty members. More recent approaches include technology-enhanced active learning, learning in collaborative environments, and the flipped classroom."

**Action Plan:** A task force will be formed to recommend what actions the University should take to provide opportunities to faculty for enhancing teaching skills, classroom communications, interactions with students, and general educational activities.

### 5 Creative Activities

Bilkent's creative activities include the arts, design, discovery, ideas, inventions, and music, manifested and disseminated in forums suitable for each accomplishment. Because some activities are more visible, appreciated and supported by government, our challenge is to nurture the underappreciated areas of creativity while continuing to support and excel in the more visible ones. One approach is to leverage our excellence in the creative arts, design, and music with those areas that receive more external support and visibility.

**Action Plan:** Establish a working group to investigate possible areas of collaboration between the Faculty of Arts, Design, and Architecture and the Faculties of Science and Engineering, Business Administration, as well as Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences.

**Action Plan:** Establish a task force to develop collaborative activities among the Departments of Economics, Computer Engineering, Mathematics, and Industrial Engineering that can significantly enhance the mission of the University. [An interdisciplinary task force has started work on the establishment of a Design & Creativity" center.]

#### 5.1 Research

As a world-class institution, Bilkent seeks to help solve global problems through high-impact research. In this quest,

Bilkent faces challenges both at home and abroad, particularly in competition for talent.

A common concern of faculty during strategic planning for research was the perception that resources would be directed only to specific target research areas, thus devaluing research not in those target areas. Creating such perception must be avoided, for individual research has shown to produce highly successful results and will continue to be encouraged and supported. The strategy is to invest in research on selected important problems by either responding to existing opportunities or creating new ones. Part of the strategy is for the University to develop its own processes for selection and investment. The most important element of the strategy, however, is to recruit and to retain faculty and to develop highly productive research groups and infrastructure. Important problems, such as those addressing grand, broad-scope challenges, often require diverse research skills and backgrounds and transcend academic territories beyond the traditional departments. This plan proposes establishing infrastructure that provides an environment conducive to innovation and creativity through synergy.

**Action Plan:** Invite an external advisory group of individuals representing international research organizations, companies that value and invest in research, and academic institutions to provide recommendations about the best directions of research for Bilkent.

Traditionally, graduate education and doctoral students have been an essential part of the research enterprise in universities. This model needs to be augmented with professional research staff for high-impact, competitive research outcomes that can lead to Nobel prizes and other similar achievements.

The strategic planning process also identified numerous infrastructural needs. Among these are Offices for sponsored research, technology transfer, and ethics. Other challenges are external to the University and include laws and regulations that govern universities, patent laws, funding for research, and other factors, all of which must be addressed.

**Action Taken:** A Technology Transfer Office (TTO) has been established that has been successfully assisting faculty in their pursuit of external funds while complying with the cognizant regulations.

**Action Plan:** Further introduce the role of TTO to faculty outside of engineering and the physical sciences to encourage proposal submission. [Implementation has started.]

As at many universities, research agendas at Bilkent are driven by the availability of funds and the reward mechanisms. The latter include merit raises, supplemental salaries, awards, and recognitions. Exceptions exist in cases where external funding is not required or is minimal and where individual goals prevail.

Significant discoveries and accomplishments in research correlate well with a number of factors. Among these, a critical number of faculty with common or overlapping interests rates high. Particularly, research areas that involve multiple disciplines benefit from synergy of their experiences.

**Action Plan:** A University-wide committee and the Provost's Office will identify existing research areas that can benefit from interdisciplinary participation and also identify new research areas on important topics. Their recommendations may include other activities to enhance research among groups of faculty from different Faculties, such as University-wide colloquia to create an environment for exchanging ideas between diverse fields.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will assist the Departments and Faculties to coordinate their hiring for interdisciplinary positions.

## 5.2 Research & Training Centers

Bilkent already has several strong research centers, which need to be continuously strengthened and supported. In addition, new centers need to be planned.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will enable groups of faculty to propose new fields of research and support these endeavors according to a protocol to be developed by a committee. [An interdisciplinary Design and Creativity Center is underway. An activity has been initiated between Philosophy and Neurosciences.]

## 6 World-Class Organization

### 6.1 Organization, Infrastructure and Operations

A world-class academic community requires a world-class support structure that includes a dynamic human and sound physical infrastructure, a well-conceived organizational structure, and fully functioning operation processes. The recommendations outlined in this section are for the benefit of the entire university community and programs.

#### 6.1.1 Governance

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) dictates many of the rules related to governance of universities in Turkey. Successful universities, however, are run neither through referendums nor by it, but somewhere in-between depending on its traditions and culture. Universities where voting on every issue is prevalent have often become dysfunctional. Bilkent has traditionally placed decision-making at the top of the administrative structure but is now taking steps to distribute the decision-making process throughout the Faculties and Departments in order to promote innovative approaches and bring out new ideas. Improved two-way communication is an essential part of these efforts.

An important aspect of governance and a strong organization is to give voice to recommendations as well as concerns and having an institutionalized mechanism to evaluate and respond to them.

**Action Plan:** It is recommended that a University Ombudsman is appointed to hear grievances against administration.

Along with some general policies affecting Faculties and Departments, faculty hiring and budget allocations have also been a source of contention between the Provost's Office and the Faculties and Departments. In order to align expectations, new processes should be introduced to expedite these processes.

**Action Plan:** The Rector's Office will consider providing signature authority to Department Chairs and Deans for up to prescribed amounts.

Current practice of spending from Individual Discretionary Research Fund (Turkish acronym KAF) and Department Discretionary Research Fund (BAF) budgets bypass the Deans and go directly to PDK for approval.

**Action Plan:** Develop guidelines for expenditures from KAF and BAF and provide training and instructions to chairs while keeping the Deans informed.

#### 6.1.2 Budgets

Traditionally, budget allocations to Departments and Faculties have been made annually to cover basic line items, except for salary, and were augmented throughout the year, as requests were made. In addition to unexpected one-time expenditures, such as infrastructure improvements and travel expense of faculty candidates, the departments could also request additional allocations to the operating costs, such as minor repairs and graduate students support, with appropriate justifications approved by the deans. Further, departments had to request and receive approval from the Provost's Office to move funds among the budget lines. Again, the level of management of budgets is varied among the departments; some have been able to use these resources to effectively promote the strategic goals of the department.

Since September 2015, the Provost's Office has implemented a pilot budget allocation plan where the budget for the whole year is established in a conference with each dean and chair who are then empowered to use their judgment to move funds among the budget lines. The expectation is to implement this approach across the campus to reduce the number of minor budget requests throughout the year.

**Action Plan:** Institute a semi-annual audit of budget expenditures in the Departments and Faculties.

#### 6.1.3 Research Enterprise & Infrastructure

The recently formed Technology Transfer Office (TTO) sends e-mails to inform faculty of calls for proposals, organizes meetings about new grant programs, and provides support to faculty who are planning to apply for grants.

**Action Plan:** Form a faculty review committee to determine how the university community can help TTO broaden and further improve its activities.

Most universities in Turkey developed mechanisms by which to raise funds through nearly commercial work for pay, which are usually the staple of private businesses. At Bilkent, the Project Review Committee (PDK) was established early in the University's history primarily to ensure that research carried out at the University led to contributions to fundamental knowledge. Such an oversight was necessary partly due to the scarcity of research funds compared with today where funds for basic research are more readily available. Bilkent PDK, which consisted of three to four faculty members who did not have administrative positions at the University, was authorized to accept or reject project proposals on behalf of the University.

PDK also assumed responsibility for how the project budget is allocated to primarily protect the University's interest in terms of what portion of the relevant expenses should be allocated to the University. PDK also enforces a university policy that allows faculty members to receive extra remuneration from their grants and contracts, if allowed by the sponsor, for which the University must also be compensated from the same source. The compensation includes the benefits associated with the extra pay. Unused fungible funds can be transferred to the principal investigator's (PI) discretionary research accounts (KAF), with a 10% overhead kept by the University for expenses; PIs can then use these funds to support their research following the University's policies and guidelines pertaining to financial expenditures. PDK also assumes responsibility for enforcing whether an expenditure from a KAF is a suitable expenditure or not, resulting in occasional complicated arrangements since the guidelines are not always clear.

**Action Plan:** The University Accounting Department that processes reimbursements will develop a clear set of guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable expenditures from discretionary and other funds.

**Action Plan:** Rector will appoint a working group to examine the PDK functions and make recommendations.

The new TUBITAK Policy on compensating universities for overhead expenses may become an issue.

**Action Plan:** A working group will be formed to recommend policy alternatives for overhead returns.

#### 6.1.4 Organizational Infrastructure

All faculty holding administrative positions at Bilkent are effectively on a part-time basis since they also teach and most also supervise graduate students and conduct research or perform creative activities. Coupled with Bilkent's centralized decision-making practice, in most cases reflection and planning for the future fall behind the daily responsibilities.

The current organization worked well when the University was in its start-up mode and it is tempting to continue in the

same manner. However, the phenomenal growth of Bilkent, its competition, and the current aspirations make it incumbent on Bilkent to re-examine its administrative structure and take measures to secure its place as a mature University.

**Action Plan:** Rector's Office will consider examining the need for additional positions and re-organizing responsibilities among the top administrative structure of the university.

A byproduct of the current organization is its flexibility, which on occasion leads to inconsistent practice of the rules, whether written or not. A world-class organization needs processes in place and people who follow them and improve them. It is common to have periodic examination of whether individual units follow established processes, whether there is a need to improve existing processes, and, better yet, to learn best practices to spread to other units.

**Action Plan:** Rector's Office will consider appointing an Auditor of Processes to periodically review the business practices throughout the University for Compliance with the University rules, where they exist. In cases where written descriptions of processes do not exist, Auditor's Office will develop them. Such activity will also help develop and maintain the institutional memory.

#### 6.1.5 Communications

##### 6.1.5.1 Communications within Bilkent

There is general agreement on the need to improve the effectiveness of communications throughout the University. Cited needs range from a better use of BAIS on one hand, to announcements of new policies or initiatives that include explanatory rationale for them on the other. Clean and clear information owing in all directions will lead to a better-informed community and avoid emergence of false, and often counterproductive, misinformation.

The deans and chairs have a particularly important role in transmitting information to their faculty colleagues, staff and students in a timely manner through written form, such as faculty meetings that have widely-distributed recorded meeting minutes.

**Action Plan:** All new policies will include a section describing the rationale for it and be communicated to the relevant parties in a timely manner.

**Action Plan:** A working group will be tasked with determining effective communication means, e.g., better use of BAIS and improved use of Bilkent website, making sure all communications are bilingual.

Flow of information among upper administration as well as from faculty can be vastly improved. There is a need for more formal, written communication of information on policy changes and decisions.

**Action Plan:** A working group will be appointed to identify patterns and make recommendations to improve



communications among administration and between administration and faculty.

An increased number of formal and informal communication platforms across the University for Faculty Members can also help exchange ideas and information. Similarly, celebration of successes of faculty members, such as distinguished awards and promotions, demonstrate appreciation. Many such activities already exist and a more formalized annual calendar of events can be developed.

**Action Plan:** The Provost's Office will develop an annual calendar of events that includes:

- A welcome reception for new faculty members with all chairs and deans (September)
- Annual meeting with department chairs only
- Bi-monthly Deans' meetings
- State of the University Bilkent Day, April 3
- Celebration of successes of awards, etc. (May)
- Teaching Awards (June -Graduation)
- Periodic receptions for Faculties

There is a need to establish effective mechanisms by which ideas that will benefit the university can be captured. The Provost's Office will continue to hold bi-monthly meetings with Faculty Deans/School Directors during the academic year. It is expected that Deans/Directors bring relevant issues from Departments/Unit Chairs to these meetings and share the outcome of the meetings with the Chairs. The Chairs in turn are the conduits of communication between Deans/Directors and Faculty/Students in their programs and vice versa.

### 6.1.5.2 Communications Regarding Infrastructure

Ideally, educational settings would benefit from a flexible, adaptable, high-performing, sustainable, and technologically rich infrastructure. This is particularly true for Fine Arts, Design, Architecture and some of the sciences and engineering.

Audio-visual equipment and software in some classrooms and lecture halls fail or fall below par. Bilkent's Construction and Maintenance Office personnel mitigate these problems as soon as they are notified. The difficulty appears to be communicating such problems to those responsible at the university

**Action Plan:** Develop and implement a plan to periodically identify needs in teaching facilities and establish a means to communicate the needs as they are observed by faculty, e.g., communication between the department secretary and building coordinator (if there is one) or a special e-mail address.

**Action Plan:** Examine the feasibility of establishing a TechShop for student projects, as well as creative and entrepreneurial activities across the campus.

### 6.1.5.2 External Communications

External communications form the basis of Bilkent's engagement with the wider society. As such, these communications must further our reputation while, at the same time, protect the Bilkent brand."

Bilkent sends messages to several types of external recipients, both domestically and internationally. The messages may range from simple information to influential policy advice. The communication channels available include broadcast media; print media such as newspapers, magazines, and brochures; and electronic media including websites and social media.

Messages for one set of recipients are generally available to all. There is a need to strategize and manage external communications according to the recipients, the types of messages, and means of delivery, and a method of measuring its impact

**Action Plan:** A working group will be appointed to examine Bilkent communications and seek advice from experts in order to improve Bilkent's external communication modes and qualities.

### 6.1.6 Life on Campus

Many students and faculty members spend much of their time and many live on the campus. In response to and in anticipation of their needs, many infrastructure projects have been completed since the strategic planning process has started. Included among these is a new swimming pool, renovated apartment buildings for faculty and graduate students, new cafeteria for students, and conversion of a parking area in front of the administration building to a small plaza. In addition, numerous renovations in the departments and a new Brain Research Center building have been built.

There is a continuing need to enliven life on the campus. Suggestions include additional renovations of lodgings for faculty and students, integrating the lake with the campus, setting up a botanical garden, and creating well-lit, safe bicycle and walking paths.

**Action Plan:** The Office of the Vice Rector for Administrative and Financial Affairs will continue with the development plans for the campus.

### 6.2 Engagement with Wider Society

Bilkent has an established reputation within Turkey and in several parts of the world. This reputation is founded on the activities and reputation of faculty members and alumni, as well as the unique attributes and activities of the University.

#### 6.2.1 Community

Bilkent's high schools are an attraction to public-at-large in Ankara, including embassy staff, high government officials, and highly-educated professional in general. The Bilkent

Symphony Orchestra makes a unique contribution to Bilkent's reputation.

Bilkent University has the intellectual resources to provide learned advice to policy makers in the Nation and beyond on important problems within our expertise areas.

Bilkent is uniquely positioned in Ankara, where government and most policy makers and funding agencies are located, but away from the Istanbul area, where most businesses are located. The proximity makes engaging with the government agencies easier.

**Recommended similar actions include:**

- Offering public presentations
- Increase effectiveness of the BSO and Bilkent Schools
- Holding adult evening and/or weekend classes and offering continuing education. These can generate income for the University and faculty, and improve the efficiency of facility utilization.
- Engaging students on societal problems by focusing on specific needs, such as playgrounds for kids or toys for handicapped children
- Considering creating lecture space in Ankara

### 6.2.2 Business Outreach

Bilkent Cyberpark is an important incubator for small businesses and start-ups. One question to explore is whether or not Bilkent should be more involved in business development in Ankara and in Turkey at large.

**Action Plan:** A recommendation by the Rectorate will be made to the Board of Trustees to examine the degree to which Bilkent should broaden its engagement with the business community in terms of business and technology development.

### 6.2.3 Alumni

Alumni are the products of a university; as such, their successes reflect on the University as do the successes of Bilkent reflect on alumni. This symbiotic relationship needs to be reinforced and brought to a new level of engagement.

Alumni relations start on the First day a student arrives on the campus. They need to know, feel and believe that Bilkent is organized to serve their best interests and need to be treated accordingly, starting on their First day. An alumni-relations strategy is required to engage the current and future alumni.

**Action Plan:** Appoint a working group consisting of alumni, faculty, and staff to examine best practices for alumni relations at other universities, and make recommendations.

**Action Plan:** Reactivate the Friends of Bilkent University (FOBU) to provide a collaborative platform to Bilkent Alumni in the USA.

## 6.3 Resources

The improvements and strategic initiatives outlined in this plan for a World Class Academic Community require significant resources, above and beyond the present state. In the world of academe, highly respected universities are all nonprofit universities, whether state-supported or private, and income generated through tuition fees and research overhead generally is not adequate for either education or research. Hence the support required from endowments and/or state budgets.

Bilkent has a singularly unique funding model in that its endowment consists of companies managed professionally and whose profits support Bilkent's efforts in education, research and student scholarships. Hence, this presents a risk that the draw from Bilkent's endowment is directly influenced by the economy.

**Action Plan:** Rector's Office will develop a plan for proactive fund raising with specific targets.

## Part III: Analytical Background of the Plan

The Strategic Plan, as laid down in Part II, is based on three analytical pillars. The first pillar is the analysis of Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) factors. The second pillar is the analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). Finally, the third pillar is the analysis of possible prioritization venues. By the very philosophy of existence of the University, analytical results are carefully combined in the light of the Mission, Vision and Values of Bilkent University to come up with an array of ambitious yet realistic action plans.

As noted at the beginning, the “Strategic Plan in Transition” (this text) is a shortened version of the “Strategic Plan 2016”, which is intended to bridge the Strategic Plan 2016 to Strategic Plan 2024. In that, PEST, SWOT and Prioritization analyses need some wise reconsideration. Toward this end, their preliminary versions are provided in the following three sections. Once they have been completed in the near future, the consequent actions plans (Part II) will be re-written and the transition to a new Strategic Plan will be accomplished.

## 7 Political, Economic, Social and Technological Factors

- Governance of higher education in Turkey
  - Its potentially intrusive and pervasive nature
  - Risk of overregulation and reform fatigue
  - Faculty turnover
- Domestic political and economic climate
  - Poor international recruitment ability
  - Faculty turnover

- Difficulties in long-term financial planning
- Public-sector incentives
  - Asymmetric focus of governmental R&D on development and support for industry rather than on basic research, which is Bilkent's forte
- Dramatic change in demographics and cultural traits pertaining to education
  - Increasing dominance of distractors
  - Erosion of classical pen-to-paper study habits
- Sphere of education in Turkey
  - Proliferation of universities in a way to reduce the average value of higher education
  - Dramatic deterioration of the quality of secondary education in a way to jeopardize incoming students' knowledge base and skills
  - Difficulties in blending incoming students with a weaker knowledge base with others
- An array of rapid technological advances
  - Enlarged room for offering new opportunities of knowledge availability and dissemination
  - New abilities of visualization via virtual reality
  - New venues for computer-based problem solving
  - Degree of integration of advances in science and engineering knowledge to education and research
- Shifting focus of international ranking procedures
  - Failures to adequately measure relatively traditional academic accomplishments
- Research publication outlets
  - High proliferation rate of outlets
  - Increasing predatory publication venues

## 8 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

### Strengths

- Brand value of 40 years and Hocabay's legacy
- University's traditions at large (augmenting effectiveness)
- Dedicated administrative staff roster (senior staff)
- Ability to hire better-skilled administrative staff
- Ability to attract top-notch early career PhD holders
- Ability to attract top-notch high-school graduates to undergraduate programs
- Ability to attract top-notch college graduates to graduate programs
- Maintenance of the culture of 'teaching researchers'

- Sustained support of Bilkent Holding companies
- 'Quality Management in Education' vision

### Weaknesses

- University's traditions at large (impeding efficiency)
- Strong habit formation and inherent resistance to change
- Inability to attain a dedication-neutral administrative staff roster change
- Unavailability of slack academic production factors – maintenance of a breakeven size of academic staff

### Opportunities

- An array of rapid technological advances

### Threats

- Heavy governance of higher education in Turkey
- Negative domestic political and economic climate
- Asymmetric outlook of public-sector incentives
- Dramatic change in demographics and cultural traits pertaining to education
- Deteriorating sphere of education in Turkey
- Shifting focus of international ranking procedures
- Deteriorating research publication outlets

## 9 Prioritization of Efforts

- Protection and enhancement of the brand value
  - International presence for Bilkent and globally visible/focal programs
- A new culture of leadership
- Enhanced formalization of University's processes
- A better framework for financial management and budgeting
  - Finding additional financial resources
  - Leveraging external resources to the University's advantage
  - A more synergistic collaboration between the Bilkent Holding companies and the University