



# **Pluralism and Equal Opportunity in Higher Education Expanding Access for Arabs, Druze and Circassians in Israel**

Report by the Planning and Budgeting Committee of  
the Council for Higher Education

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January 2013

In this report the terms "Arab population," "Arab sector" and "minorities" refer to Arab, Druze and Circassian citizens of Israel. These terms are for convenience only.

CHE – Council for Higher Education. PBC - Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council for Higher Education. [www.che.org.il](http://www.che.org.il).

21 February 2013

Arabs make up approximately 20% of Israel's population and 26% of the relevant age cohort for higher education. However, their participation in the higher education system is significantly lower – about 12%. With each additional level of education, the participation rate declines.

Beyond reducing inequality and promoting better relations between Arabs and Jews, raising the rate of Arab participation in higher education holds great importance on the social and economic planes. Academic studies are a primary means of social mobility and a key element in the development of each population group in Israel, as well as the development of the entire economy. Increased participation of Arab citizens in higher education will enhance their socio-economic status in Israeli society, and will contribute greatly to the State of Israel as a whole.

In the framework of the multi-year program for 2010-2016, the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) committed itself to lead a process of fundamental change in this area, and for the first time set a goal of making higher education accessible to minorities and the ultra-Orthodox. With the agreement of the Ministry of Finance, the PBC allocated a budget of nearly 500 million NIS over six years for this purpose.

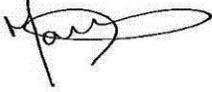
Subsequently, a joint team from the PBC's planning and budgeting departments, led by the Planning and Policy Vice President, was appointed in January 2010, and invested great effort in formulating operational recommendations. This report summarizes the knowledge gained by the professional staff, and presents the program adopted by the PBC after consultation with the Steering Committee headed by Professor Faisal Azaiza. The program is based on two basic principles:

- Addressing the entire continuum of the student's career, from secondary school through employment after graduation, or continued studies and a senior position in academia.
- Providing a comprehensive response to the barriers faced by Arab students, including language difficulties, learning skills, and cultural differences.

The higher education system has a great opportunity to change Israeli society by improving the socio-economic status of minorities in Israel, and I hope that this program will begin a shift towards a more pluralistic and egalitarian society.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank the professional staff for their dedication to this significant task, and for their efforts in delving deeper into the issues and searching for creative solutions. I encourage of all those involved and wish us all success!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manuel Trajtenberg', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg  
Chairman, PBC

06 January 2013

The Arab population in Israel attributes great importance to higher education, which it perceives as the most important, and perhaps the only means of social mobility. Higher education is a valuable component of human capital, and its acquisition is one of the most important means of creating economic and social mobility. Increased Arab participation in higher education will reduce inequality between the sectors, and promote positive relations between Arabs and Jews.

For the first time, the PBC has committed to lead a process of fundamental change in this context, and has set an explicit target in the multi-year program to make higher education accessible to Arab, Druze and Circassian citizens. The program addresses all the barriers that inhibit integration in the higher education system, from high school guidance through preparation for academic studies and comprehensive support to students in the first year of studies (a stage normally characterized by high drop-out) -- all the way to advanced degrees for outstanding students. The program also includes continued operation of the Ma'of Fund that supports outstanding young Arab lecturers in higher education institutions. The Ma'of program has opened tenure track opportunities to nearly 100 Arab lecturers, who are a role model for younger students at the beginning of their own academic careers.

In the coming year, there are additional programs to be examined by the professional staff and new ideas that may be approved by the Steering Committee that I lead. Implementation should be carried out with caution, while learning and measuring the results of each component in the holistic program, at each stage.

I wish to thank Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, Chairman of the PBC, who placed this subject on the agenda of the Council for Higher Education and raised the issue for public debate. I also thank the professional staff headed by Merav Shaviv, which labored greatly to formulate the report and the intervention programs, as well as the members of the Steering Committee for their commitment, initiative and investment.

May all our efforts bear fruit and achieve the desired change of reducing inequality in Israeli society, for a more productive, creative and unified society.

Sincerely,



Prof. Faisal Azaiza

Member of the PBC and Chairman of the Steering Committee

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2010, after signing the multi-year program with the Ministry of Finance, Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, Chair of the PBC, appointed a professional team to design a program to increase access to higher education for the Arab population. Our job was to examine higher education in the Arab population, map the barriers and difficulties en route to expanding and improving higher education, study in depth the available intervention programs and their effectiveness, coordinate and process all the data and facts, and formulate recommendations for the coming years.

During this period we collected information, read studies and articles, learned from past experience and held many meetings and conversations with professionals at colleges and universities: heads of institutions, Arab sector coordinators, preparatory course managers, staff at the Dean of Students and Student Aid Units, as well as Arab students and staff members. We consulted with government agencies, academics from the Arab sector, representatives of non-governmental organizations and representatives of philanthropic funds. In May 2011 we released a public appeal in the Jewish and Arab press inviting the general public, researchers and organizations to submit data, research and policy proposals. In July 2011 we published an interim report, which was followed by a limited pilot and evaluation study in the pre-academic preparatory courses (*mechinot*)<sup>1</sup>, which helped illuminate problems and possible solutions. We also initiated a pilot program at the Open University, in the framework of the "soft landing" program, which is now underway.

This process was designed to gather information from the field and study the issue from the broadest and most diverse points of view, aiming at forming a complete picture of the barriers faced by the Arab population en route to higher education. Meeting with Arab students, professionals and individuals in the field, allowed us to analyze data in terms of implications, causes and reasons. Our goal was to include as many parties as possible, to avoid duplication and to receive feedback on the proposed policy directions.

The state of higher education in the Arab population is influenced by many and diverse factors, as detailed in the following report. From the full picture provided, it was necessary to select both the most significant barriers and those barriers on which the PBC can have the most impact. For this reason, there are significant issues that should be addressed outside the PBC, including problems in primary and secondary education, public transportation to Arab population centers, labor market integration, and changes to the PET (psychometric examination required for university entrance). Our program

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<sup>1</sup> Generally each *mechina* is affiliated with a HE institute, although a few independent programs do exist.

includes partial reference to these issues, with the understanding that it is not possible to wait for all the systems to be improved, and that action should be taken in all fields (according to budget constraints) in order to improve access to higher education.

Our program emphasizes expansion of access along with improved educational outcomes. In order to expand access to thousands of minority students and help them to succeed in their studies, we must first invest in appropriate preparation and support for those who are eligible, in order to produce graduates whose achievements are equal to those of the Jewish population. Therefore, the plan allocates significant resources to addressing the major barriers that Arab students face before entering the academy and during their years of study, and does not propose numeric targets for massive absorption of Arab students.

Our program invests in improving integration in the existing academic system and in regular degree granting programs. We believe that integration in existing institutions is preferable to creating separate frameworks, in order to prepare students for integration into the broader society and suitable employment. Nevertheless, in order to bring about significant change within the next few years, and to reduce the incidence of study abroad (especially in Jordan), the proposed solutions may not be sufficient. We are open to initiatives arising from the field and to examining other alternatives, such as the establishment of unique frameworks in Arab, Druze and Circassian communities. This is a complex issue and we shall address it only after careful consideration.

A necessary condition for success is the cooperation, sincerity and commitment of the academic institutions funded by the PBC. Due to the range of aspects that must be handled, each institution that applies to the PBC for support must appoint an individual at the highest level of management to be in charge of formulating objectives, monitoring implementation and reporting on results. We will provide incentives for initiatives to prevent drop-out in the first year and to encourage students to select fields that are in demand in the private sector. Unlike previous years, however, our budgetary models will give flexibility to institutions in creating "outside the box" programs and using tools that are suitable for each institution, discipline of study and specific population. There is no single recipe that we wish to dictate. Rather, we wish to enable flexibility and creativity while setting clear goals for the institutions, giving special attention to the barriers that must be addressed and formulation of appropriate action plans.

We are close to the end of our planning, but only at the beginning of change. An integral part of the PBC's activity is a continuous process of assessment and drawing conclusions from the implementation. We will update the program and its completion in the framework of the PBC's permanent Steering Committee For Promoting Higher Education

Among the Minority Population headed by Professor Faisal Azaiza. In this context, we also wish to expand and deepen our understanding of how other developed countries deal with similar problems.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those who offered their time, energy, knowledge and insights, including the heads of the academic institutions, relevant officials in the institutions, Arab sector coordinators, students, faculty, researchers, representatives of non-governmental organizations, representatives of the public, and others. Special thanks to the professional employees of the relevant ministries, who assisted in thinking and outlining the program, and in particular, the Economic Development Authority of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sector in the Prime Minister's office – Ayman Saif and Roi Assaf. We thank the representatives of the Ministry of Finance - Micah Perlman and Danny Gluschenkov -- and employees of the Central Bureau of Statistics - Yosi Gidianian and Aviel Krentzler. Thanks to the Brookdale Institute researchers - Dalia Ben Rabi, Sofka Segal-Barreau and Ayala Hendin -- and to Khaled Abu Asbah from the Massar Institute, who helped us in understanding the array of preparatory courses for Arab students. Thanks to Avivit Hai from the Inter-Agency Task Force for bringing the issue to the awareness of North American Jewry. Thanks to the staff of the Planning and Budgeting Department at the PBC, who assisted in collecting the information and its analysis: Hava Klein, Yael Siman Tov-Cohen, Efrat Tiram and Yelena Krol. A special thanks to the Steering Committee of the Arab Sector led by PBC member Professor Faisal Azaiza, for its commitment to the subject and helpful comments. And finally, we thank Professor Manuel Trajtenberg for the high professional standards, fruitful discussions and support along the way.

Implementation of this program intersects with other Government plans, especially in aspects of primary and secondary education, as well as employment of Arabs, Druze and Circassians. A holistic approach is critical to enabling thousands of additional Arab students to further realize their potential and complete an academic degree, integrate in proper employment, and -- for the outstanding ones -- to continue as faculty members in institutions of higher education. According to the program "Israel 2028: Socio-economic Vision and Strategy in the Global World", it is urgent to thoroughly address the needs of the Arab sector in Israel, and in order to do that, the Government must adopt a comprehensive policy to realize the potential of the Arab sector.

We believe that professional, systematic and consistent implementation of our program, along with improvements in interfacing systems (primary/secondary education and employment, in particular) will bring a long-term breakthrough in integrating Arabs into the higher education system and, later on -- to full integration into Israeli society.

Sincerely,



Merav Shaviv

Deputy director-general, Planning and Policy, PBC

I would like to commend the work of the professional staff members: Mrs. Noa Binstein, Mr. Ari Stone and Mr. Ornan Fudem, who devoted many efforts in studying the subject and formulating the plan. Without them, the program would not have been developed.

## Executive Summary

This report presents the work of the professional staff appointed by the Chairman of the PBC on facilitating Arab access to higher education, and the program that was eventually adopted by the PBC.

The program, designed for the higher education institutions budgeted by the PBC, was formulated after consultation with the Steering Committee of the PBC on the subject headed by Prof. Faisal Azaiza, member of the PBC, and with the participation of: Prof. Roza Azhari, ORT Braude College; Dr. Rabia Basis, Gordon College of Education; Prof. Daud Bashuti, The Technion; Prof. Ezri Tarazi, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem; Dr. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; Dr. Tali Regev, Tel-Aviv University; Mr. Rasul Saada – Head, Department to promote Arab students, The Student Association; Mr. Roi Assaf, Authority of Socio-Economic Development for the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sector; The Prime Minister's Office - permanent observer.

The report includes four chapters:

**The first chapter** summarizes background data, primarily socioeconomic, on the Arab population. It focuses on the principal findings in the context of higher education: numbers of students and trends over the years, fields of study, distribution by types of institution, dropout and failure to complete within the standard time, gender analysis and the phenomenon of study abroad.

The data show that the Arab population in Israel is characterized by low socio-economic status relative to the Jewish population. Most Arab communities are rated in the lowest socio-economic clusters according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. There are significant gaps in income from gross labor per capita compared to the majority population, while the rate and duration of poverty are much higher. The employment rate is lower than in the Jewish population, and gender segmentation shows that there is a significant gap in employment rates between Arab and Jewish women. The majority of those employed do not have an academic degree. As the level of earnings rises, the gaps grow. The majority of women are employed in education, and most of the men are employed in jobs that do not require an academic degree. There is a persistent gap, in recent years, in the average number of years of schooling between Arabs and Jews in favor of the latter. Overcrowding in classrooms in elementary schools in the Arab sector is much greater than in the Jewish sector. The results of standardized tests, especially in English and Science, are lower among Arab students. Dropout rate of Arab students in grades seven – twelve is higher and is particularly evident in ninth grade (between middle

school and high school). The percentage of students who take the matriculation exams is lower, and the percentage of Arabs who possess a matriculation certificate that meets university admission requirements is much lower than that of Jews. Despite these poor outcomes, the percentage of Arab students who take pre-academic preparatory courses (*mechinot*) is extremely low. Therefore, it is not surprising that representation of the Arab population in higher education is low relative to its share in the general population, notwithstanding the upward trend over the years (which is led by women). The percentage of university graduates among Arabs is less than half that among Jews. Comparing the percentage of undergraduate students in the general population in the relevant age group for higher education shows that there is a decline in the participation rate of Arab students in undergraduate studies compared to growth among Jews. The Arab students tend to choose professional fields of study that promise immediate employment, particularly in the public sector, such as medicine, pharmacy and nursing, as well as education and teaching. They are almost entirely absent from natural sciences and engineering. The dropout rates between first and second year of studies are higher, as well as the time taken to complete a degree. The gap in dropout rates is especially evident in the academic colleges, and the phenomenon of failure to complete on time is especially evident in universities. With each level of higher education completed, Arab representation decreases, from undergraduate up to senior academic staff. There is a widespread and growing phenomenon of studying sought-after professions, such as medicine, abroad, particularly in Jordan. Bedouin population data are low in almost all parameters and outcomes..

**The second chapter** describes the major barriers to entry and integration in the higher education system. First and foremost we recognize barriers which are the result of the primary and secondary education system, which provides the "tool box" that opens the doors to higher education, and shapes the student's ability to cope in the different frameworks. There are also other barriers related to environmental, cultural, traditional and other issues.

**The Hebrew language** is a major obstacle. Although Hebrew is taught in Arab schools, there is almost no use of this language outside the classroom. Therefore, Arab students experience difficulty in academic speaking, understanding, reading and writing. There is also difficulty in the **English language**, required in higher education, being one of four (or even five) foreign languages for the Arab student. **Learning Skills** are another major barrier. Primary and secondary curricula emphasize memorization and understanding texts at a basic level, but do not encourage creative thinking, critical thinking, analysis, and independent reasoning. **The psychometric test** is a major barrier to entry in sought after academic areas of study and prestigious institutions. There is a gap of approximately 100 points in favor of examinees tested in Hebrew versus those tested in Arabic

(notwithstanding a higher average matriculation score for those tested in Arabic). There is also a **lack of appropriate guidance counseling for high school students**, such as **preliminary information, consultation and guidance** regarding admission requirements, types of programs and institutions, specific curriculum content, suitability for the profession, and employment prospects. For example, the over-representation of Arab students studying education could be moderated through vocational guidance and information about other employment options. There is also the **difficulty of physical access**. The higher education system and the labor market usually require Arab residents to venture outside of their residential area for academic studies and employment. Therefore, the severe shortage of available, accessible and affordable transportation is a significant barrier. There is a shortage of public transportation, in terms of bus frequency, hours and entry into the towns in rural Arab communities. The time spent on travel increases when there is need to use several bus lines or the train. In addition, there is difficulty with renting apartments near the campus. . **There is a cultural gap**, primarily in universities where, predominantly, the nature of study and geographic location require relocation and independent living. The Arab community, despite modernization trends, retains many traditional characteristics. In the framework of higher education, Arab students experience being a minority for the first time, without the protection of the Arab community in their residential location. For the first time they transition into a Jewish environment where the Hebrew language is predominant, as well as into an academic environment that they may perceive as unwelcoming. Also, the Arab students come to the academy at a relatively young age, as most of them do not serve in the Army and do not take a long trip abroad as the Jewish students do. This is the first time they venture out of their residential environment and have to manage independently. In some of the popular departments, institutions require that students be aged at least 20, claiming that younger students lack the maturity required for engaging in the profession studied. **Economic barriers** can prevent entry to academic studies, and cause dropout and failure to complete studies. . As shown by the data, the family of an average Arab student (which finances most of the expenses for the studies) comes from a lower socio-economic background than the family of the average Jewish student, and its sources for financing tuition and living expenses are much more meager. The lack of military service by most Arab students prevents them from receiving scholarships from various public and private bodies. For the students themselves, helping to support the family and saving for the construction of a house (mainly among men) are also motivating factors to go to work at a younger age, rather than choosing higher education.

**The third chapter** reviews the tools and programs that currently exist and implementation of previous recommendations, especially at the PBC and in the higher education system, and the various government offices. The PBC attributes great importance to this subject and in 2002, established a special steering committee for

increasing access to the Arab sector. However, the budget invested was very low and primarily supported administrative coordination in the institutions and employment of doctoral students and outstanding faculty. It is encouraging to see that various academic institutions initiated programs from their own resources and raised philanthropic funds for the effort, thus assisting integration of Arab students and gaining valuable knowledge and experience. Government programs have begun to address education, employment, and transportation, such as career guidance in high schools, improving Hebrew studies in schools, establishment of employment centers in Arab communities, and improving the transportation system in Arab communities. However, these efforts are in various stages of development, and their scope is still limited.. It is doubtful whether they are enough to bring about change in the short term.

**The fourth chapter** presents the PBC's policy for the coming years. The main points are as follows:

- **Information, consultation and guidance:** Information, consultation and guidance centers for the Arab sector will be established in Arab population centers around the country. These centers will provide reliable and objective information on higher education. They will provide educational and vocational guidance beginning in high school, all the way through a student's academic career, including assistance in employment integration. The program will be coordinated with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor.
- **Pre-academic preparatory courses (*mechinot*):** All the preparatory courses budgeted by the PBC, where minority students study (both together with Jews and separately) will receive wrap-around services that include: Hebrew/English language courses, tutoring, subsidized dormitories / transportation, coordinator / consultant and psychometric preparation courses (if necessary). In addition, the PBC will participate in marketing and branding the *mechinot*, aiming to bring them to the awareness of the Arab population and highlight their benefits. As a complementary move, the PBC will grant an excellence scholarship to the top 20% of the Arab *mechinot* graduates. . The scholarship will be awarded after admission to the first year of undergraduate studies and will be equal to the annual tuition.
- **Summer Preparation ("One Step Ahead"):** This short preparatory course is intended for Arab students who have already been admitted to college or university. This is an intensive course before the school year begins, which builds the student's knowledge base and basic skills to enable an optimal start. The summer programs take place one to two months before the start of school. Their curriculum focuses on

improving Hebrew and English language skills, study skills and orienting the students to academic life.

- **Effective absorption in the first year:** We view the first year as a critical stage for the success of the Arab student, both in terms of persistence and achievements. Most of our resources will go to programs of the individual higher education institutions, designed to achieve the following goals: reducing drop-out and switching departments; achieving timely graduation; raising achievement levels; increasing the numbers of Arab students in fields where they are under-represented, (both for professional mobility and for social considerations); promoting a welcoming campus environment; and expanding options to realize academic potential. The program components are: social mentoring (both personal and group), academic workshops and mentoring, workshops in study skills, psychological support, guidance in choosing courses, a paid academic advisor for Arab students, cultural adjustments in the academic context, and consideration of non-Jewish holidays, The primary effort will be concentrated in the first year of academic studies.
- **Career Guidance:** Prior to graduation, support will be provided for better integration into the labor market. We seek both to expand Arab employment and to ensure that the graduates are employed in fields that meet their skills.
- **Program for outstanding Arab graduate students:** The PBC has expanded its support for outstanding doctoral students, and continues to support Maof Scholarships for Arab faculty members. In addition, as of 2013/14, the PBC will support 25 outstanding students pursuing a research-oriented MA with thesis and 25 postdoctoral fellowships.
- **Absorption of Arab academic staff:** It is recommended to encourage outstanding students to pursue advanced degrees and to prefer integration of eligible Arab candidates as faculty members.
- **Institutional platform:** As this effort includes a wide range of subjects – economic, academic, social, cultural, physical accessibility, and employment, success depends on creating an institutional platform which is supported by the highest levels of management. A “Unit for Arab Students” should direct, manage and supervise the implementation of the project, both at the institutional level and at the individual student level. The unit should be headed by a senior staff member, preferably an Arab, who will report directly to the Rector/President. The person in charge will have a defined role anchored in the official documents of the institution. The person

in charge will present reports regarding activity and results to the management of the institution and to the PBC as required.

- **Translation of websites (relevant interfaces) into Arabic:** Translation of the relevant portions of the institutions' websites and the CHE website, to allow better orientation and academic information to Arab candidates.
- **Integration of Arabs in governing institutions and committees:** It is recommended that the higher education institutions adopt the principles of affirmative action when appointing members of committees, governing bodies and senior staff.
- **Increased integration of Arabs in the administrative staff of the institution:** We recommend that the institutions take steps to increase Arab representation in the administrative staff, by setting an annual target appropriate to the rate of internal rotation and the size of the administrative staff at the institution.
- **Open University** – On a one-time basis, the PBC is supporting a unique study course in four high demand fields. Students who successfully complete the program at the Open University will be able to transfer, in the framework of the "Soft Landing" program, to a university where they will complete their undergraduate degree. The students in the pilot project will receive support in the form of Arabic language assistance in all the courses, workshops to strengthen skills in Hebrew and English, and academic skills specific to their field. The students will also receive scholarships and monthly stipends.
- **Physical accessibility** – We are working in cooperation with the Ministries of Transport and Finance, the Student Association, and the institutions to map student needs. It is recommended that the Ministry of Transport allocate additional resources to implement the solutions. On the issue of housing, we recommend that priority be given to Arab students from low socio-economic background to live in dorms. In addition, due to the relative difficulty in obtaining rental housing, we propose that the institutions act directly to arrange housing near the campus for Arab students..
- **Scholarship and loan fund** – We are working jointly with philanthropic bodies to establish a Scholarship and Loan Fund for Arab students with low socio-economic backgrounds, studying in preferred fields such as engineering.
- **Arab academic institution** – The issue of establishing an Arab academic institution and transferring teacher training colleges in the Arab sector for budgeting by the

PBC, arises as a result of many initiatives that seek to increase access to the Arab sector and minimize the phenomenon of Arab students studying abroad. The issue is complex and requires thorough examination and further study. The team will continue to look into this matter during the year.