



## **Committee for the Evaluation of Hebrew Language Programmes**

**University of Haifa  
Department of Hebrew Language  
Evaluation Report**

**October 2012**

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## **Chapter 1: General Background**

At its meeting on July 25, 2010, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programmes in the field of Hebrew Language during the academic year 2011 – 2012.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education, who serves ex officio as Chairperson of the CHE, appointed a Committee consisting of:

- Prof. Geoffrey Khan, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, England–Chair
- Prof. Shmuel Bolozky, Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst , USA
- Prof. Jan Joosten, Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Strasbourg, France
- Prof. Aharon Maman, The Department of Hebrew and Jewish Languages, Hebrew University, Israel
- Prof. Judith Olszowy-Schlanger , Department of Historical and philological sciences, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne, France

*Ms. Alisa Elon* - Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to submit the following documents to CHE:

1. A final report on each of the evaluated departments,
2. A general report on the state of the discipline in the Israeli higher education system, including recommendations to the CHE for standards and potential state-wide changes in the evaluated field of study.

The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of October 2010).

## **Chapter 2-Committee Procedures**

The Committee held its first meetings on April 15, 2012, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as Hebrew Language Study programmes.

In April 2012, the Committee held its first round of visits with site visits to the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University and the University of Haifa.

The second round of visits was carried out in June 2012 with site visits to Bar-Ilan University and Ben-Gurion University.

**This report deals with the evaluation of Hebrew language studies at the Department of Hebrew Language at the University of Haifa.**

In preparation of this report, the committee met with administrators, senior and junior faculty, and students at the bachelors, masters and doctoral levels. The analysis given below reflects the results of those meetings coupled with the information provided by the University of Haifa in its self-evaluation report.

The Committee's visit to the University of Haifa took place on April 22-23, 2012. The Committee thanks the management of the University of Haifa and the Department of Hebrew Language for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit at the institution.

The schedule of the visit is attached as **Appendix 2**.

### **Chapter 3: Evaluation of Hebrew language studies at the Department of Hebrew Language at the University of Haifa**

*\* This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any subsequent changes. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

#### *Background*

The University of Haifa was established in 1963 and was accredited by the Council of Higher Education in 1972. According to the institution's Self-Evaluation report, during 2010-11, there were 18,441 students enrolled at the university including: 8,733 B.A. students, 7,061 M.A. students and 1,165 Ph.D. students.

The Department of Hebrew Language was one of the first departments at the University. It was originally established as the department of Hebrew Language and Literature and in 1973 it became an independent department of Hebrew Language.

According to the university's self-evaluation report, the number of students in the department during 2010-2011 was as follows: 99 B.A. students, 42 M.A. and 12 Ph.D. students

#### *The goals, aims and mission statement of the evaluated academic unit and study programmes*

The stated aim of the study programme in the Department of Hebrew language is to introduce students to the history and structure of the Hebrew language throughout various periods in its Semitic and Jewish contexts. This is achieved by offering (i) courses on a wide variety of types of Hebrew ranging historically from Classical Biblical Hebrew up to Modern Israeli Hebrew and (ii) courses providing students with linguistic analytical skills on many levels (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse analysis, semantics, pragmatics and lexicon). The department also recognizes the practical challenge of equipping students with qualifications that will help them with their professional career outside academia. A further challenge is the fact that the first language of a large proportion of the students is not Hebrew. The Department aims to integrate students of different educational and cultural backgrounds into the study programme and accommodate as far as is practical and reasonable a wide variety of academic levels.

The profile of staff of the department is ideally suited to fulfilling the academic aims of the study programme. The staff of the department include both philologists and theoretical linguists, who together form a team that is perfectly qualified for the delivery of a programme consisting of historical philological courses and courses in linguistic analysis. The combination of philologists and theoretical linguists in the ratio that is found in Haifa is not found in other departments of Hebrew language in Israel. Furthermore all members of tenured staff excel in their respective fields of research and are in many cases the leading experts in their fields. The Evaluation Committee would like to stress the outstanding reputation this department has on the international scene for its research. Outside of Israel there are no departments that have a such a specialized focus on Hebrew language, rather these subjects are represented by isolated members of staff who are located within broader units. There is, therefore, no concentration of excellence outside of Israel as is found in this department in Haifa University and in corresponding departments in other Israeli universities.

The course structure in the department clearly shows that the general aims of the study programme are being fulfilled. The Evaluation Committee was highly impressed by the way in which the staff are meeting the challenges of teaching students from different backgrounds and finding the right balance between academic education and the preparing of students for their professional careers.

#### *Administrative Organizational Structure. Content, Structure and Scope of the programme*

The combination of Hebrew language and theoretical linguistics within the department is, as remarked already, commended by the Evaluation Committee.

There are two undergraduate tracks in the department, dual major and single major. There are also two graduate-level tracks, Track A (with thesis) and Track B (without thesis), the latter consisting of two programmes: General Studies in Hebrew Language and the Hebrew Language Editing programme.

In spite of the generally-wide coverage of curricular areas, the department points out in its self-evaluation report that there are nevertheless some lacunae in their teaching programme and research expertise, such as certain aspects of Biblical Hebrew (vocabulary, the poetic language, Second Temple Biblical Hebrew), Medieval Hebrew (prose and poetry), Hebrew of the Enlightenment and Modern Hebrew lexicon. Some of these lacunae could be filled by the allocation to the department of a further tenured position. We **recommend**, therefore, that one more tenured position be allocated to the department to fill such lacunae, in addition to the current tenured positions, which must be replaced after retirement of their current incumbents. The development of Medieval Hebrew is particularly desirable given the tradition of research in the department as well as the potential interest of the students, in particular the Arabic native speakers, in this field. A commendable point is that staff members manage to broaden the list of the available courses by innovative methods, such as the reading and study of classical and contemporary literary texts through an online course.

On the whole, the Evaluation Committee finds that the Departmental internal structure is most satisfactory, with impressive balance between the philological and the linguistic components of instruction and research, a good deal of collaborative research within the institution and beyond, and proven capability to obtain outside grants.

#### *Teaching and Learning Outcomes*

The student body in the department is heterogeneous with regard to their mother-tongue and academic abilities. About half the students are not native speakers of Hebrew. Many of the non-native speakers of Hebrew are unfamiliar with the Classical Hebrew textual sources, such as the Bible and the Mishnah, which form the basis of some of the classes. The teachers we spoke to indicated that many of the students were not trained to have a critical approach to sources. All of this results in a very wide range of levels in the classroom, especially in the first year. All teachers in the department have faced this challenge in a very positive way and have taken admirable measures to be inclusive in their teaching, without making any student feel left out.

One way to reduce the wide range of levels among the students would be to raise the admissions threshold, and this is favoured by the department and also by some of the stronger students. The University authorities are concerned that this would bring about a drop in enrolments, but are, nevertheless, planning to raise it gradually. For instance, the admission score was 490 in the academic year 2011-12 but it is being raised to 500 for 2012-13. Some teachers commented that good results in the psychometric examination depend to a large extent on the type of high school the students attend, so it would be unfair discrimination

against certain students to raise the bar. They prefer to retain the current system and filter out the weaker students by an examination at the end of the first academic year. Many students admitted with low psychometric scores do, indeed, make good progress in the first year. This can be attributed to some extent to the high quality classroom teaching, the provision of various complementary classes (e.g. on Hebrew source texts) and the introduction of innovative teaching methods using IT (notably the *High Learn* facility). Special help is given to non-native speakers of Hebrew also in the standard pronunciation of Hebrew by means of a specially created curriculum in a language laboratory. One of the most important factors, however, appears to be that weaker students are given additional support through small tutorial groups. An increase of resources to provide more tutorial coaching for students would undoubtedly increase the success rate in the first year examinations and ultimately increase the number graduating at the end of the courses. We **recommend**, therefore, that the university makes a slight increase in the threshold for admission and makes available additional resources for tutorial coaching.

### *Measuring learning outcomes*

The combination of evaluation methods such as examinations, weekly tests, seminar papers and other written assignments provide a good assessment of students' achievements and command of the material covered in the courses. In about 25% of the BA courses final examinations are the sole method of assessment. In the rest of the courses, however, intermediate examinations, exercises and written assignments are also used for assessment. In MA courses, the grade is determined on the basis of a seminar paper or written assignments.

Outstanding BA students are encouraged to carry out personal research projects for which they are given the credit equivalent to that of one course. This is commendable, especially since it allows undergraduates to interact with the teaching staff on the level of research. It is particularly impressive that one such BA research project resulted in a joint publication by the student and supervisor.

Whereas MA theses are planned and supervised satisfactorily, it is striking that there is no general University Authority to coordinate administration and the quality assurance of PhD theses across the institution as a whole. Save for the fact that the research proposal submitted by the candidate (about 30 pages) is reviewed by an external reviewer, the process is mostly carried out internally within the department. As far as can be seen this has not had a negative impact on the quality of PhD studies. Overall the Evaluation Committee's impression is that the teaching quality in the Department is highly satisfactory.

### *Measuring students' satisfaction*

The University routinely conducts surveys of student satisfaction with teachers and courses. These evaluations are used as a basis to provide support for staff members in need of assistance in improving their teaching skills, through workshops or personal training. They also play a role in staff promotion procedures. The department also has a students' committee consisting of 4-6 representatives of students, which may inform the Head of Department about specific problems concerning teaching. The monitoring of the teaching quality of junior members of staff by peer-review is also practiced in the department. These systems of evaluation clearly enhance quality control and are to be commended.

The University has a 'Unit for the Advancement of Teaching' that offers both personal consultation and a wide variety of workshops in order to improve teaching and learning methods and to advance the lecturers' ability to make their teaching more efficient and appealing to students. The Rector's Office has a 'Unit for Computer-Aided Instruction' designed to encourage the improvement of instruction and learning by using IT. This

institutional support for the quality of teaching is also commended by the Evaluation Committee.

#### *Academic staff*

The department of Hebrew language in Haifa employs six senior tenured staff members employed for 100% of their time in the department and three further senior members employed for 50% in the department. In addition, there are two senior adjunct staff members and one junior staff member involved in the editing programme. The adjunct members are employed on the basis of twelve month contracts for the percentage of the full-time contract corresponding to their teaching. They are also employed elsewhere, in a secondary school or another higher education institution.

The adjunct staff are responsible for only a small part of the teaching curriculum. They are high quality teachers, who combine full time teaching commitments in secondary education and a teachers' training college, with their university teaching and a certain amount of research (usually publication of one article a year and participation in conferences). They are perfectly integrated in the department, fully involved in its life and problems and very happy to teach there. The adjunct staff members who are not employed by another academic institution are eligible for research funding such as financial help with participation in conferences. The teaching in the high school in addition to the university teaching is presented by these staff members as a vocation and their personal choice rather than the result of financial necessity, and the Evaluation Committee were fully satisfied that they was content with their working conditions.

#### *Recruitment policy.*

Despite the general cuts in the field of humanities and a growing pressure to encourage fields which attract more students, the Hebrew language department is considered by the Evaluation Committee to be an essential and important element in the Humanities faculty. Its role as a leading teaching and research institution is even more important given its location in the North of the country and the heterogeneous background of the students. In recent years, some essential and strategic appointments were made. The department continues to strive towards the increase of their staff and thus of their teaching provision, notably through national schemes such as Alon scholarships. The appointment of young scholars through this channel would increase the research and teaching potential of this excellent and dynamic department. We **recommend**, therefore, that the University should encourage and give priority to the applications to the Alon scholarship by the department of Hebrew studies.

#### *Appointments, regulations and procedures*

The procedures for appointments and promotions are very clearly described in the self-evaluation report. They follow the general rules stipulated by the university. Decisions at departmental level concerning appointments are made by the departmental council. Promotions procedures are initiated through the recommendation of the Head of Department, after consultation with the relevant staff members. The criteria for promotion include research publications, success in research grant applications, teaching and contribution to administration. The assessment of teaching quality in this process is based largely on student surveys conducted on-line by the university. The Evaluation Committee believes that caution should be exercised in basing decisions about promotions on such student surveys, since they often do not reflect objectively the full range of teaching contribution of a member of staff.

### *Research*

The senior members of staff are leading scholars of international reputation in their respective fields. The department is committed to research on the individual level, which is reflected by impressive outputs of publications of the highest quality, and also to collaborative research projects across departmental boundaries in the university and with scholars in other universities around the world. At the level of the university as a whole and of the Faculty of Humanities, the staff members are strongly encouraged to apply for research funding. This encouragement is expressed in the importance attached to research grant income in staff promotion procedure, in the readiness of the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities to provide modest start-up financial support for the writing of research proposals and in an efficient administrative support for scholars applying for grants. An impressive number of departmental staff have indeed been successful in research grant applications, from both national and international grant-giving bodies. So far, however, there are no research centres under the aegis of the department. Were the staff able to raise some endowment for research centres, they would be able to conduct regular research activities that would not depend on occasional grants or university support which may not always be available, as well as support their students by employing them as research assistants on a regular basis. We **recommend**, therefore, that efforts be made to create a research centre in the department. This would undoubtedly further enhance the department and attract staff and research students in the future.

### *Administration and infrastructure*

The department appears to be run extremely efficiently by the administrative team. The infrastructure facilities are of high quality, providing good accommodation for staff and good classroom space. Students of the department have access to an excellent state-of-the-art language laboratory, which enhances their learning experience. The library, although inevitably under budgetary constraints, appears to be able to supply the needs of the students and staff of the department, through a careful strategic planning.

### *Self Evaluation*

The self-evaluation process was clearly taken seriously at all levels of the university. It was abundantly evident that the preparation of the self-evaluation report by the programme was regarded as a positive experience and all members of tenured and adjunct staff collaborated in its preparation. A great deal of care had been devoted to the preparation of the report, which was very well written.

### *Summary*

The Department of Hebrew Language is providing a teaching programme of excellent quality. It is to be particularly commended for the care it offers to students whose first language is not Hebrew and the success it achieves with such students. The department is offering a vital educational service to the mixed population of the North of Israel. The Evaluation Committee would like to stress the outstanding reputation this department has on the international scene for its research. Outside of Israel there are no departments that have a specific focus on Hebrew language, rather these subjects are represented by isolated members of staff who are located within broader units. There is, therefore, no concentration of excellence outside of Israel as is found in this department in Haifa University and in corresponding departments in other Israeli universities. Given this situation and given the fact that the Hebrew language has played and is still playing a vital role in the building of the Israeli nation and the vital importance of its teaching for the full integration into Israeli

society of citizens whose first language is not Hebrew, the Evaluation Committee is of the opinion that the department should have a special status in the university and the resources allocated to it should not be dependent exclusively on economically driven metrics based on student numbers.

The Evaluation Committee has the following specific recommendations:

- 1 The university should commit itself to replacing the current tenured positions in the department on the retirement of staff.
- 2 One additional tenured position should be allocated to the department in the field of Hebrew language in order to supply teaching for a wider range of subjects.
3. The university should encourage and give priority to the applications to the Alon scholarship by the department of Hebrew studies.
- 4 The university should make a slight increase in the threshold for admission and make available additional resources for tutorial coaching in the department.
5. Efforts should be made to create a research centre in the department.

**Signed by:**



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Prof. Geoffrey Khan, Chair



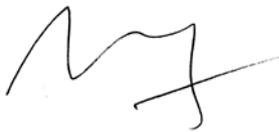
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Prof. Shmuel Bolozky



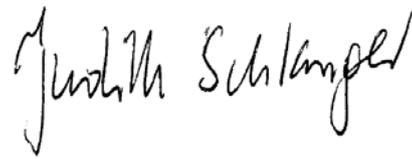
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