

## The institution's implementation of the evaluation committees' recommendations

The purpose of this follow-up is to examine whether and to what extent the institution implemented the evaluation committee's recommendations, and the impact of the evaluation process on the quality of the department and study program.

\*please note the document includes 2 sections

### **Institution: Ben-Gurion University: Department of Hebrew Language**

#### 1. Information:

The evaluator used the following documents:

- a. The evaluation committee's report of October/2012.
- b. Implementation report submitted by the institution on 22 October/2014
- c. Other documents (if there are any):  
1<sup>st</sup> interim report submitted on 24 January 2013

#### 2. Did the institution implement the evaluation committee's recommendations?

Recommendations	Was the recommendation implemented? Yes/No/Partially	Is the implementation of this recommendation is crucial for the study program to continue? Yes/no	Is there a need for further follow up before the next round of evaluation? Yes/no/partially	notes
Recommendation 1	partially	yes	yes	
Recommendation 2	yes	yes	no	
Recommendation 3	partly	no	no	
Recommendation 4	no	yes	yes	
Recommendation 5	no	no	no	
Recommendation 6	partially	No but advisable	no	
Recommendation 7	no	No but advisable	yes	
Recommendation 8	no	yes	yes	
Recommendation 9	no	Not a priority but highly advisable	yes	
Recommendation 10	no	no	no	
Recommendation 11	yes	no	no	

#### 3.

This chapter will include the conclusions regarding the implementation the evaluation committee's recommendations, and also operative recommendation for the continuation of the follow up to be implemented by the institution's administration, the department, the CHE, the PBC, etc.

**The Department of Hebrew Language (DHL) of Ben-Gurion University (BGU) has implemented fully only a part of the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee. Despite efforts of the staff members, the DHL is at present in a difficult situation due to the planned changes in the structure of the Faculty of Humanities. It appears from the report that BGU authorities have delayed implementation of several of the recommendations pending the overall decision concerning the future configuration of the Faculty. It is to be feared that 'freezing' the implementation of the recommendations, especially the ones which are defined as crucial for the continuation of the programme, will have serious negative and irredeemable implications for the future of the department whose high quality and significance have been stressed in the Evaluation Committee report. Indeed, Recommendation 4 of the Evaluation Committee was clear about the necessity of maintaining the independent status of the DHL given its excellent research reputation and the essential mission the Hebrew study plays in the Negev region including among its large Bedouin population. The Evaluation Committee expressed fear that merging with other departments may result in diluting the quality of teaching due to the students coming from different backgrounds and interests and thus damage the high quality of the department. It is also feared that such a small and highly specialized unit will find it difficult to protect its scientific interests when faced with larger units.**

**The most pressing concern is the non-implementation by BGU of Recommendation 1 regarding the replacement of the retiring faculty members. Two retired members were replaced in 2012 and 2013 by carefully selected candidates, but another retirement in 2013 has not been replaced. As for the forthcoming retirement in October 2015, the DHL has already been notified by the Dean of the Faculty that one half of the position will be filled in DHL, while the other half will be used elsewhere in the Faculty. DHL fears for two other positions whose holders will retire in 2016 and 2017. As per 2015, the DHL is short of one and a half teaching and research positions, whereas the number of its students has not diminished, and new successful options (such as an MA in editing) have been introduced. The failing to replace a retired staff member in 2013 causes automatically the lack of implementation of Recommendation 9 regarding the necessity of medieval Hebrew component in the syllabus of DHL.**

**Recommendation 2 and 3 regards adjunct staff members. The DHL has made a considerable effort to improve the status of adjunct lecturer. 2 out of 3 adjunct lecturers benefit now from a much more stable situation in the 'maslul maqbil'. Efforts are being made to diminish their workload to allow more time for research.**

**Recommendation 5 was an advice to include Semitic languages or Semitic linguistics in the name of the department to reflect the unique offer of Arabic and ancient near eastern languages in addition to Hebrew, and to strengthen the orientation towards comparative approach between languages. This change has not yet been implemented: DHL feels that it would be premature to change the name before the teaching of other Semitic languages is strengthened, but proposes to work towards this transformation in near future. This is a satisfactory solution. Similarly, Recommendation 10 concerning creation of a research centre is an object of plans and discussions, but cannot be implemented at this stage.**

**Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 concern additional teaching to be undertaken by the department. Recommendation 6 advised to introduce additional small groups teaching of Hebrew grammar (Niqqud). BGU subsidized this additional teaching for students whose mother tongue is not Hebrew. Notably Arabic-speaking students from Bedouin background could fortunately benefit from this teaching. This is a very positive and praiseworthy development. However, it is unfortunately the case that native Hebrew speakers often arrive to the university with inadequate knowledge of the grammar of their mother tongue. Additional resources for tutorials or small group teaching should be extended to Hebrew speakers, too. Two recommendations aimed at expanding the syllabus of DHL. Recommendation 7 advised the DHL to create a course in 'Hebrew expression' for the benefit of the BGU as a whole. The DHL has not implemented this recommendation because the additional funding was not forthcoming. Indeed, 'freezing' positions in the department does not allow the staff to expand their teaching load without hiring additional lecturers. However, it may be a good idea to begin by a pilot project involving a few teaching hours to assess the utility of 'Hebrew expression' course and its potential attraction to the students in humanities and other disciplines of the BGU. Recommendation 8 regarding teaching Arabic grammar and linguistics to Arabic speakers which a special attention to comparison with Hebrew is of particular importance. DHL at BGU benefits from a rare combination of competences in both Hebrew and Arabic linguistics and from the presence of Arabic native speakers. Such comparative teaching would be an asset for the university.**

**Recommendation 11 regarding DHL's contacts with its alumni has been implemented through creation of a list and invitation of the alumni to bi-weekly seminars.**

**To conclude:**

**Recommendations of the Evaluation Committee to DHL at BGU have been implemented only in part. In several cases, implementation was made impossible because of the lack of support by BGU's authorities who seem unable to make the Hebrew language a scientific priority of the faculty. The faculty of humanities at BGU is currently undergoing important structural and administrative changes, including merging small departments into larger units, and the status of the HLD is uncertain. Its current projects of extending teaching curricula are to a large extent hampered by the 'freezing' of positions of retired staff members, and uncertainty concerning the necessary future recruitments. In some other cases, such as 'Hebrew expression' or creating a new course in Arabic linguistics, DHL could be reasonably expected to propose a pilot series of courses to test the future implementation of the project.**

**It is essential:**

- 1. To ensure that HLD of BGU maintains its identity and specificity as well as administrative independent status in the process of restructuring of humanities at BGU.**
- 2. To ensure that BGU accepts the renewal of the positions of the retired staff members and allocates these positions to the DHL, to allow DHL to continue offering courses in various fields of the Hebrew and Semitic languages and linguistics, i.e. recommended medieval Hebrew**
- 3. To implement, if necessary as a pilot test series of lectures, two teaching projects: 'Hebrew expression' destined to the university students as a whole and Arabic grammar and linguistics for Arabic native speakers.**

## Section 2:

### **General observation:**

This part should include your review on the effect of the process on the quality of the evaluated field in the higher education system Israel.

**The departments and programs of Hebrew Language at the five evaluated Israeli universities are among the leading world institutions in the field. The quality of research and publications of their staff members is well recognized, and the programs offer rich and diversified syllabus, with different centres of excellence and specialization across the different universities. In addition to the purely academic standing of these departments, one must stress their role in promoting the Hebrew language also at the national and international level. Most of these evaluated departments understand their work as a mission, both in promoting higher cultural standards and respect for Knowledge in Israeli society as a whole, and, in particular at Haifa University and Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, in promoting Hebrew language and culture among native Arabic speaking citizens.**

**Despite their quality and importance within and beyond Academia, the departments of Hebrew language and associated languages (Jewish languages, Semitics, etc.), like other humanities departments, have suffered over the past decade from declining interest among prospective students but also, in some cases, from budgetary restrictions inflicted by the universities themselves.**

**It seems that the evaluation process we have undertaken has been helpful to a certain degree. First of all, with very few exceptions to which we shall return, the authorities of the universities concerned showed interest and awareness of the special role of the Hebrew language units. It is the case that the evaluation has helped the departments to clarify their needs, set their priorities and put forward their assets, and also to create a forum of discussion with the relevant university authorities. The system based on interviews and feedback between the Evaluation Committee and all the individuals and administrative levels concerned has proved very helpful, and has allowed for a better understanding of the distinctive situation of each component during a constructive exchange of ideas. In most cases, and despite the broader tendency to reduce expenditure across the Humanities, our recommendations concerning the replacement of staff members upon retirement, and also those calling for creation of new positions in the departments, were implemented. Overall, the evaluated Hebrew language units have clearly benefitted from support from the authorities of their universities. DHL at BGU is in a less comfortable situation than the other departments. The Faculty of Humanities is undergoing restructuring including merging smaller units into large**

departments, and the administrative status of the HLD is under discussion. Pending a solution, the renewal of the positions left vacant by retiring staff members is not sufficiently implemented.

It seems that our recommendations have suggested some new developments in the departments. The recommendations concerning the creation of research centres have for instance started to be implemented at BIU and Haifa University, often as result of individual initiatives of the staff members. It seems also that the departments found it useful when the Evaluation committee identified teaching fields which were less well represented in their otherwise rich programmes.

One of the concerns of the Evaluation Committee was the decreasing number of students in some of the departments. While this decrease reflected a general tendency across the humanities, it was more glaring at some departments (e.g. HUU) while it did not affect some others at all (e.g. TAU, BGU). The Evaluation Committee strove to identify the reasons for the students decrease or dropping numbers, while being conscious that different departments have different histories and attract different populations of students, and that there is no universal remedy for the decrease in students' numbers. It was evident that departments that opened new specialized Master degrees (for instance, Education at TAU, BGU, or pedagogical training, for instance at Haifa University or HUU) attracted additional students, without compromising the quality of the intake.

Alongside various factors which often remain beyond the control of the universities and departments, one constant factor discouraging students or leading to the abandon of their studies in Hebrew language programmes has proved to be the compulsory test in Hebrew grammar and vocalization (Niqqud). It has become clear that first year students do not have sufficient background in Hebrew grammar, which should have been acquired in secondary schools. This is why a number of our recommendations have concerned setting and encouraging tutorials and small groups teaching in this basic but essential field. Such additional tutorials imply either additional funding or the redistribution of resources, and the departments were rarely successful in obtaining specific funding. Nonetheless, some departments have started to implement this recommendation through internal reorganization, employment of post-doctoral researchers or looking for innovative teaching methods. In any case, the necessity to find a stable solution for the teaching of Niqqud – an integral part of Hebrew language acquisition and use - remains one of the priorities.

To conclude, the academic programmes of Hebrew language in Israel should be protected and encouraged, because they represent an invaluable asset to their universities and to society at large.