

Tevet 15, 5774
December 18, 2013

To:
Ms. Maria Levinson-Or
Coordinator
Quality Assessment Division (QAD)
Council for Higher Education
Jerusalem

**Response to the Evaluation Report of the Committee for the
Evaluation of Computer Science at Bar-Ilan University**

Dear Ms. Maria Levinson-Or,
Enclosed please find the responses of the Rector of Bar-Ilan University and the Department of Computer Science to the report by the Committee for the Evaluation of Computer Science Department at Bar-Ilan University.

Regarding the department size, we are pleased to reemphasize that since the previous round of evaluation (some 5-6 years ago) the university added 7 new faculty positions (!) to the department, which is close to 50% growth! These are **Agmon, Gabbay, Goldberg, Hassidim, Kaufman, Pinkas & Keshet**. Without exception all the candidates that were suggested by the department were considered and eventually hired. In addition four people were promoted to full Professors (**Kaminka, Lewenstein, Lindell, Porat**). This reflects a total investment of more 2.5 million NIS per year in terms of salaries only!

Also, special efforts were made by the University's administration to ad-hoc locate the two large teams recruited by Kraus and Lindell for their ERC grants.

These investments demonstrate the University's commitment to the department and provide the background to the following response of the department chairman, Prof. Doron Peled:

"I would like to thank the members of the CHE evaluation committee for having taken the time to read the report presented to them by the department, to visit the university and to talk with staff members, graduate and undergraduate students. This letter answers the important points presented in the evaluation committee report. First and foremost, it is a pleasure to read that the committee finds our department to be a top-tier department in international ranking and one of the best and leading departments in the university.

Central to the committee's report, it concludes that the excellence of the department is achieved despite lack of adequate financial resources, and that promoting this department should be of high priority for the university. I subscribe to this opinion, and hope that the voice of the committee will be heard by the university administration. While the department excels in research, and the students seem, according to the report, to be satisfied from the degree and the teaching, we are operating in dire conditions for quite a long time. This is mentioned a few times in the report. We are lacking a proper building: sharing parts of the facility with the department of mathematics, computing services and university accounting. There is a severe lack of space, where some of our lecturers do not have a separate office. Our building, whose top floor was built in a very ad-hoc way (the proper ceiling of the building is actually the floor) does not even contain a single elevator, while handicapped students may need to meet their lecturers, supervisors or attend seminars. Our lecturers are scattered throughout the campus, far apart from each other. Provisionary solutions are

used to house the AI group, with its robotics lab, at one corner of the campus, while the security group in yet another building.

The committee concludes that there should be a multi-year plan between the university and the department, with budgets and prospective growth decisions made. We are a small Computer Science department, about half the number of staff members of CS at Tel Aviv University, about third the size of CS at the Technion and even smaller than the size of CS at Ben Gurion University. Yet we offer the same degrees as these larger departments. At the moment, for all we know, we currently are not slated to grow this year. The situation for next year is unknown. The budget of the department is low. The axe fell only recently on the budget for some teaching-related activity. We are striving to provide the high quality degree for which the committee has praised us under these conditions, but it becomes harder. The budget situation is uniformly hard: we realize that we are in a country that is far from being rich; on the other hand, we are in a country that knows the importance of making the right investment in education and research, even by North American and European standards. It is my hope that the council's report would push the university to realize that when you have an important intellectual and academic treasure at your possession, it should be nourished, and, as the committee suggests, prioritized appropriately.

The committee makes the suggestion that the department can continue its excellence in certain fields that require not only theory but also experimental research. Indeed, I believe we have such a potential, especially with our AI expertise. However, experimental computer science requires resources. This affects Israel's computer science direction towards theory, rather than experimental research. We are working hard to obtain grants and funding to succeed even more in both theory and experimental research.

The committee presents several excellent recommendations that are directed to the department, and can be followed with existing budget and human resources. This includes for example the creation of a process by which our graduate students can meet, the nomination of people to recognized position in European and US organizations such as ACM and IEEE, and the development of a mentoring mechanism for new hires. We regard these and other recommendations as important and will start immediately to implement them. Some other recommendations are already taken care of: our staff members are participating in European grants, we have several (four) large ERC grants and bi-national grants with other countries, most notably the US and Germany, all of this in addition to many ISF (Israel Science Foundation) that our faculty members have. The university has an internal organization that helps applying for international grants, both in the Israeli and European arena and our researchers are making use of this support.

Finally, I would like to comment that since the assessment of the committee was made, there has been a change of department head, and I am not the one who wrote the original report. I would like to thank Prof. Tomi Klein for the great work he has done. As the committee points out, Prof. Klein has done most of the work himself, and I hope that further reports would be more of a common effort (criticism on this point to me is in place). I am asked if there are any changes/updates. Being very impressed with the report made by Prof. Klein, I would like to suggest only one, related to citation index. I believe that there are newer tools for achieving a more accurate measures of visibility of department members, such as *arnetminer* or *google scholar*, which on the one hand are more knowledgeable about computer science papers, and, on the other hand, clearly separate researchers in computer science from researchers of similar names in other fields. Since the statistics collected using this tool presents (some of) our researchers in even better light than the ones in the report, I include an updated citation index based on *arnetminer* as an attachment to this letter. In addition, I am happy to report that since the committee's visit, Prof. Yehuda Lindell received yet another

ERC grant for 2M EU, Prof. Ido Dagan has been nominated to an ACL fellow and Prof. Gal Kaminka has won the Landau prize".

In summary, we thank the CHE Committee for helpful recommendations and hope to continue to improve the quality of Computer Science Department.

Sincerely,


Prof. Miriam Faust
Vice Rector

In charge of Quality Evaluation

Cc:
Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector
Prof. Malka Schaps, Dean of the Faculty of Exact Sciences
Prof. Doron A. Peled, Head, Department of Computer Science

Appendix to letter to CHE: Citations for Computer Science Department members

Agmon Noa	670
Amir Amihood	4485
Aumann Yonathan	2508
Dagan Ido	5784
Doron Peled	16022
Gabbay Dov	6146
Goldberg Yoav	201
Hassidim Avinatan	319
Herzberg Amir	5752
Kaminka Gal	2551
Kaufman Tali	1167
Klein Shmuel Tomi	1277
Koppel Moshe	1152
Kraus Sarit	11691
Lewenstein Moshe	1682
Lindell Yehuda	9320
Netanyahu Nathan	4287
Pinkas Benny	8793
Porat Ely	1290
Roditty Liam	1046
Sarne Dudi	191