



Committee for the Evaluation of Economics Study Programs

The Open University
Department of Management and Economics
Evaluation Report

May 2017

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Chapter 1: Background

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Economics during the academic year of 2015-2016.

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. Georg Winckler** - former Rector of the University of Vienna, Austria - committee chair (Emeritus).
- **Prof. Russell Cooper¹** - Department of Economics, Penn State University, USA.
- **Prof. David Dillenberger** - Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania, USA.
- **Prof. Philippe Weil** - Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium.
- **Prof. Eyal Winter²** - Department of Economics, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel.

Ms. Maria Levinson-Or served as the Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:³

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in Economics, and to conduct on-site visits at those institutions.
2. Submit to the CHE an individual report on each of the evaluated academic units and study programs, including the Committee's findings and recommendations.
3. Submit to the CHE a general report regarding the examined field of study within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (of September 2015).

¹ Due to scheduling constraints, Prof. Russell Cooper did not participate in the site visits to the University of Haifa, Ben-Gurion University and Bar-Ilan University.

² In accordance with the CHE's policy, Prof. Eyal Winter did not participate in the evaluation of the Economics department at the Hebrew University to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interests.

³ The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Chapter 2: Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meeting on 18.12.2016, during which it discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment process, as well as economics study programs in Israel.

In December 2016, the Committee held its visits of evaluation, and visited the Academic College Tel-Aviv Yaffo, the College of Management Academic Studies, Tel-Aviv University, Ruppin Academic Center, the Open University, Tel-Hai Academic College, the Max Stern Academic College of Emek Yezreel, the Hebrew University, University of Haifa, Bar-Ilan University and Ben-Gurion University. During the visits, the Committee met with various stakeholders at the institutions, including management, faculty, staff, and students.

During its visit to Israel, the committee divided into two sub-committees for conducting parallel visits. The members who visited the institution are prof. Georg Winckler and prof. Philippe Weil. However, all committee members were part of the following discussion and contributed to drafting the report.

This report deals with the Department of Economics and Management at the Open University. The Committee's visit to the Open University took place on December 21, 2016.

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

The Committee thanks the management of the Open University and the Department of Management and Economics for their self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the committee during its visit at the institution.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of Economics and Management Study Program at the Open University

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.

The Economics and Management Department at the Open University was selected to undergo a shortened review within this evaluation cycle due to its past performance and current self-evaluation. The committee arrived to a shortened visit in the institution and met with the heads of the institution and the program.

The committee was very impressed with the institution's and the department's mission and goals, as well as their overall vision for upcoming years.

We agree with the administration and the department that the current faculty should increase by a few more positions especially if they aspire to launch an MA program in economics in the upcoming years. To reach this goal, the committee suggests a partial redeployment of existing resources. Some course coordinator and possibly tutor positions could be given a research-oriented profile, therefore creating, within existing resources, a number of research oriented junior faculty positions.

In view of its mission, it is vital that the institution collects detailed data on learning outcomes and placements from its students and alumni to evaluate its performance and to help design future changes to the study program or the teaching models. The committee learned that the institution began tracking dropout rates closely. We recommend differentiating between those students who leave the Open University to transfer to other universities and those students who leave for other reasons. This requires either agreeing with partner universities on the exchange of data of transfer students, or via the Central Bureau of Statistics. This also requires identifying the reasons why the other students leave: academic difficulties, economics difficulties, or personal reasons. Until there is a better understanding of dropout rates, we urge the department to refrain from compromising the academic level of courses as a method to reduce the dropout rate.

The committee supports the department's plans to increase the number of English courses it offers, including an emphasis on English writing skills.

The committee supports the university's request to revise its budgeting formula by the PBC, as the current formula is extremely enrollment based, and does not align with the current needs and vision of the university.

Chapter 4: Summary of Recommendations

Essential:

1. To accomplish its mission as an open university, it is vital that the institution collects detailed data on learning outcomes, dropouts, and placements.

Important:

1. The economics faculty should be increased by at least 2 positions before launching an MA program.
2. More courses taught in English should be added to the study program.

Signed by:



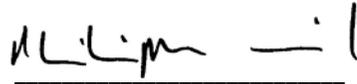
Prof. Georg Winckler - Chair



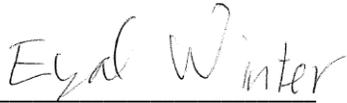
Prof. Russell Cooper



Prof. David Dillenberger



Prof. Philippe Weil



Prof. Eyal Winter

Appendix 1: Letter of Appointment



June 2016

Prof. Georg Winckler
University of Vienna
Austria

Dear Professor,

The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) strives to ensure the continuing excellence and quality of Israeli higher education through a systematic evaluation process. By engaging upon this mission, the CHE seeks: to enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies, to provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel, and to ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

As part of this important endeavor we reach out to world renowned academicians to help us meet the challenges that confront the Israeli higher education by accepting our invitation to participate in our international evaluation committees. This process establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial enterprise.

It is with great pleasure that I hereby appoint you to serve as the chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of the study programs in **Economics**. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Russell Cooper, Prof. David Dillenberger, Prof. Oded Galor, Prof. Philippe Weil, and Prof. Eyal Winter. Ms. Maria Levinson-Or will be the coordinator of the Committee.

Details regarding the operation of the committee and its mandate are provided in the enclosed appendix.

I wish you much success in your role as the chair of this most important committee.

Sincerely,


Dr. Rivka Wadmany
Vice Chair,
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Enclosures: Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees

cc: Dr. Varda Ben-Shaul, Deputy Director-General for QA, CHE
Ms. Maria Levinson-Or, Committee Coordinator

Appendix 2: Site Visit Schedule

Economics - Schedule of site visit the Open University

Meeting Room: visitors center meeting room

Wednesday, December 21 ,2016

09:30-10:30	Opening session with the heads of the institution	Prof. Jacob (Kobi) Metzger , President Prof. Aviad Heifetz , Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Inbal Ofer , QA Coordinator
10:30-12:00	Meeting with the Head of the department	Dr. Varda Wasserman , Head of the Department Dr. Yishay Maoz , previous Head of economics track Dr. Dror Goldberg , New Head of Economics track