



Committee for the Evaluation of
English for Academic Purposes in Israel

Evaluation Report

April 2018

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Chapter 1- Background

On June 28, 2016, The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate the existing study programs of English for Academic Purposes in all Israeli Higher Education Institutions.

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. Claude Goldenberg** - literacy, language, and English education, teacher education , Stanford University, USA- **committee chair**
- **Mw. Dr. E.A. Anne Bannink**- discourse studies, second/foreign language acquisition, anthropology of education and intercultural communication, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
- **Dr. Elisheva Barkon**- Vocabulary in second language acquisition, Applied linguistics, Reading in a second language, Second language acquisition, Fluency in language processing, Head of the committee for teaching English in the Ministry of Education, Oranim Academic College, Israel
- **Prof. Dr. Claudia Finkbeiner**- Teaching & Learning Foreign Language Research and Intercultural Communication Research; language awareness and multilingualism; L2 reading, strategies and interest in reading; CLIL; blended learning environments, University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany.
- **Prof. dr. Alex Housen**- Second language acquisition, (second) language teaching, bilingualism and bilingual education, and English linguistics, Vrije University Brussel, Belgium
- **Prof. Malatesha Joshi**–bilingualism and bi-literacy, differential diagnosis and intervention of reading and spelling problems, literacy acquisition in different languages, Texas A&M, USA
- **Prof. Karen M. Lauridsen**- Higher education course design, pedagogy and didactics; International education; Multilingualism; Multilingual and multicultural learning spaces, Aarhus BSS University, Denmark
- **Prof. Anna Mauranen**, Research Director , Language processing, English as a lingua franca, modelling spoken language, rhetoric of science, academic language University of Helsinki, Finland
- **Prof. (emeritus) Elite Olshtain**- second language acquisition, bilingualism, language attrition, and reading instruction, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
- **Prof. (emeritus) Penny Ur**– teaching practice of English theory, Chair of the Israeli Committee for English for Mechinot, Oranim Academic College, Israel

- **Prof. Dr. M.H. Verspoor**- Chair of the English Department and teaches courses in Applied Linguistics and English Language and Culture, University of Groningen, Netherlands

Ms. Daniella Sandler- Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to:¹

1. Examine the self-evaluation reports, submitted by the institutions that provide study programs in English for Academic Purposes.
2. Submit to the CHE a report regarding English for Academic Purposes within the Israeli system of higher education including recommendations for standards in this field, on a national level.

The entire process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's Guidelines for Self-Evaluation that was set specifically for the field of English for Academic purposes and sent out to all English for Academic Purposes (EAP) units on September 28, 2016.

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

Chapter 2 - Committee Procedures

The Committee held its first meeting on February 12, 2018. During this daylong preparation day, the Committee discussed fundamental issues concerning higher education in Israel, the quality assessment activity, as well as EAP programs in Israel.

During February and March 2018, the Committee conducted two series of meetings, each consisting of a week of deliberations. The members of the Committee met with representatives of the CHE, with leadership from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Management and EAP staff, Ministry of Education (MOE) representatives, Student Union representatives and other stakeholders of EAP in Israel.

In addition to separate meetings with the various representatives, it was decided to also have two conference days, one in February and the second in March, with representatives from all the institutions. The first conference enabled the Committee to get authentic input from the various institutions and create a dialogue with them. The second conference provided some feedback to some of the insights that the Committee developed during the process. Both conferences contributed significantly to the final report prepared by the Committee.

Following these committee procedures is the report the Committee was requested to prepare according to its initial charge.

The Committee's schedule for February and March visits, as well as both conferences are listed in **Appendix 2**.

The Committee thanks the Higher Education Institutions' management and EAP units in Israel for their committed participation and cooperation throughout the entire evaluation process.

Chapter 3 – Introduction:

This report, commissioned by the Council for Higher Education, recommends measures to:

- Implement a common framework to be used as a standard for describing levels of proficiency in English,
- Reconfigure English language studies in HEIs so that all students study and advance in their English proficiency as part of their academic programs, and
- Over approximately the next 5-10 years, substantially raise the level of English for all Israeli higher education students in BA programs or the equivalent in order to prepare them for using English in their studies and their future careers in Israel and/or abroad.

At present, students' level of proficiency at the end of high school is very mixed, from very low up to the current 'exemption' level ('ptor'), or even above. About 80% of candidates for HEIs do not meet the exemption level on entry, and many are not able to reach that level in the course of their first two years of study, as required under the existing regulations. Thus, students who do not meet this level have to take extra-curricular courses in English, which are both time-consuming and an extra financial burden.

Moreover, the focus of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction in HEIs today is English reading comprehension, with excessive emphasis on reading strategies, which often leads to a relative neglect of other important skills.

A third issue is the lack of common standards for describing students' proficiency level, which hampers recognition across Israeli HEIs.

When fully implemented, our recommendations and those of the other committees recommending improvements in English teaching throughout the Israeli education system will:

- Allow students to develop communicative skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English;
- Enable all students to improve their English proficiency levels in the course of their studies;
- Establish a common entry level in English for all higher-education (HE) candidates;
- Ensure a common framework of reference for describing students' entry and exit levels;
- Enable students to participate in English-medium instruction (EMI);
- Equip Israeli HE students with the language skills needed to participate in international programs;
- Prepare students for using English in Israel and internationally for their future professional careers or continuing study.

All these points are closely related to the new policy of the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) to promote internationalization at home (the participation of foreign students in integrated HE programs in Israel) and abroad (travel by Israeli students to study in other countries).

Our recommendations are also linked to the ongoing initiative under the Ministry of Education to raise English levels within elementary and secondary education, designed to narrow and eventually eliminate the present gap between proficiency levels at the end of high school and those required for entry to HE. In response to this and the CHE-initiated reforms to improve English teacher education, English proficiency of high school graduates is expected to rise over the next few years, which in turn will lead to higher overall levels of English proficiency as students begin their HEI studies. This change will not happen overnight, however.

We recognize that the implementation of these recommendations will be a challenge for all stakeholders involved: the HEIs, the CHE, the MOE, and teachers and students. Implementation will require communication, coordination, and funding from the CHE, and a strong commitment on the part of the HEIs to dedicate resources – human and financial – to improving the quality of English curriculum and instruction. However, such implementation is essential, if Israel is to play a central and leading role in international business, research, and other fields in the 21st century.

Our recommendations are grouped under six main headings below:

1. Scope
2. Structure and position of the English Program
3. Entry level
4. Standardized assessment
5. Staff and professional development
6. Coordination and Monitoring

1. Scope

Recommendation

1. English teaching in HEIs will aim to achieve a high-level of competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing in English for Purposes of International Communication (EPIC). This will broaden the scope of EAP which at present focuses mainly on reading comprehension of academic texts.

Comments and clarifications

English is the language in which international academic and professional discourse, both spoken and written, takes place. Therefore, today's HEI graduates can only function effectively in future employment, whether in Israel or abroad, if they possess the ability to communicate in English at a high level of proficiency in a variety of situations. These situations include:

- Listening to, understanding and responding to lectures, webinars, argumentation, explanations or other informal spoken input;
- Using spoken English to interact and network with other professionals and academics from different countries in conferences or at other social or work-based events;
- Reading in different genres relevant to the area of specialty, such as research articles, course materials or manuals, position papers, and shorter informal texts such as emails or postings through social media;
- Writing both formal and informal texts of varied types, such as those mentioned in the previous item.

The syllabi and teaching methods of English courses should be designed to prepare students for all the above, and more. To that end, they should prioritize expanding students' English vocabulary (including – but not limited to – academic language), its use in context, and their written and spoken discourse skills.

2. Structure and Position of the EPIC Program

Note: The recommendations in this section form the essential core of the proposed reform. Many recommendations can be implemented beginning immediately, but full implementation will require several years and must be coordinated with other reforms proposed by other CHE and MOE committees.

Recommendations

2a. English courses will consist of the following levels, defined and aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR):

1. Pre-entry: a beginners course (previously ‘trom-besisi’) to be taken, when necessary, prior to entry to the HEI (as a preparatory course; up to A1 for speaking/writing, A2 for listening/reading)- to be decided by the Committee for Preparatory Courses. Preparatory courses at pre-entry will be government-funded.
2. Basic (up to A2 for speaking/writing, B1 for listening/reading)- 4 weekly hours for 2 semesters.
3. Intermediate (up to B1 for speaking/writing, B2 for listening/reading)- 3 weekly hours for 2 semesters.
4. Advanced (English for Specific Purposes (ESP): B2/C1 level oriented towards the subject of study)(up to B2 for speaking/writing, C1 for listening/reading)- 2 weekly hours for 2 semesters
5. English-Medium Instruction (EMI) (a content course taught in English) (C1-C2)- 2 weekly hours for 2 semesters

2b. All students will take two one-year English courses during their BA studies, selected according to their placement levels.

2c. These two English courses (selected from Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, EMI) will be an integral part of the academic BA program and will earn credit points.

2d. Students will be required to improve their proficiency by at least one CEFR level on all four skills from the time they begin their studies, as assessed by the CEFR-aligned language test (see section 4 below)

2e. By 2030, the target minimum exit level will be B2 for productive skills and C1 for receptive. The target minimum entry level requirement will be B1 for productive skills and B2 for receptive (See next, Section 3).

2f. The current free Open University online courses will be discontinued as free-standing courses. This recommendation must be announced and implemented immediately.

2g. Online and digital resources may be used as supplements to face-to-face courses only (i.e. not as substitutes). This recommendation must be announced and implemented immediately.

2h. The number of students in all pre-entry and basic courses will be limited to 20, and to 25 in intermediate and advanced courses. This recommendation must be announced and implemented immediately.

Comments and clarifications

The integration of the EPIC courses into the academic program means that they will be credited and counted towards students' grade point average. Note that this requirement is standard practice in many European universities (for an example, see Appendix 5). In the US, a number of prestigious universities belong to the CLAC consortium², committed to integrating foreign language studies in their BA courses. Even universities that are not members of the consortium give students' academic credit for foreign language courses, with grades contributing to students' grade point averages.

Students will enter the EPIC program according to their individual levels. Those who do not meet the entry requirements first take the Pre-basic/Preparatory course before they are allowed to enroll in the BA (or equivalent) program; students who enter at Basic level take the Basic and Intermediate courses; those who come in at Intermediate level take the Intermediate and Advanced/ESP courses; and students entering at the Advanced/ESP level will take one or more EMI courses after completing the Advanced/ESP course.

As a result, students will be expected to improve their proficiency by at least one CEFR level on all four skills in the course of their studies. This may be assessed through a CEFR-aligned language test (see section 4 below).

The present 'exemption' condition for graduation will be cancelled, as all HE students will study a minimum of two years of English, depending on their entry levels. Exit levels will vary but be substantially higher, on average, than they currently are.

Each course will be spread over a full year (two semesters) thus providing teachers and students the time needed to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The current Open University free-standing online courses have been ineffective and should be discontinued at the earliest possible date. This step will also boost teacher morale and contribute to the much needed restoration of the field's confidence in the CHE. Suitable parts of the online courses developed by the Open University may be used as teaching/learning resources in face-to-face teaching.

Student numbers per class should be limited to the specification above since teaching all four skills (and in particular productive skills) requires interactive teaching pedagogies which are impossible to implement with larger classes.

² <https://clacconsortium.org/>

3. Entry Level

Recommendations

3a. All HEIs will adhere to a consistent minimum English proficiency entry-level requirement: As soon as possible, or once pre-basic preparatory courses (see above, section 2) are fully operational, minimum English proficiency entry level requirement should be raised to CEFR-level A1 for productive skills and A2 for receptive skills.

3b. Over the next decade, as improvements in primary and secondary English instruction take root and high school graduates' proficiency levels rise, minimum entry levels should also rise. By 2030, minimum English proficiency levels for HEI admission should be CEFR-level B1 for productive skills (speaking and writing) and B2 for receptive (listening and reading).

3c. Individual institutions and disciplines / programs may apply higher entry requirements.

Comments and clarifications

As already recommended by the Laufer Committee (2013, Appendix 3), Israeli students will only be able to enter higher education if they have a minimal level of English proficiency. This minimum English entry-level will be different for receptive and productive skills, and gradually increase over time (to B1 for productive skills and B2 for receptive) (See Appendix 4). By way of comparison, in most non-English speaking European countries the A2/B1 levels are the outcome levels expected and tested in lower secondary education (Junior High School); many European countries test at the B2 (and some at the C1) level at the end of secondary education (Eurydice Report 2015).

Different minimum entry-levels will be applied for receptive and productive skills in English: CEFR level A2 for receptive skills (listening, reading) and A1 for productive skills (speaking, writing). The reason for this difference is that receptive skills are generally at a significantly higher level in a foreign language than are productive ones.

A significant number of candidate HE students, however, currently do not yet attain the recommended minimum entry-level specified above. In order to enable such students to enter HE, the following lower entry-level requirement will be in force during a transitional stage: CEFR A1-levels for productive skills and A2-levels for receptive skills. In light of the MOE's initiative to raise the level of English in elementary and secondary education, we expect these to rise to A2 and B1, respectively, over time until no later than 2030 the entry-level requirements are B1 and B2, respectively.

Government-funded pre-entry preparatory courses will be provided for students who, for a variety of reasons, have not reached the required minimum entry level. This is in keeping with the current CHE policy of making HE inclusive and accessible to all sectors of the Israeli population. CHE and PBC must also provide additional resources to help students with documented learning disabilities and their instructors.

Finally, individual institutions and academic study programs will have the option of applying higher entry-level requirements in accordance with the profile of their student population and specific program needs.

4. Standardized Assessment

Recommendations

4a. Independent bodies such as the National Institute for Testing and Evaluation (NITE/MALO) will be checked as optional bodies to develop a test instrument for assessing all aspects of English proficiency (see Section 1), aligned with CEFR standards (see Appendix 4).

4b. This test/instrument will be used for determining entry and initial placement, and, where desired, elsewhere: for example, as an instrument to determine levels that will be universally acceptable as a basis for mobility and transfer between institutions.

Comments and clarifications

Common standards for evaluating achievement are crucial to equity among students as well as institutions. They also offer a reliable and realistic view to policy makers and institutions on the overall quality of language skills in Israel. Therefore, a shift towards standardized evaluation practices must be implemented, based on statements of what a student can do with language at each proficiency level. Note that standardized does not mean uniform. Different institutions and programs within institutions might have reasons to set higher than minimum proficiency levels recommended in this report. The important point is that all proficiency levels must be defined within a common standardized framework.

The test instrument for assessing English proficiency will be CEFR-aligned, and adapted for Israel, as, for example, in the ECOSTAR initiative, to ensure nationwide and international comparability. It will be adaptable to specific contexts (age group, content, discipline), cover all proficiency levels from pre-entry to advanced and include assessment of all four skills.

5. Staff and Professional Development

Recommendation

5a. All EPIC faculty will hold an MA or PhD. If this degree is not TESOL³-related, they should have an additional qualification in this subject.

5b. At least one member of the EPIC staff should have a PhD.

5c. There will be a promotion track for English teachers that will ensure employment stability (such as permanent contracts or tenure).

5d. Ongoing professional development for English teachers will be provided either by the institution or by an umbrella organization for all HEIs in Israel, such as H-INET or MOFET.

Comments and clarifications

Today TESOL is recognized worldwide as a discipline in itself, hence the importance of appropriate qualifications to introduce necessary changes and monitor their implementation in Israel. Comparable college and university EPIC teacher qualifications will contribute to closing the existing gap between the standard of English taught at different HEIs.

To establish a status similar to other academic programs, the head of the EPIC unit should hold a PhD in a TESOL-related field. This qualification will be necessary for the formation of a leading body (think tank) of EPIC faculty to plan and implement the recommendations; it will also enable EPIC courses to be credit-bearing.

Raising the standard of English in all HEIs will depend in part on establishing a promotion track for English teachers to ensure employment stability, to enhance the prestige of EPIC units and boost motivation and staff commitment.

Umbrella organizations recognized by all HEIs will offer professional development. For example, yearly nationwide conferences and workshops can be organized for all EPIC teachers. These will emphasize the teaching of the various components of EPIC (see Section 1). In addition, EPIC teachers will be encouraged to present at international conferences.

³ Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages

6. Coordination and Monitoring

Recommendations

6a. The CHE, PBC, and MOE will establish a standing committee to coordinate and monitor short- and long-term implementation of decisions relating to the improvement of English education in the Israeli educational system based on the recommendations of committees engaged in this national project.

6b. The committee will comprise representatives from HEIs (EPIC teachers and staff from other faculties, administrators, students), a majority of whom are TESOL experts; members of relevant committees that contributed recommendations; and members of CHE, PBC, and MOE with operational authority.

6c. The Coordination and Monitoring Committee will develop a comprehensive plan, including a timeline, integrating the various committee's reports and recommendations. It will communicate the details of planned changes to all relevant bodies in a timely and transparent manner to facilitate preparation and implementation. Key aspects of the proposed changes should be made known to the public, especially those relevant to current and future HEI students in Israel.

6d. After developing the comprehensive plan and communicating to relevant audiences, the committee will

- Commission the creation of a National Data System (NDS) to collect timely data relevant to monitoring implementation and impact of the recommendations contained in the comprehensive plan.
- Receive periodic reports from the NDS in order to monitor and evaluate plan implementation and make any necessary adjustments to timeline and implementation plans.
- Issue periodic progress reports to the CHE, PBC, MOE, HEIs, and the public on (a) implementation of recommendations in the comprehensive plan and (b) whether there are observed changes in student English proficiency levels in primary and secondary schools and HEIs.

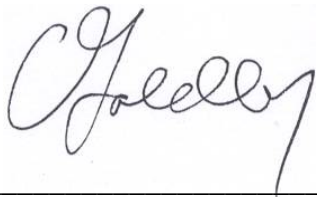
Comments and clarifications

Israel is embarking on an ambitious national effort to raise Israeli students' overall level of English proficiency while narrowing the gap between least and most privileged students. There are presently at least six different committees making policy and practice recommendations intended to improve English education programs in Israel. For this effort to be successful, all levels of Israeli education—from primary to university—and three national government agencies—the MOE, CHE and PBC—must be involved and in communication with each other.

It is imperative that a cohesive framework be developed and that there be ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and communication. We observed several sources of confusion and conflict, most prominently an ill-conceived and hastily implemented plan for students at the pre-basic level to take online courses. The failure rate in these courses was an astonishing 80%. In addition, the courses had

the unfortunate consequence of dozens perhaps hundreds of instructors losing their jobs, as HEIs took advantage of what appeared to be a simple cost-saving strategy. This episode proved costly in terms of faculty morale and trust. It did nothing to solve the challenge of raising English proficiency levels; if anything, it was a setback. A coherent, transparent, and clearly communicated plan that makes sense to all constituencies would go a long way toward rebuilding morale and trust while making major strides toward improving English teaching and learning in Israel.


Signed by:



Prof. Claude Goldenberg - Chair



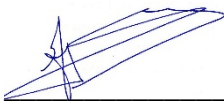
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Dr. Elisheva Barka



Prof. Dr. Claudia Finkbeiner



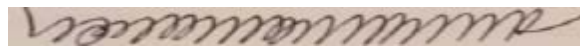
Prof. Dr. Alex Housen



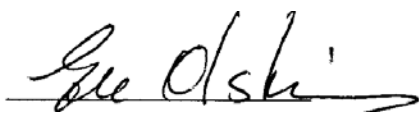
Prof. R. Malatesha (Malt) Joshi



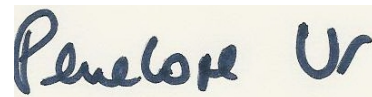
Prof. Karen M. Lauridsen



Prof. Anna Mauranen



Prof. (emeritus) Elite Olshtain



Prof. (emeritus) Penny Ur



Prof. Dr. M.H. Verspoor

Appendix 1 – Letter of Appointment:



February 2018

Prof. Claude Goldenberg - Committee Chair
Stanford University
USA

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 **Chair** of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of the study programs in **English for Academic Purposes**. In addition to yourself, the composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Dr. Claudia Finkbeiner, Prof. Elite Olshtein, Mw. Dr. E.A. Alex Housen, Prof. Dr. M.H. Anne Bannink, Prof. Dr. M.H. Verspoor, Prof. Karen M. Lauridsen, Prof. Malatesha Joshi, Prof. (emeritus) Penny Ur and Dr. Elisheva Barkon.

Ms. Daniella Sandler 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 a member of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

Prof. Ido Perlamn
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. Daniella Sandler, Committee Coordinator

Appendix 2 – Committee Schedule:

Schedule for the Evaluation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Committee-
ROUND 1

Updated 30.1.18

Time	Visit/Meeting	Location	Accommodation
Sunday 11/2/18 9:00-17:00	Orientation/ Preparatory Meetings- Studying EAP in Israel today - Internationalization	CHE Offices, Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem
Monday 12/2/18	- Round of Meetings 1: - Meeting 1- Representatives of Hebrew University, - Bar Ilan Univeristy and Tel Aviv Jaffa College - Meeting 2- David Yelin, Shenkar Design College, Lev, The Arab Academic College for Education in Israel - Meeting 3-3.15 pm- Student Representation- National Union of Israeli Students	CHE Offices, Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem
Tuesday 13/2/18	Round of Meeting 2- - Ecostar - HINET - Prep for conference 1 Half a day off	CHE Offices, Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem
Wednesday 14/2/18	Conference Day number 1	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem
Thursday 15/2/18	- Committee discussion Round of Meetings 3 - Open slot	CHE Offices, Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem
Friday 16/2/18	Committee Summation/Report Writing prep for second round	CHE Offices, Jerusalem	Mishkenot Sha'ananim Jerusalem

Schedule for the Evaluation Committee of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

ROUND 2

Updated 07.03.18

Time	Visit/Meeting	Location	Accommodation
Monday 12/3/18 9:00-17:00	Committee catch up- Studying EAP in Israel – previous committees	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Tuesday 13/3/18	Round of Meetings 1: 9:00-10.30 MALO 11:00-14.00 Open University Open slot (CBS?)	B.S.R Offices Ramat Gan	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Wednesday 14/3/18	Round of Meetings 2: 9:00-10:00- Higher Admin- Universities 11.00-12:00- Higher Admin- Colleges 14:00-16:00- AI and Computational Approaches in Education (Dr. Giora Alexandron – other participants)	B.S.R Offices Ramat Gan	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Thursday 15/3/18	Conference with institutions	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Friday 16/3/18	Committee writing/ half Day off	TBA	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Saturday 17/3/18	Day off		Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Sunday 18/3/18	Committee Summation/Report Writing	B.S.R Offices Ramat Gan	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv
Monday 19/3/18	Committee Summation/Report Writing/	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv	Dan Panorama Tel Aviv