

January 29, 2024

Council for Higher Education
Quality Assessment Division

Dear Sirs / Mesdames,

**Re: Self Evaluation – Biology – Action Plan for Implementation of the
Committee's Recommendations**

We are grateful to the Committee for providing us with this unique opportunity to engage in serious, systematic examination of our Biology departments' roles, mission, and activities.

Further to your letter of 18.10.2023, and in line with your request for an action plan for implementation of the recommendations proposed by the Evaluation Committee, in the following table, we address the Committee's comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,



Prof. Gur Alroey,

Rector

Self-Evaluation – Life Sciences Studies
Action Plan for Implementation of the Committee's Recommendations

Committee's Recommendations [Essential / Important / Desirable] (October 2023)	Action Plan – Steps Toward Implementation Departments' Response (D) [Biology/Human Biology/Evolutionary and Environmental Biology/Neuro Biology]; Dean of Faculty's Response (F); University Administration's Response (U) (January 2024)	Schedule (Month/Year)
Essential:		
<p>E1. The Committee supports the initiative to reorganize all Life Science faculty members under a common umbrella program. The inclusion of Oranim will reinforce Life Science at Haifa and is critical for pursuing the stated UN sustainability goals. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.8, p. 16]</i></p>	<p>(U+F) There is a plan to establish a School of Life Sciences, which will include all the departments in the discipline. The proposal to establish the School of Life Sciences will be submitted in March 2024 to the UoH Senate for its approval. The issue of Oranim is still being studied – the last proposal that was raised regarding this issue and that was being examined – that faculty members have a joint appointment, half-half – has not moved forward because of the changes in administrations.</p>	2024-25 academic year
<p>E2. The University leadership should communicate the proposed reorganization to all faculty members in the Departments. A process allowing input from all stakeholders should be established. This reorganization should be done without exhausting professors who are already over-committed to Faculty teaching and service. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.1, p. 5]</i></p>	<p>(U+F) Regarding this issue, the Rector is working together with the Dean and the Dean is expected to implement the plan together with the faculty members. The Rector met with stakeholders (the heads of the biology departments) a number of months ago and also spoke to the Faculty Council about this issue.</p>	Ongoing
<p>E3. The inclusion of Marine Biology as an additional Department in the School of Life Sciences is essential to reaching the noteworthy potential of the University, leading to a win-win situation for both sides in the long run. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.1, p. 5]</i></p>	<p>(U+F) There are ongoing cooperations between the Department of Marine Biology and the Departments of Life Sciences. The UoH is interested in promoting the School of Maritime Sciences and, therefore, the anchoring of the department there is no less important.</p>	Ongoing
<p>E4. The Faculty administration has to streamline their policies for teaching and degree-related requirements at all levels, to ensure all students across the Life Science departments gain similar conditions and support.</p>	<p>(F) With the inauguration of the School of Life Sciences (expected to occur in October 2024), the Dean and the head of the School will start the implementation of this recommendation immediately.</p>	Starting 10/2024 and onwards.

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[for further details, please see Section 3.3, p. 7]		
<p>E5. The University and Faculty should find means to better support graduate students financially, notably by providing TA opportunities and fellowships at levels similar to other Israeli universities. The fellowships and methods of support of graduate students should be handled within the Faculty of Natural Sciences, or the proposed Graduate School of Life Sciences. [for further details, please see Section 3.5, p. 11]</p>	<p>(U) In 2023-24, the University revised its doctoral scholarship policy – and doubled the amounts of Excellence in Studies for Research Students scholarships it awards. Teaching assistants are allocated in line with the number of students in the Faculty and the UoH's financial capabilities.</p> <p>(F) The lack of funding for graduate students is an ongoing discussion between the Dean and the Rector, as well as between the Dean and the President. There is a consensus that the matters needs to be improved. The general understanding is that additional donations are required to increase the number and amount of scholarships. The Dean has presented to the University Administration a new initiative to allocate additional scholarship for graduate students directly to faculty members who win large grants. The details of such a proposal are being summarized and will be submitted to the University Administration shortly.</p>	Ongoing
<p>E6. Recruitment of new faculty should follow the commitment by the Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of discrete line(s), and the commitment of laboratory space. [for further details, please see Section 3.6, p. 14]</p>	<p>(F) The Faculty has been allocated six (6) new positions this year alone, which is probably a record high in recent years. Among these, four new positions went to life sciences (2 in evolutionary and environmental biology; 1 in human biology; 1 in neurobiology). 2 new positions went to exact sciences (1 in statistics; 1 in physics—biophysics). Beyond synergy at the Faculty level, the Dean's commitment to life sciences study has now been realized.</p>	Ongoing
<p>E7. A University-wide formal space audit is necessary to allow better space utilization, upgrading, and planning for both research and teaching endeavors. [for further details, please see Section 3.9, p. 17]</p>	<p>(U+F) The UoH is conducting a space audit in order to maximize space allocation and try to better serve the needs of the Biology departments.</p>	Ongoing
Important:		

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<p>I1. The University could benefit from a standing external advisory committee, composed of leading experts in the relevant field, to review and advise on the research and the facilities available to the Faculty of Natural Science, in the prospect and implementation of the structural changes. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.1, p. 4]</i></p>	<p>(U) The establishment of a School of Life Sciences is in advanced stages and the issues noted in the recommendation are being formulated by internal factors.</p> <p>(F) A new wing of teaching labs will be built very shortly, in conjunction with planning of UoH's Medical School. The new wing will allow us to repurpose the old (current) teaching labs for research.</p>	<p>(U) Ongoing</p> <p>(F) Expected 2025</p>
<p>I2. The Department heads should be empowered to direct professors with low evaluation grades to improve their teaching. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.4, p. 8]</i></p>	<p>(F) The departments' heads can already do that today. Importantly, with the transition to the School of Life Sciences, the Head of School would be in charge and have better tools to do that.</p> <p>(D) The idea of empowering department heads to direct professors with low evaluation grades to improve their teaching is rooted in the desire to maintain and enhance the overall quality of education within the Faculty. We decided that each department head will read all the teaching evaluations of faculty members in their department. In case of low evaluations (1 standard error below average), the department/school head will discuss this and offer the faculty members opportunities for professional development. This could include workshops, mentoring programs, and access to resources that can help enhance their teaching skills. In the case of no or low improvement, an alternative course would be assigned to the faculty member in the following academic year.</p>	<p>Ongoing, with more emphasis starting 10/2024 and onwards</p>
<p>I3. For courses where extensive student complaints are registered, a careful evaluation of instructional materials and all other teaching aspects should be undertaken, to ensure significant improvement. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.4, p. 9]</i></p>	<p>(D) While empowering department heads to direct faculty members with low evaluation grades can be a useful strategy, it is crucial to approach it with a focus on fairness, constructive feedback, professional development, and a collaborative spirit to create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. The discussions will be held in the first month after publication of the teaching evaluations.</p>	<p>Starting Spring semester of 2023-24 academic year</p>

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<p>14. Criteria for promotion should be clarified to include field-specific criteria for research excellence. The Faculty should ensure it is appropriately communicated. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.6, p. 13]</i></p>	<p>(U+F) The UoH Appointment and Promotion Committee reviews each candidate on their own, taking into consideration their individual file, and puts great weight on the recommendations of the Dean, the Department, and experts in the field. Consequently, there is no question about not examining sub-specialities.</p>	Ongoing
<p>15. The Faculty should ensure space and modernization of infrastructure should be done on time for newly recruited faculty so that they can begin working at full steam immediately upon arrival, and the research not be impaired by lack of space for essential equipment. Also, the tenure clock should be extended for faculty members experiencing significant delays in lab renovations or in the implementation of other resources out of their control. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.6, p. 13]</i></p>	<p>(U) The UoH is aware of the challenge related to establishing labs and efforts are being continually made to shorten the time it takes to do this. Obviously, more can be done to improve handling of this issue, which is managed by the Vice President and Dean of Research and the University's CEO.</p> <p>(F) The Faculty works continuously with the Vice President and Dean of Research and with the University's CEO to optimize this process.</p>	Ongoing
<p>16. The unit in charge of BSc should do a rigorous assessment of the causes leading to students leaving the program to reduce the high attrition rate. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.5, p. 11]</i></p>	<p>(D) We have started conducting this assessment with the help of the University's Student Retention & Graduation Coefficient Unit for reducing dropouts and improving the graduation coefficient utilization factor. We already had three meetings with the head of the unit and decided the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We added a student orientation day prior to the opening of the academic year. Our first one took place this year in September. During the orientation, UoH representatives including the Faculty Dean, the head of the BSc program, BSc office manager, and representatives of the student association met the students. 2. The Department will consider allowing students to retake courses no more than two times to improve their grades. It has been our experience that some students 'get stuck' in the loop of trying to improve their grades. 	

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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The Department will encourage new students to take a Hebrew literacy course, preferably already in the summer before the start of the academic year, through the UoH Preparatory School. 4. The Department will follow up academically the students' achievements and progress. 5. The Department will appoint a person (a counselor) whose responsibility is to meet with students who fail after their first semester to better understand the causes of their failures and to offer practical ways toward improvement. 6. The Department started a mentoring course for new students, in which students from advanced years (who will receive 2 credit points) will help new students to integrate into studies. 	
<p>17. The Faculty should include courses on computer science and statistics at the highest level to undergraduate and graduate Life Science students. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.3, p. 8]</i></p>	<p>(F) In conjunction with the inauguration of the School of Life Sciences, the Dean and the head of the School will address this issue in the School's various degree programs.</p> <p>(D) In addition to the mandatory basic statistics course (3 credit points), we are offering advanced courses (MSc) – in experimental design and statistics (4 credit points) and a new course in computer programming – that are open to BSc students.</p>	<p>(F) With more emphasis starting 10/2024 and onwards. (D) Already implemented – started 2023-24</p>
<p>18. Institutional efforts must be made to reduce the burden posed by language barriers in the courses of instruction. Entering students should receive intensive remedial training in English and/or Hebrew to be able to successfully complete their course of study. The proficiency level for these should match the Life Sciences' comprehension and communication needs. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.7, p. 15]</i></p>	<p>(U) The UoH has a process that is an example for other universities, as noted in the State Comptroller's report titled "Government Handling of Idleness Among Youth in Arab Society", May 2023. The UoH has set up a Hebrew pre-university studies preparatory program for students who do not meet minimum threshold of the YAEL exam.</p> <p>Regarding summer courses in English, as part of the Rector's SDG vision, the Dean of Teaching and the Office of the Rector have worked together so that the summer English courses, according to the CHE rules (reaching the exemption level), will cost the same as during the year. The UoH Administration has given approval. Likewise, registration</p>	

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	<p>for the summer semester has been enabled even if the individual registering is not yet an official student.</p> <p>(D) We think that addressing language barriers in courses of instruction is a commendable goal, as it contributes to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Introducing intensive remedial training in English and/or Hebrew for students entering Life Sciences can be an effective strategy. We advise students to participate in a Hebrew literacy course, preferably already in the summer (prior to the official start of classes), through the UoH Preparatory School. In addition, we have added three seminar courses where students will be presenting their studies in front of the class and encouraged to participate in discussions following these presentations.</p>	
<p>19. The Faculty should encourage and create opportunities for graduate students to present their work in public. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.5, p. 12]</i></p>	<p>(F) Graduate students' "pub-talks" and outreach lectures will be encouraged. The Dean and the head of the School of Life Sciences will promote these activities.</p> <p>(D) As mentioned in our response to recommendation 18, we have added three seminar courses where students will be presenting their studies in front of the class and then discussions among the students will be encouraged. Still, the main event of the BSc studies where students can present their work in public is 'the Faculty/School Poster Day'. On Poster Day, students present their research projects conducted in their department's research labs and receive credit for this extensive and overall very significant effort (6 or 8 credits). To encourage participation, we have added a few prizes for the best graphics or oral poster presentations. Regarding graduate students, each graduate student presents their work at least twice during the course of their studies – the first presentation is through their research proposal, in which the student elaborates on the research background,</p>	<p>(F) With more emphasis starting 10/2024 and onwards</p>

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	<p>research questions, methodology and timetable of the research, and the second presentation takes place at the end of their studies, when the student presents a summary of the findings and achievements. In the second presentation it is standard to invite members of the public who might be interested in the presentation. We believe that encouraging graduate students to present their work to the general public is a desirable goal and we will actively seek ways to create such opportunities. These will include science lectures in pubs and bars, as has occasionally been done by faculty members, as well as better exposure of the work of graduate students to the public through the UoH's Division of Communication and Media Relations. The latter Division has been successful in advertising the work of faculty members to journalists, followed by exposure to the public through newspapers and radio and TV interviews. Together with the Division, we will discuss ways to encourage our graduate students to take part in these public presentations of the research that they are conducting.</p>	
<p>110. The Faculty should develop a formal mentoring process for researchers at all levels, and especially young faculty members to advise on promotion, including tenure, needs, and procedures; grant writing and publishing; teaching; and generally navigating academia. Specific efforts should be made in the Faculty to hire outstanding Arab and female faculty members, to reflect the student populations. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.6, p. 14]</i></p>	<p>(F) Each new and untenured faculty member has an academic mentor. The Vice Dean of Research allocates on demand mentors for all faculty to improve their research proposals (when necessity). Hiring in the faculty is made on the basis of scientific merit and always with "an open heart". 2 of the 6 new faculties are women. (D) We have assigned a mentor for every new faculty. The mentor has 10+ years of experience as an independent PI and is routinely in contact with the new faculty. The head of the department supervises this mentorship program. We will further intensify our efforts to recruit Arab and female faculty members to better reflect the student population.</p>	Ongoing
Desirable:		

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<p>D1. The future SER should be more concise and unite the Life Sciences (or relevant) departments in one document. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.2, p. 5]</i></p>	<p>(U) At the beginning of the process, the issue of whether to write one report for all the departments operating in the field of biology together or separately for each department arose. The joint decision, with input from the Faculty Dean, the department heads, and the Unit for Academic Quality Evaluation in the Office of the Rector, was to undertake a separate process for each department. The objective was to reflect the organizational structure, so that each department would be able to identify and present its strengths, weaknesses, and action plan in the report separately.</p> <p>In hindsight, we understand that this strategy made it somewhat difficult for the committee to engage in broad methodological observation of the field of biology as it is taught at the UoH. We will certainly take this recommendation into account in future submissions of evaluation reports, when a number of academic units operating in the same discipline are being evaluated.</p>	<p>(U) November 2023 and on</p>
<p>D2. The Committee recommends the University to establish a well-advertised career office, as well as publicized access to information about academic and non-academic career tracks. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.5, p. 12]</i></p>	<p>(U) Consultation and assistance in choosing a future vocational career direction are offered by the Career-Guidance Section in the Office of the Dean of Students. Counseling and assistance in choosing a career direction is given individually to students by their advisor. Naturally, we believe strongly in encouraging students to continue their studies to the graduate level, and we invest great efforts in discussing this possibility with them, e.g., choosing a topic for a thesis, but also discussing generally whether they are suited for graduate studies, and in what field.</p> <p>In tandem with the UoH's uncompromising commitment to excellence in research and teaching, we believe we have a significant mission to impart to students personal and professional skills and liaise between students and potential employers. Fulfilling this commitment will increase the number of alumni finding quality employment opportunities. The Career</p>	<p>(U) Ongoing</p>

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	<p>Accelerator Program is intended to be the launchpad of a basic University-wide process that will establish and expand the bridge between higher education and quality employment. The Career Accelerator Program focuses on a number of professional tracks or "career incubators". Each incubator offers a holistic training track that links students and the demands of the job market and career assets crucial for any job or defined employment area. The incubators offered for academic year 2023–24 are in the following areas: Human Resources, Digital Marketing, and Data Analysis and Presentation.</p> <p>(D) At the level of the Faculty, the School of Life Sciences and research departments, we will increase our students' exposure to the success stories of our alumni through invited seminars of industry researchers and entrepreneurs within the obligatory seminar series of the departments and especially of the School of Life Sciences.</p>	
<p>D3. The Head of the BSc program and the Dean of the Faculty should work with course directors from other Faculties to remove barriers for dual majors, eliminating conflicting schedules. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.3, p. 7]</i></p>	<p>(F) The Dean, the head of undergraduate studies (who is also the designated head of the School of Life Sciences), the Faculty's head of administration, and the undergraduate studies administrator, work continuously with other faculties (Social Sciences; Education) to coordinate inter-faculty teaching schedules for dual majors and other programs (such as the teaching certificate).</p> <p>(D) We have rescheduled all the courses taken under the biology major so that they are now spread across only three weekdays. This enables the courses of other majors (such as Psychology) to be scheduled on the remaining two days, with no conflicts. We are in contact with all potential double-major programs to control and ascertain that no conflicts will arise in the future.</p>	Ongoing
<p>D4. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the undergraduate teaching program be referred to as a Unit and</p>	<p>(F) This will be an inherent part of the School of Life Sciences.</p>	Starting 10/2024 and onwards

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not a "department", as that designation is for the three research departments. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.3, p. 7]</i>	(D) We have established a School of Life Sciences that will be in charge of all the teaching (BSc, MSc and PhD). This School's head will be responsible for all the teaching programs or units, including the undergraduate teaching program.	
D5. The Evaluation Committee recommends the Faculty of Natural Science to establish a Graduate School Unit with its own Head for all MSc and PhD programs across the Faculty. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.3, p. 7]</i>	(F) This will be an inherent part of the School of Life Sciences. (D) As mentioned above, the School of Life Sciences is being established and will start operating in the next academic year. Because of disciplinary differences between the three departments, we will keep the structure where each head of department is responsible for the curriculum of each department, which is approved thereafter by the School administration. Later, we will examine whether it is possible to unify the various study programs and place someone in charge of the study programs of the advanced degrees within the School.	Starting 10/2024 and onwards
D6. The University or Faculty should create an alumni association which can assist students networking and could be used to solicit donations. <i>[for further details, please see Section 3.5, p. 12]</i>	(U) The HighFA Forum – The elite forum of the UoH's alumni is a community of leading graduates who hold key positions at the cutting edge of the Israeli economy. The Forum was established with the aim of creating opportunities for alumni to connect and collaborate with senior business and public leaders in the economy, to be partners in the vision to promote academic and research excellence with the emphasis on SDG and to make an impact on the future of academic education and shape the next generation with regard to the economy and Israeli society. The layers of influence propagating from the Forum are expressed in academic excellence (scholarships for outstanding researchers and students; funding of recruitment of excellent researchers and pioneering research); social impact (social mobility programs; social involvement student scholarships, academic–business alliances, legal clinics, scholarships for students from under-represented populations) and	Ongoing

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	<p>partnerships in UoH's vision (committee membership, key roles in the Friends of UoH Association, UoH ambassadors and the creations of new linkages/networks).</p> <p>(F) The graduate departments generally keep track of their recent alumni. New graduates can usually get relevant information via the departments' offices.</p> <p>(D) Under the School of Life Sciences, we are planning to create such an alumni association, which is indeed an important body that can assist both the students and the School as a whole.</p>	

Corrections to comments appearing in the Committee's report

General notes made by the committee (October 2023)	Department's Response (BIO/HB/EEB/NB) (December 2023)
<p>Page 2, Section 1.2: "The Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] participating in the evaluation process were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Achva Academic College ● Ariel University ● Bar Ilan University ● The Hebrew University ● Technion ● Tel Aviv University ● Weizmann Institute" 	<p>The University of Haifa is not listed.</p>