

30 January 2024

To: **Prof. Lynne Regan**
Committee Chair

Prof. Idit Tshuva
Vice Chair
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)

The Quality Assessment Report in the Life Sciences, September 2023
— Weizmann Institute of Science Response

Firstly, we would like to express our gratitude to the committee for its work. We value and recognize the importance of the internal quality assessment processes at the Weizmann Institute of Science (WIS), as highlighted in the report, and consistently invest significant efforts in ensuring and maintaining quality within the framework of the Institute's quality assessment procedures (SAAC).

Before addressing the committee's recommendations, we wish to discuss some of the topics raised by the committee in the report's Executive Summary (Section 2), Observations (Section 3), and Conclusions (Section 4.1). We would also like to respectfully draw the committee's attention to a few factual inaccuracies in the report and clarify specific issues, as follows:

Page 3, paragraph 2; Page 6, paragraph 3.3

"Most courses are research-focused and highly specific, resulting in graduates with excellent research skills, but potentially limited awareness of topics unrelated to their immediate research. Efforts should be made to also provide breadth in scientific content and the impact of research on society."

WIS's response:

Numerous discussions about whether we should have a very broad, hierarchically structured program in our graduate studies — or a more practically- and research-oriented one were held at WIS. Each of our research schools, with its board of studies for the different disciplines [mathematics/computer sciences, physics, chemistry, and the life sciences (LS)], has held several discussions related to this question and tackled it differently. In LS, there is a strong preference towards science-related and hands-on practical courses. To augment the LS research school's program, together with the different track heads, we encourage our students to take external courses in addition to our regular course program, e.g., Coursera's online courses, courses at the IUI in Eilat, as well as in other WIS faculties.

Page 4, paragraph 2; Page 8, paragraph 3.5

"Nonetheless, the Committee recommends finding ways to operate this system in a more transparent and equitable manner, because several issues, such as unfair pressure by Faculty members asking students to "commit" prior to conducting all rotations, were shared with the Committee".

“in practice, it is frequently the case that students and lab heads agree early-on on a placement match. This results in some students unknowingly performing rotations in labs where they have no possibility of pursuing thesis research. This system also forces lab heads who have made pre-deals to host and train students they may not be able to accept in their lab. As reported by several students, and some professors, this hidden marketplace is a source of anxiety to both sides and is ultimately not an efficient use of their time.”

WIS’s response:

We have a new system in which incoming MSc students are encouraged to meet many potential PIs from the LS and related faculties, then rank their preferences for rotation labs. The PIs rank their own preferences, based on meeting the students and inspecting their files. A matching algorithm based on related procedures (such as medical residency pairing), is used to “match” students and PIs for rotations. This process is repeated before every rotation, also ensuring that students and PIs decide on the second and third rotation later in the year, after the students are much more familiar with the campus.

In addition, students can opt to delay their decisions until they meet all the PIs they are interested in and decide on the second/third rotation significantly later in their studies.

Page 4, paragraph 2; Page 9, paragraph 3.5; Page 16, paragraph 4.1

“In stark contrast, the Committee heard, from stakeholders at all levels, of examples of supervisor harassment and bullying experienced by students. This is a great concern. There is as yet no way to report bullying that students and faculty are comfortable using. Then again, the Committee was pleased to learn that new approaches to address this issue are already being developed and/or implemented (e.g., Ombudsperson; ‘SOS’). Hence, the Committee commends the leadership efforts and strongly recommends immediately pursuing these strategies. Further, the Evaluation Committee learned that these initiatives and policies are not yet well known to all at the WIS community, and thus the administration needs to determine a more effective means to communicate with faculty and trainees.”

“During the visit, the Committee heard of incidents of alleged student mistreatment (and even bullying and sexual harassment) by laboratory heads. These incidents are apparently more prevalent among non-tenured faculty who are eager to demonstrate lab productivity. The problem appears to be not uncommon and was noted by some senior and junior faculty interviewed by the Committee, as well as all MSc and PhD students and some alumni. Importantly, students feel that they have no avenue to report their mistreatment or to obtain help. In the rare instances where the issue was raised with Feinberg School administration, students reported the responses to be unsupportive.

“Importantly and to this end, the Committee raised the issue with Feinberg school administrators during the visit, and was pleased to learn about the great importance they attach to this subject. The evaluation Committee was gratified to learn of the solutions that WIS is already planning to implement. These include hiring an ombudsperson, instituting a web platform where students and postdocs could fill in an anonymous contact form to file a complaint, and introducing a monitoring

system by in-house social workers and a clinical psychologist, combined with a mentorship training program for young faculty (dubbed "SOS Induction"). Importantly, leadership should take in consideration that it was evident during the visit that many students are unaware of their options; students either lack awareness of these tools, or they do not use them because they do not believe there will be any consequences for bad behavior or, worse, they fear retribution. It is hence vital that students be aware of what support is available to them – who is the disinterested party they should contact if there is a problem? The Committee strongly recommends continuing to taking all possible means to mitigate and eliminate student mistreatment, and views open and frequent communication about issues of sexual harassment, mistreatment, and bullying at all levels of instruction at the Institute as an imperative.”

“A few problems were identified during the visit and these are listed in the Committee’s recommendations. The most significant one is at the top of the list of essential recommendations: How students are treated by faculty”.

WIS’s response:

It is worth noting that while most institutions do not inquire about bullying, we conducted an in-depth examination of this phenomenon through internal surveys as a basis for decision-making purposes, both in 2022 and in 2023. Subsequently, we have initiated multiple practices to create a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment. The surveys encompassed responses from more than 70% of our students and postdocs, in contrast to the interviews conducted by the committee, which involved less than 2% of our students and postdocs. Our survey findings indicate that **the vast majority of the students and postdocs felt their PIs support them academically and professionally** (around 85%+ in various questions). However, we have also found that **8% of the postdocs and 3.7% of the students experienced bullying**. No data is available about bullying from academic institutions in Israel, and in a cross-cultural comparison of the prevalence of university students’ experiences of bullying, the numbers vary between countries, from 25% in Argentina, to 12% in the US, 5% in Finland, and 2% in Estonia (Pörhölä et al., 2020). Therefore, it is clear that our rate is among the lowest.

Nonetheless, our policy is zero tolerance. We firmly believe that even one student or postdoc reporting being subjected to any form of abuse is one too many; we are doing and will take all necessary action to eliminate such cases. Within this context, the Feinberg Graduate School (FGS) introduced new regulations to prevent harassment at the beginning of the current academic year and the regulations were published on the Institute's website and distributed to all scientists, lecturers, students, and fellows. In addition, a student and postdoc ombudsperson has been appointed. As detailed in our letter of July 17, 2023, the Institute as a whole, and the FGS in particular, have implemented a series of initiatives and efforts proven effective in preventing harassment and enhancing the learning and research environment. We will continue to invest in advancing this important issue, and in doing so and in order to achieve this objective, we closely monitor and analyze research groups, focusing on those experiencing a history of premature departures. This enables us to proactively address emerging problems by taking prompt and effective action as needed. The Institute’s Council of Professors recently decided to factor in mentorship-related aspects into the promotion process. In addition, an upper limit on the number of PhD students per PI is now strictly

enforced; faculty seeking to increase this number must apply through a special committee, which pays particular attention to the PI's mentorship record. If the request is approved, FGS will monitor the process through an annual interview with the group members.

In addition to the longstanding obligatory student feedback on course lecturers, it was recently decided that students will also provide feedback on their rotation mentors. The FGS's Dean, manager and Academic Secretary, and Board of Studies conduct informal meetings and one-on-one conversations with students and postdoctoral fellows to ensure they are comfortable in raising their concerns. In addition, based on the understanding that some of the "bullying" cases emerged from a misunderstanding of the Israeli culture and differences in communication styles, a cross-cultural training for international students and postdocs was developed with the professional guidance of the Interchange consultant group, and is already implemented for each all new international students in their first months in Israel. We are now working on a complementary initiative that would explain the communication differences to the Israeli community on campus as well.

The FGS's website includes a page dedicated to guiding students and postdocs who wish to file a complaint, alert FGS and WIS officials, and report and discuss instances of suspected misconduct, harassment, bullying, hazards, and safety. Complaints are forwarded to the appropriate office holders at WIS, including (all or some, depending on the type of complaint and the circumstances): The WIS's Vice President, FGS's Dean, FGS's Manager and Academic Secretary, Chair of the Board of Studies, Mental Health Services (social worker, off-campus psychologist, psychiatrist), the relevant PI, WIS's Safety Unit, head of the Office for the Advancement of Women in Science & Gender Equality, and the head of the Diversity and Inclusion Office at WIS. In severe cases, the WIS's President and Vice President appoint a special independent committee to examine the complaints. If supervisor misbehavior or other difficulties are identified, help is provided in cooperation with the social worker, including assistance in finding another supervisor when necessary.

A new addition to the FGS's website is the Anonymous Contact Form, which is dedicated to guiding students and postdocs on filing anonymous complaints addressed to the FGS's Dean, as well as reporting or discussing instances of suspected misconduct, harassment, or bullying.

We emphasize that the WIS's Scientific Council is fully supportive of these actions. In fact, these issues were discussed in a recent Scientific Council meeting with the VP and Deans, in order to raise awareness of the topic. Furthermore, a recent Council offsite (retreat) meeting included a roundtable session dedicated to mentorship, which was also discussed in the meeting's plenary session. During this meeting, we addressed incorporating a code for the prevention of bullying, aligning it with the existing Prevention of Sexual Harassment code, and with the Bill put forth by the Knesset. At the current time, we are in the final stages of integrating this code into the WIS's code of ethics. Finally, as of last year, we have introduced a compulsory induction day for all WIS new faculty, during which they meet the Dean and Manager and Academic Secretary of the FGS to discuss their first steps into building a healthy research group.

We hope that our efforts will bear fruit, and plan to monitor the subject in upcoming surveys.

Page 4, paragraph 2; Pages 10-12, paragraph 3.6

“Various teaching resources are available for all faculty members. In contrast, mentorship and graduate supervision training for new, and established, PIs are somewhat limited. There have been significant improvements over the years in changing the peer-pressured “24/7 research” culture at WIS, and we heard that there is greater awareness of the importance of work-life balance by the administration. Nonetheless, the Committee noticed that this undercurrent continues to exist, to some extent, leading to instances of abusive behavior by PIs toward students. The Committee recommends continuing to develop a rigorous code of conduct for all WIS faculty and staff and implement the intended mandatory mentorship and graduate supervision training program for all PIs to be taken in their first year at WIS.”

WIS’s response:

In February 2023, the WIS’s VP appointed a think tank, tasked with revisiting the Institutional code of conduct. Led by the Chair of the Scientific Council, the think tank included representatives of the Institute’s senior management, the FGS, the Legal Office, the Research Grants and Projects Office, and from each faculty.

The directive is to implement and enforce a robust code of conduct, which all new students and faculty will be required to sign that they have read and agree to act in accordance to. Among other important purviews, this was recently incorporated as one of the criteria for professorial promotions. We are currently at the final draft preparation stage. The FGS’s Ethics, Conduct, and Discipline regulations will be integrated into the institutional code of conduct and will be obligatory to all WIS community.

Additionally, at the beginning of 2023, we established a pilot Mentorship Program for PIs in their first years at WIS by senior faculty, in collaboration with the Head of the Program for the Development and Empowerment of Group Leaders and the Academic Secretary. All new faculty members joining the Institute in the past year have been assigned such mentors. Accordingly, the mentors undergo personalized training and receive appropriate tools from an external advisor specializing in mentorship in academia.

Based on the conclusions and feedback from the said pilot, the Mentorship Program and the tools available to the mentors will undergo continuous improvement, and new PIs joining the Institute in the future will similarly be paired with a mentor.

Page 4, paragraph 2; Pages 10-12, paragraph 3.6

“The Committee was impressed to learn that start-up packages are very generous and internationally competitive. Overall, the resources at the institute are outstanding and there are multiple opportunities annually to access resources to enhance a lab’s infrastructure. Recruitment, appointment, and promotion policies are made available to all faculty, and the process and expectations for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor seem to be transparent. On the other hand, faculty members expressed concern that the process for promotion to full professor is somewhat opaque. The Committee noted, however, that feedback to the administration has resulted in a reevaluation of this process and encourages WIS leadership to continue carrying on with this potential improvement.”

WIS’s response:

In the realm of process transparency, at the beginning of 2023, the VP initiated a mid-term assessment process for the Associate Professor rank, conducted via a meeting between the respective Dean and the Associate Professor, approximately 3-4 years after the last promotion. Such assessment enables, inter alia, the faculty member to raise any question and to receive, first-hand, all relevant information and clarifications with regards to their personal standing in the promotion process, which is initiated by the candidate's Faculty. The process is implemented and monitored annually by the Academic Affairs Office.

Page 5, paragraph 3.1

"The Feinberg Graduate School oversees the MSc and PhD programs and the Feinberg Graduate School and the two Deans oversee the postdoctoral program."

WIS's response:

The Feinberg Graduate School is also responsible for the postdoctoral training program, with Prof. Yohai Kaspi serving as the program's Chair.

Pages 6-7, paragraph 3.3

"Nonetheless, none of the students we met received mentoring on writing a proposal for attaining a postdoctoral fellowship. Furthermore, the students were unaware of opportunities for these types of possibilities/awards. The Committee was also concerned that PhD students, who were about to graduate, were only just starting to think about what they would do next. The ability of labs to pay graduating students as postdocs for a few months after graduation appears to be positive. Yet, in reality, it solely serves as a 'safety net' that allows students to put off planning for the next step of their careers while the mentors benefit from the mentees added research efforts. The Committee would expect students to be thinking and planning for the year before they graduate and it is this Committee's intent to make the PIs and leadership aware of this noted cultural pitfall."

WIS's response:

Through the career workshops conducted at the WIS, we emphasized that the students should think and plan their career's next step. In addition, many of these topics are covered in the 'Soft Skills' course many of our students take. However, we are working to offer additional workshops for navigating the academic career after the PhD, including the "Setting Out on Your Postdoc Journey" event.

Page 8, paragraph 3.4

"Through a collaboration between FGS and the Davidson Institute of Science Education, there are interactive workshops to improve teaching skills and to learn how to integrate novel pedagogical approaches and technologies in the classroom. This training is available to those that choose to avail themselves of the opportunity and we learned that some faculty have taken this training, but certainly

not all since it is not mandatory. The Committee suggests organizing a single-day workshop tailored to the specific teaching requirements of different courses for all faculty members and teaching assistants without prior teaching experience. It is also commendable that the EduCore team of the Science Teaching Department has established a Moodle system, and encouraged additional training to maximize the system's benefits.”

WIS’s response:

It should be noted that collaboration on the education quality improvement plan is carried out by the FGS in conjunction with the Department of Science Education and not with the Davidson Institute. Indeed, as recommended by the committee, collaborative efforts with the Department of Science Education have been undertaken, including preparations for the current academic year, which involved training on the model and the pedagogy. In addition, and as mentioned in section 10 below, we are currently recruiting candidates for an additional senior position in the field of courses and teaching, whose responsibilities will include promoting training for new lectures and teaching assistance, as well as improvement of teaching quality.

Page 9, paragraph 3.4

“The information provided to the Committee states a 10% and 4% student attrition rate for PhD and MSc studies, respectively. This is commensurate with or better than attrition rates at many other universities. Nonetheless, a higher fraction of non-Israeli students do not complete their PhD studies than would be expected based on their representation amongst PhD studentship. 21.7% of PhD students are non-Israeli, whereas 37% of students who do not complete their studies are non-Israeli. A similar, but less significant outcome is seen with MSc students. The Committee recommends that the school investigate the reason(s) for attrition in general – and the differential attrition among international students, to identify where improvements can be made and proceed to implementing these.”

WIS’s response:

Notably, the fraction of non-Israeli students who do not complete their PhD studies is 27%, and not 37%. Hence the numbers do not appear significant, considering the fraction of non-Israeli PhD students (21.7%) and optional measurement error.

As for the committee’s recommendation for the school to investigate the reason(s) for attrition, it should be noted that in accordance with FGS regulations, the relevant Board of Studies chair holds a meeting with every student or postdoctoral fellow who requests to quit their studies or internship, in order to ensure that no mentorship issues are involved in the decision, identify where improvements can be made, or assist in transitioning to another group in case the student or postdoctoral fellow seeks to move due to research incompatibility or for other reasons.

Moreover, the International Office conducts regular automatic surveys among all international students and postdocs immediately upon their departure. The FGS will use this survey to investigate the reason(s) for attrition.

Page 9, paragraph 3.4

“The Committee noted that students do not have formal exposure to career counseling. It is unclear if WIS has an office to link students with jobs, provide interview skill training, and so forth. Students earning MSc and PhD degrees have many non-academic opportunities for post-graduation employment, and it would be very useful to have a centralized office, as well as periodic workshops that introduce students to such alternative careers (industry, teaching, science legislation, patents, etc.). The Committee was told about a Biotech club organized by students, which could be consolidated in developing a cohesive non-academic advisory program. In addition, the Alumni of the Life Sciences programs could be tapped to be a resource for current trainees. The students indicated that “soft skills” including scientific writing and presentation skills were part of the graduate program. This is important and useful in pursuing research based as well as other health science relevant careers.”

WIS’s response:

The Institute is recruiting a Head of Teaching and Courses section, who will, among other responsibilities, focus on promoting soft skills and career development. This is in addition to various existing initiatives at the Institute, including:

- An annual workshop offered to postdocs — Workshop: Professional Development for Young Scientists.
- A course on Science Communication. Over the years, the Institute has also offered the Practical Aspects of Innovative Pharma and Biotech Business course, taught by Erez Bar-On, a successful biotech entrepreneur. The course imparts theoretical knowledge and includes a final project, where students visit companies and present their business plans.
- All programs have workshops on effective presentation and additional soft skills.
- A LinkedIn workshop.
- The Alumni Organization also provides career opportunities.
- Numerous career opportunities are available in all programs.
- The “BINA Innovation Fellows Program” is a unique initiative led by BINA (Bridge. Innovate. Nurture. Advance), under the auspices of the Office for Innovation and Technology Transfer at WIS, in collaboration with leading venture capital companies, a Moon Fund and Grove Ventures, as a career development and mentorship vehicle for PhD students at WIS who are interested in translational research. The BINA Fellows Program is a multidisciplinary program for students in both the life sciences and the exact sciences.
- A new initiative — a joint MBA program with another Israeli university.

Page 9-10, paragraph 3.5

“Students also reported that they do not have access to information about postdoctoral fellowships for Israeli students studying abroad. The Committee believes that central curation and advertising of such opportunities would be valuable, as postdoctoral fellowships are prestigious, and having funding

(e.g., having assured a postdoctoral fellowship to sponsor their future training) provides access to many more laboratories. Such fellowships also can provide supplemental financial support. Ideally, this information would be made available early in the training period because of grant deadlines.

“The Evaluation Committee met with several alumni. These professionals all lived nearby and were contacted with the request to come to the session. They indicated that they each maintained a relationship with their mentors or with the department, but were unaware of an alumni association. They indicated that they thought the Feinberg Graduate School maintained a database of alumni. We encourage WIS and Feinberg School to maintain a database of alumni that they tap into to connect with current trainees interested in diverse careers. The alumni we met were clearly intrigued by the opportunity to share their experiences with current students.”

WIS’s response:

Regarding the publication of external scholarship opportunities, although the Office for the Advancement of Women in Science and Gender Equality publishes opportunities for women, the FGS will work to implement the recommendation widely for all its students.

As for the alumni organization, the subject is currently under examination, and the Institute is actively working to improve the existing framework.

Page 9-10, paragraph 3.6

“Graduate student stipends are also covered by the institution itself (2 years for Master’s students and 4 years for Ph.D. students, with short extensions possible at the PI’s expense).”

WIS’s response:

A master’s scholarship is awarded for a period of 24 months, 21 of them funded by the Institute and the remaining 3 months, including extensions, funded by the supervisor. The doctoral scholarship is granted for a minimum period of 54 months and usually for 60 months, with the Institute funding half of the doctoral scholarship for a period of 36 months, and the remaining portion funded by the supervisor. A new scientist’s start-up package includes full funding for an Institute-covered doctoral scholarship for a period of 36 months.

“While such major lab equipment is usually purchased at the point of recruitment, there is an annual major equipment funding competition at the institute that requires an application. Faculty members, especially past tenure, were appreciative of this extra opportunity for their infrastructure needs but commented on how this process is not very transparent, with mostly no feedback provided for unsuccessful internal equipment grants. We learned from the senior administration that the main criteria for a successful application were that the equipment was not available at WIS, that it would be shared among groups of PIs, and that it was pushing the boundaries of science. These are laudable criteria, but we recommend making these decision-making criteria written into a policy (e.g., transparent and clear process) that provides equal opportunity for all faculty members.”

WIS’s response:

WIS has accepted the committee's suggestion on this matter and has already implemented and internally published the change, as can be seen below:

> **Evaluation**

The main criteria upon which proposals will be evaluated are that (1) the equipment is not yet available at the Weizmann Institute; (2) the equipment will serve multiple groups of PIs, and (3) that the equipment will support research that will be pushing the boundaries of science.

"This could undervalue the candidate's achievements in the eyes of the WIS-level committee which includes professionals from other faculties."

WIS's response:

For every candidate under deliberation, a file is presented to the relevant Appointments and Promotions Committee by a senior faculty member from the candidate's department. The presentation is designed to make the candidate's research accessible to Committee members from different disciplines and to address any question the Committee might have with regards to the candidate's research activity and research statement.

As for promotion from Associate Professor to Full Professor, and the mentorship program, please refer to the above-mentioned details, Sections 4-5.

Pages 12-13, paragraph 3.7 — Diversity

"Nonetheless, there appears to be room for improvement. There are currently only 4 Arab faculty members on the WIS Faculty, with two in Life Sciences, and only 3% of students are Arab. The Committee heard that Arab students are dissatisfied with their small numbers and reported a sense of isolation. Students appreciated the provision of on-site housing, rather than commuting from their family's homes. There was no mention of Haredi or Ethiopian minorities among the faculty or student cohorts in the reports provided to the Committee. The Committee encourages developing programs to encourage the recruitment of students from these communities."

WIS's response:

The percentage of Arab students was recently updated and today stands at 4%. As described above, we implement various initiatives to increase the number of Arab students and postdocs, including:

- The Young Weizmann Scholars Diversity and Excellence program, recruiting second-year undergraduate students from diversity groups. The program targets students from all diversity groups, including: Arabs, Haredi, Israeli Ethiopians, students from the periphery, and first generation in higher education, for a summer term at the Weizmann labs, followed by soft-skill training.
- An annual marketing campaign to recruit Arab students to all WIS graduate programs.
- Using current Arab students' networks to reach a wider audience and recruit additional graduate students.



- An online “open day” in Arabic.
- Providing on-campus and close to the campus housing for some of the Arab students, based on need (in general, the housing option is available only to international students, not to Israelis).
- Providing students and postdocs with psychological care in Arabic at a subsidized rate.
- Providing mentoring program to new Arab students during their first semester on campus.
- Providing a special workshop series for MSc students during their first year at WIS, “a success booster”, with lectures from leading scientist about tools for academic success.
- We published a diversity calendar for the entire Institute community, detailing holidays and fasting periods during which it is advisable to refrain from departmental activities, to accommodate students of various religions and nationalities who may be unable to participate. We also hold annual events on campus that showcase the diversity of our community, featuring distinctive customs and festivals of the various groups. These events include lectures and specialized tours focusing on diverse communities.
- We offered subsidized courses for learning the Arabic language, open to English speakers as well.

As for Arab faculty, the numbers are low; since 2023, we have been working with other universities in an initiative led by the Hebrew University’s Vice President of Strategy and Diversity, Prof. Mona Khoury, to increase the numbers. Prof. Khoury created a list of all Arab potential candidates that could be recruited as an academic staff in all sciences. She shared the list with WIS and it was distributed by the Diversity Office to all the Institute’s deans, so no potential candidates will be overlooked. This year there were no relevant candidates (many of the researchers are in social sciences, the humanities, and others fields that are not relevant for the WIS), but we hope this initiative will help us to recruit excellent candidates in upcoming years.

Haredi and Ethiopian minorities are part of the diversity groups we address and participate in our recruitment programs. To increase the representation of those two groups, we cooperate with several colleges that have undergraduate Life Sciences programs and with the Open University, and they recommend a number of excellent students for graduate studies at WIS each year. The recommendations are presented to the heads of the WIS’s admission committees.

“It is laudable that 53-62% of students and postdocs are women. However, it appears that about 25% of the faculty members are women, with more presentation at the lower ranks. No explicit programs/goals to increase women faculty were noted.

“There is a multipronged program for promotion and mentoring of women students, but most of the women PhD graduates do not go abroad for postdocs, which is a common standard for recruitment into an academic position in Israel.”

WIS’s response:

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We do not understand why the committee concluded that our Office for the Advancement of Women in Science and Gender Equality does not have explicit goals and programs to increase the number of female faculty members. It is, in fact, the entire focus of our office. We respectfully refer you to the Institute's report (sections 4.4.2.1, 4.4.2.2, and 4.4.2.3) for information about our programs.

In addition, enclosed is our strategic program, "[Kav Hamasheva](#)", sent to the Council for Higher Education's Planning and Budgeting Committee, describing all directions for advancing women in science in the next few years.

Furthermore, we have established a database of women postdocs abroad (mentioned on the strategic program), to maintain contact with them on a regular basis, follow their progress, and enable them to become familiar with the Institute and its advantages.

"Another program provides support for the trailing husband so that the woman can accept an international postdoc position."

WIS's response:

We do not have such a training program.

"WIS has initiated a number of programs to provide an international co-mentor for an Israeli postdoc mentor of a woman researcher to facilitate acquiring the international training requirement for an Israeli academic position; it is an open question whether other Israeli colleges and universities will accept that alternative credential for women unable to leave Israel for the postdoctoral training."

WIS's response:

This is the least we can do to help women scientists who cannot leave Israel to conduct postdoctoral research abroad.

"There is a new non-obligatory program for training in unconscious bias."

WIS's response:

We regret that this was the committee's impression. We do have mandatory unconscious bias training for all PIs and committee members, and all current PIs and promotion committee members have been trained. We believe that in order to understand our vision and what we do to achieve it, it would have been beneficial for the committee to meet the representative of the Office of the Advancement of Women in Science and Gender Equality in person.

"Although there is a program for 3 months' maternity leave for trainees, we were told that this is inferior to other universities in Israel, where students have a total of six months paid leave. One student indicated that she had 3 months of unpaid leave after the conclusion of the paid period."

WIS's response:

The information was cross-checked with several universities (Technion, Bar-Ilan, Hebrew University, and Ben-Gurion) and found to be incorrect — none of them pay beyond 15 weeks.

“No data was provided about how many international (non-Israeli) faculty members there are.” The Committee heard from international students that their medical insurance does not cover procedures and treatments available to Israeli students. Senior leadership indicated that there are emergency funds available for this type of need, but neither the International Office nor the Insurance administrator had provided that information (or support) to the international trainees who made inquiries.

WIS’s response:

There are 10 international faculty members in total: Six Associate and Full Professors and four Senior Scientists. In addition, there are nine international Staff Scientists.

The WIS’s International Office arranges insurance for international FGS students and postdoctoral fellows, as well as for their families (spouses and children), and the WIS directly covers the cost. For further information, <https://www.weizmann.ac.il/InternationalOffice/before/health>.

The private insurance policy we offer international students and postdoctoral fellows is the best currently available under the Israeli insurance regulations. It provides comprehensive health coverage for the students, postdocs, and their family members, and includes pregnancy coverage with only a three-month waiting period, as well as services provided by one of Israel’s largest healthcare providers, which has many clinics across Rehovot.

While Israel’s current insurance regulations limit the coverage available to internationals (i.e., exclusions to the policy apply, such as pre-existing medical conditions), the FGS has a fund that can assist in such cases.

In addition, the health insurance provider’s representatives offer a 24/7 English-language service and are available to assist with any difficulties related to healthcare services (e.g., language, making appointments, and more). The International Office continually reviews available options in Israel and seeks ways to enhance what is offered to our internationals.

According to the guidance of the International Office’s insurance consultants and the healthcare insurance provider, Harel, the Institute cannot offer international students identical or equivalent insurance to that offered to Israelis, as coverage terms in Israel for foreign residents are derived from state regulations to which the insurance companies and healthcare funds are subject. These terms are not identical to the insurance coverage provided to local residents. Given the regulatory limitations, the Institute cannot provide insurance coverage that does not fully comply with these restrictions.

As for annual training in bullying, harassment, and ethics — a mandatory tutorial for preventing sexual harassment has been successfully implemented throughout all WIS academic and administrative sectors. Similarly, the bullying and workplace harassment prevention tutorial is currently in development and will also be mandatory for all Institute communities.

Below is the Institute's response to the committee's recommendations:

Top of Form

Committee's recommendations	WIS's response
<p>The Institution should continue to further develop, implement and enforce a rigorous code of conduct for all WIS faculty, students, and staff.</p>	<p>Please refer to the above-mentioned details in Section 4.</p>
<p>The Institution should provide obligatory training annually for unconscious bias, bullying, harassment, and ethics (as opposed to solely that for preventing sexual harassment).</p>	<p>Please refer to the above-mentioned details in Sections 3 and 4.</p> <p>As for ethics, it should be mentioned that Ethics is a mandatory course for all students and postdocs.</p> <p>In addition, and as mentioned in section 13 above, WIS does have mandatory unconscious bias training for all PIs and committee members. Currently, all the PIs and promotion committees have been trained. Furthermore, relevant materials on unconscious bias are available to the members of all Institute Appointments and Promotions committees, which are accessible at all times. These important principles are always "on the table" while discussing a candidate.</p>
<p>At the Institution level, develop a mandatory mentorship and graduate supervision training program for all PIs to be taken in their first year at WIS.</p>	<p>Additionally, we have commenced, at the beginning of 2023, a pilot Mentorship program of Senior Faculty, intended for PIs in their first years at WIS, with the collaboration of the Head of the Program for Development and Empowerment of Group Leaders and the Academic Secretary. All new faculty members joined the Institute in the past year have such veteran PI mentor. Accordingly, the mentors undergo personalized training and receive appropriate tools by an external advisor specializing in mentorship in the academia.</p> <p>The Forum for Training and Empowering junior investigators (FORTE) was created 15 years ago, designed to assist the young PIs during their first years at the Weizmann Institute, by providing them with extensive training opportunities (personal coaching and workshops with peers), such as a tailor-made</p>

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	<p>orientation day for the young PIs, training programs on various topics like lab management, recruitment, student mentoring, etc., designed to enhance soft skills and management toolbox.</p> <p>Additionally, they participate in a two-day offsite workshop led by a company that specializes in contents relevant to lab management.</p> <p>Another important facet is the young PI Forum created to help them face and share their many challenges.</p> <p>All these and more are proving to assist in providing the young PIs "smooth sailing" in the crucial initial period of starting and running their research groups.</p>
<p>Students should be aware of what support is available to them – they should know who is the disinterested party they should contact if there is a problem.</p>	<p>As mentioned in section 3 above, the FGS introduced new regulations at the beginning of the current academic year to prevent harassment. As part of these measures, a student and postdoc ombudsperson was appointed, and the regulations were published on the FGS's website and distributed to all scientists, lecturers, students, and postdocs.</p> <p>The information is also provided during orientation days held upon their arrival at the Institute.</p>
<p>Add additional frontal courses to the Feinberg graduate school, and minimize students' need for external courses</p>	<p>This is a general recommendation without specific details. Nevertheless, it should be noted that we are constantly expanding our curriculum, adding new courses every year. Furthermore, since the establishment of the ExCLS program, we are in a process of expanding our course list, especially frontal courses.</p>
<p>The Institution should provide health insurance coverage for all international trainees which is comparable to that offered for Israeli students</p>	<p>As detailed in Section 13.</p>
<p>The Institution should make available to all faculty the decision-making criteria for the annual major equipment grant competition.</p>	<p>As mentioned in Section 12, the WIS has already accepted the committee's suggestion</p>

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	on this matter and has implemented and published the change internally.
<p>At all levels, a robust communications strategy should be developed and implemented, to communicate institutional policies and initiatives to all faculty members, trainees, and staff. The Committee found that there are some wonderful resources that the trainees (students and postdocs) just do not know about.</p>	<p>The Institute's finalized code of conduct will be published and made accessible through all available platforms, to all WIS community, including the provision of direct contact details of the office holders responsible for implementing the code's various aspects, including the prevention of sexual harassment, prevention of bullying, the Institute's and FGS ombudsmen, etc.</p> <p>The Vice President serves as the Institute's Research Integrity Officer (RIO). In this capacity, the VP enforces the Institutional <i>Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research Policy and Procedures</i>.</p> <p>A mandatory tutorial for preventing sexual harassment has been successfully implemented across all academic and administrative sectors.</p> <p>Similarly, a tutorial for the prevention of bullying and workplace harassment is currently under development and will also be mandatory to all Institute community.</p> <p>Regarding the FGS's communication, emphasis is placed on ongoing communications with students and postdocs on a regular basis. All relevant scientists and administration members are copied. Through a new initiative, information is also distributed through the FGS's app. In addition, all relevant information is available on the WIS's website.</p>
<p>Formalize career development for all trainees, with information about non-academic career opportunities.</p>	<p>As detailed in Section 10.</p>
<p>At the Feinberg School level, further effort should be made to operate the system of MSc rotation allocation in a more transparent and equitable manner, and to find ways to limit futile rotations (cases where the professor and another student have already matched).</p>	<p>As detailed in Section 2.</p>

Committee's recommendations	WIS's response
<p>The relevant Faculty leadership should develop clear guidance and training for PIs on how to provide narratives in their tenure package that are accessible to a multidisciplinary (institutional) review panel.</p>	<p>This topic is addressed, among others, at the faculty (dean – candidate) meeting individually before submission, and, of course, as mentioned earlier, each file is presented to the respective Appointments and Promotions Committee by a senior faculty member who is proficient in the candidate's research area. Such presentation is aimed to make the particular field of research accessible to members from other disciplines.</p>
<p>At the ExCLs level, efforts should be made to provide access to key concepts and readings for the topic in the first 2-3 lectures of the seminar-style courses, such that all students have some grasp of the foundational concepts.</p>	<p>WIS accepts this recommendation: We will prepare and circulate among the lecturers giving seminar-style courses a 'best practices' document that will include a recommendation to begin the course with 2-3 lectures that provide an overview of the field. We will follow up on the syllabuses of these courses to ensure this is implemented</p>
<p>Feinberg School should investigate/analyze the reason(s) for attrition in general – and the differential attrition among certain groups, for example, international students, to identify where improvements can be made.</p>	<p>In accordance with FGS regulations, the relevant Board of Studies chair holds a meeting with every student or postdoctoral fellow who requests to quit their studies or internship, in order to ensure no mentorship issues are involved in the decision, identify where improvements can be made, or assist in transitioning to another group, should the student or postdoctoral fellow seek to move due to research incompatibility or for other reasons.</p> <p>Moreover, the International Office conducts regular automatic surveys among all international students and postdocs immediately upon their departure.</p>
<p>The relevant Faculty leadership should articulate and communicate expectations on timing and research requirements for promotion from tenured associate to full professor</p>	<p>This topic is addressed, among others, at the faculty (dean – candidate) meeting individually before submission.</p> <p>As described in section 5 of this document, a mid-term assessment process for the tenured associate is conducted via a meeting between her/him and the respective Dean, approximately 3-4 years after the last promotion. Such assessment enables, inter alia, the tenured associate to raise any question, to</p>

Committee's recommendations	WIS's response
	discuss the timing, and to receive, first-hand, all relevant information and clarifications with regards to their personal standing in the promotion process. The process is implemented and monitored annually by the Academic Affairs Office.
A highly developed WIS alumni database should be generated and made available to assist current students in understanding different job tracks, for networking, fundraising, and more.	As for the alumni organization, a current examination of the subject is in progress, and the Institute is actively working to improve the existing framework.

Prof. Gilad Perez, Dean



Feinberg Graduate School
Weizmann Institute Of Science



Prof. Ziv Reich
Vice President