

## REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

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### ISRAEL INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES AT THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

8-11 JANUARY 2017

The Committee, which met in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv from the evening of January 8 through January 11, was composed of Professors Andreu Mas-Colell (Economics, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona), Jacques Revel (Early Modern History, Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and New York University), Marina Rustow (Near Eastern History, Princeton University), Shimon Yankielowicz (Physics, Tel Aviv University) and the chair, Patrick Geary (Medieval History, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton). During the visit, the Committee met with over fifty individuals including, in addition to the Director of the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies (hereafter the Institute), the President of Hebrew University, the rectors of both The Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, Humanities deans from The Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and Ben Gurion University, the President of the Israel Academy of Science, the former director of the Van Leer Institute, past directors of the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, present and past members of the Institute board, present and past members of the Academic Committees, organizers of Research Groups, organizers of Advanced Schools, Bruno Award holders, and senior and younger academics with no prior connection to the Institute. All the individuals with whom the Committee spoke were, without exception, helpful and forthcoming, and made every effort to help the committee understand the Institute, its functions, achievements, and challenges. The Committee wishes to thank Asher Ragen and Natania Isaak-Weschler of Yad Hanadiv who made all the arrangements as well as all the individuals who met with it. The Committee thanks as well the Director of the Institute, Prof. Michal Linial, who prior to the Committee's arrival provided a detailed report on the Institute's activities and challenges from 2009/10 through 2015/16 as well as explanations and clarifications on demand during our stay.

**Overview.** The Institute's aim is to support unrestricted research across all disciplines while pushing the frontier of knowledge and maintaining the highest level of academic excellence. Its mission as a national institute is that of excellence and partnership. All of the Committee's recommendations stem from this mission. The Institute changed its name, effective 2012, from the Institute for Advanced Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem to the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, reflecting its aspiration as a national institution. The committee was unanimous in its assessment that overall, the Institute is of very high quality and unique value to the Israeli scientific community and to the wider scientific and academic world. It is an institution that has earned a unique and highly valued international profile for both its Advanced Schools and its Research Groups. Within Israel, its more recent association with the Michael Bruno Memorial Award incorporates into its mission the recognition of younger scholars of the highest quality. Nevertheless, it faces significant challenges in the short term and the longer term that could jeopardize its ability to continue to fulfill its mission, let alone to enhance this profile.

**Governance and administration.** The Institute is governed by a Director appointed by the President of Hebrew University and a Board composed of three professors appointed by Hebrew University and three individuals appointed by Yad Hanadiv. The Board has the additional responsibility of handling the refereeing procedure and the final selection of the Bruno Award winners. Selection of research groups is performed by two Academic Committees, one in the social sciences and humanities and one in the natural sciences, each consisting of two professors from The Hebrew University and three academics from other universities, one of whom must be from abroad. It is our understanding that Academic Committee members are chosen (upon consultations) by the director of the Institute and approved by the board. The precise procedure should be put into the bylaws of the Institute. The director of the Institute joins the committees as an extra member (hence, the HU effectively has yet another member). Six General Directors chosen for their international standing organize the Advanced Schools. Longstanding Schools exist in Mathematics, Life Sciences, Theoretical Physics, and Economics. A new School has been established in Computer Science and a revamped School is being developed in Humanities.

Thirteen staff members assist the operations of the Institute.

**Activities.** The Institute conducts four essential types of activities. The largest proportion of its budget is devoted to the Research Groups, normally comprised of eight scholars, which meet in the Institute for one year, one term, or sometimes shorter periods. This is a unique core activity that characterizes the Institute. Advanced Schools meet for approximately 10 days, during which time world leaders in their respective disciplines conduct high-level instruction for up to seventy invited and an additional seventy or so participants. These Advanced Schools bring the Institute its widest international recognition for scientific excellence. In addition, the Institute both organizes and hosts workshops, most connected to the research groups. Finally, the Institute grants the Bruno Award. Our report will cover each of these activities in turn.

**Findings.** In spite of the name change, as well as the creation of academic committees and other recent administrative changes, the Institute continues to struggle to function as a national institute rather than as an institution of The Hebrew University, and to be recognized as such. The process of selection of research groups and of participants in Advanced Schools and workshops has been changed to offer equal access to scholars from other Israeli institutions, as well as those from abroad. However, at The Hebrew University, elsewhere in Jerusalem, and especially at other universities, the entrenched perception is that the Institute offers preferential treatment to Hebrew University faculty members or is accessible mainly if not exclusively to their research groups. This is a disturbing finding, since the same problem was already noted in the two prior visiting reports from 1999 and 2008. The name-change seems to have come in response to such feedback, but it has not been sufficient.

This impression of Hebrew University dominance is reinforced by the plurality of positions reserved on the Board and the Academic Committees for Hebrew University faculty as well as the University's insistence on the right to appoint the Director from among The Hebrew University faculty. Whether or not these administrative arrangements do result in a bias toward Hebrew University faculty, it is a fact that out of 30 Research Groups between 2009/10 and 2015/16, only 3 contained no members of The Hebrew University faculty; 8 contained 1; 15 contained 2; and 4 contained 3. In 2016/17 the ratio of Hebrew University faculty to faculty from other Israeli universities has decreased, and two groups will have no Hebrew University faculty. However, the perception is deeply established that this is not a national institution. The Committee's interviews with two generations of scholars have made it clear that this perception is detrimental to the success of the Institute and to The Hebrew University itself. The hierarchy of Israeli academic institutions has flattened in the past two decades and become more decentralized, and the Institute's structure should reflect this if it is to be considered a national institution. Achieving this goal requires both additional changes in governance and administration and a powerful and more effective informational program.

## ADMINISTRATION

The Committee believes that if the Institute is to be a national institution and be seen as one, a number of administrative changes are essential.

- 1. Directorship.** The Hebrew University should renounce its requirement that the Director be chosen from among its faculty. The Director should be chosen through an international search open to candidates from throughout Israel and the world. This will create fair competition. It will also expand the pool of qualified potential directors. Some with whom the Committee spoke also urged that the Institute better balance the choice of a director from among the different disciplines: only one of the Institute's past directors has been a humanist, even though the majority of its research groups take place across the humanities disciplines. In any case, the Board should have a role in this search.
- 2. Board Composition.** The Hebrew University should renounce its control of three positions on the board in favor of a more nuanced appointment mechanism that guarantees a board with a larger proportion of faculty from other Israeli universities.
- 3. Board Responsibilities.** The Board should be much more active than it is currently. The Committee noted that significant recommendations of previous visiting committees, such as better communication with scholars in Israel and abroad about eligibility for Research Groups and Advanced Schools, have not been effectively implemented. The Board should ensure that such changes take place and should help the Director to implement them. It should also actively supervise the quality of the Research Groups and Advanced Schools, and it should review the effectiveness of the Research Groups on a regular basis. It should discuss in depth the long-term plans of the Institute and the policies it employs. It should debate major policy issues such as the recently introduced requirement that members of Research Groups from Israeli institutions other than The Hebrew University must forfeit their sabbaticals (see below). In keeping with normal board procedures, the Board should elect its own chairperson. Currently it is chaired by the Director, a situation that allows for few checks and balances and which might lead to conflict of interest.
- 4. Academic Committees.** To increase the function and perception of the Institute as an unbiased national institution, the Committee recommends that the Academic Committee include four professors from Israeli universities and one from abroad. The composition of the committees should be well balanced among disciplines and affiliations of the members, taking into account that the Director joins the committees as an extra member.

- 5. Relationship with other institutions.** The Committee believes that there is, potentially, much for the Institute to gain as a national institution through closer collaboration and perhaps formal relationships with other Jerusalem and national institutions. Members of Research Groups should present their research to a broader public and publicize the work of the Institute by regularly offering lectures at the Van Leer Institute and the new National Library. Both sites could also serve as venues for jointly sponsored workshops. Relationships with other national institutes and bodies, such as the Israel Academy of Sciences, should be leveraged. The Committee applauds the new policy of inviting members of the Young Academy of Sciences to submit proposals for Research Groups, but more can be done to foster a close and sustainable collaboration among national scientific bodies.
- 6. Finances.** The Committee recognizes that the control exercised by The Hebrew University is not only an accident of history but is directly related to the fact that the University established it (together with Yad Hanadiv) and generously provides 50% of its annual budget in cash and in kind, with Yad Hanadiv providing the other 50%. The Committee recognizes the deep commitment that The Hebrew University has made to the Institute for over forty years and the great benefit that has accrued to faculty from other universities and to international scholars and scientists. The Committee believes, however, that in the long term this is an inappropriate way to finance a national institution. A goal of the Director and the Board should be to develop and secure alternative funding for the Institute. This would achieve two objectives. First, it would free The Hebrew University from the burden of supporting what is supposed to be a national institution to which no other universities make any contribution. Second, in light of the reality that Yad Hanadiv, which has funded the Institute since its inception, normally funds start-up projects and does not make commitments to open-ended, continuing funding of initiatives, finding the appropriate stable alternatives would secure the Institute's long-term financial future. A firm goal should be the financial independence of the Institute, achieved either through a direct line item in the budget of the Planning and Budgeting Committee of Higher Education, through private endowments, or through a combination of the two. Raising these funds to ensure the long-term financial stability of the Institute should be a primary duty of the Institute and the board.
- 7. Outreach and communications.** In keeping with the twin goals of maximizing the Institute's visibility and opening its institutional culture to those outside Jerusalem, the Committee recommends the creation of a new position of Outreach and Communications Director. This individual's responsibilities would include publicizing calls for Research Groups, workshops and conferences, arranging presentations by fellows extra muros, handling publicity and press releases surrounding the Institute activities and in particular the Bruno Award, and generally ensuring that Institute's reputation and public face are in keeping with its mission. Since the problem of the public perception of the Institute has remained an entrenched one for two decades if not more – with most people the Committee spoke with outside Jerusalem being either unaware or poorly informed of its activities or else believing it to be an exclusive Hebrew University preserve – the situation needs to be taken into hand once and for all.

## RESEARCH GROUPS

The Research Groups are the heart and the unique core activity of the Institute and have been a particularly successful operation, with much impact on the humanities and social sciences. They have been less successful in the natural sciences and mathematics. This is perhaps largely due to the major experimental component in the natural sciences, the different pace of scientific research, and the plethora of alternatives for collaborative research in the natural sciences. In addition, many scientists are reluctant to leave their labs for extended periods. However, many of the scientists with whom the Committee spoke would be delighted to undertake shorter-term collaborations of one to three months.

Moreover, and most importantly, the very existence of the Research Groups as a national enterprise is in serious jeopardy because of recent changes in the way Israeli scholars from outside The Hebrew University are funded to participate in them.

The Committee recommends the following changes as an urgent priority.

- 1. Group structure.** Greater flexibility should be given to groups in terms of numbers and duration. It should be possible to have successful groups with fewer than eight members. Likewise, the period for which groups meet should also be flexible, with the possibility of much shorter periods, especially in the natural sciences, even one month, or intermittently over a year, in addition to the traditional full term or year. This would be particularly beneficial in increasing participation of scientists.
- 2. Topics.** Within the humanities and social sciences, the Committee was surprised to see the somewhat limited range of research group themes. Disciplines such as anthropology and sociology are underrepresented. Biblical and Near Eastern studies are well represented, but topics in which Jewish studies intersects with modern literature, non-Western history, history of art, and other fields, as well as the social scientific disciplines above, are underrepresented. Truly interdisciplinary Research Groups are too rare.
- 3. Group composition.** Currently the constitution of groups is problematic. Proposals are submitted a year and a half in advance and are required to list participants. This creates difficulties.

First, proposed groups inevitably reflect the networks of the project organizers, and, therefore, may miss appropriate scientists or scholars in Israel and abroad.

Second, the composition of the groups frequently changes. In some cases, up to 50% of the members have changed between the time the proposal is accepted and the group begins. The quality control of these changes is inevitably not as rigorous as it should be since the changes are often made at the last minute and under duress to comply with the eight-member requirement.

Third, there is a widespread belief that in order to be successful, research groups need to include senior Hebrew University faculty. Regardless of the truth of this perception, the appearance of fairness is not helped by the current procedure of forming a group.

The Committee therefore recommends that the Institute consider changing the selection process. In particular, it urges the Institute to consider evaluating proposals that do not list the participants and to select them on the significance and quality of the research project proposed and the qualifications of the proposers. Once a proposal is accepted, a public call for participation would be published widely, and participants would then apply and be chosen by an ad hoc committee consisting of the group leaders and outside scholars. This would not only mitigate the problem of scholars committing lightly to groups and canceling after the group is accepted; it would also bring Institute procedures into line with those of most other major research organizations with themed research groups. The Committee strongly encourages that the Institute attempt this procedure on a trial basis in the near future.

- 4. Encouraging submissions.** While procedures for the selection of research groups have changed, publicity about these changes, and thus the possibility of submitting a successful proposal without a Hebrew University affiliation, has not sufficiently penetrated the academic community outside Jerusalem. The Director has been proactive in meeting with groups such as the Young Academy and others. This is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done to inform scholars and scientists outside Jerusalem about the Institute's programs and its openness to proposals.
- 5. Transparency.** Even while recognizing that the procedures for selecting groups has improved, a number of individuals pointed out that scholars in Jerusalem benefit from proximity to the Institute and thus from knowledge of the unwritten rules of the game that gives them an advantage in developing a successful proposal. The Committee urges that, in the tradition of institutions such as the US National Science Foundation, all successful proposals be made publicly available and placed on-line on the Institute's web site in their entirety in order to assist researchers from other institutions in preparing successful applications.
- 6. Funding.** Current Institute policy requires Israeli faculty from outside The Hebrew University who participate in groups to surrender their sabbaticals. Hebrew University faculty do not surrender their sabbaticals while fellows of the Institute but are required to teach 1/3 of their normal teaching load. Repeatedly the Committee heard from group leaders, both past and future, as well as from outstanding scholars and scientists who were considering proposing or participating in groups, that their sabbaticals were absolutely essential for travel and research abroad. The traditional economic incentives Israeli scholars have received for spending sabbaticals abroad have enormously benefitted the internationalization of research culture in Israel. The Committee was told repeatedly that while researchers considered participation in a Research Group a very positive experience, it was qualitatively different from the opportunities offered by a sabbatical abroad, and that they would never give up a sabbatical to spend a year in Jerusalem. Younger scientists and scholars have most vocally expressed this. If this is the case, then in the words of one administrator, the research group program, the core of the Institute's program, is doomed. Others went further, calling the sabbatical policy "the death of the Institute" or "highly destructive to research in Israel." The Committee urges that an administrative solution be developed and that funds be found, either by an increase in income or a decrease in other activities, up to and including reducing, if necessary, the number of workshops, conferences, and even research groups, to ensure that Israeli participants receive 100% of their salaries while participating in research groups without using their sabbaticals. This policy should be applied also to The Hebrew University faculty, so that they have the same freedom from teaching obligations as their colleagues from other Israeli universities. Failing this, the Committee expects that the research groups will be filled with Hebrew University faculty, foreign participants, and Israelis who for non-academic reasons cannot spend their sabbaticals abroad, or even worse, cannot get a sabbatical abroad because of their inferior academic standing.
- 7. Conferences.** Several members of Research Groups mentioned that funding for their final conference or workshop was not sufficient. The Committee understands that there are budgetary constraints, but encourages the Institute and its board to look into the matter and, if possible, to increase the current level of guaranteed conference/workshop funding. The Institute should actively look for partnerships with other universities and institutions around the country to host these conferences. If the Research Group leaders want to hold a larger and more costly conference than is envisioned in the Institute budget, then they should work with the Institute and its staff to ensure the needed additional funds.
- 8. Reunions.** The current practice of funding reunions of Research Groups is an excellent one. The time frame within which Research Groups can reunite should be extended depending on the group's needs, including the possibility of more than one reunion. Often the real impact on a field



of a group's work does not become clear until more than one to three years later, and deeper, arm's-length assessments are more helpful for cementing the gains the group has made.

- 9. Evaluation.** The current practice of requiring a report at the end of a research group (not always followed) is inadequate. The Institute needs to develop a more scientific means of evaluating the impact of research groups three and five years after their conclusion, perhaps with the assistance of an outside institution specialized in scientific impact research.

**Advanced Schools.** The Advanced Schools in mathematics, the natural sciences, and economics are an unqualified success. The reason for their success, by all reports, is that the instructors in these Schools are the undisputed world leaders in the topics chosen. The Advanced Schools have managed to achieve this status because the directors in general are carefully chosen from among the worldwide leaders in their respective fields, they command a wide overview of their branch of science, they have strong connections with other prominent leaders all over the world and they enjoy a particularly strong devotion to the excellence of Israeli academia and deep understanding of its unique importance for the state of Israel. It is of utmost importance to maintain these criteria when inevitably these leaders step down. These Schools need to be continued and every effort be made to ensure that they maintain their international prestige.

The Humanities Schools have been less successful and have not demonstrated the same international impact. The Committee has had difficulty understanding what the current and future structure of the Humanities Schools actually are. The descriptions in the report provided to the Committee seemed contradictory and somewhat vague.

The Committee urges that the successful Advanced Schools be continued. It suggests two basic changes in their structure, pending clarification of the information on Advanced Schools in the humanities:

- 1. Disciplinary range.** New Schools in disciplines not traditionally represented should be attempted on a trial basis in order to capitalize on the enormous success of the Advanced Schools.
- 2. Venue.** The existing Advances Schools work very well in Jerusalem and should continue in their present location. New Advanced Schools should be encouraged to consider venues outside the four walls of the Institute. While this may raise fears among Institute administrators that the benefits of the Schools will not accrue to the Institute itself, the Committee believes that holding new Schools elsewhere will increase the national character, visibility and perception of the Institute as a truly national institute for advanced studies.

**Bruno Award.** The Committee is firmly convinced that the Bruno Award is extremely important to the profile of outstanding young Israeli scholars and scientists. It is also pleased that the award is connected to the Institute, both for the recipients and for the Institute itself. However, the award is less well-known in Israeli society at large than it deserves to be and is perhaps even underappreciated in Israeli academia. The Committee is certain that the award currently suffers from insufficient public education and communication and that this has hampered its effectiveness in Israeli academe and in society in general. A well-run outreach and communications campaign – run by a proposed Director of Outreach and Communications (see above) – would help the Bruno Award make the maximum impact on its recipients' careers and on the Institute's public profile.

The Committee is also concerned about the amount of Board time that is consumed in selecting award winners. The Board has the primary responsibility of overseeing the Institute and assisting the Director in the overall responsibility for the Institute. While the Committee is not recommending that the Board relinquish its role in the Bruno Award to a separate committee, it urges the Institute to consider whether the time consumed by the award is perhaps distracting the board from what should be

its primary mission of providing oversight and assistance to the Director. The problem could be solved by a subcommittee including members from outside the board and/or from the academic committees.

Part of general lack of awareness of the Bruno Award may be related to the fact that the candidates for the award are chosen by a group of around fifty nominators. The nominators are balanced between institutions and academic disciplines and serve for a term of three years. There is no public call for nominations. The Institute and the board should discuss whether there are other, more effective ways that will also help the recognition of the award, for example, a formal yearly request to all Israeli universities asking them to nominate up to four candidates, two from the natural sciences and two from the social sciences and humanities. In this manner, there could be a nomination procedure within each university, and thus each university would be involved, increasing its administration's awareness of the award.

**Workshops and conferences.** Research groups are normally expected to hold at least one workshop/conference during the time of their existence and a follow-up workshop/conference a year later. The Committee considers this a valuable requirement, but it urges flexibility in the scheduling of the follow-up conference. In the interest of the national character of the Institute, it also urges that some of these workshops be held at locations other than The Hebrew University.

Bruno Award winners are likewise expected to hold an event at the Institute following their receipt of the award. These, too, are important events in Israeli scientific life. However, in the interest of the national character of the Institute, it urges that some of these workshops be held at locations other than The Hebrew University.

As for other conferences and workshops held at the Institute, the Committee sees these as of less significance to the Institute since there are other resources within Israeli academia that already support such activities (e.g., the Israeli Science Foundation and various resources within the universities). The Committee is pleased that the current Director of the Institute has drastically reduced the number of such workshops and conferences and has ended the practice of allowing non-Institute related workshops to take place on its premises, and has generally focused resources on the core activities of the Institute. Should any programs need to be cut for financial reasons, the workshops not directly related to the Research Groups or Bruno Award holders should be the first in line, although the Committee fully realizes that these are a small portion of the overall budget.

**Miscellaneous observations.** The Committee also gathered suggestions for improvement concerning a number of additional issues affecting the quality of the Institute's programs.

- 1. Residential life.** Foreign participants in research groups have noted that it is very difficult to move families with children to Jerusalem for one year because of the extremely high cost of placing children in foreign language schools. The Institute, in keeping with other competitive institutions, should look into financial support to make it possible for families to relocate to Jerusalem for long periods.
- 2. Life in Jerusalem.** Some foreign members have commented on how challenging the particular situation of life in Jerusalem, with its cultural and religious tensions, can be for foreigners. The Institute must consider how best to assist fellows and especially their families to deal with the challenge of daily life in this unique city.
- 3. Space.** Fellows complained, and the Committee experienced, the disruptions caused by noise and congestion in the building currently housing the Institute. The open atrium causes sound to reverberate throughout the building and into offices. The current seminar space is inadequate for the activity level of the Institute and would make any augmentation of its activities difficult. The lack of a common room hampers small, informal discussions among scholars and scientists unless they are conducted in the corridors, which only adds to the general noise level. The proposed move to



the building that now houses the National Library may alleviate these problems, but the Director should have a role in designing the renovated space that will be occupied by the Institute to its best advantage. An even better solution might be to move the Institute to its own building near the new National Library, but the Committee understands that this would require considerable financial support.

- 4. Sociability.** The Committee has observed the lack of regularly scheduled social events such as an afternoon tea, cocktail hour or a weekly dinner that would bring the various fellows of the Institute together in informal but productive encounters. The Committee was happy to learn that the current Institute has already taken some step in this direction. The social life of institutes is absolutely essential to the success of the research they foster, all the more so in an institute committed to collaborative work and discussion across the disciplines.

**Conclusion.** The Committee judges the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies a successful and unique institution in Israel and, in many ways, in the world. Its Advanced Schools make a major contribution to scientific research and its residential Research Groups offer a unique opportunity for concentrated, collaborative scholarship, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, where collaborative research venues are few and far between. However, in the short term, the value of the Institute is threatened by the disastrous policy change that will force Israeli scholars and scientists, especially the younger ones, to choose between a stay at the Institute or a sabbatical abroad. In the long term, the current relationship with The Hebrew University and the way it is perceived by people at other universities prevent it from being a truly national institution, and its dependence on Yad Hanadiv does not adequately consider the long-term sustainability of its existence.

The Hebrew University should have nothing to fear from these changes. Indeed, the intellectual impact of the Institute on its community will not decrease. The more truly national an organization the Institute is, the more its activities, scientists and scholars from other Israeli institutions and from abroad will enrich Hebrew University's intellectual community.

The Committee considers it of the utmost importance that the Director and the Board take a more active role in charting a new, truly independent future for the Institute by securing the funding and the independent institutional structure that can guarantee its ability to reach its full potential. At the same time, the Director must implement new, concrete steps to reach the wider community of scientists and scholars outside Jerusalem in order to explain the goals of the Institute, procedures for applying to participate in its activities, and to valorize the Institute, to make transparent the procedures for applying to its Research Groups, and to enhance the value of its Bruno Award to a wider public in Israel and abroad.

Ultimately, the sole interest of the Institute should be that of serving science rather than any one institution or nation. It is as a free-standing scientific institution in the service of science and all humanity that the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies can best contribute to the scientific and academic stature of Jerusalem and Israel.

Finally, since a number of the recommendations in this report repeat those made by the two previous visiting committees, the Committee urges that the Director and the Board follow up and implement these recommendations with the assistance, if necessary, of Yad Hanadiv.

Respectfully submitted  
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