



Honorary Fellowships of the Open University Conferred on Dr. Yossi Vardi and Prof. Brenda Gourley

"We live in extraordinary times," said Prof. Brenda Gourley, Vice-Chancellor of the Open University, UK, and one of two recipients (along with Dr. Yossi Vardi, a pioneer in the field of international technology), of an Honorary Fellowship of the Open University of Israel, conferred at the spring graduation ceremonies.

Speaking at one of two graduation ceremonies, at which 1,228 graduates, including 173 in Master's programs, received their degrees (with two more ceremonies to be held in September with a similar number of graduates), she said, "Never before have so many been so prosperous, benefited from such dazzling technology and achieved, on average, such levels of

education. And yet, never before has there been so much poverty, so much preventable disease and so much need for education.

"This is a century in which the extremes have to be addressed. Education is fundamental to the life of our planet, and the wonderful thing is that we have the means, through technology and our own ingenuity, to bring education to so many. What we have to learn is how to share our common wealth – and share we must."

Referring to the OUI's Pe'er Project and others like it around the world, Prof. Gourley noted that "the Open Education Resource unit is a marvelous step in the right direction. The Web

makes it possible for all to learn. My hope is that we embrace these new discoveries in the knowledge that they may be central to solving the problems of the 21st century."

Dr. Yossi Vardi spoke of the valuable work that the Open University does "not only because of the knowledge it imparts but also because it closes gaps among those from many different backgrounds. It is also known as one of the pleasantest institutions in Israel. In my world of development and technology, it's well known that if a graduate comes from the Open University, he or she is hard-working and willing to make the extra effort."

Guest speakers were Prof. Stanley Fischer, Governor of the Bank of Israel, and Minister of Science, Culture and Sport, Galeb Majadle.

Prof. Fischer paid tribute to the achievements of the graduates, who for the most part had taken on the burden of working as well as studying, and stressed the fundamental importance of education.

Citing statistics of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), he noted that in many respects, such as the number of students studying at tertiary level, Israel scores well compared to other countries. However, in other ways, such as the relative decrease in expenditure per student from 1995-2005 compared to OECD countries, the Israeli education system has shown itself to be ineffective. Student achievements, he said, are relatively low; some educational facilities don't even provide basic mathematics, science and English. The reasons for the decline in education in Israel include the variety of educational systems (Arab, secular, religious),

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a slowing of growth in expenditure on education, the brain drain and the fact that the recommendations of the Dovrat and Shochat commissions on education reforms have not been implemented.

Minister of Science, Culture and Sport, Ghaleb Majadle noted that he himself had studied at the Open University, as had his wife, and he knew personally

how hard its students work and how high the standards of the university are. "I see in the Open University a system that is important for Israeli society, particularly for those on the periphery, to whom it offers equality of opportunity," he said.

Prof. Gershon Ben-Shakhar, President of the Open University of Israel remarked that for the past 30 years, the

Open University has taken upon itself the challenge of providing higher education to anyone who wanted it, and at the same time, ensuring that the quality of that education is at least as high as that of any other university in Israel. The Open University demands a great deal from its students, but the result has been that its graduates are in demand in the workplace because of the qualities of independence and hard work that it fosters.

Dr. Yossi Vardi has made long-standing contributions to the development and advancement of technology, industry and commerce in Israel, as one of the pioneers of high-tech and Internet in this country. While still in his twenties, Dr. Vardi was co-founder and CEO of one of the first and largest software houses in Israel, Tekem, as Director-General of the Ministry of Development, and as Director-General of the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. He was involved in a broad range of fields, among them software, Internet, water and energy, and he served on the boards of numerous industrial concerns. Dr. Vardi's contributions have forged a breakthrough which established Israel's reputation in the forefront of international technology, from founding Mirabilis, whose resounding success inspired a generation of young Israelis, to establishing dozens of high-tech start-up companies, serving as advisor to leading international Internet companies such as AOL and Amazon and to lecturing at important professional and economic world conferences. He has received many awards and citations, including the Prime Minister's Award for lifetime achievements in promoting Israeli high-tech, the Industrial Award from the Israel Union of Industrialists, and the Ramniceanu Entrepreneurs Award from Tel Aviv University. In addition, he has worked to help close social gaps in Israeli society, addressing the needs of students from deprived backgrounds, new immigrants and the children of foreign workers. In the field of higher learning, Dr. Vardi has been involved as a researcher in Operations Research, establishing the Bi-National Industrial Research and Development Fund, serving on the Boards of Trustees of the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and as a member of the Council and of the Executive Committee of the Open University of Israel.



Prof. Brenda Gourley has achieved a reputation for excellence in the field of higher education as Vice-Chancellor of the Open University, UK and formerly as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Natal in South Africa. Prof. Gourley serves as chief academic and administration officer of the Open University, UK, striving to promote social justice and using education as the vehicle to achieve that end. Dedicated to the Open University mission of bringing quality higher education wherever it is sought and to all those who wish to learn, she focuses on advancing the educational activity of the institution and enhancing its work. The Honorary Fellowship was conferred in tribute to her important work in the global arena of higher learning, developing educational strategy and creating collaboration among universities the world over. She served as Chair of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and as member of the Board of the International Association of Universities and the Longer Term Strategy Group of Universities of the UK. She has been awarded honorary degrees from the University of Nottingham in England, the University of Abertay in Scotland, Richmond University in Virginia and the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan. Dr. Gourley is committed to broadening access to higher education, leading the OpenLearn project, utilizing state-of-the-art technologies and offering resources and learning programs of the Open University on the Internet for the benefit of all who thirst for knowledge, wherever they are.