

Foreword

This report summarizes the first year of my term as President of the Open University. For me, this was a fascinating year during which I became aware of the uniqueness of the university and encountered its dedicated workers.

Completing the Dorothy de Rothschild Campus in Raanana and the move to the new campus were the focus of our activities this year. Though the construction of the campus was not entirely completed, we moved as planned: the warehouse and distribution center moved in March and the other university units moved in September. In spite of the difficulties and the fact that much of the furniture was not ready, we began working at our new campus immediately after the holidays. It should be noted that the move was completed successfully thanks to many devoted employees who worked around the clock during the transition period.

Soon after the move to Raanana, we held the inauguration celebrations during which we took the opportunity to thank all the individuals and organizations that contributed to the building of the campus. In spite of the fact that construction and repairs were going on all around us, the ceremonies were exceptionally well-organized and were a huge success.

The 2003-2004 academic year, unfortunately, was a year of budgetary difficulties which stemmed from a reduction in income: allocations from the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC – *Vatat*) decreased and, at the same time, the anticipated increase in enrollments did not transpire. As a result, we were forced to cut down on expenditures during the year, and in particular, to change our preparations for 2004-2005, with a budget based on conservative revenue estimates. This change forced us to eliminate non-essential activities, to keep tutoring costs at a level which reflects enrollments, and to streamline many procedures and activities.

In addition, a committee, chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, was appointed to examine the structure of the Open University. Its mission was to suggest ways to make operations more efficient and to save money in the future.

At the same time we began negotiations with the PBC regarding our demand to change the PBC's model for budgeting the university to a model like that of all the other universities and colleges budgeted by the PBC that takes into account the outputs of the OUI. We have prepared such a model and submitted it to the PBC. Thus far, we have reached an agreement with them that standard university tuition for the OUI is the tuition for a course with regular tutoring. As a result, from now on, students at the OUI will pay tuition for 20 courses (instead of 18, as was the case to date). However, any courses beyond those paid for, which are needed to complete degree studies, will be tuition-free (instead of only 4 courses, as was the case to date).

This year changes were also made in the Statutes and General Regulations of the Open University, as well as in the procedures for appointing and promoting faculty.

In 2003-2004, we made preparations to offer the new graduate degree in Education, and in its first semester (Fall 2004), some 150 students are registered. In addition, we added several programs of study this year, including a B.A. in Social Sciences – Emphasis on Education: Learning Disabilities, and programs in Economics and Management with divisions of studies in the Humanities (the Arts, Literature and Music). This year we also began to teach a large number of new undergraduate and graduate courses.

Intensive development of courses continues in all departments. However, we established a new development policy which emphasizes revision and updating of old courses, with new courses mainly developed only when they are needed to complete study programs which have been approved.

This year we began to work on a number of new academic programs, including an undergraduate degree in Cognitive Studies, graduate programs in Psychology (Social Psychology and Neuropsychology), undergraduate degrees in the Humanities (in Film Studies and in Music), and an undergraduate degree in Bioinformatics (which has been submitted to the Council for Higher Education). We are offering new combinations of fields in the dual-disciplinary programs (Chemistry and Economics, Chemistry and Management, Chemistry and Education, Economics and Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Chemistry). Several of our programs are awaiting a response from the CHE, and others have been approved and only require final authorization.

Research activity at the Open University moved forward this year: Three research projects supported by the Israel Science Foundation were begun this year, and another three projects which received support from competitive external funds will be carried out in 2004-2005. The work of the Research Authority, together with the Chais Research Center for the Integration of Technology in Education, as well as projects carried out by *Shoham* and funded by Yad-Hanadiv, aim to enhance the integration of innovative technologies in teaching.

A discussion on the status of course coordinators was again on our agenda this year and a committee, headed by the President, was set up to deal with this issue, on the understanding that this group is central to the Open University, and in fact supervises and manages all tutorial activities. The committee's mission is to redefine the role of the course coordinators, to correct distortions in determining the scope of their position, to propose a promotion track for them, and to increase their involvement in the University's academic bodies.

This year the University continued its efforts to expand the access to higher education for different groups in Israeli society. We have established a team headed by the Dean of Academic Studies to examine problems unique to our Arabic-speaking students and to propose ways for the University to answer their specific needs; we have continued our contact with the IDF in order to increase the number of soldiers studying at the Open University while examining the option of offering tutorial sessions at military facilities and bases; we began a project in cooperation with the Ashdod municipality with the aim of integrating outstanding high school students in studies at the Open University; and we continued to consult various entities in the ultra-orthodox sector in order to expand the accessibility of the University for this sector.

In Project Russia, we continue to develop courses. This year we made it our goal to enable students in this project to receive an Open University degree on the basis of their studies in the CIS.

Finally, I would like to thank the wonderful staff of the Open University. Thanks to their dedication and hard work, we were able to fulfill our obligations – obligations which were particularly difficult this year.

Gershon Ben-Shakhar
President, The Open University of Israel