

האקדמיה הצעירה הישראלית  
الأكاديمية الشابّة الإسرائيليّة  
THE ISRAEL YOUNG ACADEMY



# A Survey of Early Academic Career Scholars in Israel



# A Survey of Early Academic Career Scholars in Israel

(Led by committee members: **Prof. Liat Ayalon**, **Prof. Ehud Nakar** and **Prof. Maya Schuldiner**)

During the course of 2015, the Israel Young Academy conducted a survey among scholars in Israel in order to understand their main needs. The survey targeted academics who had begun their work on a tenure track during the preceding 10 years at one of the research universities in Israel and at the Weizmann Institute of Science.

**Responding to the survey were 594 scholars**, comprising about **one third** of all the young researchers who began work during the previous decade and whom the committee contacted.

The demographic data show that the young researchers in Israel who started working during the previous 10 years on a tenure track are on average, 40 years of age, generally married and parents of two or three children. They did their doctoral work in Israel and their post-doctorate abroad. Most are at the level of lecturer or senior lecturer (still without tenure).

Since the questionnaire included about 40 questions and there were many options for adding free text, there were also many opportunities to analyze the responses. The Young Academy chose to focus on attributes that were shared by the population of scholars independent of the institution where they worked.

The survey indicates that most of the scholars were satisfied with the time they spent abroad doing their post-doctorate and from the process of returning to Israel and absorption. In contrast, in the process of preparing for a university position, it seems there is room for improvement. The young researchers report on the lack of information at the stage of submitting an application for the job and when starting out at work. The findings show that mainly, there is a lack of guidance needed for carrying out administrative roles, for coping with administrative systems, and in how research grant application systems operate. Many furthermore noted that the workload of teaching and administration during the initial years at work make it very difficult to conduct research. This point stands out particularly in the humanities. Many of the reports stress the lack of sufficient consideration of scholars who are parents of children of kindergarten and elementary school age, especially in setting the times for seminars and meetings.



In general, the scholars are satisfied with the options for receiving external research grants and most report that the funds they have recruited enable them to conduct the research of interest to them. At the same time, a point repeated in many of the reports was the significant lack of funds for traveling to scientific conventions abroad and for collaborations abroad.

Most of the young researchers are satisfied with the level of the students in Israel and from their ability to recruit them for continuing M.Sc and PhD studies. Yet, the difficulty in recruiting post-doctorates is conspicuous and needless to say, the lack of experienced graduate research students at the post-doctoral stage impairs the ability to conduct ambitious, long-term research projects.

A point of concern which arose from the survey is that in almost all of the topics examined in the survey there is a large gap between the satisfaction level of scholars in the humanities and the social sciences and the rest of the scholars. The conclusion drawn from the survey is that young researchers in the humanities and the social sciences are held at a disadvantage in almost all areas both by the universities and by senior colleagues.

## **Following the survey findings, these are the committee's recommendations:**

1. To formalize a systematic acceptance and intake process, and to that end, it is recommended that:
  - a. Official documents be prepared which can be accessed on each university's website and which describe the university's job application and acceptance process.
  - b. An absorption department be created for handling all aspects common to new hires such as administration, housing, education institutions for children, employment for spouses, etc.
  - c. An entity be responsible for assimilating and guiding the young scholars. This body would provide the tools for the researchers' acclimatization into the university.
  - d. A veteran researcher be appointed as a guide for each young researcher starting out at the university.
2. To emphasize the importance of reducing new researchers' teaching and administrative obligations during the first year of employment, and to enforce such accommodation. To consider expanding relief to two years.



3. To aim to increase transparency as much as possible in the process of tenure and promotions, which by its nature is confidential; for example, to prepare official documents for each university which explain the process of candidacy for tenure, the nature of the requirements, and the timetable.
4. To increase the options for intra-institutional funding for young researchers' participation in conferences and international collaborations.
5. To establish an entity whose objective is to recruit foreign post-doctoral students interested in conducting research in Israel.
6. To be considerate of parents when fixing the times of seminars and meetings.
7. To work towards improving the situation in the social sciences and the humanities, part of which is reflected in the survey. This situation is a problem which deviates from the topics covered by the survey and which requires systemic treatment. Within the framework of the Young Academy, there is a committee whose aim is to advance the treatment of issues specific to the social sciences and the humanities. Nonetheless, there are two issues which require immediate attention:
  - a. It seems that the attitude of the veteran faculty toward the young scholars is insufficient in some cases. Action must be taken to raise awareness to the problem and to resolve it.
  - b. Absorption grants in the social sciences are insufficient. Since in most cases the budgets required in these fields are much smaller than the absorption grants typical in the natural and life sciences, it is possible to significantly alleviate this problem with an investment of a reasonable allocation.

The Young Academy's Humanities Committee recently formulated a plan of action for promoting various topics the survey uncovered. So as to disseminate the questionnaire's conclusions and discuss solutions, the Survey Committee members issued a leaflet with the survey results, and they are meeting with all the university heads in the country for a face-to-face conversation regarding the survey results.



## The process of returning to and resettling in Israel

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
To what extent has the requirement to gain experience overseas in order to be eligible for tenure in Israel been prohibitive for you?	3.38	3.21
Have you been accepted to the institution of your choice?	8.42	2.37
To what extent has your hiring process been conducted impartially, and on a strictly professional basis?	6.97	2.63
How has living abroad affected your family?	7.13	2.85
How have the costs associated with living abroad affected your standard of living?	5.67	2.74
Has your family settled back well in Israel?	7.14	2.62

## Preparation for and intake in current position

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
How supportive have been senior members of your department / faculty, and how much good will have they shown?	7.58	2.49
How methodical has been the guidance that you have received from senior members of your department / faculty?	4.98	3.26
How supportive have been other young members of your department / faculty?	6.35	3.13
How much guidance and preparation have you received for administrative roles?	2.62	2.78
How much guidance and assistance have you received in connection with grant applications and requests for research funding?	5.14	2.98
How much help have you received with understanding the administrative system?	4.45	2.92
How supportive has the administrative system been of your work and research?	5.22	2.89
To what extent do you feel that the way you have been treated was influenced by your gender, religion, nationality or age?	3.33	3.37



	mean	SD
In your opinion, how high is the quality of research done around you (by other members of your department / faculty)?	7.41	1.85
To what extent has the work space you were provided with (office, lab, etc.) suited your needs?	6.93	2.82
Has your work space been made ready on schedule?	5.45	3.90
Do the libraries or databases in your institution serve your needs adequately?	7.20	2.73
Does your university provide you with adequate access to online databases and contents?	7.73	2.48
Is the university promoting and supporting collaboration among young academics from different faculties and disciplines?	4.79	3.11

## Teaching and administration

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
To what extent has your teaching load affected your ability to do research?	7.24	2.70
To what extent have non-scientific job requirements (sitting on committees, etc.) affected your ability to do research?	5.79	2.74
To what extent have you been given course release on your first year?	5.87	3.56



## Research funding

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
Have you received an adequate absorption budget?	6.36	3.44
Have you been able to secure adequate budgets from research funds for granting scholarships and paying salaries?	6.95	3.34
Have you been able to secure adequate budgets from research funds for purchasing equipment and consumables?	6.51	3.50
Have you received adequate support from your institution for purchasing equipment and consumables?	6.13	3.20
Have you received internal research funding from your institution?	5.45	3.49
To the best of your knowledge, are consumables and equipment more expensive in Israel than abroad?	8.21	2.00

## Students

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
Have you been able to recruit M.A. and PhD students?	7.52	2.76
How high is the quality of Israeli students, compared with other countries?	6.77	2.11
Have you been able to recruit postdoctoral students?	4.65	4.11

## Promotion and tenure

0 denoting “not at all” and 10 – “absolutely”

	mean	SD
To what extent has the process of tenure tracking or promotion been conducted impartially, and on a strictly professional basis?	7.18	2.84
To what extent has your promotion process proceeded quickly and efficiently?	5.01	3.36
To what extent have requirements and criteria for your promotion been transparent and clear?	4.74	3.27



