

Dead Sea Working Group to Enliven Education

In June 1999 the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) of the Israel Council for Higher Education held a joint international workshop on The Future of the Research University (*The FORUM*, Summer 1999). The workshop brought together Israeli academics and decisionmakers and recognized international experts — such as Sir Brian Fender, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and Prof. David Litster, Vice President for R&D and Dean of the Graduate School of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) — to discuss the problems and opportunities facing research universities in today's new climate. Participants shared their country's experiences and their implications for Israel's ongoing restructuring of its system of higher education.

To further explore these challenging ideas and options, and to lay the groundwork for future action, the Israel Academy and PBC held a followup *ad hoc* meeting of selected senior Israeli participants at the Dead Sea (November 22-22, 1999). A Central Steering Committee, headed by Israel Academy President Prof. Jacob Ziv and PBC Chairman Prof. Nehemia Levtzion, was set up to oversee the subsequent work of several subcommittees, the first of which will deal with:

- * Increasing Public Understanding of Academic Research
- * Funding Israeli Academic Research
- * Industry-Academic Policy and Relations.

Prof. Levtzion noted that the first committee could also help Israel's PBC and scientific community present a better, more positive case to the Government. The second committee could provide useful feedback on the PBC's allocation formulas, which determine the size of national block grants to Israel's universities and colleges. Prof. Ziv noted that competitive grants programs, such as the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) provide the PBC a useful way to promote Israel's existing research strengths, but that a new umbrella organization is needed to include mechanisms for proactively addressing Israel's weaknesses and starting new fields. Prof. Joshua Jortner, former President of the Israel Academy and former PBC Chairman, noted the advantages of such *ad hoc* organizations as TELEM (*The FORUM*, Autumn 1998) and FIRST, which meets this need without a proliferation of new official organizations.

Prof. Jortner noted that the industrial funding of academic research is quite different from public funding and often carries different conditions (e.g., secrecy). Prof. Zehev Tadmor, former President of the Technion, agreed and noted that industrial funding usually comes from personal contacts and a close common interest in specific practical problems. It is thus largely noncompetitive in nature, and scientific quality may suffer. Prof. Ziv noted that faculty credibility must be maintained and that Israel, while encouraging industrial-academic cooperation, must develop more explicit policies for industry-related faculty research, absence and return. The participants agreed to meet biannually to report their progress on these and other critical issues.