Gap Year (Working Title)

*An Examination of Gap Year Tracks for Arabs in Israel as a Bridging and Connecting Mechanism Promoting High-Quality and Broad-Based Integration in Israeli Society*

Why is It Important?

Recent years have seen an increase in the resources invested in young people in Arab society in schools and in higher education. Following these investments, and as the result of social and economic processes in Arab society, significant improvements can be seen in matriculation rates and in the number and proportion of Arabs in higher education in Israel. Despite these trends, one of whose outcomes is a significant rise in the number of graduates in Arab society, various difficulties are still apparent in terms of maximizing the potential among young Arabs to integrate in higher education, and even more severe problems are evident in terms of the actual integration of Arab graduates in the workplace.

Based on our experience at the grassroots in this field over recent years, and following discussions with others active in the field, we have reached the conclusion that a key factor that must be addressed in this context is the readiness of young Arabs to integrate in economic life, due to their young age by comparison to their Jewish peers. This is compounded by their relative isolation from the rest of society prior to the higher education stage. These factors mean that a young Arab woman who was an outstanding high school student may not manage to realize her capabilities. A young Arab man may be unable to cope with cultural differences and the demands these present.

The ideal point for intervention is between high school and higher education—between the period of structural segregation and the period of structural integration. The period following high school marks the last opportunity prior to integration to close gaps and to improve the ability to integrate and to exploit potential. Through high-quality and focused action, we believe that it will be possible to prepare these young people for what lies ahead, significantly narrowing the gaps (academic, matriculation, and identity) between them and their Jewish peers. In addition to narrowing gaps at the entry point to higher education, we believe that a program at this stage will also enhance achievements during the academic stage, encourage quicker and more successful integration in the workplace, and ultimately help to lift the glass ceiling facing the participants.

For more detailed discussion of the issue of motivation and the reasons that led us to examine this subject, see the Rings article (attached). The article highlights the need to prepare young people for integration in the majority group, given their past in segregated tracks and gaps in terms of age, language, and culture. These issues are detailed further in the appendixes to this document.

The arena: Several programs are already active for Arab society during the stage between high school and higher education/employment. The formats of these programs vary and they are intended for different target populations and goals. Numerous programs operate in Jewish society during the same stage, whether by way of preparation for military service or as a year of volunteering. Numerous and diverse programs can be found abroad, offering additional models for minority groups beyond those found in Israel. See below for a preliminary mapping of frameworks and programs we will seek to learn from as we examine the existing tools.

Stakeholders: We believe that broad-based and high-quality action for Arab society during the stage between high school and higher education will have many beneficiaries, from the individual level up to the level of the Israeli economy. Maximizing participation throughout the process will encourage both a more precise examination of existing programs and, ultimately, the development of the best possible model with the best chances for broad inculcation.

The appendixes provide detailed information regarding the arena and stakeholders.

**Program / Work Process**

**Preliminary process prior to research**

• Building a logical model for the program and a provisional attempt to define criteria for success (to be examined and validated at later stages)

• Establishing an Advisory Committee and consulting with relevant bodies: The goal of the Advisory Committee is to ensure that the project stays on track and does not miss key points.

A. The Advisory Committee will include: senior Arab academics, representatives of the business sector (Arabs and Jews), experts in informal education, and representatives of foundations. In addition, we will attempt to locate individuals from other populations who can help enrich the discourse (Haredim, members of the Ethiopian-Jewish community, etc.). We will also seek to include government representatives on the committee.

B. In light of the large number of participants, we may divide the group into a Senior Advisory Committee alongside a number of round tables with stakeholders meeting throughout the process. In addition, of course, we will also hold regular consultations with numerous other players throughout the process.

C. A round table for the initiators and directors of the existing programs for Arabs, in order to include them in the process and learn from their grassroots knowledge and extensive experience in the field.

• Building a coalition for the process – we will locate partners from each of the following groups and involve them and consult with them throughout the process.

A. Understanding the government’s role in the program – understanding motivations, aspirations, and influence leverages.

B. Understanding the role of academics in the program – the possibility for partnership during the building phase with academic institutions that express an interest in the program rationale.

C. Understanding the role of employers in the program – we will attempt to create partnerships with key players and to recruit them in the planning process, and hopefully in the program itself.

D. Understanding the role and part of parents and the community in the process – ongoing work at every stage and on every issue.

**Research stages:** The stages here are based on the order of the process, but it is very possible that some processes will be undertaken simultaneously, both due to timing considerations and due to the actual flow of information based on the meetings with the different players.

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| Research question | Secondary questions | Actions |
| What gaps among young people in Arab society must be addressed in order to realize their potential as they integrate in higher education and in the workplace? | • What gaps do academic institutions identify as factors that impair success?  • What gaps do employers identity?  • What gaps do young Arabs identity in entering higher education and employment? | • Review of the literature – mapping the field  • Focus groups and/or surveys  • In-depth interviews with academics, employers, and young people |
| What types of responses exist regarding the gaps identified – in programs not intended for Arabs in Israel | • What gap year and pre-academic programs exist abroad?  • What existing programs abroad emphasize the integration of minorities in higher education and employment?  • What are the existing programs for Jewish society in Israel – pre-army academic programs and tracks? | • Review of gap year programs in Israel and around the world, including location of programs intended for minority groups.  • Contacting the program directors to obtain more detailed insights |
| What are the existing programs in Israel focusing on Arab society? What responses do they provide for the identified gaps? | • What are the goals of these programs and for what purpose were they established?  • How do they meet the areas requiring reinforcement as identified in the previous stage? | • Meetings with the initiators and directors of programs  • Comparison between the existing programs in terms of their response to the clusters of gaps identified |
| What is the operational model of the existing programs for Arabs in terms on the following key issues: | • The precise definition of the target population for the program (study level, age, socioeconomic profile, gender, etc.)?  • How is the target population recruited to the program?  • How are parents and families mobilized to support the program?  • Location of activities: Is there an advantage to programs where the participants sleep away from home; should this be throughout the program or only in certain parts; and what are the main costs and benefits in terms of the location of the activities?  • Social activities – what part do these play in the program? What actions maximize the achievement of the program goals (in terms of strengthening capabilities)?  • Strengthening academic capabilities: At what stage of the program is this addressed? What contents should form the focus? Ideal point for relevant entry exams (psychometric, etc.)?  • Academic orientation: What is the ideal process? How does the orientation interface with the participants’ readiness and maturation during the program?  • Regarding all these issues, and others that emerge – we will seek to understand the main contribution of the programs and areas requiring improvement as identified by the participants and graduates of the programs, and to understand the key obstacles identified by them and by the program directors | • Meetings with the initiators, directors, and coordinators of the programs and focus groups with graduates and participants. We are aware of the sensitivities this raises, but we hope that the participatory approach we bring will help promote trust and involvement (see above – joint round table) |
| Additional examination of the target population | • Based on the findings from our discussions with the existing programs, we will attempt to identify whether there is a specific target population that we believe will make a particularly significant contribution to the program | • The first step will be to examine whether the research literature from recent years (particularly the research by Brookdale accompanying the program of the Budgeting and Programs Committee) mentions any specific group that manages to reach higher education but needs reinforcement in terms of the elements identified in the early stage of the process |

**Intermediate Stage: Building Models and Cost/Benefit Calculations**

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| Building/selecting the ideal models for gap year programs focusing on integration in higher education and employment (requiring an academic background) | • We will attempt to match the elements requiring reinforcement with the existing responses in Israel and around the world  • We will seek to develop several models for ideal responses. The emphasis and the attempt to be innovative will focus here on how, at the end of the year, the participants will be ready to integrate successfully in higher education, and ultimately in employment | • During the consolidation of this process, we will consult extensively with various stakeholders: government, academia, employers, and Arab society  • Brainstorming workshops – we will hold several brainstorming workshops with key figures, young people, and graduates from Arab society. The emphasis here will be both on instances when we do not find full correlation between the elements requiring reinforcement and the existing responses, and on an attempt to challenge existing thinking and identify creative solutions  • At the end of the process, we will aim to develop between one and three models (some of the models may be based on existing programs in the field) |
| Understanding the benefits of a program of this type: Listing benefits (including in financial terms) for individuals, communities, and the nation from the operation of a high-quality one-year gap program over four timeframes: | 1. Immediate – the gap year itself  • Individual – what is the practical/financial gain for the participant (saving costs in preparation for higher education, etc.)?  • Community – benefit from social actions (naturally depending on the ultimate format of the program)  2. Short-term – higher education  • Individual – better choice of field of study; reduction of time required to complete the degree; enhanced achievements  • Academic institutions – reducing switching of courses and dropout; higher utilization and stronger academic level, enabling a greater focus on weaker Arab students (due to the level of maturation among students coming from the programs)  • Council for Higher Education / Budgeting and Programs Committee – more heterogeneous dispersion of Arab students; higher representation of Arabs among graduates; improvement in achievements of Arab students (macro)  • Nation – reducing the duration of studies – greater availability for the job market  • Community – enhancing confidence in the ability of young people to integrate and succeed in a wide range of study fields  3. Intermediate – entering the job market after studies  • State (also relevant for individuals and community) – enhancing the correlation between the study subject and actual profession; reducing time required for integration in the job market (in a quality position); maximizing potential  • Community – enhancing confidence in the ability to integrate in a broader range of fields in the economy  4. Long-term – throughout career  • Academia – increase in number of graduates continuing to advanced degrees (not a key focus, but could be a positive side-effect of the program)  • Individuals (as well as employers and state) – building a high-quality and ambitious career  • Community – graduates of the programs will strengthen the resilience of the community and serve as role models | • Conservative analysis of the improvement we believe will be achieved in terms of the young people’s achievements  • Translating the improvement into financial terms, when possible |

**Completion of the Process**

A. Deliverable – a comprehensive policy paper discussing the possibilities for a gap year for Arabs in Israel. In addition to our direct use of the paper in order to reach a decision on the continuation of the process, it will also serve as a knowledge resource relating to: 1) The existing situation in Israel and how these programs respond to the issue of integration in higher education and employment commensurate with education; 2) Existing possibilities abroad and in Israel that are not currently exploited; 3) Possible models for the development of additional programs of this type in Israel; 4) Soft components requiring reinforcement in order to maximize the potential in the field (relevant for schools and academia).

B. Understanding the next step: In this stage, we will attempt to understand how we can move forward in order to launch the program in October 2020:

1. Will we choose a specific model that we want to implement on a pilot basis?

2. If we are considering several models, we will need to understand how to examine them (several parallel pilot programs?)

3. Is there an option for a joint initiative with the government/academia?

4. Understanding the place and role of philanthropy.

C. The conclusions from this stage will lead to the decision whether there is a path to move forward. The goal is to answer this question by the end of December 2019 or thereabouts.

1. If the answer is affirmative, we will need to understand how to accompany the pilot with research in order to examine its success.

**Appendixes – Additional Details**

A. Key components we anticipate the solution will need to address

B. Players in the field and stakeholders

A. Key components in the solution: In order to bring the young participants to the required level of maturation, we will need to address the following aspects, which relate to two spheres: individual abilities/capacities and the environment.

1. Areas of activity for improving personal capabilities:

• Independence: Like their Jewish peers, Arab high school graduates also need to develop their personal capabilities outside the educational framework. While young Jews undergo this process during their military service (when within a few months they assume significant roles and yield high self-value), most young Arabs do not have an analogous experience enhancing their independence and enabling them to manage without their parents, teachers, and community. For young Arabs, this transition can be expected to be challenging, particularly when we factor in other aspects relating to a new environment that is radically different in almost every respect from that they have known until this stage.

• Cultural encounter: As noted, in addition to their young age, Arabs entering higher education have had virtually no prior encounter with the Jewish population. This encounter exposes significant gaps in communication due to both linguistic and cultural factors.

• Identity: Identity is an important component in the ability of minorities to integrate on an equal footing with the majority group. Young people are required to bridge the cultural differences between Arab and Jewish society, while in many cases their own identity is not sufficiently consolidated to cope with these differences.

• Preparation for higher education:

A. Choosing an area of study: In recent years there has been a significant improvement in the representation of Arabs in numerous study areas. However, strong patterns still appear to apply in the choice of study area, due in part to incomplete information, but mainly to a limited belief in their ability to integrate in all areas of academic activity. As a result, the choice of subjects by young Arabs is not always consistent with their actual aspirations and abilities.

B. Coping with studies: The dramatic change experienced by young people from Arab society as they enter higher education requires them to reach the highest academic level so that they can cope with challenging studies. It is also essential for them to be able to write in Hebrew and read in English at a high level in order to keep pace with their academic studies. Another vital aspect is the need to develop critical academic thinking, without which it is not possible to succeed in higher education.

2. Environmental support:

• Family and community: In order to enable the young participants to grow during the gap year, and thereafter in higher education, it is vital to recruit the support of their families and community and to ensure that they fully support the participants. This means that the families and community must take part in the process, understand the possibilities in academia and in the job market, and appreciate the young participants’ aspirations.

• Academia: Academic institutions must be involved in the process from two directions:

A. Strengthening academic capabilities and providing academic orientation and an introduction to the fields of study.

B. The gap year must be implemented in cooperation with academic institutions in order to secure recognition for the program and to ensure that the participants enjoy a tangible return for their investment of a year.

• Employment market: This is our ultimate goal. Naturally we are referring to employment commensurate with education, leading the young participants to self-realization and prosperity. As part of the program we will seek to enhance the level of mutual acquaintance: A) Increasing the participants’ awareness of the diverse opportunities available to them, as well as the standards and demands presented by the institution to applicants; B) Connecting employers to the participants from Arab society so that they can appreciate the tremendous potential involved.

B. Stakeholders and Interested Parties

1. Players in the field – programs for young people

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| Similar programs for Arab society | Parallel post-high school frameworks |
| Masar – Rothschild Caesarea: leadership program | Pre-academic programs |
| Desert Stars: Building a leadership group in Bedouin society | Civilian Year of Service |
| Ajeec: Two programs:  • Volunteer year (Taliyah) – including volunteering in preparation for higher education  • Community year – a year of joint volunteering by Jews and Arabs, together with dialogue and familiarization activities | Pre-military academies (Mechinot) – not relevant for Arab society, but relevant regarding some content areas |
|  | Public Emissaries (program for Haredi youth) |
|  | Community colleges (abroad) |
|  | Gap year programs abroad for minority groups |

2. Stakeholders

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| Institutional | Philanthropic | Other Bodies |
| Ministry of Education | Yad Hanadiv | Abraham Fund Initiatives, Sikkuy |
| Ministry of Finance | Rothschild Caesarea | Arab graduates and students |
| Economic Development Authority, Ministry for Social Equality | Kellerman Foundation | Major employers in the economy |
| Youth Authority, Ministry for Social Equality | Blaustein Foundation | Arab businesspeople / investors |
| Labor Branch, Ministry of Welfare | Task Force | Rowad program, Riyan centers |
| Council for Higher Education | Portland Trust | School principals  High-school students |
| Academic institutions | One8 Foundation | Mossawa |
| Student Union | SVF | Al-Rowad, Hasoub |
| Local authorities |  | Collective Impact |
|  |  | Tsofen |