

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

1. The Forty-sixth Session of the Scientific Council of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was held in Lyon on 27–29 January 2010.
2. In making this response, the Director thanks the Scientific Council for its work and especially for the useful comments and advice on all items discussed at the 46th Session.

GENERAL REMARKS

3. The Director is pleased to note the increasing dialogue with the Scientific Council Chair and Vice-Chair through the regular teleconferences held jointly with them and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Council. In addition, he was pleased to be able to report on the increased contribution of Scientific Council members during the year through participation in ad hoc Advisory Groups at the Agency.
4. The Scientific Council discussed the review procedures (Guidelines adopted at the last Governing Council, cf. Resolution GC/51/R11) following the positive experience of the Section of Infections (INF) Review Panel and decided to use the same procedure for the next review in 2010. The Director will ensure this is implemented for the peer-review of the Section of Genetics.
5. The Scientific Council noted that although at the last meeting a need was felt for a repeat BEC Cluster Review in late 2010, since then the scientific structure of the Agency had changed. In addition, the Section of Cancer Information (CIN) is now headed by Dr David Forman. There was therefore not such an urgent need for a re-review of the Section. The Director therefore draws attention to the fact that the Section will be reviewed in 2011, following the schedule in the IARC Medium-Term Strategy 2010–2014 (see Document GC/52/6).
6. In response to a request from the 51st Governing Council for more detail in the Scientific Council report, the Scientific Council Chair and the Secretariat provided the Rapporteur with a comprehensive template to record the discussion, advice and recommendations under each agenda item. This procedure was tested in the hope that it would make it easier for the Governing Council to have an overview of the Scientific Council's work.

7. Following the procedure described above, the Director believes that this was a useful experience which helped the Scientific Council in the production of its Report. He will suggest that such a procedure be used again next year.

RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC ITEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The Report of the meeting of the 51st Governing Council:

- During discussion of the Governing Council's report, the Scientific Council encouraged consideration of new Participating States from Africa or Latin America and suggested to invite China and Brazil to participate at the 52nd Governing Council. In response the Director discussed this with the Governing Council Chair and invitations were issued to both states. The Director will explore the possibility of an African Participating State in the medium-term.
- The Scientific Council asked how the departure of senior scientific staff affected ongoing research and other activities at the Agency. In response the Director has conducted a review of all ongoing studies with senior colleagues at IARC and solutions have been identified on a project-by-project basis. Notification of these decisions has been given to external collaborators and funding agencies.
- The recommendations made by the ad hoc Advisory Group for Cancer Registration have been incorporated by the Director into the IARC Medium-Term Strategy 2010–2014 (Document GC/52/6) as presented to the 52nd Governing Council meeting.

9. The Scientific Council made the following observations and noted the Director's response to the MCC Cluster Review, held at IARC in November 2008:

- The Scientific Council appreciated the changes made by the Director in response to the MCC review in 2008.
- The Scientific Council was impressed by translational research between epidemiology and basic sciences within these research Groups.
- The Scientific Council strongly supported the ongoing restructuring of the Biobank, and asked for feedback on the operation of the Biobank activities at its 47th session in 2011.
- The Scientific Council strongly supported the creation of a separate Section of the IARC Monographs.

10. In relation to the IARC Biobank, the Director has pursued the recruitment of the Laboratory Manager (P2 grade) to be Head of the Laboratory Services and Biobank Group and also the Scientific Officer (P4 grade) who will be the line manager of the latter post in the Director's office. Dr Hainaut is Head of the Biobank Steering Committee and the Committee has been constituted with defined Terms of Reference. The Biobank will be placed on the agenda of the Scientific Council at its 47th session.

11. In relation to the IARC Monographs back-log, resources for an additional one year temporary post for an epidemiologist have been provided by the Director and additional external editorial assistance has been engaged to ensure that the strict timelines are adhered to.

12. The overall recommendations for the Section (INF) and the Infections and Cancer Biology (ICB) and Infections and Cancer Epidemiology (ICE) Groups were discussed. Both the ICB and ICE Groups received an *Outstanding* rating on the scientific quality and a *Perfect fit* of the relevance of the work to the mission of IARC from the Review Panel.

13. The Scientific Council strongly supported the conclusions in the Report from the Review Panel that the Section be adequately supported for their ongoing work, and the Director confirmed that this was his intention. The Director will report on the actions taken as a result of the Review at the next Scientific Council session.

14. The draft IARC Medium-Term Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2010–2014 (document SC/46/7 – MTS) was presented to the Scientific Council for discussion.

15. The Scientific Council had a long discussion of this important document. The Scientific Council supported the creation of new Groups and Sections to support the aims of the Medium-Term Strategy. Overall there was strong support and the Scientific Council made some suggestions to the Director regarding the following topics:

- To place more emphasis on the interdisciplinary work at the Agency and recognize this as one of the major strengths.
- To contact and elicit feedback from larger external funding bodies such as NIH, EU, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other potential funders that are essential for the external funding of the Agency.
- To balance the resources between projects and activities in high-resource countries and low- and middle-resource countries in accordance with IARC Statute.
- The need to focus on areas where the Agency is uniquely placed to carry out research was noted.
- To clearly state the areas within the Statute that the Agency is not going to emphasize.

16. The Scientific Council recommended that the IARC Medium-Term Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2010–2014 be approved by the Governing Council at its 52nd Session in May 2010.

17. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for its support to the Medium-Term Strategy (2010–2014). The Director made amendments to the document presented to the Scientific Council in order to reflect the above comments and these are included in the final document (GC/52/6) presented to the Governing Council.

18. The Director presented the suggested Key Performance indicators (KPIs) for the Agency (Document SC/46/9). The priority for IARC is to focus on measures that are linked to its overall mission, core activities and/or the Medium-Term Strategy.

19. A number of potential KPIs were presented to the Scientific Council focused on the following areas: research funding; publication; describing the cancer burden; education & training (courses and students/fellows); and information dissemination.

20. In discussion, the Scientific Council expressed its view that it was not fully convinced of the use of KPIs for the Agency as they do not reflect the complexity of the Agency activities, particularly its mission to carry out research on cancer in low- and middle-resource countries. Rather the Scientific Council felt that the current peer-review process was an excellent method of performance review. The Scientific Council recommended that the Director include in his report to the Governing Council some of the elements covered in document SC/46/9 to reflect the breadth of the Agency's activities.

21. In response to the comments of the Scientific Council the Director has incorporated a number of the areas covered by the proposed KPIs into his written and oral reports to the Governing Council (see Document GC/52/3). This information will be reported on an annual basis. The document on KPIs presented to the Governing Council (GC/52/9) reflects the discussions at the Scientific Council session.

22. The Director presented a proposed IARC Education and Training programme, which included a refocusing of the Agency's objectives and approach to this priority area. The Director requested that the Scientific Council consider the proposals in this document and advise him on the future priorities and opportunities within the context of the IARC Medium-Term Strategy (2010–2014).

23. The Scientific Council acknowledged the importance of the Education and Training programme at the Agency. This is an area in which the Agency can make a unique contribution. The Scientific Council made some suggestions and comments in the following areas:

- Acknowledged the value of the post-fellowship support;
- Agreed that in some circumstances fees could be charged for participating in IARC courses, based on ability to pay;
- Adding soft skills such as grant writing and project management to the fellowship training;
- Encouraged the creation of an IARC Alumni Association;
- Supported the idea of short-term fellowships; and
- Supported seeking partnerships for IARC educational and training activities.

24. The Scientific Council recommended that the Governing Council approve the proposed directions for the IARC Education and Training programme.

25. The Director therefore presents the proposal to the Governing Council for consideration at its 52nd Session (see Document GC/52/7). The Director has also assigned additional funds to permit the appointment of a Senior Visiting Scientist (Dr Rodolfo Saracci) to support the early phase of the development of the Education and Training Group and has co-located members of the Group on the 11th floor of the tower building.

26. Purchase of scientific equipment: as described in IARC Medium-Term Strategy (2010–2014), one of the priorities of the Agency is to perform interdisciplinary research, pioneering the integration of laboratory sciences and epidemiological research.

27. Obtaining funding for major items of equipment through competitive grant applications is difficult. The request for purchase of equipment is first submitted to the Scientific Council for its consideration and is then submitted to the Governing Council to consider investment from the Governing Council Special Fund at its 52nd session in May 2010.

28. The following items were proposed for purchase: Next-generation DNA sequencing instrument; Gas chromatograph; and High-performance liquid chromatography/mass spectrometry/mass spectrometry system (HPLC/MS/MS). The Scientific Council considered these items and recognized the urgent need for updating the laboratory equipment at the Agency. The Scientific Council also discussed the need for recruitment of key staff, in particular in the area of bioinformatics, and the possible need for updating the infrastructure (data storage and network).

29. Based on the full cost of the implementation of these changes, the budget should be recalculated. Before proceeding, the Director was advised to establish the full cost and the annual running costs, particularly in relation to the next-generation DNA sequencing.

30. With the above reservations, the Scientific Council recommends that the Governing Council approve the above-mentioned purchase of this scientific equipment.

31. Following the advice of the Scientific Council the Director and senior colleagues made a further assessment of the needs of the Agency in respect to next-generation sequencing. The modified proposal for investment in new equipment is presented to the Governing Council for consideration in document GC/52/13B.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

32. The Director thanked the outgoing Chair of the Scientific Council, Dr Harry Comber, for his commitment to the work of the Agency. His advice was particularly valuable during a challenging period of transition. Dr Comber will also continue one more year on the Scientific Council.