

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) FOR THE AGENCY

Introduction

1. A document (SC/46/9) on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was presented to the Scientific Council at its 46th Session. The current document integrates the original presentation to the Scientific Council, the comments received on that document and a resulting proposal from the Secretariat to the Governing Council for its consideration.
2. KPIs are in use within many public and private institutions around the world. Research institutions are asked for indicators which show evidence of scientific quality, transparency and innovation. Regardless of how KPIs are defined, they remain controversial and there is no widely accepted best-practice approach to their implementation.
3. Individual researchers are assessed and evaluated throughout their careers by measures such as peer-review. KPIs monitor institutional performance and may be interpreted as the application of performance assessment at the institutional level.
4. Ideally, KPIs provide data that allows the evaluation of progress towards key institutional objectives or a strategic direction. It is agreed that the distinct and broad remit of the Agency should be reflected in reporting to its stakeholders.

Application of KPIs to IARC

5. The Agency has distinct groups of stakeholders. While the driving force for the development of KPIs has been the Governing Council, the recognition of other groups of stakeholders (national and international organizations, scientific collaborators, fellows, students etc.) serves as a stimulus to reflect on what is being done to serve these groups and how well we are doing in their eyes.
6. One of the challenges of identifying appropriate KPIs is selecting what to measure. The KPIs should provide data that allow evaluation of progress towards a strategic goal. The priority for IARC is to focus on measures that are linked to its overall mission, core activities and/or the Medium-Term Strategy. KPIs could then be used to monitor progress and indicate trends along the way. KPIs can also be used to set targets.

7. Common KPIs that are measured and reported by research, scientific or academic institutions may inform KPIs developed for the Agency, but such indicators do not fully reflect the breadth of the Agency, or its unique mission and remit.
8. The distinct remit of the Agency implies that information generated by KPIs cannot easily be used for purposes of external comparison. Questions also arise as to how KPIs would be interpreted and used in governance or in shaping research at the Agency.
9. The development and implementation of explicit KPIs would signal a shift in the Agency's culture, affecting staff at all levels. Appropriate KPIs may assist in shaping activities by being a catalyst for discussion Agency-wide. For KPIs to be relevant, they must encompass areas within the control of the Agency, reflect its unique role and contributions, be accepted by staff and be measurable.
10. Viewed from an administrative perspective, there is the risk that KPIs may be interpreted as another layer of administration, accompanied by additional work, data collecting and complex reporting regimes.
11. From the research perspective, KPIs can be viewed as an extension of what is currently being monitored within the Agency's research groups and institution-wide, without the pressure of specific targets. In this respect a key decision is whether the use of formal KPIs to *monitor* activity should be extended to the development of specific *targets*.
12. The introduction of KPIs presents an opportunity to re-engage IARC staff in the *Mission* and *core values* of the Agency, emphasizing the importance of the Medium-Term Strategy which defines core activities and strategies for a specified period. The identification, communication and implementation of KPIs could play an important role therefore in translating strategy into action.
13. At the same time KPIs run the risk of unduly changing or adapting people's behaviour to achieve targets. KPIs are meant to be applied to measure the performance of the institution, not the individual or group; yet, some targets may result in undue pressure on specific individuals or groups within the Agency.

Discussion of the Scientific Council

14. Prior to the discussion of the Scientific Council, the Agency identified a number of potential KPIs drawn from the approaches previously taken through the IARC Scientific Coordination Office, examination of KPIs from other relevant organizations and from internal discussions both with individuals in different parts of the Agency and at the IARC Senior Leadership Team.
15. A number of areas covering the broad remit of the Agency were presented to the Scientific Council in document SC/46/9 focusing on the following areas of activity: publications; extra-budgetary income; cancer registration coverage; fellows and students; courses; information dissemination and access to publications.

16. The Scientific Council discussed document SC/46/9 and the proposed KPIs. Members of the Council shared their own experiences within their home institutions. Concern was expressed regarding the validity and appropriateness of KPIs in a scientific institute where peer-review is the performance assessment measure of choice.

17. Though the peer-review process is imperfect, the Scientific Council in its report (see document GC/52/4) expressed its support for this as its preferred mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the achievements of the Agency. There are a number of activities within the Agency that are subject to additional peer-review such as applications for extra-budgetary funding or publication of scientific results.

18. A key peer-review process is the rigorous scientific review which IARC sections undergo on five-year cycle. In 2009 the Section of Infections was reviewed and during 2010 the Section of Genetics will be reviewed. The thoroughness of the scientific review process is seen to be a more informative and relevant indicator in the context of the Agency.

19. As a result of the discussion of the Scientific Council, it was recommended to the Director: "The Scientific Council, deeming the current Review process an excellent method of performance review, was not fully convinced of the use of KPIs for the Agency as they do not reflect the complexity of the Agency, particularly its mission to carry out research on cancer in low- and middle-resource countries. 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."

Proposal

20. Whilst taking account of the comments of the Scientific Council regarding peer-review, the Secretariat also recognizes the need to provide reports to the Governing Council with a more transparent methodology, covering the major areas of Agency activity and allowing analysis of trends over time. In particular, whilst the more traditional research activities of the Agency may be well-captured by peer-review, some of its broader remit may not be so easily monitored and evaluated in this way. There is also a need to assess activity which cuts across the individual research groupings of the Agency.

21. As a consequence, in addition to peer-review of research activity, a number of areas proposed in SC/46/9 have been pursued in a structured but pilot manner and presented in the Director's Report to the Governing Council (see document GC/52/3). Specifically these comprise an analysis of scientific publications, information dissemination and publishing, grants and contracts, and education and training (principally courses and fellows). Other areas from SC/46/9, such as the coverage of cancer registration in low- and middle-income countries, would be better evaluated within the peer-review process of the Section of Cancer Information.

22. The Secretariat proposes that the above areas are subject to standard mechanisms and formats of reporting through the annual Director's report to the Governing Council. These data will be presented over a rolling four year period to permit the Governing Council to evaluate trends in activity over time. In addition, the measures will be further refined through comments from the Governing Council.

23. No specific targets for individual KPIs are proposed at this stage. This is because the setting of targets may be counter-productive and because without accurate data on the current level of activity, setting appropriate targets is problematic.

24. In addition to the peer-review process by the Scientific Council and the above standard reporting, the Director may provide supplemental information by identifying and reporting on specific areas linked to the Medium-Term strategy or to core activities which illustrate the impact of the Agency.

25. The Governing Council is requested to consider this proposal and to advise the Director on the implementation of performance measures, recognizing the unique nature of IARC's mandate.