

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

1. The Director acknowledges the valuable support of the Scientific Council and its engagement in the work of the Agency through evaluation and advice, at the annual Scientific Council meeting, peer-review meetings and through participation in ad hoc advisory groups. The regular teleconferences with the Scientific Council Chair and Vice-Chair, together with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Council, have provided more continuity between formal meetings as well as improved dialogue between the two Councils.

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEETINGS

2. A major consideration at the 47th session of the Scientific Council was in relation to the balance between scientific advice and more administrative aspects of the work of the Council. The Scientific Council and the Director agreed that the format of the Scientific Council meeting needed to be changed to create more emphasis on the former element.

3. In conjunction with the above assessment, the Director proposed that the peer-review of Sections be combined with the annual Scientific Council meeting in January/February, as opposed to holding a separate meeting in October/November each year. This proposal was supported by the Scientific Council for a trial period, given that it would bring more scientific discussion into the January meeting, engage the whole Council more actively in the peer-review process and reduce the administrative and financial burden on the Agency.

4. The January meeting would thus be extended from the current two and a half days and run for four and a half days with the first two days focused on the peer-review process. As per current practice, experts external to the Scientific Council would be called upon to form part of the peer-review Panel together with Scientific Council members. Given that two scientific Sections need to be reviewed each year, as per the IARC Medium-Term Strategy 2010–2014, the peer-review would proceed in parallel sessions.

5. The Director and Scientific Council therefore request that the Governing Council approve the decision to incorporate the peer-review process into a single meeting in January as from 2012 for a trial period of two years. A two-year period is requested to permit lessons learned from scheduling the 2012 meeting to be incorporated into the process in 2013 in order to permit a full evaluation of the new approach.

PEER REVIEW OF SECTIONS OF INFECTIONS AND GENETICS

6. The Director was pleased the Scientific Council recognized the positive actions taken following the peer-review of the Section of Infections and noted with satisfaction that these supportive changes had been welcomed by the Section and Groups Heads.

7. In relation to the peer-review of the Section of Genetics, which had taken place on 20–21 October 2010, the Director welcomed the recognition by the Scientific Council of the rapid response he had made to a number of their recommendations: the decision to move ahead with next-generation sequencing acquisition; to locate the responsibility for this facility within Genetic Cancer Susceptibility (GCS); and to invest in bioinformatics expertise through in-house appointments and external collaboration.

8. Given the recent appointment of Dr James McKay as Head of GCS at the time of the peer-review exercise, a further "light-touch" review of the developing aims of GCS at the 48th meeting of the Scientific Council was suggested. The Director agreed and will include this on the agenda for that meeting.

PURCHASE OF SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT

9. The Director appreciated the support of the Scientific Council in relation to the proposed purchase of core items of shared scientific equipment. Since the meeting in January 2011, some savings in the Director's budget have been identified to purchase one item (DNA quantification system) on the regular budget and hence this has been removed from the request to the Governing Council (see document GC/53/13A).

10. As suggested by the Scientific Council, opportunities to identify support for scientific equipment purchases through extra-budgetary sources are considered wherever their inclusion is permitted by the funding agency; the IARC Grants Office has the task of supporting this initiative through the application process.

PROPOSED PROGRAMME (2012–2015) AND BUDGET (2012–2013)

11. The Director appreciated the support of the Scientific Council for the Proposed Programme (2012–2015) and Budget (2012–13) and submitted this document to the Governing Council for consideration (see document GC/53/7).

12. The recognition by the Scientific Council of the professionalism in preparation of the document, reflecting a consistency between the IARC Medium-Term Strategy (2010–2014), the organizational structure, the proposed programme and the budget was appreciated.

13. The Director noted the concerns of the Scientific Council with respect to the financial resources of the Agency. As well as proposing a viable level of financial support in the current proposed programme and budget, the Director is actively seeking to strengthen the financial position of the Agency by seeking additional Participating States, increased extra-budgetary resources and additional voluntary contributions from existing Participating States.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

14. The Scientific Council recommended that the Governing Council approve the two additional proposed KPIs, i.e. measurement of the access to and downloads from the Agency's web sites and assessment of the scale of external collaborations, in order to complement the standard set of IARC KPIs already incorporated into the Director's report.

15. Following the Scientific Council meeting an evaluation of web metric tools has been conducted and a decision made to use a web analytics tool called Urchin. This tool has the advantages of reprocessing and analysing historical data, thus allowing the Agency to accurately and comprehensively evaluate web traffic and quantify interest in specific IARC areas and activities.

16. The Scientific Council also made a request that the Agency should measure its success in catalyzing effective cancer registration in low- and middle-income countries. An international stakeholders meeting on cancer registration worldwide is to be held in Lyon in July 2011 and at this meeting appropriate KPIs in relation to this activity will be discussed. Following that meeting the Agency will explore the possible KPIs and report back to the Scientific and Governing Councils.

FEEDBACK ON THE OPERATION OF THE BIOBANK ACTIVITIES

17. The appointment of Dr Maimuna Mendy as Group Head of the Laboratory Services and Biobank (LSB), has led to significant advances in organizing and managing both core laboratory facilities and the Biobank resource, as noted in the report of the Scientific Council.

18. The planning for maintenance and replacement of key items of equipment is a vital support to the Agency's research programmes. The inventory of bio-specimens and the availability of this information on-line will provide an increasingly valuable resource to the international cancer research community.

19. The creation of the Laboratory Steering Committee and the Biobank Steering Committee helps to ensure that the services in LSB remain focused on the needs of the scientists and their international collaborators. The cost recovery approach will support retention of high-quality technical staff on extra-budgetary funding as well as maintenance of an adequate infrastructure.

20. The Director noted that the Scientific Council had recommended to the Governing Council to approve the proposed directions for the Biobank activities and seeks support to continue these developments.

DISCUSSION ON THE BIOSTATISTICS GROUP (BST) ACTIVITIES AT IARC

21. The development of biostatistics at the Agency has been extensively considered over the last two years. The Scientific Council supported the approach taken in having a Biostatistics Group (BST) which cuts across the vertical organizational structure of scientific Sections. The Director is in the process of implementing a number of the key features highlighted by the Scientific Council and the Advisory Group on Biostatistics.

22. These include:

- making time available for biostatisticians to devote to methodological developments
- including a member with specific expertise in applied statistics in peer-review committees where methodological research is being evaluated
- including statistical expertise on the IARC post-doctoral Fellowships Selection Committee
- including the Head of BST in the development of post descriptions for all statistician posts across the Agency and on the corresponding interview panels
- ensuring all research Groups at IARC have access to statistical advice
- creating academic exchanges with centres of excellence in statistics, biometry and bioinformatics

23. All IARC Sections/Groups which include epidemiology now have statisticians among their staff. A mechanism to provide access to adequate statistical support in the other laboratory Groups will be addressed.

24. As requested, the Director will keep the Scientific Council informed regarding the implementation of the BST activities by reporting back at the 48th session of the Council next year, including on the request for reassurance concerning statistical support across the scientific Groups.

PROPOSAL REGARDING RENEWAL OF SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEMBERS AND LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP

25. Following the Scientific Council recommendation that no change currently be made to the process of appointing and replacing Scientific Council members, the Director proceeded with requests to eight Participating States to provide names of potential Scientific Council members for consideration at the 53rd Session of the Governing Council (see document GC/53/17).