



## **PROPOSAL TO UNDERTAKE AN EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF IARC**

1. The research activities of the Agency are reviewed and evaluated through a variety of procedures that differ in scope and time interval, providing considerable flexibility and breadth in terms of opportunities for review. These procedures are summarized briefly below.
2. It is noteworthy that the Agency is also scrutinized on its financial and operational activities through external and internal (World Health Organization (WHO)) audit as well as Governing Council (GC) review but these processes are not described further here.

### ***Governing Council***

3. The GC is composed of representatives appointed by the national governments of each IARC Participating State. On an annual basis the GC receives reports from the Director and the Scientific Council (SC) in order to evaluate the work of IARC. The Director also specifically reports to the GC on responses he/she has made to the different modalities of peer-review detailed below. The GC considers all aspects of the Agency's activities and passes resolutions to which the Secretariat is bound to adhere.

### ***Scientific Council***

4. The SC is composed of 25 scientists, one per IARC Participating State, selected on the basis of their expertise and not as national representatives. The SC covers the full spectrum of the Agency's scientific activities from basic science through to implementation research and cancer control. On an annual basis the SC reviews different aspects of the IARC research programme and reports its findings to the GC. The SC also considers and advises on areas where the Agency may take fresh initiatives. The SC can request that a specific topic be placed on the agenda for review at any one of its regular meetings.

### ***External Peer-Review Panels***

5. Each of the scientific Sections of the Agency is subject to in-depth peer-review on a five-year cycle. The Peer-Review Panel is composed of members of the SC plus selected external experts in order to provide the full range of expertise required for the review exercise. The review looks at the scientific quality as well as the "fit" to the Agency's mandate and to the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS). The results of the peer-review are considered by the SC and GC. The Director reports one year later to the SC and GC with his/her responses to the review.

### ***External Ad hoc Advisory and Working Groups***

6. The Director, the SC and GC may decide to constitute an ad hoc advisory or working group to provide advice on a specific area of Agency activity. These groups are typically composed of a combination of SC members and external experts to complement any missing areas of expertise from among the SC or where additional views are sought. The outcome of the advisory or working group may be discussed at the subsequent Council meetings.

### ***External Competitive Peer-Review***

7. The Agency submits competitive bids for research projects in line with its agreed MTS. Agency scientists also submit around 350 manuscripts for publication each year. In both cases the work of IARC is subject to peer-review prior to grant awards or journal acceptance.

### ***Medium-Term Strategy (MTS)***

8. The scope of the Agency's work is defined within the MTS. The current MTS stretches from 2016–2020; it is anticipated that the next MTS will cover the period 2021–2025. This would necessitate the MTS 2021–2025 being submitted to the SC in early 2020 (56<sup>th</sup> Session) for adoption by the GC in May 2020 (62<sup>nd</sup> Session). Alternatively, given the timing of the election of the new Director, the GC might consider adopting the MTS 2021–2025 at its 63<sup>rd</sup> Session in May 2021, with the existing MTS running an extra five months (the previous MTS 2010–2014 was extended by one year in May 2013 (Resolution [GC/55/R11](#)) to cover the years 2010–2015 in order to align it with the proposed programme). The start of the new MTS will coincide with the Agency occupying the "Nouveau Centre" in mid-2021.

9. The process to develop the MTS is defined by the GC and implemented by the Secretariat. The previous exercise comprised several steps, overseen by a Joint GC/SC Working Group (including representation from WHO) as well as consultations with SC and GC members, leading global cancer experts and a wider group of stakeholders including professional groups, civil society and concerned individuals. The overall outcome of the consultation process helped shape the MTS 2016–2020 presented by the Secretariat to the SC and ultimately adopted by the GC at its 57<sup>th</sup> Session in May 2015 (Resolution [GC/57/R8](#)).

### ***Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of MTS***

10. The MTS 2016–2020 is itself subject to a mid-term evaluation with a review document to be prepared in 2018 for submission to the SC and GC for discussion during their Sessions in 2019. This evaluation was developed in response to a specific GC request for a process that would provide an assessment of the Agency's overall progress in implementing the MTS, by monitoring achievement of results, assessing their alignment with the strategic priorities and their contribution to attaining the stated high-level objectives.

11. The general approach and the framework of indicators to be used in the MTS evaluation were developed by a Working Group composed of members of the SC and GC, a representative of WHO and members of the IARC Secretariat, and were subsequently discussed and endorsed by the SC and GC during their sessions in 2017. The evaluation will be based on a combination of two complementary approaches: a series of representative case studies illustrating the impact of key achievements in each of the main areas of the MTS, accompanied by a set of quantitative

indicators on outputs and outcomes from activities across the Agency to monitor results and their alignment to the MTS priorities.

***Request for external evaluation: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland***

12. In 2017, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland sent a document to the IARC Director suggesting an independent external evaluation of IARC be undertaken in the near future, focusing on the Agency's role in the international cancer research environment (see Annex below). The Ministry noted the requirement to enhance cooperation and coordination between IARC and WHO; this is a subject addressed in Document GC/60/13. In addition, the Ministry expressed concern at the "unwillingness of Participating States to increase their assessed contributions" while noting that "maintaining capacity in biobanking, highly sophisticated technologies and the processing and storage of genomic data will place increasing financial demands on the Agency and the Participating States."

13. The Ministry also stated: "Given that operating an international research laboratory is not among the core functions specified in Resolution WHA18.44 on the Establishment of an International Agency for Research on Cancer, the time would seem opportune to reconsider the strategic role of the Agency."

14. While the purpose of the current document is not to address specifically the above points, it is important to highlight a number of relevant features of IARC's current activities:

- The multidisciplinary research approach followed by the Secretariat, including enhancing international biobanking, is at the core of the MTS 2016–2020 as adopted by the GC in its Resolution GC/57/R8.
- The current MTS is in complete alignment with the mandate of IARC, as defined in its [Statute](#), to promote international collaboration in cancer research. The Statute states that to achieve its objectives: "The Agency shall make provision for planning, promoting and developing research in all phases of the causation, treatment and prevention of cancer".
- Coordination and participation in multicentre collaborative studies remain central to IARC's approach but it is notable that a majority of such modern epidemiological studies require multi-disciplinary research and expertise.
- On the advice of the SC and as approved by the GC, IARC has adopted a balanced approach between a modest level of investment in equipment in-house, e.g. medium capacity next-generation sequencing or metabolomics platforms, or outsourcing to national facilities, e.g. for high-throughput next-generation sequencing. This approach is scrutinized on each occasion where new equipment investment is made.
- The past investment in laboratory equipment, including the biobank, has come through regular budget, extrabudgetary sources, programme support costs and Governing Council Special Fund; no investment in equipment for the "Nouveau Centre" is envisaged to come through additional assessed contributions on Participating States.
- Equipping the biobank as a state-of-the-art facility in the "Nouveau Centre" is based on the SC advice; the resource mobilization is intended to achieve this without additional assessed contributions from Participating States.

15. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland noted that an “independent external evaluation of the Agency would be useful” and that “its recommendations could be taken into consideration in the formulation of the Agency’s medium-term strategy for the years 2021–2025.”

16. The Director visited Helsinki in November 2017 to discuss the request from the government of Finland, meeting with the Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services and the GC Representative. The Ministry referred to a number of proposed areas to be covered by the evaluation:

- alignment of the activities of the IARC with its mandate.
- collaboration between the Agency and WHO in cancer control.
- the importance of operating an international research laboratory, a biobank and a next-generation sequencing platform for the success of the Agency.
- the sustainability of operating an international research laboratory and a biobank.
- the scope for adding more value and impact.

17. The SC should play a central role in any strategic evaluation of the Agency. The proposed evaluation is directly in line with the SC mandate whose purpose is to provide strategic advice and guidance on scientific direction to the GC from a perspective external to and independent from the Agency.

18. Given the forthcoming requirement for the Agency to develop the MTS 2021–2025, recognizing the timing of the arrival of the new Director, and noting the flexibility of the oversight available to the GC through the different review procedures described above, the Secretariat suggests that the external evaluation proposed by the Finnish Ministry be an integral part of the development of the MTS 2021–2025, drawing on the expertise of the SC and incorporating complementary expertise where the GC considers necessary.

19. The GC could adopt a specific, detailed procedure for preparation of the MTS 2021–2025 at its 61<sup>st</sup> Session in May 2019, informed by the outcome of the mid-term review of the MTS 2016–2020. The discussion at that Session could be supported by a document from the Secretariat proposing options and a timetable. This procedure would draw on the necessary external expertise required, in addition to the SC members, and would work to a scope defined by the GC, taking account of the proposal by Finland.

## Annex

■ MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

21.12.2017  
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### **A PROPOSAL TO UNDERTAKE AN EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE IARC**

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was established in 1965 by a resolution of the World Health Assembly as the specialized cancer agency of the World Health Organization. The objective of the IARC is to promote international collaboration in cancer research. With a global mandate, IARC provides an evidence base for cancer prevention by describing the occurrence of cancer, understanding its causes and evaluating interventions and their implementation. IARC generates new evidence both through the collation, analysis and evaluation of data as part of independent expert review and through the conduct of interdisciplinary research projects. IARC's membership has grown to 25 countries. It has its own Governing Council. The Agency's headquarters is in Lyon, France.

The Agency's budget for the biennium 2018–2019 is approximately €44 million. In addition to the assessed contributions from Participating States, the Agency currently has €10–12 million of annual extrabudgetary expenditure won by competitive bidding.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland would like to suggest that an independent external evaluation of the IARC focusing on the Agency's role in the international cancer research environment be undertaken in the near future.

The close working relationship between IARC and the WHO, which has a normative function in cancer control, allows research findings of the IARC to be translated effectively into timely policies. However, due to an apparent lack of clarity, the respective roles of the IARC and the WHO in cancer control have recently been discussed at the highest level. The need to further enhance cooperation and coordination was recognized by the Governing Council of the IARC in its 59<sup>th</sup> Session in May 2017.

The identified need to acquire expensive new technologies for conducting multidisciplinary research in the Agency would seem to be at odds with the unwillingness of Participating States to increase their assessed contributions. The Agency has already established a global cancer biobank with biological samples from 1.5 million well-characterized subjects. IARC is currently looking for sources of funding for the installation in the "Nouveau Centre" of a fully automated biobank and state-of-the-art laboratory facilities. The Agency is upgrading its next-generation sequencing platform and strengthening the capacity to process and analyze complex data sets. Maintaining capacity in biobanking, highly sophisticated technologies and the processing and storage of genomic data will place increasing financial demands on the Agency and the Participating States.

Given that operating an international research laboratory is not among the core functions specified in resolution WHA18.44 on the Establishment of an International Agency for Research on Cancer, the time would seem opportune to reconsider the strategic role of the Agency. Are next-generation sequencing, biobanking and state-of-the-art laboratory infrastructure essential for the Agency's success? Or should the future efforts of the IARC be reoriented towards a stronger coordinating role, placing an even greater emphasis on multicentre collaboration?

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We believe that an independent external evaluation of the Agency would be useful. We are not aware of any external evaluation of the Agency in the past. If an evaluation were to be undertaken in the near future, its recommendations could be taken into consideration in the formulation of the Agency's medium-term strategy for the years 2021–2025.

The proposed external evaluation would make recommendations regarding the Agency's appropriate role in the international cancer research environment. Issues to be addressed could include the following:

- alignment of the activities of the IARC with its mandate
- collaboration between the Agency and the WHO in cancer control
- the importance of operating an international research laboratory, a biobank and a next-generation sequencing platform for the success of the Agency
- the sustainability of operating an international research laboratory and a biobank
- the scope for adding more value and impact

In view of the fact that the budget of the Agency has already been approved for the next biennium, the evaluation may need to be financed from external sources.

