

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 54TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

1. The 54th Session of the IARC Scientific Council (SC) was held in Lyon on 31 January–2 February 2018. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Governing Council (GC), Drs Mads Melbye and Stephen Robbins, were in attendance. The current document presents a brief summary of the discussions and responses from the Director in relation to areas not addressed elsewhere on the agenda of the 60th GC Session.

Presentation of the Director's Report

2. The Director presented a selection of scientific highlights from the IARC Biennial Report 2016–2017 and reported on the discussions from the 59th GC and on updates from the 53rd SC. The SC thanked the Director and congratulated the Agency's staff on the quality and breadth of the work presented in the IARC Biennial Report 2016–2017.

3. The SC emphasized the importance of IARC's activities in cancer surveillance and in supporting the implementation of prevention programmes. The SC recognized and emphasized the importance of laboratory research and the maintenance of key in-house expertise for the success of IARC's mission.

4. The SC asked questions about the activities affected by the reduction in the requested budget for 2018–2019. SC members expressed concern about the impact of these budgetary constraints on reduced training opportunities for young scientists in particular from low- and middle-income countries, notably as a consequence of the suspension of the IARC Postdoctoral Training Fellowship programme and the organization of the IARC Summer School biennially instead of annually. The Director is continuing to seek extrabudgetary funds for these activities including through requests for additional voluntary contributions from Participating States.

5. The SC emphasized the importance and global impact of the Monograph and Handbook Programmes, and of the need to ensure that the selection of agents and timing of their evaluations should continue to be solely science driven and decided by the IARC Director. The Director is adhering to these principles in establishing procedures to increase cooperation with WHO henceforth (see Document GC/60/17).

Director's response to the Reviews of the Sections of Cancer Surveillance (CSU) and Environment and Radiation (ENV), held in January 2017

6. In line with the recommendations regarding the production of standard reports, the Director gave an oral presentation on the responses to the Peer-Reviews of both Sections.

7. The SC noted with satisfaction the successful actions taken since the review and thanked the Director and the CSU and ENV Section Heads for their responses to the points raised. The SC further emphasized the broader importance of cancer registration for public health and society, which is not adequately reflected in a review based solely on scientific criteria, and encouraged the allocation of additional regular budget resources to this activity.

IARC current status and future challenges

8. The Director presented his assessment of the current status and future challenges for IARC at the request of SC on the occasion of the last year of his tenure.

9. The SC commented on a number of points, including the need to address gender diversity at the leadership level, the potential for expanding research in areas of growing importance such as digital health and primary prevention strategies, and encouraged the ongoing dialogue with WHO on issues of hazard identification and risk assessment.

10. The Director has created a Women in Science Advisory Group that has been active in 2017–2018. The Group made recommendations which have resulted in a number of changes to, for example, recruitment procedures and support related to maternity leave. A new role of Equality and Diversity Officer has been created, with a place on the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The Director also began to address the gender imbalance on the SLT, consequent to a series of recent retirements of senior female colleagues, by changing the membership composition.

11. The SC thanked the Director for his leadership and congratulated him and the Agency staff on the extraordinary achievements over the last 10 years.

Presentation of posters by IARC scientists

12. The poster presentations again stimulated lively discussions between SC members and the IARC early- and mid-career scientists. In order to provide feedback on these discussions and an overview of the work presented, specific SC members were charged with reporting to SC on posters presented within their areas of expertise.

13. The SC expressed its appreciation for this session and for the quality and relevance of the research presented.

14. The Director noted the value the SC places on this interactive session and indicated that consideration should be given to allocating additional time to it at the next SC meeting.

Report of the activities of the Education and Training Group (ETR), 2015–2017

15. Ms Anouk Berger, ETR Group Head, presented the report of activities and achievements of the ETR programmes over the period 2015–2017. The SC suggested showcasing the positive feedback received from course participants on the ETR website, and encouraged IARC to explore collaborations with other institutions for its courses to contribute to academic degrees or to be accredited in Continuous Professional Development programmes.

16. The SC acknowledged the substantial achievements in the development of e-learning resources and congratulated ETR for the impressive portfolio of activities in the period.

Cross-cutting research themes – plenary feedback and discussion on parallel sessions

17. Three multidisciplinary research topics each involving multiple IARC Sections were presented, to seek advice from the SC on the development and implementation of the areas discussed. The three topics presented were: Large-scale cohort studies, including the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC); Public cancer databases; and World Health Assembly Resolution on Cancer (May 2017).

18. In order to stimulate more in-depth discussion with the SC the cross-cutting themes were presented in three parallel sessions, followed by a short plenary session where a summary of the most significant points discussed was presented by three SC rapporteurs.

19. The SC welcomed the presentations and discussions on all three cross-cutting topics, commenting that they were both useful and informative, and recommending that the format of the parallel sessions be maintained in future SC sessions.

20. The Director noted the positive response of SC members and IARC scientists to these interactive sessions. A similarly structured session should be scheduled for the next SC meeting.

Requests for support from the Governing Council Special Fund (GCSF)

21. The SC strongly recommended that the GC approves the allocation of GCSF funds for the purchase of scientific equipment and for the replenishment of the EPIC biobank, which it judged to be critical for future research activities in this major cohort. Furthermore, given the considerable uncertainty in the budgeting of the costs for the replenishment of the EPIC biobank, the SC recommended increasing the requested budget for this activity, with the understanding that unspent funds will remain in the GCSF.

22. The Director welcomed the endorsement by the SC and is asking the GC to consider this recommendation in Document GC/60/16.

Scientific Peer-Review of the Sections of Early Detection and Prevention (EDP) and Nutrition and Metabolism (NME)

23. The Director thanked the Peer-Review Panels and the SC for their constructive comments and recommendations and noted with satisfaction the high ratings received by both Sections on the scientific quality of their past work and future plans, as well as the perfect fit with the Agency's mission and strategy.

24. Responses to the suggestions and comments coming from the Peer-Review Panels will be addressed over the coming year and the Director will report back more fully on these actions at the next SC and GC meetings.

25. One specific point from the EDP review, but with wider resonance, concerned collaboration across research Groups and Sections. In order to enable greater collaboration, the Director plans to initiate a number of "cancer-themed" scientific exchange groups bringing researchers together from across the Agency. These themed groups will be led by mid-career scientists to provide a career development opportunity for these staff with respect to leadership skills.