

**DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO  
MOLECULAR CARCINOGENESIS CLUSTER (MCC) REVIEW,  
HELD AT IARC IN NOVEMBER 2008**

1. The Director notes with satisfaction the high overall evaluation assigned to the former Molecular Carcinogenesis Cluster, including the Groups led by Dr Hainaut (Molecular Carcinogenesis and Biomarkers Group (MCB)), Dr Herceg (Epigenetics Group (EGE)) and Dr Cogliano (Carcinogen Identification and Evaluation Group, (CIE)).
2. The two former Groups now comprise the Section of Mechanisms of Carcinogenesis (Head of Section, Dr Hainaut), namely Molecular Carcinogenesis (MOC) headed by Dr Hainaut and EGE headed by Dr Herceg. CIE is now a separate Section of IARC Monographs (IMO).
3. In respect to MOC the Council noted that "addition of another senior investigator and staff scientist would add more depth". This was responded to within the budgetary constraints and competing priorities by assignment of a new P2 scientist post to work under Dr Hainaut. The post is for a scientist with expertise in mechanisms of carcinogenesis and biomarkers but with a focus on application to epidemiological studies. This investment permits the MOC Group to support a key component of the Medium-Term Strategy of the Agency in the area of biomarker development. The above initiative also adds to the capacity of the Group to collaborate with other Groups and disciplines. Complementary investment in biomarker research is being made within the Section of Nutrition and Metabolism.
4. The Scientific Council recommended that the Agency should extend externally funded fellowships for "up to 4 (2+2) years". The Senior Leadership Team reviewed this issue in May 2009 and agreed to permit externally funded postdocs to be extended for up to three years without the need for the exceptional agreement of the Director for the third year.
5. The Council recommended that the investment in proteomics be considered by the new Director. The Agency does not have a proteomics facility and neither does it have scientific staff with long-term experience and track-record in proteomics. There is no plan to invest in this area at present, emphasis being placed rather on the opportunities for metabolomics in collaboration with the Centre Européen de Résonance Magnétique Nucléaire à Très Hauts Champs (CRMN Lyon), University of Lyon. Where required for specific research projects, proteomics research will occur through external collaborations.

6. The Council identified among the threats to MCB the need for excellent facilities including "state-of-the-art scientific equipment and its maintenance" as well as the requirement of "molecular biology and genetics/genomics". This analysis may well have been equally applied to EGE and other IARC laboratory research groups.

7. In respect to the above situation, the new Director established a Laboratory Working Group, comprising the leaders of all the Agency's laboratory research groups and key associated support staff, with objectives to review all aspects of core laboratory services and equipment and to advise the Director on required investment.

8. As a result the Agency was able to invest in 2009 in two key pieces of essential equipment: a Fluorescent Activated Cell Sorter and a Confocal Microscope, both items considered the highest priority by the Laboratory Working Group, replacing outdated items. These purchases were accompanied by other smaller items of shared equipment, including a BioRad gel documentation system and a Luminex machine.

9. Previously no provision was made in the budget for service contracts on major equipment items. This left the Agency's research projects inherently vulnerable to equipment failure. Prioritization within the 2010–2011 budget has enabled service contracts to be covered from the regular budget for the vast majority of items of shared equipment.

10. A regular budget allocation has also been provided to cover the full costs of liquid nitrogen for the IARC Biobank and a consumables budget for the core laboratory services and Biobank.

11. The Laboratory Working Group was replaced by a permanent Laboratory Steering Committee (LSC) which will continue to advise the Director on the requirements and priorities for investment in the equipment and services for the Agency. The Director looks to the discussion by the Council of a separate document (SC/46/10) prepared on advice from the LSC in this regard.

12. With respect to EGE, the emphasis of the Group is now orientated to understanding the role of epigenetic changes in response to putative environmental and lifestyle exposures. The Group is seeking to exploit opportunities in adult cohorts studies, such as EPIC, but also new opportunities in mother:child birth cohorts which have associated biobanks. Dr Herceg has been invited to join the Steering Committee of the International Childhood Cancer Cohort Consortium (I4C) subsequent to the Agency hosting an I4C meeting in November 2009. This creates new international networks for the Group and more widely for Agency scientists in a priority area for the Medium-Term Strategy 2010–2014.

13. As recommended by the Council, the Director was able to create a new P2 scientist position on the regular budget to focus on epigenetics applied to epidemiological studies. Dr Hernandez was recruited to this position in November 2009. In addition, an existing P4 staff member (Dr Krutovskikh) was reassigned to EGE to work in this area in order to explore the application of microRNA analysis to biobank specimens. Finally, as a result of the clerical review in the Agency the enlarged Group was assigned its own full-time secretary for the first time. This appointment will also provide support in developing grant applications.

14. In response to the need to separate the management and leadership tasks of the Biobank, a new governance structure has been established. A Laboratory Manager post (grade P2) was created to provide day-to-day management of the common laboratory services and the IARC Biobank in a newly created Laboratory Services and Biobank Group (LSB). The Laboratory Manager is guided by two committees, the Laboratory Steering Committee (LSC), chaired by Dr Tommasino, and the Biobank Steering Committee (BSC) (Chair to be appointed). A budget has been set for the LSB as mentioned above. The purpose of the BSC is to ensure the strategic developments of the IARC Biobank, at the same time releasing the senior scientists from day-to-day management.

15. The IARC Monographs was assigned the status of Section in order to provide greater profile to this core activity both within and outside the Agency. This also ensures the direct reporting to the Director, as supported by the Scientific Council review of MCC. In order to tackle the backlog in publication of the Monographs series, a strict timeline has been developed with regular review of progress and a completion date for volumes 92–99 by the end of 2010.

16. As a result of the clerical review one clerical post with experience of publications has been assigned to the Communications Group (effective January 2010) with flexibility to provide additional support to the Monographs programme as necessary. The requirement for additional support will be monitored during 2010 in relation to progress against the timeplan.

17. The six meetings in relation to volume 100 of the Monographs were successfully completed with experience gained by P2 level scientists in taking on the role of Responsible Officer for specific meetings.

18. Progress has also been made in improving access to the Monographs through the IARC website. The complete Monograph Volumes 50–91, 97 and Supplement 7 are now freely available in PDF format on the Monographs website, with earlier Volumes being added regularly. Whenever the outcome of a Monograph Working Group meeting warrants a public statement to be made, an IARC Press Release is published, which is aimed at the interested layperson.