

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT  
AND UPDATE FROM THE FORTY-SIXTH SESSION  
OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL**

1. The Forty-sixth Session of the Scientific Council (SC) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was held in Lyon on 27–29 January 2010. The Chair was Dr Harry Comber (Ireland) and Dr Henrik Grönberg was elected Rapporteur. Apologies for absences were received from Professor Yung-Jue Bang (Republic of Korea), Dr Florence Demenais (France), Professor Bart Kiemeneij (The Netherlands), Dr Hitoshi Nakagama (Japan), Dr Marina Pollán (Spain), Dr Viswanathan Shanta (India) and Professor Giulio Superti-Furga (Austria).
2. Unfortunately, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Council were both unable to attend the session as planned.

**General remarks**

3. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for its work and for its useful comments and advice. Both he and his colleagues have appreciated the leadership shown by the outgoing Chair of the Scientific Council, Dr Comber.
4. The Scientific Council provides support to the Agency in many ways: through the annual meeting in January, the peer-review process for individual Sections, the regular teleconferences between the Director, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Governing and Scientific Councils, and participation in ad hoc Advisory Groups. The increased involvement has been of benefit to the Agency and resulted in improved communication with the Scientific Council.
5. The third Scientific Council since the arrival of the current Director presents an opportunity to reflect upon how to make best use of the commitment of Council members to the Agency.
6. The current format of the Council meetings in January, whilst providing helpful views on various aspects of the Agency's activities, does not currently include the primary scientific peer-review. The latter process is achieved through a separate meeting in the autumn including both Council members and external experts. This additional meeting, whilst providing an in-depth review of great value, creates a significant administrative and financial burden for IARC and time demands on Scientific Council members.

7. In May 2005, the Governing Council (see Resolution GC/47/R10) endorsed the proposal to conduct a detailed scientific assessment of each Cluster, over a five-year cycle. In earlier years, the peer-review process was incorporated into the January meeting of the Scientific Council. The return to this format would provide a more science-based focus to the meeting in January as well as reducing the time and administrative burdens on both Council members and Agency staff. In addition, given that: 1) the Council has expanded to 21 members, with an increased depth and breadth of expertise and 2) the presence of nine scientific Sections at the Agency requires two Sections to be reviewed annually (to maintain a five-year cycle), the Director would like to propose to the Council that consideration is given to reintegrating the peer-review process into the January meeting. The IARC Senior Leadership Team is fully supportive of this proposal.

8. If such an option were accepted, the Council could work in parallel during part of the January meeting to review two different Sections, supplemented by external experts where judged necessary to complement Council members' expertise. Other Scientific Council business could be covered in a shorter time period, by relying on the distribution/circulation of written reports and their discussion. This would re-focus the Council meetings on core scientific evaluation and advice.

9. The Council is asked to consider this option and to advise the Governing Council on any changes to the current system.

## **Response to particular items and recommendations**

### *Peer-Review*

10. A detailed response to the Review of the Section of Infections (INF) can be found in document SC/47/5.

11. Although there had been some suggestions that the scoring system in the review process should be modified following the previous year's reviews, it had been decided that it should run in its present form for a while longer before any changes were made.

12. In the most recent review of the GEN Section the Director felt that whilst the current format of the peer-review process itself was appropriate, the scoring system – jumping from "Outstanding" to "Satisfactory", with no intermediate categories – did not provide enough subtlety in the grading system. This could be reconsidered by the Council for future meetings.

### *Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)*

13. The Director had presented a set of proposed KPIs. Members of the Scientific Council had expressed differing views, however, the consensus was that the proposed indicators did not adequately reflect the complex nature of the Agency's work. The reservation had also been expressed that more attention might be paid to bringing about improvements in the indicators than to responding to the Agency's real research priorities. The Scientific Council had recommended that the Director should include information in his written report to the Governing Council on the areas covered by the proposed indicators.

14. The Director presented a written report on the subject of KPIs to the Governing Council in May 2010 (see document GC/52/9), which included the views of the Scientific Council on the prime role of peer-review. He also incorporated into his report, as planned, the key performance indicator data over a four-year period but without any specific targets. The Governing Council appreciated the written report and asked the Director to further develop KPIs for comment by the next Scientific Council [in January 2011] and consideration by the Governing Council [in May 2011]. This can be found in more detail in document SC/47/7.

### *Education and Training*

15. The Scientific Council had approved the changes made by the Director, namely:

- ✓ providing/making available post-fellowship support, when fellows returned to their own countries;
- ✓ fees could be charged for IARC courses in some cases;
- ✓ new courses should be provided for IARC fellows on "soft skills", such as the preparation of grant applications or project management;
- ✓ an alumni association should be set up for former fellows;
- ✓ some short-term fellowships should be created;
- ✓ further partners should be sought for education and training activities.

16. The comments of the Scientific Council were incorporated into a report to the Governing Council and the proposals were supported (see document SC/47/3).

17. Over the last year the Education and Training (ETR) Group has initiated a set of generic training courses for all graduate students and fellows working at the Agency. More advanced courses are being developed in cooperation with other centres of excellence. The ETR Group has been exploring possible joint funding of post-doctoral fellowships with Participating States.

18. The development of the IARC alumni association is not a trivial task, particularly in light of the restrictions on the Agency's budget. However, the value of such a network is recognized and therefore a simple, web-based approach is being explored using "LinkedIn". This system is considered a convenient, accessible, cheap and flexible way to begin the construction of the IARC alumni network/association.

### *Purchase of scientific equipment*

19. The Director had proposed a number of major purchases of scientific equipment. The Scientific Council, while acknowledging the urgent need for the new equipment, had considered that a number of hidden costs, especially in the area of IT, needed to be considered more thoroughly.

20. Subsequent to the Scientific Council meeting, the Director developed the plans in some detail and presented these to the Governing Council at its meeting in May 2011 (see document

SC/47/3). The Council approved the purchases of the gas chromatography and the HPLC-mass spectrometry equipment. The Council also approved the purchase of next generation DNA sequencing equipment on the condition that a more detailed plan was presented to a Subcommittee of two members of the Scientific Council (Chair, plus one other) and the Chair of the Governing Council. In particular, the Governing Council requested that the report evaluates the options for developing the facility in-house versus using an external NGS service provider.

21. The two options were extensively considered. The conclusion was that the development of an in-house NGS platform and the associated bioinformatic capacity represents an important resource for the Agency, both in practical terms, allowing unrestricted access for optimization of protocols for cancer specific projects, and in terms of maintaining the Agency's ability to attract high level staff and secure the award of research grants. Notably, the Scientific Council peer-review of the Section of Genetics strongly supported this option.

22. The two options are not, however, mutually exclusive. Outsourcing some aspects of NGS activities will be necessary, for example for very large-scale projects that exceed the capacity of the in-house platform (outsourcing to centres such as the French Centre National de Genotypage). Collaboration with a local NGS service provider (such as ProfileXpert) will also continue to be pursued as it offers important practical advantages in the short-term and provides a solution for dealing with potential peaks of workload at the Agency.

23. Subsequent to the approval of these plans, the funds requested from the Governing Council Special Fund will be used to purchase the next generation DNA sequencer and to acquire and upgrade the IT hardware and infrastructure needed to run the data analyses. An important component of this project is the development of the bioinformatics capacity at the Agency. This aspect will involve establishing a close collaboration with the Centre Bioinformatique de Lyon (CBL). We plan to formalize the relationship with CBL and to create a post for a bioinformatician at IARC who will carry out the analyses in collaboration with CBL and bridge the two organizations.

#### *Rotation and length of membership on the Scientific Council*

24. The Scientific Council had noted with concern that eight of its members were due to retire in 2011. A proposal to address this issue can be found in document SC/47/10.

#### **Concluding remarks**

25. The Director thanked Dr Comber for his commitment and support to the Agency as Chair of the Scientific Council during a period of great change.

26. The Director notes with great sadness that Dr Elaine Ron passed away on the 20 November 2010. Elaine was a marvellous scientist, mentor and friend of the Agency. She served on the Agency's Scientific Council for four years and was Chair of the 44<sup>th</sup> session in 2008. Her scientific rigour and her warm personality are greatly missed. Scientific and Governing Council members were informed and a tribute was placed on the IARC internet.