

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FROM THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

1. The following is a report in brief format, as requested by the Scientific Council, updating on follow-up to the 47th Session Scientific Council for items not covered elsewhere.

Purchase of scientific equipment (see document SC/47/14)

2. The Governing Council approved the purchase of the equipment recommended by the Scientific Council in January 2011. These purchases are at the following stage:

- Real-time PCR detection system, DNA-quantification system and a high performance, well-calibrated sonicator have been purchased;
- Bids have been received for the liquid/DNA aliquoting robotic apparatus. The automated ELISA multi-well plate reader and washer will be purchased before the end of 2011;
- A call for tender for the robotics to automatically perform solid phase extraction was published on 21 November 2011, and the equipment will be purchased by early 2012.

Feedback on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Agency (see document SC/47/7)

3. The Agency has continued to explore the best set of KPIs adapted to its specific mission. Additional information is now collected on access to IARC online publications and resources. Specifically the 'Urchin 7' software has been applied to the main IARC web site and to a number of sub-sites such that data can be presented to the Governing Council. In addition, in respect to measures of collaboration we are testing the use of different software tools ('sci²' and 'scimaps') to produce maps of the Agency's collaborative networks based on data from publications and other records of research collaborations.

4. The Scientific Council had commented on the Agency's role in supporting cancer registration. In July the Agency organized in Lyon a meeting of major stakeholders which resulted in a summary statement supporting the creation of a number of regional "hubs" of excellence in cancer registration. The Global Initiative on Cancer Registry Development was launched at the World Cancer Leaders' Summit in Dublin in November 2011. Efforts are now underway to find the resources to finance this global initiative. No KPI has yet been decided upon for this area of activity.

5. The Director reviewed KPIs used by WHO but these were found to be not generally relevant to a research organization.

Feedback on the operation of the Biobank activities (see document SC/47/8)

6. Considerable effort has been made to enter details of the different biospecimen collections into the IARC Biobank. Specifically, data for over 161 000 samples have been catalogued and data for over 20% of these catalogued samples have been imported into the IARC centralized database using the in-house SAMI software package.

7. The IARC Biobank web site has been launched with a list of the collections available at the Agency and the point of contact for each collection. An access policy is being developed to manage requests for collaborative studies using these collections. Documents on guidelines and standard SOPs for pre-analytical sample processing and sample management are included in the resources accessible in the web site.

8. The cost recovery programme to support activities for a sustainable biobank was developed and is being implemented; this includes the introduction of revised costs for sample management and processing which are also being incorporated in the budgets of research grant applications.

Discussion on the Biostatistics Group (BST) at IARC (see document SC/47/9)

9. The majority of Sections now have statistical expertise available within the Section. Exceptions remain the two purely laboratory-based Sections MCA or MPA¹. A formal mechanism to address the needs of these Sections will be sought. Although there are no positions within IMO specifically designated as statisticians, there are several epidemiologists who are highly competent users of statistics.

10. Regarding methodological work, exceptional funding from the Governing Council Special Fund was used to bring Professor Nanny Wermuth to the Agency as a Senior Visiting Scientist for one year. Her major project is to complete a monograph on the systematic use of chains of regressions to account for dependence between various factors which modify disease risk or selection in studies. This has been a major interest throughout her career and she hopes to produce an exposition that is clear and useful to practitioners of applied statistics. She is drawing illustrative examples from the various data-sets available at IARC. In addition, her extensive network of contacts within the international statistical community has already improved the level of communication with the statistics faculty of the University of Lyon 1.

11. Regarding joint activities/meetings, BST funds have been used to bring statisticians from other institutes to stimulate discussion of statistical methodology. To date Professor Per Kragh Andersen (University of Copenhagen) and Dr Frank Dudbridge (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) have each visited for several days to discuss with staff and give two lectures each.

¹ MCA = Section of Mechanisms of Carcinogenesis; MPA = Section of Molecular Pathology; IMO = IARC Monographs;

12. A number of courses in statistical practice have been conducted in collaboration with the Education and Training Group (ETR): Basic Stata (Richard Muwonge); Advanced R for epidemiology (Martyn Plummer and numerous visiting faculty); Not so Basic Stata (Graham Byrnes). All courses were fully subscribed. The Advanced R course was a particular success, drawing a large number of participants both externally and from within IARC.

13. No further resources have been available to appoint an additional senior statistician external to the Group structure given the budget constraints. A budget will be assigned to the BST Group for 2012–2013 to permit further activities in biostatistics across the Agency.