



Scientific Council
Fifty-eighth Session

SC/58/8
14 February 2022

Lyon, 9–11 February 2022
By Web conference

REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ITS FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION

INTRODUCTION

1. The Fifty-eighth Session of the Scientific Council (SC) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the second fully virtual session in its history, was opened by Dr Janne Pitkaniemi (SC Chairperson), at 09:00 on Wednesday 9 February 2022. He welcomed the participants, including the six new SC members: Drs Einas Abdulaziz Eid Al Kuwari (Qatar), Walter Berger (Austria), Jie He (China), Marie-Elise Parent (Canada), Luis Felipe Ribeiro Pinto (Brazil) and Mathilde Touvier (France).
2. He also welcomed Drs Stephen Robbins (Chairperson, Governing Council [GC], Canada) and Pål Romundstad (GC Vice-Chairperson, Norway), Bente Mikkelsen (Director, Noncommunicable Diseases, WHO/HQ, WHO Representative), Jean-Yves Blay and Béatrice Fervers (Observers from the Centre Léon Bérard), and Dr Sonali Johnson (UICC Observer)¹.
3. Apologies for absence were received from Dr James Cerhan (USA) who cannot attend on 9 February and from Dr Kazem Zendehdel (Islamic Republic of Iran).
4. For ease of reference a list of acronyms of IARC Pillars and Branches can be found in [Annex 1](#) at the end of this Report.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

5. Declarations of interests were summarized by the Secretariat and available for consultation by SC members. Please refer to [Annex 2](#) at the end of this Report.

ELECTION OF RAPPORTEUR

6. Dr William Gallagher was elected Rapporteur.

¹ Photographs: participants were not asked to sign a consent form. The Secretariat read a statement, at the opening of the session, informing participants of the Group photograph, consisting of several screen shots to be taken during the first break. Participants with their cameras switched on will be taken as equivalent to their consent to have their picture displayed on the Governance website and kept in the IARC archives for future use. This also covers consent for screen shots taken during the meeting. Participants were asked to let the Secretariat know formally if they wished not to have their picture published by IARC, at the time of the meeting or in future.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA ([Document SC/58/1](#))

7. The agenda was adopted.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT INCLUDING:

THE IARC BIENNIAL REPORT 2020–2021 ([Document SC/58/2](#))

8. The Director's presentation of the [scientific highlights from the IARC Biennial Report 2020–2021](#) was made available on the INDICO platform.

9. For the first time, a companion webpage to IARC Biennial Report 2020–2021 was created and can be found at: <https://www.iarc.who.int/biennial-report-2020-2021web/>

10. A video summarizing [IARC achievements in 2021](#) was projected.

11. In addition, the Director delivered a short presentation in which comments and questions received prior to the meeting were addressed.

12. A summary of discussions and questions raised by the SC at the meeting and answers given by the Director and IARC staff is given below:

- The SC enquired about the use of more innovative communication tools when engaging with children, teenagers and young adults (e.g. utilizing different social media platforms, e.g. Snapchat, Tik Tok). The Secretariat provided an update on IARC's expanding efforts in this area, which include new strategies to reach out to a wider audience of stakeholders, including the public, through new visuals/graphics; these activities are limited to some extent by resourcing.
- The SC commented that improved empowerment communication actions could be taken towards citizens and health practitioners in the field of cancer prevention to improve capacity in distinguishing scientifically based messages from fake news and how to understand research results. The Secretariat again provided an update on IARC's activities in this area.
- The SC commented that collaborations with national networks in the field of cancer prevention may be developed to provide more impact. The Secretariat agreed that such connections would provide added impact and commented specifically on activities in the nutrition and cancer space.
- The SC congratulated IARC on the development of its new IT platform, which will facilitate fruitful interaction between researchers. There was also a suggestion that some technical courses, e.g. in the omics space, could be opened more widely.
- The SC enquired about the progress of the WHO Academy; this is a new initiative which will be a physical building, strongly supported by France, adjacent to the Nouveau Centre. The Director indicated that IARC is already working closely with the WHO Academy on a course on cervical cancer screening and elimination, as an initial body of work. The WHO Academy may use the facilities of the Nouveau Centre on a temporary basis prior to the new building being built.

- The SC suggested the generation of a publicly facing platform for factual communication to combat misinformation. The Director indicated it would be critical to join forces with the WHO in terms of fulfilling ambitions in terms of more widespread communication efforts. Dr Mikkelsen (WHO) provided a link to an exemplar website where misinformation in the COVID-19 arena is provided: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic/understanding-the-infodemic-and-misinformation-in-the-fight-against-covid-19#tab=tab_1. Dr Mikkelsen also commented on the various global initiatives in which collaboration between the WHO and IARC is being strengthened, such as linkage between IARC data and WHO preventive strategies.
- The SC queried whether IARC and the WHO were working together to specifically combat fake news in relation to HPV vaccination. The Director indicated that IARC does not have a specific programme on combating fake news in the vaccination space, but agreed that working synergistically with the WHO (which has such a platform) would be useful.

13. The Scientific Council congratulated the Director and her staff on the IARC Biennial Report 2020–2021.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 63rd SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL (GC)

14. The documents and minutes of the 63rd GC session are available on the event management platform (<https://events.iarc.who.int/event/GC63-May2021/>). The main highlights were as follows:

- China joined IARC as a new Participating State in May 2021.
- GC approved the 2022–2023 budget at a level of €45 371 329.
- The [IARC Medium-Term Strategy \(MTS\) for 2021–2025](#) was adopted and the Director was requested to make a proposal for an evaluation approach ([see discussion below](#)).
- The request for €420 000 for the purchase of scientific equipment (€70 000) and core IT infrastructure and services (€350 000) was approved.
- GC authorized a loan of up to €1 million from the Governing Council Special Fund to fund “Priority 1” items for the Nouveau Centre, to be reimbursed over a five-year period from the operational budget and/or resource mobilization results ([see update on the Nouveau Centre below](#)).

15. The Scientific Council thanked the Director for these highlights from the 63rd GC session.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FROM THE 57th SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

16. The Director mentioned that all items requiring follow-up will be covered in the next three days.
17. An update on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues was included in [the Director's presentation](#).
18. The Scientific Council noted the Director's update from the 57th Scientific Council.

DISCUSSION WITH THE DIRECTOR, THE DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE AND THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ONLY

19. The SC thanked the Director for this opportunity to discuss and made the following observations:
 - The Director commented on the historical legacy of gender imbalance at IARC, particularly at higher levels of seniority, which is a key aspect to be addressed going forward.
 - The Director described new measures to address gender equality at IARC including how internal committee and external meeting participations are considered, as well as the Equity and Diversity Advisory Group (EDAG) initiative. It is proposed to place the EDAG initiative on the IARC external website, in addition to its current location on the IARC intranet, to increase its visibility. Mandatory training on gender equity and diversity is already in place at IARC. A broader discussion was held in respect of metric analysis and need for appropriate balance in terms of assessment. The SC also enquired about paternity leave measures in place, with current arrangements in IARC being guided by practices within the WHO, which are quite progressive in this respect. The SC strongly supports the implementation of the EDAG initiative.
 - The Director provided an overview of IARC's COVID-19 and Cancer Initiative (IARC-C19) proposal. The primary objective would be to inform IARC's Participating States on mitigation and recovery strategies, which would aim to provide over a four-year timeframe: (1) a global platform to monitor national policies in the wake of the pandemic and their impact on cancer services and cancer outcomes, and (2) the evidence needed to support decision-making in cancer control, both during and after the pandemic.

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO THE GENOMIC EPIDEMIOLOGY (GEM) BRANCH REVIEW, HELD REMOTELY IN JANUARY 2021

20. The [details of action taken following the Genomic Epidemiology \(GEM\) Branch review](#) were discussed.
21. The Director noted with great satisfaction GEM's outstanding overall evaluation.

22. The SC made the following observations and noted the Director's response to the GEM Review:

- The SC congratulated the GEM Branch on their work, particularly in respect to engagement with and capacity building in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- Project management has emerged as a critical issue for GEM, with the branch model allowing some degree of consolidation of this work, as well as re-orientation/training of certain staff members towards these duties. The GEM Branch review also identified as critical to bring in new staff with expertise in high-dimensional analysis, which will be considered in the next biennium (2024–2025). IARC has committed to additional scientific IT infrastructure and staff in the immediate future.
- The SC queried whether the primary aim was to determine whether the work in LMICs is to either discern biological differences in individuals between countries or to facilitate changes in implementation, particularly in respect of cost-effective interventions. The GEM Branch indicated that it focuses on both of these aspects in their work.

UPDATE ON DATA SCIENCE ACTIVITIES ([Document SC/58/3](#))

23. The Secretariat was requested to update SC and GC on its data science activities on a regular basis, including: computational biology, bioinformatics, biostatistics, and (supporting these areas) Information Technology (IT).

24. [The video presentation of this update](#) by Matthieu Foll, Vivian Viallon and Nicolas Tardy, on behalf of the Computational Biology, Bioinformatics and Biostatistics Committee (C3B), was made available on the INDICO platform.

25. The SC made the following observations, supports the plan for the next phase of development of the Scientific IT platform, noted the update and looked forward to future updates on a biennial basis.

- The SC queried how data protection and open science issues were addressed. It was indicated that IARC followed the key principles related to ensuring appropriate data security, as well as standardized rules for engagement with third party collaborators in respect of data sharing.
- There is a key requirement to further connect the areas of bioinformatics and statistics, which is a main aim of C3B, with particular activities organized relating to training and knowledge sharing.
- The SC queried how IARC deals with challenges in respect of sample and data sharing between countries. It was agreed that this is a challenge, with discussions being had at the European and other levels to address this complex issue.

- IARC confirmed that it does not share data with entities having links to the tobacco industry or with for-profit companies, as per WHO regulations (Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors, or FENSA).
- The SC queried as to how the IT infrastructural capacities are being addressed, especially considering continual growth of data. It was indicated that very significant growth in data and associated computational demands have been experienced in recent years at IARC, with some capacity still present. Good support is there within IARC, but it is crucial to maintain this.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK OF THE IARC MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY (MTS) 2021–2025 AND ITS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) ([Document SC/58/4](#))

26. Mr Olivier Exertier, Consultant, Director's Office, presented this item.

27. He mentioned that in May 2021, the GC requested the Director to make a proposal for an evaluation approach of the MTS for 2021–2025 (see [Resolution GC/63/R4](#)).

28. A Working Group was established, composed of SC and GC members, met several times virtually, and was supported by the WHO Evaluation Office.

29. The Working Group issued its recommendations and a corresponding set of KPIs. Drs Luis Felipe Ribeiro Pinto and Mathilde Touvier (SC members on the Working Group) were available to answer questions.

30. The Scientific Council made the following comments and recommendations to be presented to the GC at its next session in May 2022:

- The SC congratulated the Working Group Team and IARC personnel for their efforts in producing the evaluation framework, and strongly endorsed the plan.
- Dr Touvier indicated that an increased focus will be on qualitative evaluation of outputs, as opposed to purely quantitative measures (in light of DORA¹ and Leiden guidelines²).
- The SC appreciated the inclusion of KPIs related to gender equity and minorities in the evaluation framework.
- The SC endorses the recruitment of new Participating States, where feasible. It was suggested that members of the SC could aid in recruitment of new Participating States.

¹ Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA): <https://sfdora.org/read/>

² <http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/>

COVID-19 AND CANCER INITIATIVE: A BUILDING BACK BETTER PROPOSAL (IARC-C19) (Document SC/58/5)

31. Dr Freddie Bray, CSU Branch Head, and Dr Isabelle Soerjomataram, CSU Deputy Branch Head, presented IARC COVID-19 and Cancer Initiative (IARC-C19) which aims to provide over a four-year timeframe: i) a global platform to monitor national policies in the wake of the pandemic and their impact on cancer services and cancer outcomes, and ii) the evidence needed to support decision-making in cancer control, both during and after the pandemic.

32. A critical feature of IARC-C19 is the transfer, exchange and dissemination of knowledge to various stakeholders in collaboration with IARC Participating States. Given the policy and societal relevance of this initiative, IARC will disseminate information to key stakeholders from policy makers to civil society organizations in collaboration with national stakeholders and academic partners.

33. To implement IARC-C19, a budget of €6 million is needed over a four-year period; two-thirds of this funding (€4 million) will be sought from IARC Participating States and other countries seeking to invest in IARC-C19. The remaining funding (€2 million) will be based on in-kind support, via the secondment of one or more staff (depending on national structures and capacity) via dedicated national technology fellowships.

- The SC understands the critical importance of the IARC-C19 project and fully endorses its strategy and its mode of operation (with a strong emphasis on transfer of knowledge and capacity building for Participating States). The proposed programme nicely illustrates the responsive nature of IARC to a key international challenge and ability to provide widespread and long-term impact.
- The SC commented that the work may inform future pandemic preparedness, with this aspect to be considered going forward.
- The SC commented on the importance of considering gender-specific differences in terms of impact of COVID-19 on cancer. It was indicated that these aspects were being considered, along with other key variables such as age.
- The SC indicated that the technological breakthroughs in terms of rapid and low-cost diagnostics which were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic could have implications for cost effective interventions in the HPV testing space.

34. Dr Mikkelsen reinforced that the links between IARC and the WHO in respect of this work is very strong. Information relating to ongoing work on estimates of service disruption, mitigation strategies and economic impact were pointed to – links to this information can be provided on request to IARC.

35. The Director made the comment that this project is of critical importance to IARC and the WHO, with a strong emphasis on knowledge transfer and more immediate use of data.

- The SC recommends that the GC looks carefully at the project IARC-C19 to identify resources needed for its implementation.

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP OF THE REVIEW PANEL IN 2023

36. In 2023, the Nutrition and Metabolism (NME) Branch, Head: Dr Marc Gunter, will be reviewed.
37. Drs Tone Bjørge, Ulrike Haug and Marie-Elise Parent will participate in the NME Review Panel. It was agreed that Drs Haug and Parent would Co-Chair the Review Panel.
38. The external members will be chosen by the Secretariat in consultation with the Co-Chairs of the Review Panel and the SC Chair.
39. The Review will take place remotely (five half days) on 23–27 January 2023.

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING POSTER (FLASH TALK) REVIEW

40. Scientists in the Branches not undergoing review and in the Laboratory Support, Biobanking and Services were invited to prepare flash talks to showcase and present their work to SC members during dedicated teleconferences, held on 18 and 19 January 2022.
41. On 20 January 2022, a session was dedicated to overall comments and recommendations which are listed below:

Scientific Council (SC) comments on scientific work

1. Alignment with the MTS 2021–2025

- All posters/projects presented within each Branch are in line with IARC MTS 2021–2025.

2. Collaboration across Branches/International collaboration

- Close collaborations within Pillar 2 have been highlighted during the poster session.
- Limited inter-Branch collaborations have been noted for EGM and EPR Branches within Pillar 3.

3. International collaboration

- Broad international collaboration has been highlighted for all Branches.

4. Address the emerging priorities

- Most of the projects presented within each Branch fit very well into some aspect of the three main IARC emerging priorities.

5. Potential impact of the research proposal on the unmet needs in cancer control

- Most of the projects presented have the potential for key impact on cancer control, especially concerning early detection and prevention.
- There should be a focus on bringing some basic research into knowledge translation and developed for the needs in cancer control, i.e. “from understanding to Prevention”.

General comments and recommendations

- The originality and scientific insights of the presentations were excellent.
- The balance between young and senior scientists was satisfactory.
- In order to facilitate the high-level research, the continuous support of statistics and bioinformatics is crucial, with particular attention to mediation/pathway analyses, gene-environment interactions, and multi-omics analyses. The SC recommends that IARC management make sure that increased need for expertise in innovative data-analytics is provided.
- The SC recommends intensifying internal collaboration across Branches, particularly for Branches within Pillar 3.

Specific recommendation on the design of the virtual session

- The SC acknowledges the excellent work performed and the quality of presentations.
- The SC judges favorably the exercise of virtual posters/videos by the IARC personnel, and subsequent live discussion.
- The SC thanks the Secretariat for making available the pre-recording videos of the presentations beforehand.
- The SC is satisfied by the design of the virtual session, the early career scientists being given enough space and time for an interactive and dynamic session.
- The SC recommends that the Branch Heads give a short overview of the general scientific activities within each Branch before the presentation of posters, enabling the SC members to have an overview of each project presented within the general scientific context of the Branch.
- The SC recommends including a take-away message at the end of all presentations.
- The SC recommends allowing more time between the presentation of posters and the drafting of recommendations (2 days).

Suggestion for next year virtual poster session (SC/59)

- The SC supports the Secretariat's suggestion to bring forward the date of the virtual poster session to the first week of December 2022 (e.g. Tuesday 6 to Thursday 8 December for three two-hour sessions for presentation and discussion of posters and Tuesday 13 December for drafting of the overall recommendations for SC/59).
- The SC recommends having some talks which more specifically illustrate cross-branch structure and inter-disciplinary interactions.
- The SC recommends a short summary of the Branch or Deputy Heads of the overall activities of their respective Branch prior to the other short-talks.
- The Secretariat wish to thank the SC for their contributions and will take note of these recommendations.

BIENNIAL REPORT ON IARC EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ([Document SC/58/6](#))

42. Ms Anouk Berger, Head, Learning and Capacity Building (LCB) Branch, [made her presentation of the key achievements](#) of the IARC Research Training and Fellowship programme (FEL) and of the IARC Courses programme (COR), covering the period 2020–2021, available on the INDICO platform.

43. For FEL, in addition to maintaining the programme at its current level of quality, and onboarding/supporting Early Career and Visiting Scientists (ECVS) and their host team on a daily basis, the focus of LCB is to:

- further implement the terms contained in the Programme's Handbook and monitor the need for any modifications;
- continue to develop and sustain initiatives to contribute to enhance the training experience/career prospect of ECS, in particular doctoral students and postdoctoral scientists;
- continue to interact and support ECSA;
- identify additional resources to maintain or expand training opportunities for Postdoctoral Fellowships; and
- strengthen the links with local and international stakeholders.

44. For COR, In the coming years the focus of LCB is to:

- conduct a review of both the IARC Learning strategic directions and technical infrastructure;
- identify resources to consolidate the IARC Learning portal and to increase the production/publication of eLearning material in English and other languages;
- stimulate and support the organization of webinar series, with recorded sessions and material posted on the IARC website for free access;
- monitor the use of eLearning resources;
- identify funding resources to continue to run the IARC Summer School on a regular basis, as well as to set-up online courses expanding its target audience;
- develop more specialized and advanced modules in areas of IARC competence; and
- pursue collaboration with and support to Branches for the design, development, organization and/or evaluation of education and training materials, courses or programmes.

45. SC was asked to comment on the activities and achievements of the programme as well as to suggest areas for further enhancement or which may be reduced in emphasis.

46. In response, the SC made the following comments/suggestions/recommendations:

- The SC congratulated IARC on its endeavours in education and training.
- The SC indicated that this activity is fundamental for IARC's future and its mission, particularly in respect of training the next generation of researchers.
- The SC suggested to construct a permanent alumni programme to help build and sustain networks. IARC is exploring this aspect and determining what is required to launch and maintain such a programme in a long-term capacity.

- The SC queried if there was any mechanism(s) to facilitate re-integration of fellows to allow them to flourish when they return to their home country. The Secretariat indicated some mechanisms to facilitate re-integration (e.g. Return Grant) but these perhaps need to be strengthened.
- The SC indicated that it was pleased that an application for funding had been submitted under the HORIZON-MSCA-COFUND-2021 programme (now that IARC is eligible to apply).
- The SC queried as to the success rate in terms of fellowship applications. The Secretariat indicated that the success rate of eligible applications was circa 10%.
- The SC suggested exploring possibilities of further interaction with the WHO Academy, as well as investigating opportunities afforded by the new building.

47. SC was also asked for advice on seeking additional resources from, for example, Participating States and Foundations, in order to finance the maintenance and expansion of education and training activities.

48. As described in the [IARC Director's report to the Governing Council](#) and in the [IARC Medium Term Strategy 2021-2025](#), it was decided in 2020 to discontinue the IARC Senior Visiting Scientist Award. In view of the limited resources of the Agency and of the capacity building mission of the Agency, it was indeed considered more cost efficient to convert this award into several shorter awards targeting mid-career scientists from LMICs and/or Participating States, to develop collaborative research projects with IARC, and contribute to enhancing their career prospects and build the capacity of their instruction through longer term collaborations initiated/strengthened through the Fellowship.

49. SC was asked to provide feedback on this proposal so that the matter can be brought to the attention of the 64th Session of IARC Governing Council in May 2022.

50. The SC discussed converting the IARC Senior Visiting Scientist Award into several shorter awards targeting mid-career scientists from LMICs and/or Participating States and made the following comments:

- The SC supports the proposal to convert the 12-month Senior Visiting Scientist Award into shorter Mid-Career Visiting Scientist Awards, with the request of reallocation of funding from the Special Account for Undesignated Voluntary Contributions to be submitted to the 64th Session of the GC in May 2022.
- The SC recommends some flexibility in the duration of the Mid-Career Visiting Scientist Awards, with an average of six months but varying from three months to 9-12 months depending on the specific project. The SC would favour increased participation from LMICs.

UPDATE ON THE “NOUVEAU CENTRE” AND ON RESOURCE MOBILIZATION (Document SC/58/7)

51. Ms Elisabeth Françon Pompui, Administrative Services Officer, provided [an update on the “Nouveau Centre”](#) project on the INDICO platform.

52. The revised project timeline is as follows:

- Building works to continue until end of September 2022.
- IARC anticipated works and equipment (biobank set up and IT infrastructure) from February to October 2022.
- Set-up of conference rooms and physical move from 1 November to mid-December 2022.
- Official opening of the “Nouveau Centre” in January 2023.
- Official inauguration ceremony on 12 May 2023.

53. As of 1 December 2021, the budget status to equip the Nouveau Centre is as follows (numbers in *italics* refer to the budget status as of December 2020):

Priority	Definition	TOTAL	Funds secured	Funds identified but not secured	Remaining funding gap
1	Critical item or earmarked donation	€6.76 million (€7.66 million)	€6.25 million (€3.01 million)	€0.15 million	€0.36 million (€4.65 million)
2	Non-critical item, rebuilding existing capacity	€1.62 million (€1.61 million)	€0.03 million	-	€1.59 million
3	Investment in upstream sectors, create an attractive working environment, improvement to align with Open science vision	€3.00 million (€4.14 million)	-	-	€3.00 million (€4.14 million)
	TOTAL	€11.38 million (€13.41 million)	€6.27 million (€3.01 million)	€0.15 million (-)	€4.95 million (€10.4 million)

54. Mr Clément Chauvet, Head, Strategic Engagement and External Relations, provided [an update on resource mobilization](#) on the INDICO platform.

55. IARC Secretariat is still looking for additional funding for the Nouveau Centre and asked SC to help in reaching out to their respective governments and in advocating for investment in the Nouveau Centre.

56. The SC made the following observations and thanked the Secretariat for the update:

- The SC congratulated IARC on their tireless work in respect of fundraising efforts.

- The SC were encouraged to support the fundraising initiative directly where possible, as well as to ensure spreading of the message via their respective national networks.
- The SC requested that a short media pack be circulated to SC members so as to facilitate dissemination of this opportunity.
- The SC queried in respect of potential tax rebates of donations in other countries, in addition to France. Donors are directed to contact the DAF Office to obtain a tax exemption certificate. IARC collaborates with the WHO Foundation to facilitate tax rebates in countries other than France. For larger donations, it was indicated that specific support by the DAF Office would be provided to donors.
- The SC suggested to use more visuals relating to specific laboratory work and environments when fundraising for the Nouveau Centre, particularly pertaining to the biobanking activities.

SCIENTIFIC REPORT OF THE CANCER SURVEILLANCE (CSU) BRANCH REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (Document SC/58/WP3)

57. The Scientific Report of the CSU Review was presented by Dr Louisa Gordon, Chair of the Review Panel (RP).

58. The external experts and SC members of the RP were thanked for their valuable contributions.

59. The RP noted the following concerning the CSU Branch:

Assessment of CSU's scientific quality (using the six-point scale below)¹

- CSU's past performance:

Outstanding

Overall, the evaluation of CSU's scientific quality in the last five years was exceptional and is demonstrated by an impressive body of outstanding accomplishments. Successes occurred despite continuing and new challenges posed by budgetary pressures, the COVID-19 pandemic, and data protection regulations.

¹ The following classification will be used:

O (Outstanding)	Outstanding work of the highest international calibre, pioneering and trend-setting. This score will only be applied to exceptional programmes of work, not because a programme was particularly topical or in an under-researched area.
F (Forefront)	Work that is at the forefront internationally and that, it is considered, will have an important and substantial impact.
C (Competitive)	Work that is internationally competitive, of high quality, and will make a significant contribution.
NC (Not competitive)	Work that is not considered competitive or high quality and is unlikely to make a significant contribution.
U (Unsatisfactory)	Unsatisfactory or poor quality work.
P (Preliminary)	Work that is too preliminary to rate, which should be continued and monitored/reassessed by the Director in the short- to medium-term with subsequent update to the Scientific Council.

This ranking reflects the overall performance of CSU from 2017–2021. The RP recognizes that the emerging areas of cancer economics and social inequalities are too new to evaluate their performance at the same level as the established CSU programmes, which have been maturing for over a decade.

- CSU's future plans:

Outstanding

Assessment of the relevance of CSU's work to the mission of IARC¹

- CSU's past performance:

Perfect fit

CSU has clearly performed relevant work to the IARC's mission and MTS. There are no concerns that any of the six programmatic areas are not fully aligned with the mission of IARC.

- CSU's future plans:

Perfect fit

Overall recommendations for CSU

- The RP recommends strong support for CSU future plans to maintain IARC's position as a premier provider of global cancer surveillance and descriptive epidemiology research. The RP recognizes CSU leadership has been outstanding as demonstrated by their excellent experience and track records.
- CSU (Data for Action) is one of the four IARC pillars and is currently underfunded. Despite increasing needs of cancer data provided by CSU, limited RB funding and reliance on EB funding for core activities is a persistent and critical concern, which may cause systematic exhaustion of the Branch and lack of fulfilment of the IARC MTS. The RP recommends ensuring adequate administrative assistance for securing EB funds. The RP advises the IARC Director to substantially increase secure support to CSU over the long term from RB funding, even if this requires commensurate reductions in other activities.
- GICR is an essential part of CSU and it provides the scaffolding and standards for cancer registries all over the world. The RP recommends that this important part of the CSU Branch be covered entirely and securely with RB funds, including the GICR leadership.

¹ The following classification will be used:

- 1: **Perfect fit:** This type of work is ideally suited to the mission of IARC.
- 2: **Good fit:** This type of work is suited to the mission of the Agency.
- 3: **Questionable fit:** Uncertain.
- 4: **Poor fit:** Work which should not continue.

Scores should be accompanied by justifications and recommendations for action, where necessary.

- All CSU activities directly link to the IARC mission as the most standardized and reliable global cancer data provider, playing a vital role in both national, regional and global health policy. Increased timeliness of the data is important. The RP encourages CSU to proceed with obtaining cancer registry data more frequently (biannually/annually).
- The RP recommends that CSU continues to develop their new solutions that can handle data flow impediments caused by stricter data sharing legislation worldwide. The proposed emphasis on aggregate data, and novel methods such as federated analysis and synthetic data seems wise. RP also recommends that CSU work with IARC leadership to encourage WHO and UN to find longer-term solutions for data sharing agreements with countries worldwide.
- The RP recommends CSU develop a transparent system to strategize and prioritize future projects, incoming ideas and new collaborations with greater collective strategic clarity to assist with managing workloads. Strategic positioning relative to other large international descriptive (cancer) epidemiology efforts would be valuable for CSU.
- The further development of the e-tools pipeline from cancer registration to cancer statistics (CanReg5, CanStaging+) combined with harmonization of cancer data is encouraged by RP.
- The proposed new global indicators, such as productivity losses and DALYs, describe the cancer burden beyond the traditional measures and are endorsed by RP. RP recommends CSU further pursue country level PAFs of cancer risk factors started at IARC to the predictions of cancer burden. This will support future preventive cancer policies and preventive efforts globally.
- New programmatic areas covered by CSU, including health economics and social inequalities are prioritized in MTS. For these important programme areas to thrive, the RP recognizes that these areas will need continued attention and support.
- CSU must maintain a strong commitment to leading and conducting innovative data science in surveillance research consistent with its international leadership position. Specific suggestions for areas of continued scientific focus might include: methods for integration and harmonization of complex diverse data sources; artificial intelligence and machine learning; methods for causal inference; federated data analysis methods or synthetic data methods.
- The RP recommends CSU reflect on opportunities to create/curate data resources that could be a true global public good and increasingly amenable to access and/or analysis by researchers globally outside IARC. Even among ongoing international cancer surveillance efforts, IARC CSU is in a highly unique position to generate such global public goods in a manner consistent with the IARC mission while recognizing data privacy regulations worldwide.
- The RP recommends monitoring the impact and influence of CSU outputs in terms of health policy using research impact tools (e.g. overton.io). This will assist in maintaining visibility of CSU's expanding brands and target CSU's dissemination

work. Documenting policy uptake of CSU outputs may also assist in promoting CSU's impact and contribute to IARC philanthropic donations and fund-raising efforts.

- The RP recommends aggressively pursuing suitable opportunities for grant funding based on their strong body of work and continued commitment to innovative data science. The emerging areas of social inequalities and descriptive economics will add to existing CSU competitiveness and collaborations for grant funding from diverse international funders.

60. The overall recommendations for the CSU Branch were discussed. The SC stressed the importance of addressing the budgetary challenges of the CSU Branch in the context of the overall financial landscape of IARC and the nature of the activities being performed (e.g. readiness for external grant funding, strategic relevance to the core mission of IARC).

61. The CSU Branch Head, Dr Bray, thanked the RP for their comprehensive work, which provided key recommendations that will aid in the Branch's strategic planning.

62. In response, the Director made the following comments:

- The Director thanked the RP of the CSU Branch for their work and indicated that the specific recommendations will be taken on board, with presentation of progress in this respect to take place at the next SC meeting.
- The Director stressed the importance of cancer surveillance in IARC's mission and the key activities of the CSU Branch in this respect.

63. The Cancer Surveillance (CSU) Branch Review Panel Report was accepted by the Scientific Council.

SCIENTIFIC REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIFESTYLE EPIDEMIOLOGY (ENV) BRANCH REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (Document SC/58/WP4)

64. The Scientific Report of the ENV Review was presented by Drs Hendriek Boshuizen and Sabine Rohrmann, Co-Chairs of the Review Panel (RP).

65. The external experts and SC members of the RP were thanked for their valuable contributions.

66. The RP noted the following concerning the ENV Branch:

Assessment of ENV's scientific quality

- ENV's past performance:

Outstanding

- The scientists in ENV are recognized experts in the field with extensive experience and expertise and are exceptionally collaborative within and outside the IARC.

- ENV continues to demonstrate international leadership and outstanding contributions as evidenced by its prolific publication record and the impact on public health, policy, and clinical practice.
- Several highly valuable collaborative networks in cancer research have been established, with the inclusion of LMICs.

- ENV's future plans:

Outstanding.

- All of the on-going and proposed research is of outstanding quality. Setting priorities involves making difficult choices.
- The RP is particularly enthusiastic about the work in LMICs, but also other parts of the programme are outstanding with international leadership in many areas.
- The Branch focus on areas where IARC can make a difference, either because an independent organization is needed or because of IARC's experience in work in LMICs, is an excellent choice.

Assessment of the relevance of ENV's work to the mission of IARC

- ENV's past performance:

Perfect fit.

- ENV's current research activities fit perfectly with IARC's fundamental and emerging scientific priorities for 2021-25.
- ENV is focusing on research where it can make a real difference. Some examples are the work in Nigeria and countries of the former Soviet Union, where ENV started projects that engage a variety of institutes of different countries and helps building up a research community.
- In addition to its important work in the development of cancer Codes adapted to specific regions in the world, ENV conducts dissemination and implementation research, to insure an effective uptake of the recommendations (Objective 5). These activities are directly in line with IARC's mission to inform populations on cancer prevention strategies, towards a reduction of the cancer burden.

- ENV's future plans:

Perfect fit.

- All projects are in perfect alignment with IARC's mission. They will provide valuable information for prevention, implementation of prevention, advocacy and transfer of knowledge.
- Through Objective 5, ENV contributes importantly to the implementation and dissemination of knowledge towards cancer prevention, taking into account regional specificities.

Overall recommendations for ENV

In summary, ENV has demonstrated outstanding progress over the past five years. Its portfolio is well balanced in terms of having projects at different stages of completion. The future plans have global relevance and appear fully aligned with IARC's mission.

- The RP is impressed by the work being initiated and conducted in **LMICs** and recommends to at least keep this work at the current level of engagement but preferably increase it and expand it to other countries, as it fills major gaps in knowledge and fosters capacity building in these countries. IARC's recognized impartiality positions it ideally to conduct such research. This work requires that IARC personnel, both PIs and their team, can be regularly on site in the field, including for pilot and feasibility studies.
- Given the work being planned, the RP believes that IARC should consider funding a **position in exposure assessment**, in particular with a focus on LMICs-specific exposure circumstances. The RP felt that it could be of value to conduct exposure assessment now of exposures considered of high risk in LMICs in order to be able to conduct cancer studies in the future.
- ENV's **objective 5** is very important and timely and is an IARC-wide priority. However, the funding of this objective depends completely on external sources. Therefore, the RP recommends that internal funding from the regular budget be allocated to this important objective to provide a stable basis.
- The RP expressed concerns over the increasing **administrative burden and bureaucracy** associated notably with the creation and maintenance of consortia activities, which are at the core of ENV's research. It recommends exploring whether more administrative tasks could be taken over by technical staff to leave more room for scientific work. However, the RP is well aware of the fact that the Branch's administrative staff has its limits.
- The RP notes that the **European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)** (or its interpretation by specific countries) is impeding sharing of raw data within scientific collaborations. This is not a problem specific for the Branch or even IARC but requires due attention.
- The RP recommends maintaining critical mass in the area of **radiation** research and ensure sufficient training possibilities for international scientists. As nuclear power is gaining in importance due to the climate crisis, it is essential to maintain sufficient expertise globally.
- To further respond to IARC's MTS 2021–2025, ENV could be encouraged to broaden **Objective 2** to also include the study of exposures to potentially important new causes of cancer. For instance, it may be that LMIC economies involve exposure circumstances not previously encountered (ex. certain chemical mixtures, interaction with environmental heat or other agents in e-waste depositories, etc.), which would go beyond the current focus by ENV on known and suspected carcinogens. The RP discussed the possibility of developing a priority plan within this objective but recognizes that competing demands from on-going projects renders this difficult.
- IARC is in a prime position to also advance **dissemination** projects not only in HICs and MICs, but particularly in LICs, which often do not have the financial and scientific capacities to advance this. The RP encourages ENV to lead and support dissemination efforts in LMICs and help building up capacity in these countries.

- The RP encourages ENV to prolong its policy to focus on areas where ENV can make a difference, either because an independent organization is needed or because of ENV's experience in work in LMICs.

67. The overall recommendations for the ENV Branch were discussed. The SC agree that additional resources should be sought internally to support the Branch's Objective 5: 'To Enable Cancer Prevention and Control Through Research Evidence Translation', taking on board the financial landscape within IARC.

68. In response, the Director made the following comments:

- The Director thanked the RP for their work and appreciated their encouraging words.
- The Director indicated that the activities within the ENV Branch are central to the IARC mission.
- The Director indicated that the recommendations of the panel will be taken on board, with progress towards these being presented at the next SC meeting.

69. The Branch and Deputy Heads thanked the RP for their input.

70. The Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology (ENV) Branch Review Panel Report was accepted by the Scientific Council.

ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 59TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL IN 2023

71. Dr Manami Inoue was elected Chairperson.

72. Dr Luis Felipe Pinto was elected Vice-Chairperson.

DATE OF NEXT SESSION

73. Wednesday 8, Thursday 9 and Friday 10 February 2023 (remote format). The NME Review Panel will take place over five half days (remote format) on Monday 23 to Friday 27 January 2023.

ADOPTION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL REPORT (Document SC/58/8)

74. The report of the Fifty-eighth Session of the Scientific Council was **adopted**.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

75. The customary expressions of thanks were exchanged.

76. Dr Weiderpass thanked the outgoing members of the Scientific Council, Drs Hendriek Boshuizen (the Netherlands), James R. Cerhan (USA), Janne Pitkaniemi (Finland), Sabine Rohrmann (Switzerland), Anne Tjønneland (Denmark) and Kazem Zendejdel (Islamic Republic of Iran).

ANNEX 1 – LIST OF ACRONYMS OF IARC PILLARS AND BRANCHES

ACRONYM	PILLAR / BRANCH
	Pillar I: DATA FOR ACTION
CSU	Cancer Surveillance Branch
	Pillar II: UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES
GEM	Genomic Epidemiology Branch
NME	Nutrition and Metabolism Branch
	Pillar III: FROM UNDERSTANDING TO PREVENTION
ENV	Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology Branch
EGM	Epigenomics and Mechanisms Branch
EPR	Early Detection, Prevention and Infections Branch
	Pillar IV: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION
ESC	Evidence Synthesis and Classification Branch
LCB	Learning and Capacity Building Branch
LSB	Laboratory Support, Biobanking and Services
	DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
SSR	SERVICES TO SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

ANNEX 2 – DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Declarations of interest were provided by all Scientific Council members.

Interests were declared by a minority of Scientific Council members and include:

- Research support from the private sector;
- Personal consultancy fees from the private sector;
- Investment interests in the private sector;
- Intellectual property rights (holding patents applications).

The list of declared interests was available for consultation, upon request to the Secretariat.

Upon review by the Secretariat none of the declared interests were considered to represent a potential or significant conflict of interest with respect to the content of the meeting.

The individuals reporting interests were asked to check the contents of the table below, which they all subsequently approved.

Scientific Council member	Disclosure statement
Walter Berger	Reports having a commercial interest in P4 Therapeutics in his capacity of co-founder and stakeholder
James Robert Cerhan	Reports that his unit at Mayo Clinic benefits from research funding from Genentech, Celgene/BMS and Nanostring Technologies (current)
William Gallagher	Reports holding stocks in OncoAssure Limited in his capacity of co-founder and Director; receiving personal consultancy fees from Carrick Therapeutics; and holding patent applications US8116551B2 and EP2227774B1, GB0504302D0, FR2784383B1 US7220732B2 and EP1492799B1. Previously held stock in OncoMark Limited
Mathilde Touvier	Reports having received personal consultancy fees from France Television / KM Production