

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 53rd SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

1. The Scientific Council has the essential roles of advising the Director and the Governing Council on the Agency's scientific strategy and its implementation, and evaluating the scientific quality of the research carried out at IARC through the participation of its members in the Peer-Review Panels. In addition, the members of the Scientific Council contribute to specific projects and research areas at the Agency through their participation in a range of advisory groups and committees. Over the last year the participation of Drs Stephen Chanock and Lukas Huber in the external Advisory Group on Bioinformatics was greatly appreciated.
2. Dialogue with and between the two Councils is promoted through regular teleconferences between the Director and the Governing and Scientific Council Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and by the Chairs' attendance of the other Council's sessions.
3. The 53rd Session of the IARC Scientific Council was held in Lyon on 25–27 January 2017. It was attended by the Chairperson of the Governing Council, Dr Mark Palmer. The following sections of this document present a summary of the actions taken in response to the discussions and recommendations made during the 53rd Session of the Scientific Council that are not addressed elsewhere on the agenda of the Governing Council.

Presentation of the Director's Report

4. According to last year's Governing Council resolution, the presentation of an Interim Annual Report of the Agency's activities in alternate years to the Biennial Report was replaced by an oral presentation by the Director of major scientific highlights, together with a list of publications of Agency staff (available from <http://www.iarc.fr/en/research-groups/staffpublications.php>). In addition, the Director reported on the discussions from the 58th Governing Council and on updates from the 52nd Scientific Council. The Scientific Council thanked the Director for his presentations and congratulated the Agency's staff on the quality of IARC's activities over the previous year.
5. The Scientific Council received and noted the document entitled: "Biennial Report of the IARC Ethics Committee (IEC), 2015–2016" without additional comment (see document GC/59/10).

6. The Scientific Council asked questions about the future of the Monographs programme. The Monographs programme has been the subject of concerted and apparently coordinated efforts to undermine the credibility of its work since the evaluation of glyphosate in March 2015, an agent with high commercial value. The major focus has been on the evaluation process and conclusions, both through articles published in scientific journals and authored by industry-associated or industry-funded scientists, as well as through misrepresentation in parts of the media. Furthermore, some umbrella associations representing industry have developed specific campaigns to criticize the Monographs programme and questioned the current peer-reviewed funding from the US National Institutes of Health to the Monographs programme. In addition, some Monograph Working Group members who participated in the glyphosate evaluation have been subject to broad-based Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and subpoenas in the US courts, with the risk in the future of chilling scientific review during the deliberative process.

7. In response to the above approaches the Agency has taken a number of actions: a) to submit scientific responses to articles published in scientific journals; b) to place relevant correspondence and other information into the public domain on the IARC Governance website in order to inform the Governing and Scientific Councils as well as other interested parties including the general public; c) with the support of WHO Office of Legal Counsel, to provide advice to those IARC Working Group members and their institutions when faced with FOIA requests and subpoenas; d) to review in-house and in coordination with colleagues in WHO how to enhance cooperation in the planning and communication of future Monographs, notably in distinguishing between the hazard identification and evaluation conducted within the Monographs programme and the process of risk assessment and management conducted by WHO and other international and national authorities on the basis of Monograph evaluations. The Secretariat continues to monitor the situation.

Discussion of the Proposed Framework for Evaluating the Implementation of the IARC Medium-Term Strategy (2016–2017)

8. The presentation on the proposed Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) evaluation framework outlined the approach and rationale adopted in its development, together with the recommendations from the Working Group, composed of members of the Scientific and Governing Councils as well as WHO, which reviewed and advised on the range of indicators for monitoring progress against the strategic objectives in the MTS.

9. The Director welcomed the Scientific Council's endorsement of the proposed MTS evaluation framework, and the recommendation for its approval by the Governing Council.

10. The Director accepted the suggestion by the Scientific Council not to expand further the list of indicators to be measured, selecting those which are useful and can be efficiently collected using the currently available resources.

11. Based on the feedback from Scientific Council the Secretariat did not make further substantive changes to the MTS evaluation framework, subsequent to the version approved by the Working Group. The Director is presenting the proposed MTS evaluation framework for consideration by the Governing Council at the current session (see document GC/59/8).

Director's response to the Reviews of the Section of Genetics (GEN) held in January 2016

12. In line with the recommendations regarding the production of standard reports, the Director gave an oral presentation on the responses to the Peer-Review of the GEN Section.

13. The Scientific Council noted with satisfaction the progress made over the previous year in successfully implementing the points raised by the Review Panel and thanked the Director and the GEN Group Heads for the responses to the various points raised.

Discussion with the Director, the Director of Administration and Finance and the Scientific Council

14. The Scientific Council previously requested the opportunity to discuss generic issues relating to the Agency's operations with the Director and the Director of Administration and Finance. This year the discussion centred on proposals for ensuring the effective operation of the Scientific Council, given the increasing number of participants, and on the process for replacement of outgoing members.

15. The issue of the Scientific Council operation was subsequently discussed by the IARC Senior Leadership Team. The Secretariat wishes to continue to enhance the scientific interactions during the Council meetings, recognizing that while progress has been made in this regard the larger Scientific Council size means new approaches should be considered. One of the options is to organize parallel sessions during the Scientific Council attended by sub-sets of its members, focused either on particular scientific Sections/Groups or cross-cutting research topics. The format and feedback process on the poster sessions also needs to be revised to make it more focused on the actions suggested by the Scientific Council members (see below).

16. The Scientific Council had suggested some decisions could be taken in plenary but in the presence of only a proportion of Council members. However, the Secretariat considers key decisions need to be made in plenary with all available Council members present.

17. As the number of Participating States increases, the structure and operation of the Scientific Council will be kept under review by the Chair and Vice-Chair together with the Secretariat. Based on the experience over the next years, the way the Scientific Council can continue to fulfil its role effectively with expanded membership may need to be formally considered by the Governing Council.

Presentation of posters by IARC scientists

18. The presentations of posters by IARC scientists were again given a more prominent position in the Scientific Council programme. The Scientific Council members actively interacted at the posters' session with early-career and senior scientists.

19. In order to stimulate discussion on the work presented, specific members of the Scientific Council were assigned to report on posters. This worked well during the poster session discussions but the summaries provided in plenary were not as useful as anticipated. The Secretariat will continue to explore formats for the poster presentation that will showcase and promote discussion on the work of early-career scientists at IARC.

Presentation of Cross-cutting Theme and discussion

20. A multidisciplinary research topic on 'Circulating tumour DNA: application to population-based studies' involving several IARC Sections was presented, to seek advice from the Scientific Council on the development of this research area at IARC.

21. The comments provided by the members of the Scientific Council on the development of circulating tumour DNA (liquid biopsy) studies were helpful and timely, on a scientific and technical level but also in strategic terms. Future commitments in this area and IARC's potentially unique contribution will be assessed in internal discussions among senior scientists and the Director in 2017.

Purchase of scientific equipment

22. The Scientific Council recommended that the Governing Council approves the purchase of scientific equipment as proposed, emphasizing that it considered these purchases necessary for supporting the developments in bioinformatics discussed below.

23. The Director welcomed the endorsement by the Scientific Council and asks the Governing Council to consider this recommendation in document GC/59/11.

Report on the IARC Open Access Policy

24. The report reviewed the first two years of implementation of the open access policy at IARC. This preliminary evaluation showed a positive effect on the proportion of published articles being made available immediately through the payment of article processing charges, thus supporting the policy's objective of promoting the broadest possible barrier-free access to the Agency's research (see document SC/53/7).

25. The Director welcomed the Scientific Council's positive evaluation and support to request additional financial support from the Governing Council to continue to pursue the implementation of the open access policy.

26. At its 57th Session, the Governing Council agreed to provide €50 000 per annum for three years (2015–2017) from the Governing Council Special Fund (GCSF) to permit IARC to promote open access publishing (GC/57/R11). As of 31 December 2016, the total expenditure and commitment was €41 616.97, and the remaining balance on this fund was €58 383.03, which if carried forward to 2017 could be combined with the third allocation of €50 000.

27. Given the strategy of the Agency to continue to promote open access publishing but recognizing that the funds approved under GC/57/R11 are considered sufficient to cover 2017 and 2018, the Secretariat has decided not to request additional funds from the GCSF for this purpose at this time, on the understanding that the available funds from 2017 may be carried forward to 2018. It is envisaged that a request for additional funds for 2019 onwards will be presented to the Governing Council at its 60th session supported by a report on the results from the first three years of this initiative.

Presentation and discussion on IARC's Strategy and Plans for Bioinformatics

28. The presentation outlined the results of the internal review of the Agency's resources and capacity in the area of bioinformatics, and the resulting proposals for their development in order to continue to effectively support inter-disciplinary research at IARC. The initial proposals were discussed by an external Advisory Group established by the Director, composed of two Scientific Council members and two external experts, which reviewed the plans and advised on their implementation.

29. The proposed plans for bioinformatics have now been implemented, including new positions funded through a combination of restructuring and assignment of resources from unbudgeted assessments.

30. The Scientific Council supported the proposed strategy for bioinformatics and stressed the importance of continual monitoring and investment in this highly dynamic and increasingly important field in order to keep the Agency's research competitive. The Secretariat will seek the advice of the Scientific Council on bioinformatics on a regular basis when new developments need to be considered.

Proposed Programme and Budget (2018–2019)

31. The Scientific Council welcomed the changes in the presentation and structure of the programme and budget documents, namely the inclusion of additional high priority projects requiring extrabudgetary funding, and encouraged the Participating States to consider making additional voluntary contributions to support these areas, which the Scientific Council emphasized were central to the implementation of the Medium-Term Strategy.

32. The Director welcomed the Scientific Council's recommendations that the Governing Council adopt the Proposed Programme and Budget (2018–2019) as submitted by the Secretariat.

Scientific Peer-Review of the Sections of Cancer Surveillance (CSU) and Environment and Radiation (ENV)

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

34. Responses to the suggestions and comments coming from the peer-review will be addressed over the coming year and the Director will report back more fully on these actions at the next Scientific and Governing Council meetings. Nevertheless, a number of actions have already been taken in response to the comments from the panels.

35. To secure additional statistical expertise, CSU is hosting a visiting scientist (part-time) with longstanding expertise in developing public-health orientated statistical methods. CSU is also in the process of recruiting a Professional staff Statistician to support the extensions of its global indicator work, including global survival benchmarking. In terms of IT and web expertise, CSU will recruit a

full-time Data Manager and Web Programmer over the next 12 months to support linkages between CSU databases and further developments of the Global Cancer Observatory. The Childhood Cancer programme is in major transition, with a primary aim to develop a cohesive package of global indicators and research over the coming years.

36. The ENV Section has a longstanding tradition of playing a leading role in research on radiation and cancer, but given the limited resources there has never been more than one Professional and one support staff position on the regular budget in this area. This strategy will be continued by maintaining the same person-time commitment dedicated to radiation research following the retirement of a senior staff member in 2017. In response to the Peer-Review recommendation for increased support for occupational epidemiology, a 50% post has been created on the regular budget following internal restructuring, effective from July 2017.