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FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS

PART IV

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

Implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy 2017-2022

ADDENDUM 2

COMMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

Pursuant to Item 9.2.7 of the UNESCO Human Resources Manual, the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) submits its comments on human resources issues.

1. The International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) has studied the report on progress regarding the human resources strategy and the next steps for its implementation. The report is, to a certain extent, informative about the shortcomings in current human resources management and makes it possible to learn more about the next key steps.

Strengthening staff capabilities for the SDGs

2. In general, we find it difficult to see how the components of the human resources management strategy proposed in this document are particularly relevant to the achievement of the SDGs. As references to the SDGs seems almost to be verbal only, one must question the actual relevance of the document presented to Member States. What is the vision of a reform that pays only lip-service to the objectives it purports to achieve? The reference to the SDGs could have led to a challenge to the Secretariat working "in silos", and thus give genuine weight to functional mobility, which cannot seriously be implemented without genuine individual career management in the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) and not almost exclusively in the sectors. How could it be surprising, then, that some staff members remain in the same post for years, or that performance evaluation has virtually no impact on careers? The reality is that, unfortunately, HRM does not play a central



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role in career development. HRM limits itself almost solely to administrative tasks, delegating, for instance, nearly all recruitment to sectors. A real innovation for career management would be for HRM to fill a certain volume of posts every year, which would then be at the disposal of HRM, as is done for the Young Professionals Programme. The Director-General has limited room for manoeuvre for the establishment of posts. Our proposal would be for HRM to be explicitly entrusted with this, and to be accountable for it. This option would enable the direct management of talent-based mobility by adjusting needs and resources proactively and fairly. Such a measure would also address the situation of long-term temporary staff. Unfortunately, the document does not go far enough in terms of innovation.

3. With regard to the role of HRM, ISAU is concerned about certain types of recruitment, including project staff recruitment, which is not subject to geographical representation. The number of project appointments (PA) is increasing exponentially (approximately 400 at the time of writing). This kind of recruitment also circumvents the Appointment Review Boards (ARBs), and thus our participation and so remains opaque. HRM, which is the guarantor of geographical representation, should further involve in particular administrative officers in the field. HRM should create a unit to conduct investigations outside the context of those conducted by the Ethics Office and the Internal Oversight Service (IOS). The purpose would be to deal with staff grievances regarding the progress of their careers, before the problems reach the stage of the internal Appeals Board or the Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT, which, we recall, has condemned UNESCO repeatedly). Today, it is the representative staff associations that play that role.

UNESCO Competency Framework

4. ISAU welcomes the inclusion of key skills in vacancy notices in order to evaluate the match between the competencies required for the vacant post and the competencies of the candidates. We note that job descriptions should also be updated (as per Item 3.1, paragraph 9, of the Human Resources Manual) in order to be aligned with competency frameworks. Today, job descriptions and vacancy notices often refer to competencies that do not correspond to the reality of the functions in question. Therefore, although the initiative is commendable, its goals are attainable only if there is an effort made in updating in advance.

Recruitment

5. ISAU welcomes the implementation of the updated recruitment policy, with a 30% reduction in the time required for recruitment.

6. In addition, ISAU is continuing to struggle hard for the acceptance of its demands for greater transparency and efficiency in the ARB process. The lack of visibility and real involvement is in violation of the status to which the representative staff associations are entitled. After 11 months of implementation, we are sufficiently detached to be able to call for an improvement to the process.

7. It is essential to “actively identify sources of talent and establish a wide talent pool” (paragraph 5). However, in-house talents and experiences should not be overlooked in the search. UNESCO has staff with varied competencies, including skills that must be developed and recognized in recruitment, which is not necessarily the case today. We suggest that the posts in recruitment be re-advertised, as a priority internally and then externally; especially for posts at grades G-6 and G-7.

Mobility

8. We have worked with HRM and made our contribution to the development of the new mobility policy, which is an essential element in talent management. It is important that HRM play its full role and ensure that the new policy is actually applied.

Learning and development

9. ISAU agrees that this is an absolute priority as training is overwhelmingly endorsed by the staff. We therefore welcome the “invest for efficient delivery” initiative. However, this is only an ad hoc initiative, and we regret the lack of adequate funding to establish a genuine programme to improve training at UNESCO.

Performance management

10. ISAU concurs with the findings of the External Auditor on the shortcomings of the current system of performance management. This system, which easily be described as labyrinthine, is so complex that neither staff nor supervisors can find their way around it. Furthermore, it is not representative: most evaluations are extremely positive, although this does not correspond to the reality of performance. What is to be thought of an organization where 13% of staff “exceed expectations” and 86% “meet expectations”? This merely shows the tendency of supervisors to evaluate staff not sincerely, but for the sole purpose of evading bureaucracy. ISAU obviously intends to play its full role in the establishment of the new performance management policy which will remedy these shortcomings.

Create an Enabling and Engaging Work Environment

Culture of accountability and transparency – ethics/standards of conduct

11. ISAU notes all the projects related to ethics and standards of conduct and will continue to participate actively in this work as a representative staff association.

Internal justice system

12. As ISAU contributed to the review of the Appeals Board procedure, we wish to participate in the same way to the review of the grievance mechanism. With reference to the review of the rebuttal process in performance assessment, we call unreservedly for a comprehensive review of the evaluation system, which in its current state fails to be relevant and to reflect the reality of competencies and performance in the Organization. In any event, ISAU must be consulted on these points.

Staff well-being

13. ISAU has observed that staff fulfilment is not always at the heart of concerns, even though the Secretariat accepts in paragraph 10 that “staff wellbeing should be given a high priority”. The establishment of a well-being framework seems to be one of the few recent innovations covered in the document, and one that we encourage. However, further improvements are needed. In particular, it would be desirable for decent infrastructure to be put in place. Once again, we must be involved in the formulation of all policies, including telework and flexible working, which are yet to be democratized. Some supervisors are indeed refusing to introduce these arrangements, which are, even so, beneficial to the Organization as well as to the staff members concerned. We regret that, despite our many reminders to HRM, the Executive Board decision on the implementation of flexible working has still not been implemented, even though flexible working is more egalitarian and easier to establish than telework, which is not applicable to all posts.

14. We will remain vigilant concerning the introduction of these new policies: while these agreements should allow the Organization to “respond to the challenge in finding new and better ways of managing people, time and workloads”, they should not be used as a pretext and be misused to require even more work from people who are already performing more tasks than those that already exist in their job description.

15. Despite the innovation efforts on the theme of well-being, there is a sense of disconnect between personal development, which HRM would take responsibility for, and professional development, which would remain in the hands of the sectors.

16. ISAU certainly appreciates the holding by HRM of meditation sessions, but would like to see meditation as well on the numerous requests of representative staff associations that remain unanswered. One thing is certain: the proposed elements keep on coming, without any mention of consultation of staff associations, which does not augur well for the efficacy of the proposed reforms.

Monitoring and reporting

17. We fully agree about the essential nature of monitoring progress with data and statistics. However, we note that the HR Dashboard will be for ADGs/Directors of bureaux, and that the HR Strategy Dashboard will be for HRM (paragraph 11). It is deeply regrettable that the communication of this data to staff associations is not envisaged.

Action plans on geographical distribution and gender parity [Annexes II and III] Gender parity at all levels

18. With regard to geographical balance, it is surprising that the Secretariat persists in publishing figures only for Directors (paragraph 13). We should recall that geographical representation applies to all Professionals. The omission is all the more worrying because HRM has the data, which it has provided in great detail for gender balance.

19. ISAU considers that data on posts should be separated by source of funding (regular or extrabudgetary). In the context of a regular budget freeze, many staff are recruited on extrabudgetary funds. We emphasize in particular the absolute lack of visibility on the recruitment of project staff (PA), carried out exclusively by the sectors. We do not understand why, in the context of recruitment to these extrabudgetary posts (approximately 400), sectors should benefit from a separate regime.

20. Regarding gender balance, we can only express appreciation for the measures in place (including the management and leadership training programme for women referred to in paragraph 14). While this is a beginning, we must recognize, however, that such measures can only be successful by effectively raising global staff awareness about combatting the glass ceiling.

The global staff survey and the strategic transformation

21. We note in particular paragraph 15 (ii) which states that one of the priorities is “to ensure that the leadership of the Organization listens to and understands staff ideas and opinions, encourages innovation and creativity – so essential to this Organization – and is driving and managing change effectively”. Although we agree on the critical importance of the topic for staff, we nevertheless wonder how this “understanding”, “commitment” and “effective management” can be ensured in the absence of a specific mechanism.

22. With regard to the results of the survey, we invite Member States to look further than the summary proposed by HRM and to read the document detailing the results. We hope, at the very least, that the needs and aspirations expressed by the staff will be duly taken into account, including on the capacity of managers to engage in the career development of their staff and to manage conflict effectively; the fear of some staff members of expressing their views openly; the values and culture of the Organization; respect for individuals; performance management; confidence in leadership; conduct of change, and recognition and appreciation of work accomplished.