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

PART III

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

ADDENDUM 2

COMMENTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF ASSOCIATION OF UNESCO (ISAU)

SUMMARY

B. Implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy 2017-2022

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 (document 211 EX/5.III.B).

1. These comments, drawn up in a constructive spirit of open dialogue, contain ISAU's observations and recommendations on the implementation of the UNESCO Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2021.

Strengthening staff capabilities for the SDGs

2. The document begins by referring to the strengthening of staff capabilities for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but it unfortunately makes no mention of the career development issues that such strengthening should entail. Moreover, the SDGs are not mentioned anywhere else in the document.



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3. These two shortcomings give the impression of a certain arbitrariness in the way human resources management is approached: arbitrariness in the link between the results achieved by individual staff members and their promotion, and arbitrariness also in the link between the tools presented and the concrete objectives of the staff's work, for which the SDGs are indeed a key frame of reference.

4. To display such arbitrariness does not instil motivation in the staff, especially in the current period when the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic make the fulfilment of tasks more difficult for our colleagues, who have not been lacking in their duties, quite the contrary.

Workforce planning and skills inventory

5. Regular workforce planning and skills inventory are necessary exercises to ensure that UNESCO is effectively equipped to fulfil its missions. It is important, however, that these exercises be conducted in an open and consultative manner in order to achieve tangible and conclusive results.

6. It should be noted that, in the current context of budgetary constraints, these exercises have no real practical significance. It might also be expected that such exercises should address career planning, for example, by providing staff with a clear vision of the skills required to progress in terms of responsibility.

7. Again, it is unfortunate that the reference to learning and development is never linked to career advancement opportunities for staff members.

8. ISAU agrees with the principles of planning and inventory. We fear, however, that such principles applied without connection to staff motivation will be limited to bureaucratic exercises with no practical impact on the functioning of the Organization.

Recruitment

9. While the efforts of ADM/HRM in the area of outreach to candidates deserve to be recognized, it must be stressed that they are only made upstream of recruitment. This approach raises at least two problems.

10. First, the strategy applied suggests that underrepresentation and non-representation is due to a lack of candidates. If that is the case, ADM/HRM should provide Member States with statistics on the geographical origin of applicants, which would make it possible to measure the effectiveness of its efforts; outreach activities cannot be measured, even over time as the document states, without objective and clear measurement tools.

11. Second, these efforts cannot really be effective if ADM/HRM is not involved in the entire recruitment process, particularly in recruitment panels, where the actual decisions are taken. ISAU is regularly contacted by staff members who express doubts as to the transparency of recruitment, as ADM/HRM seems above all to echo the views of and endorse the choices made by the sectors.

12. ADM/HRM's lack of real involvement in recruitment is obvious in the case of Project Appointment (PA) and temporary staff, whose recruitment is almost entirely at the discretion of the sectors, which ISAU has consistently denounced. These posts should be subject to the Appointment Review Board (ARB) as well as to the geographical distribution criterion.

13. Moreover, it is known that the incumbents of PA and temporary posts often constitute an adjustment variable, a situation which leads to the perpetuation of many of them in an illegitimate precarious situation. This precarious status is a source of insecurity for our colleagues and at the same time costly for the Organization, since it cannot build on the recognized experience and expertise accumulated over many years of commitment.

14. It is up to ADM/HRM to defend the Organization's interests, not by targeting these long-term personnel in a precarious position, but by assessing their practical contribution and, where appropriate, by regularizing the status of those who are carrying out regular tasks. From this point of view, the issue of PA and temporary posts is in fact another symptom of ADM/HRM's lack of involvement in the recruitment process, whose lack of transparency suggests that the posts belong to the sectors recruiting and not to the Organization per se.

Mobility

15. ISAU agrees with the Administration that COVID-19 has limited the possibilities for implementing the mobility policy. It is nonetheless questionable whether it is appropriate to limit the current exercise to directors, heads of field offices and staff members in hardship duty stations, who are affected by health constraints in the same way as others. The exclusion of staff at Headquarters in this exercise also seems to imply that the colleagues concerned could not, in principle, be rotated to Headquarters.

16. We note that all Internal Oversight Service (IOS) recommendations, which ISAU supports, will be implemented when launching the mobility exercise. We reiterate that geographical mobility must be carried out in conjunction with functional mobility and the field office reform, and that the staff associations must be closely involved in the mobility exercises.

Learning and development

17. ISAU welcomes the efforts made by ADM/HRM to help staff members to adapt to the sometimes-difficult circumstances that COVID-19 has brought about. It is encouraging that a special effort has been made to welcome newcomers and we hope that their integration, which is a guarantee of their effectiveness, can take place in the best possible conditions. It is appropriate that ADM/HRM seek to measure this integration.

18. We would also like to highlight the commitment of staff members to professional development during this period in order to be in a better position to carry out their tasks. On this point, we continue to deplore the lack of a link between the training offered by ADM/HRM and career development.

Human resources partnerships

19. The hosting of seconded staff represents a contribution of skills and talents that can be very positive for the Organization. This practice should not, however, lead to the neglect of existing skills and talents in the Organization that could be usefully mobilized, which points to the need for workforce planning and skills inventory exercises that reflect the realities, as mentioned above.

20. Lastly, while secondments do represent a gain, the cost in terms of training time must also be taken into account, given that the seconded staff's commitment is of limited duration.

UNESCO internship programme

21. ISAU strongly supports the principle of remuneration for internships. The lack of remuneration leads to a bias in the recruitment of interns in favour of economically advantaged students, especially at Headquarters, located in a city with a high cost of living, which cannot fail to curb the ambitions of many bright and competent students.

22. We also agree that remuneration for internships would help to build a pool of talented and diverse young professionals, including from non-represented and underrepresented countries, for service at UNESCO.

Create an enabling and engaging work environment

Performance management

23. ISAU also agrees with the statement in the document that “the creation of an enabling and engaging work environment provides the Organization with opportunities to maximize contribution of staff, individually and through teams, with high motivation and engagement”.

24. Nevertheless, ISAU considers that depriving staff of their rights, as the Administration has done by abolishing the Reports Board and the Review Panel, is certainly not the best way to create such an environment. On the contrary, this measure is likely to demotivate staff and create a climate of tension.

25. Furthermore, if performance management is to be used, as the Administration claims, as a “means to constructive, productive dialogue rather than a sterile, administrative tool”, we are convinced that it is merely an administrative and bureaucratic tool when no link is established between the evaluation of staff performance and their career development.

26. We reiterate our proposal for a 360-degree assessment that should include an evaluation of the ability of supervisors to value their staff. This would build trust and foster a dynamic and supportive work environment.

Staff well-being framework

27. We take note of the work that ADM/HRM is currently doing to develop a framework for staff well-being. However, this work has not yet led to any consultations with the staff associations. ISAU also hopes that careful thought has been given to office space management in order to provide an optimum setting for the staff on their return to the premises.

28. The gains in flexible work arrangements must also be considered from the point of view of the Organization. While staff are just as effective, if not more so, when they have greater autonomy and flexibility in the day-to-day organization of their work, it is important to reflect carefully on the cost of their supervision and presence on the premises. It could be noted, for example, that the current period has demonstrated the effectiveness of electronic signatures. However, this effectiveness is undermined if some supervisors continue to require signatures on paper documents, a practice that forces entire teams to be present on the premises in an unnecessary, counterproductive and costly manner for the Organization. Such an example shows how the issue of flexibility goes beyond the mere well-being of the staff.

Geographical distribution

29. Our comments on geographical distribution have been submitted separately under document 211 EX/5.III.C Add.2.

30. The Executive Board will have noted that our comments partly repeat those submitted to it by ISAU at previous sessions. The culture of deafness that we previously denounced does not seem to have changed. Indeed, the comments of the staff associations to the Administration are barely paid attention, with the exception, very recently, of ISAU’s criticism of the management of COVID-19 at UNESCO.



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PART III

HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES

SUMMARY

B. Implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy 2017-2022

This document provides an update on activities on the two overarching objectives of the Human Resources Management Strategy: the strengthening of staff capabilities for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and the creation of an enabling and engaging work environment.

Decision required: paragraph 17.



Job: 202100670

Background

1. This document is submitted pursuant to 209 EX/Decision 5.III.A which requested the Director-General to report on the implementation of the [Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022](#), approved by the General Conference in November 2017. This report updates the information submitted presented to the Executive Board at its 209th session (document [209 EX/5.III.A](#)).
2. [The Human Resources Management Strategy](#) focuses on two overarching objectives: the strengthening of staff capabilities for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and the creation of an enabling and engaging work environment. Under these two objectives, 12 initiatives are planned to be carried out over a six-year period, as set out in the Implementation Plan.

Strengthening staff capabilities for the SDGs

3. In order to strengthen staff capabilities to implement its mandate, during the reporting period, UNESCO implemented activities in workforce planning, recruitment, outreach, mobility, learning and development, and performance management.
4. **Workforce planning and skills inventory:** following the successful completion of a pilot programme in 2019, a simplified model was developed, to support C/5 planning. This has resulted in a better understanding by HRM of specific staffing needs for the biennium, and informs succession planning and recruitment, and learning and development activities. As requested at the 209th (July 2020) session of the Executive Board¹, HRM will be launching in April 2021, a skills inventory exercise, to develop an overview of the existing specific expertise in UNESCO. This will be the basis of identifying gaps, if any, of the skills and expertise in UNESCO, and addressing them through (1) learning and development programmes, (2) targeted outreach for recruitment, (3) facilitated knowledge-sharing, and (4) focused organizational and succession planning. The results of the skills inventory exercise will be presented in the context of the full report on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy 2017-2022 at the 41st session of the General Conference in November 2021.
5. **Recruitment:** In 2020, 72 staff at Professional levels and above were appointed, including 34 (47%) external recruits. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the overall time for recruitment, from the date of advertisement to the date of appointment slightly improved. Enhancements, including increased and more effective use of a new end-to-end recruitment tool (*SuccessFactors*) should continue to generate efficiencies. In 2020, HRM organized or participated in over 20 online outreach activities, with the goal of increasing interest in UNESCO by qualified candidates, including the diaspora of non- and under-represented Member States, who may be studying or working abroad. Two of these outreach events were joint United Nations events, aimed at reaching senior women candidates with 7 to 10 years' professional experience. The outcome of these outreach activities can only be measured over time and will therefore be monitored with a view to providing Member States with a quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of such activities, in due course.
6. **Mobility:** While the the Executive Board at its 209th session invited the Director-General to resume the managed mobility exercise, national restrictions on international travel in 2020 posed severe constraints on the Organization's ability to move its personnel, including for onboarding and transfers. The Secretariat has therefore decided to limit the scope of the 2020-2021 managed mobility exercise that would normally have been launched in the fourth quarter of 2020. The current exercise will be limited to Directors and Heads of Field Offices, and staff members in hardship duty stations (D and E), who have reached or exceeded their standard duration of assignment, using a tailored approach to ensure their mobility. All remaining staff members that would have been considered for the 2020-2021 exercise will be included in the 2021-2022 exercise, though in the case of promotion through mobility, implementation requires a staff regulation change, to be

¹ [209 EX/Decision/5/III.A](#).

presented to the General Conference. Preparations for this exercise will begin in June 2021, for launch in September 2021, COVID-19 conditions permitting. All IOS recommendations will be implemented when launching the mobility exercise. Nonetheless, in 2020, mobility continued with a total of 39 staff who moved geographically to another duty station. Of these, 14 were from Headquarters to the field, 12 from the field to Headquarters and 13 between field offices.

7. Learning and development: During the reporting period, HRM organized initiatives specifically related to the challenges generated by COVID-19. Three online workshops assisted supervisors and managers to adapt quickly to leading a remote team, and two online workshops explored work-life balance. Ad hoc, personalized, coaching-based support was provided to managers and staff. Remote working guidelines were provided for staff and supervisors, as well as targeted recommendations for online learning; an informal networking activity facilitated connections and knowledge-sharing between staff at a time when many were isolated. Overall, access to learning and development resources on the UNESCO learning platform (MyLearning), saw an almost 200% increase in individual users, as compared to 2018, and a dramatic increase in learning resources (e-learning, video-recordings, etc.) accessed, from 2,500 in 2019 to 10,000 in 2020. The delivery of the Senior Leadership Development Programme continued with a fourth session in February 2020 for Directors and Heads of Field Offices at P-5 level, to develop capacity in coaching, conflict management, change management and providing feedback. Skills for Professional and General Service staff were developed through two key programmes: (1) a mentoring programme, incorporating training for mentors and mentees focusing on skill-building; (2) the “Competencies for Professional Development” programme on areas such as teamwork, innovation, and knowledge-sharing. Initially targeting G staff, the programme was also offered to Professionals. Language classes were transitioned from face-to-face to virtual classrooms from March to June 2020, and in October a mixed format of classes was introduced in order to respond to requests from colleagues with hybrid working arrangements. Together with BSP, training modules on results-based management were updated and offered to staff: the programme has been accessed online 993 times by 494 colleagues, with a majority in the field. Career support and career development training to individuals and groups continued, adapting rapidly to respond to organizational and team-based needs. Induction sessions for newcomers at UNESCO were held online. Some 16 informal “lunchtime talks” provided personnel an in-depth, house-wide perspective on a variety of topics.

8. Human resources partnerships: During 2020, some 258 junior staff and experts served UNESCO as junior professional officers, secondees, loaned personnel, sponsored trainees, sponsored junior experts, UNESCO volunteers and United Nations volunteers in Headquarters (112) and in field offices (146). Such personnel supplement the workforce and may provide expertise not available within the Organization. They supplement in-house talent, bringing with them innovative practices which benefit UNESCO programmes.

9. UNESCO internship programme: in response to the recommendations of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit following its review of internship programmes in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2018/1), UNESCO established a working group with the participation of Young UNESCO, to align its internship programme with best practices across the United Nations system, to promote fair access and a more equitable participation of interns across geographical, social and economic groups. Some recommendations have been implemented to adhere to United Nations minimum standards, allowing interns full access to online training courses, inviting them to induction workshops and themed lunchtime events. Other recommendations require further reflection and/or approval from the governing bodies, in particular consideration of a paid internship programme, which will require the establishment of a voluntary trust fund or another financing mechanism. The internship programme is designed to provide talented students worldwide the opportunity to work in a multicultural international environment in their selected field of expertise. It can also contribute to building a pool of talented and diverse young professionals, including from non- and under-represented countries, for service at UNESCO.

Create an enabling and engaging work environment

10. The creation of an enabling and engaging work environment provides the Organization with opportunities to maximise contribution of staff, individually and through teams, with high motivation and engagement.

11. **Performance management:** In 2020, a new performance management policy was launched, to align UNESCO to other United Nations agencies in an annual performance assessment cycle. HRM seeks to change the approach of performance management, to encourage staff and their supervisors to use it as a means to constructive, productive dialogue rather than a sterile, administrative tool. The key changes to the policy are the strong focus on development, career and frequent feedback. By introducing a mandatory mid-term review, staff have at last three formal performance conversations with their supervisor, with feedback on their performance. A revamped performance management tool, MyTalent-Performance, provides a more user-friendly platform, with user guides, relevant learning resources and important performance management documents. To date, compliance rates are much higher than previous years, with 95% of staff having set their objectives, and 94% having completed their mid-term review, and 84% to date having completed their end-of-year performance for the annual 2020 performance cycle.

12. **Staff well-being framework:** Creating an enabling and supportive environment for staff is key to an efficient workforce, particularly when resources are limited. In this connection, UNESCO is developing a staff well-being framework encompassing flexible work arrangements, including telecommuting, and a health strategy to promote ways to help staff who may encounter difficulties in their professional and private lives. This framework will continue to be developed and refined, taking into consideration any best practices and lessons learned from the ongoing COVID-19 response, before being finalized.

13. At the appropriate moment, a back-to-office framework, with specific guidance, will be put in place to ensure that staff can resume normal working conditions, allowing the necessary personal interaction, while respecting applicable safety measures.

14. **Policy and process review:** Under the objective of creating an enabling and engaging work environment, the **Internal Justice System** process was reviewed, approved by the 40th session of the General Conference and implemented in January 2020. The main improvements, as presented in the revised Statutes of the Appeals Board, include the possibility of shortening the duration of the appeal process including a maximum timeframe for hearings by the Appeals Board while allowing adjustments to the schedule. With the view to improving operational efficiency, the Director-General introduced greater delegation of authority in human resources management, to reduce duplication and shorten decision-making process. Delegating appropriate decision-making authority to various levels loosens bottlenecks, while continuing to attribute clear accountability for decisions.

15. **Monitoring and reporting:** In order to improve transparency, HRM makes available to Member States, key human resources data [[Key Data on UNESCO Staff and Posts](#)] on UNESCO.int. Following the request of the General Conference at its 40th session, UNESCO.int also contains organizational charts of sectors, as well as a list of staff members per sector/bureau.

16. Details on geographical distribution and gender parity may be found in the separate report submitted by the Secretariat under document [211 EX/5.III.C](#).

Proposed draft decision

17. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling [209 EX/Decision 5.III.A](#),
2. Having examined document 211 EX/5.III.B,
3. Takes note of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022;
4. Requests the Director-General to present a full report on the implementation of the Human Resources Management Strategy for 2017-2022 to the General Conference at its 41st session.