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Organización
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**Internal Oversight Service
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**Audit of UNESCO's
Recruitment Process for International Staff**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Results of the Audit

UNESCO's recruitment procedures are derived from the Staff Rules and Regulations and are set forth in detail in the Human Resources Manual. The process is designed to identify and appoint high quality staff while also achieving wide geographical representation and gender balance in the Secretariat. Competition is an important aspect of the recruitment process, and current staff are to be given priority when making appointments.

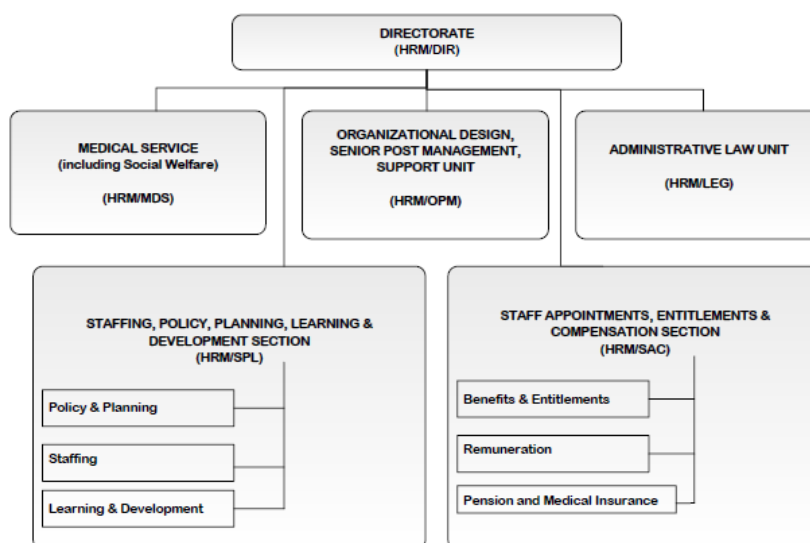
For purposes of this audit, IOS examined all recruitments completed in 2014 and 2015. From a compliance perspective, these generally conformed to the established procedures. However, the procedures are characterized by sequential steps – often involving a pre-selection committee, an evaluation panel and an advisory board – resulting in a lengthy process with considerable investment of staff time. While certain efficiencies have been successfully introduced, the Organization has had little success in accelerating time lapsed from initiation to entry on duty which currently averages one year.

The report contains 14 recommendations to improve recruitment for international Professional posts and higher grades. These include improvements to the workflow, clarification of certain procedures, and emphasize the importance of improved planning, with timely advertisement and clear service standards, to reduce prolonged staffing gaps.

Background

1. UNESCO's recruitment procedures are designed to ensure that staff appointments are made in accordance with the staff regulations approved by the General Conference. The overarching objective of the staff regulations in this regard is to secure the highest standards of integrity, efficiency and technical competence when appointing the staff of the Secretariat. Within this objective, the appointments are to be made on a competitive basis to achieve a wide geographical representation with due consideration to the improvement of gender balance at all levels of the Organization.
2. The Director-General is responsible for appointing the staff of the Secretariat in accordance with staff regulations. The Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) maintains UNESCO's Human Resources Manual, which sets forth the administrative procedures to be followed in implementing the staff regulations and rules.
3. HRM is responsible for providing guidance to hiring units on recruitment planning, job descriptions, vacancy notices, advertising and performing electronic pre-screening of candidates. HRM also informs candidates of the outcome of the recruitment process, issues the appointment letters and provides oversight of the process. For the recruitment of international Professional staff, HRM is to ensure that hiring units apply the Human Resources (HR) recruitment procedures and provides an interface between the hiring unit, the advisory bodies on personnel matters (PAB) and the Director-General. For P-5 posts, the posts of Heads of Field Office, Directors and above, HRM staff participate more directly in the recruitment process, for example by attending interviews, undertaking logistical and technical support, providing advice and note-taking support for some posts. For posts of the Senior Management Team, HRM also co-develops the vacancy notices together with the Office of the Director-General.
4. HRM's current organisational chart is as follows:

Figure 1. Organisational Chart of HRM as of August 2015



5. Recruitment of professional posts is decentralized to sectors and services, with the Staffing unit of the Staffing, Policy, Planning, Learning and Development (HRM/SPL) section in an advisory and oversight role. The HR management capacity varies among the programme sectors, with Education sector having dedicated HR staff while other sectors assign administrative staff as HR focal points. The Organizational Design Senior Post Management, Support unit (HRM/OPM) is the focal point for recruiting P-5 Heads of Field offices, Directors (D) and Assistant Director-General (ADG) posts.

6. UNESCO's recruitment process is largely administered through Taleo, a specialized off-the-shelf software for recruitment acquired by HRM in December 2011.

7. Table 1 below provides an overview of the number of recruitments completed by year between January 2012 and June 2015 for posts of international Professionals and above.

Table 1. Number of recruitments completed from January 2012 to June 2015

Type of post	Total	2012	2013	2014	2015
Professional	90	14	24	21	31
Heads of Field Offices	26	1	14	11	-
Directors	13	2	2	7	2
ADG	5	-	-	5	-
Total	134	17	40	44	33

Scope, Objective and Methodology

8. This audit was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of UNESCO's recruitment process for international Professional staff, Directors and Assistant Directors-General. This included assessment of (i) the workflows, controls and accountabilities in place to ensure compliance with the staff regulations, (ii) the procedures, guidance and tools used to manage the process and (iii) consideration of the handling of sensitive information associated with recruitment of staff.

9. The audit considered the key phases of the recruitment process including:

- Recruitment Planning
- Recruitment Preparation

- Advertisement of Post
- Receipt and Evaluation of Applications
- Selection and Appointment
- Entry on Duty

10. UNESCO's recruitment process has been impacted by financial shortfalls in recent years. This was particularly notable in late 2011 and 2012, when many vacancies were frozen in order to stabilize the budget, and in 2013 and 2014 as a redeployment exercise was undertaken following staffing reviews of Sectors and Services. Accordingly, our sampling methodology covered recruitments completed between January 2014 and June 2015. In order to reflect the current recruitment process, we excluded outliers, such as suspended recruitments due to the funding shortfall, that distorted overall conclusions.

11. The audit was performed in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*. This included a risk assessment during the planning phase of the audit, detailed analyses of each of the 72 sampled recruitments, interviews with hiring managers, HRM and BFM personnel, consideration of the use and effectiveness of automated tools used to initiate and manage the recruitment workflows, benchmarking with other UN organizations and consideration of past audits and evaluations.

Achievements

12. When compared to previous assessments of UNESCO's recruitment process, progress has been made in a number of areas.

13. HRM has introduced an automated recruitment system that retains information on applications received and their assessment and decisions. One notable efficiency of this system is the automated pre-screening of candidates to eliminate from further consideration external candidates that do not meet specific essential requirements of the post. It also provides a record of applications received and the progress of candidates through the recruitment process.

14. HRM has also launched a number of important initiatives to improve the recruitment process. These include a project to introduce generic job descriptions in the Programme Sectors, the promotion of competency-based interviews and preparation of Confidentiality Statements to be signed by HRM personnel with access to sensitive and confidential information. Confidentiality statements have already been introduced for PAB members. While further action is needed to complete and more widely embed these good practices, substantive progress has been made.

15. UNESCO's overall gender balance among Professional staff and above is among the best in the UN system at 49 percent.¹ Since 2008, UNESCO has made significant progress to achieve gender parity at the senior level. In 2014 and 2015, two thirds of the appointed candidates at the Director and ADG levels were female, increasing representation of women at the senior level to 42 percent. However, despite proactive measures, data indicates that UNESCO will fall behind the target of achieving gender parity at the senior levels by end of 2015.

16. For the posts of Assistant Director-General (ADG), UNESCO publicly advertises vacancies setting forth specific qualifications for the posts. UNESCO compares favourably in this regard to some other UN organizations where appointments at this level are seen as political in nature and are not subject to a transparent recruitment process. The establishment of specific required qualifications for these posts can protect the Organization noting that appointed staff must meet all required qualifications as advertised.

¹ CEB/2014/HLCM/HR/21.

17. HRM has also redesigned the vacancy notice format to simplify the presentation and introduce more consistency.

Challenges and Opportunities

18. Notwithstanding the progress noted above, much remains to be done to improve the current process for recruiting international staff at the professional and above levels. See Annex II for Table of Prior Recommendations to Improve UNESCO's Recruitment processes.

19. Medium-term recruitment planning is not effectively in place. While an HR strategy was prepared for 2011 to 2016, indicators of progress were not effectively developed and nearly half of the planned actions to implement the strategy have been suspended due to the lack of budget resources.

20. Recruitment plans are not developed for hiring units, and service standards are out-dated and do not reflect current roles and procedures. As a result, the service standards are not monitored or otherwise used for planning, management and accountability purposes, and key steps of the recruitment process are often taken reactively leading to lengthy gaps between incumbencies of posts. Table 2 below compares the average time lapsed (in months) for international Professional recruitments as reported by IOS in 2009 and the average time lapsed for recruitments completed from January 2014 to June 2015.

Table 2. Average time taken for Professional (P) posts recruitment from initiation to DG decision

Average time taken from initiation ² to DG decision for P posts in months	2014 & 2015	2008
External recruitments	10	10
Internal recruitments	8	5
Internal followed by External recruitments	18	20

21. The automated tool used to initiate recruitments, the Organisation Management workflow, is no longer current. HRM has partially implemented this electronic workflow; however, the rigidity of the tool has resulted in a sequential workflow that unnecessarily delays the process. The enhancement requirements articulated by HRM have been put on hold by KMI due to the obsolete nature of the automated platform on which the tool is based. Its partial implementation has also led to inconsistent practices among Programme Sectors and Central Services when initiating recruitments.

22. UNESCO's current provisions on educational requirements are not clearly established and consistently applied when developing vacancy notices. While UNESCO's HR Manual establishes that candidates for Professional and higher categories should possess at a minimum a completed advanced degree, the UNESCO Staff Rules stipulate the minimum requirement of a university degree or equivalent experience for Professional posts. Beginning in 2014, the requirement for an advanced degree as set forth in the HR Manual has often been set aside for higher-level posts to accept relevant professional experience in lieu of an advanced degree. This change follows practices in the UN Secretariat and aligns with UNESCO Staff Rules but is not consistent with provisions of UNESCO's HR Manual, resulting in confusion and controversy regarding UNESCO's standards for educational qualifications.

23. The prescribed periods for advertising vacancies – internally for one month and externally for two months – delays recruitment. While there is a great deal of variance among UN organizations, half of the organizations advertise vacancies for one month or less. Prior studies have recommended that UNESCO shorten its advertising period to one month.³ While the 36th General Conference did not endorse the change, it merits reconsideration in

² The date the hiring unit formally requests, by HR Form 5-3 or through the automated workflow, the initiation of a recruitment.

³ The UN Joint Inspection Unit's *Report on Staff Recruitment in the UN System* (2012) and the *IOS Evaluation of UNESCO's Recruitment Policy and Practice* (2009).

light of improved on-line systems and expanded global access to the Internet. A shortened advertising period can be combined with other measures, such as more targeted advertising through other media in addition to the UNESCO website and a wider practice of concurrent internal and external advertising, to shorten the recruitment process while effectively identifying a strong pool of candidates.

24. Despite the overall target established in UNESCO's 2011 Human Resource Management Strategy of having 85 percent of Member States represented in the Secretariat by 2016, the proportion of under- and non-represented Member States is increasing (see Table 3). UNESCO's staff complement is declining and this has had an adverse impact on its overall geographical representation. UNESCO recruited very few external candidates from 2012 until mid-2014; therefore, the shift in geographical representation has mainly been driven by staff departures.

Table 3. UNESCO's geographical representation as of June 2005, 2010 and 2015

Year	Over-represented	In balance	Under-represented	Non-represented
2005	26	79	55	31
2010	26	77	53	37
2015	17	70	66	42

Source: 2005: 172 EX/35, 2010: 185EX/Inf. 8 & 2015: 38 C/INF.4

25. Ethics guidance for UNESCO staff is sparse with regard to recruitment. The HR Management Strategy includes an action assigned to HRM to develop and implement, in consultation with the Ethics Office, policies on conflicts of interest and related matters. Progress has been made with regard to the Financial Disclosure Programme and the Gift policy, but no substantive progress has been made in developing the Conflicts of Interest Policy. Consequently, UNESCO relies on the more general Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants to guide personnel on potential conflicts of interest in the recruitment process. Completion of the foreseen Conflicts of Interest Policy, including relevant guidance on identifying and managing conflicts of interest in the recruitment process, would contribute to the common understanding and application of ethical standards.

26. Limited targeting of vacancy announcements limits candidatures. From January 2014 to June 2015, UNESCO advertised nine vacancy notices using media other than UNESCO's website; however, there was no analysis of cost-effectiveness of the alternate media. UNESCO's external advertisements are posted on the recruitment website and shared with members of the UN HR Network. For Director and above posts, vacancy notices are also circulated to the Permanent Delegations. Although the vacancy notices attract a large number of candidates (on average, Professional posts advertised in 2015 received 215 applications), a significant portion do not meet requirements of the post and, in some instances, hiring managers were required to re-advertise the vacancy because there were insufficient suitable candidates or a wider pool of candidates was needed to support geographic or gender objectives.

27. The assessment of candidates is the lengthiest phase of the recruitment process. It involves a three-step process comprising (i) a pre-screening to identify candidates not meeting key requirements of the post, (ii) a pre-selection phase to retain candidates who are assessed to have met all essential requirements of the posts and (iii) an evaluation phase to identify the candidates to be retained for interview. The pre-screening process is automated and efficient, and since 2009 the pre-selection and evaluation phases can be combined for internal recruitments to enhance efficiency. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to further simplify the pre-selection process and to improve the institutional record of the progression of candidates from the pre-selection to interview stage.

28. Assessment Centres can improve the evaluation of candidates for key posts. While several UN organizations draw on the services of Assessment Centres to support the evaluation of candidates for key posts, UNESCO has stopped using these services following

the financial shortfall in 2011. An objective and well formulized assessment of shortlisted candidates can assist the evaluation panels in differentiating candidates going beyond interviews and reference checks. HRM points out that the value of using Assessment Centres for senior positions is debated within the UN system.

29. The advisory body on personnel matters (PAB) is generally recognized as increasing the transparency and reliability of appointments of staff at the international Professional and Headquarters-based General Service levels. However, given the number of staff involved, the time spent reviewing recruitment files and the meetings with hiring managers, this is a heavy process that requires investment of staff time as well as adds an additional sequential step to the recruitment process. HRM should explore alternatives with the Staff Associations and other stakeholders to lighten the process while still obtaining sufficient assurance to advise the Director-General. Senior-level recruitments (Director and above) are not subject to a process of independent review and advice to the Director-General. While such a process would not necessarily involve representatives of the Staff Associations, a formal and explicit assurance to the Director-General that the recruitment process conformed to relevant regulations, rules and procedures prior to making senior-level appointments could mitigate risks of disputes and controversy.

30. UNESCO's automated recruitment tool is only partially implemented. In December 2011, HRM purchased software licenses for Taleo, a talent acquisition / recruitment tool. While benefits have been achieved through this tool, HRM is not using it to its full capacity.

31. The audit also noted that cost-effective steps can be taken to improve the safeguarding of confidential recruitment information.

32. To address these conditions, this report makes 14 recommendations to improve UNESCO's recruitment process for international Professional staff and above.

Table of recommendations

Recommendation 1: HRM to clearly assign accountability and resources to facilitate planning of recruitments across the organization. This should include tools or templates to establish milestones and target dates for the projected recruitments to avoid lengthy gaps in incumbencies. As part of the planning, early consideration should be given to the requirements of the post and any special recruitment needs such as more proactive advertising (e.g., in professional journals) in the event of external recruitment and special assessment methods (e.g., assessment centres or written examinations) for the evaluation of candidates. Further, HRM should provide hiring units with standardized guidance on use and required input in Taleo and update the checklist of steps in the recruitment process.

Recommendation 2: HRM, in collaboration with BFM and KMI, to enhance the workflow and associated management tool for updating post data, including for recruitment preparation, in order to introduce clear service standards and replace sequential steps with concurrent reviews and approvals where feasible. This may require replacing the automated tool due to its inflexibility. The current validation by BFM in the preparation phase should also be reconsidered if staff limitations prevent prompt validation.

Recommendation 3: HRM to identify which posts can be transitioned from unique to generic job descriptions and establish a plan with timeframe, roles and resource needs to advance this exercise for all identified posts.

Recommendation 4: HRM to clarify, formalize and disseminate the policy on educational qualifications for the recruitment of UNESCO staff members at the Professional and higher levels in order to ensure consistent understanding and application of the policy.

Recommendation 5: HRM, in collaboration with the Ethics Office, to establish, formalize and disseminate policy and guidance for identifying and addressing conflicts of interest with regard to

staff recruitment. This can be incorporated as a part of a more comprehensive conflict-of-interest policy, as considered appropriate.

Recommendation 6: HRM to propose revision of the staff regulations and rules to (i) shorten the period of external advertisement of vacancies and (ii) on a pilot basis, introduce direct external recruitment of vacancies to avoid sequential advertisement while still preserving the associated staff rights.

Recommendation 7: HRM, in the context of recruitment planning, to establish and assign to hiring Sectors and Services time-bound targets for improving both geographical representation and gender balance and then closely monitor the progress achieved. This initiative should be coordinated with more proactive and targeted advertisement practices.

Recommendation 8: HRM, in collaboration with Sectors and Services, to develop practical guidance on advertising vacancies in media beyond the UNESCO website including (i) funding of advertisements through staff cost savings, (ii) approaches for targeting specific competencies and attributes (e.g., geographic and/or gender considerations) and (iii) a monitoring mechanism to assess the cost-effectiveness of such advertising. Further, HRM should consider practices in place at other UN organizations, including the use of recruitment firms to identify additional highly qualified candidates for selected posts and rosters for recurring vacancies, and introduce these practices in UNESCO where appropriate on a pilot basis.

Recommendation 9: HRM to modify current guidance to require Evaluation Panels to enter a brief annotation in Taleo reflecting decisions to not move candidates to the next stage of the recruitment process.

Recommendation 10: HRM to (i) introduce a more streamlined pre-selection process involving only an HRM representative and the hiring manager or designate; (ii) prepare and disseminate to Evaluation Panel chairs a standard briefing note on the roles, responsibilities and working methods of the Evaluation Panel; and (iii) modify current guidance to require that each member of the Evaluation Panel signs the summary record of the conclusions of the evaluation process. HRM should also consider assigning a representative to advise and oversee each Panel through the evaluation process.

Recommendation 11: HRM to establish criteria (e.g., grade level, nature of duties) and guidance for using Assessment Centres for the recruitment of key personnel. This should include learning from the practices in other UN organizations and identifying the various assessment services available and the associated costs.

Recommendation 12: HRM to (i) engage with stakeholders on options to lighten the PAB process without undermining the level of transparency and advisory support provided to the Director-General and (ii) introduce a clear statement of assurance by HRM or, alternatively, an independent review and advice to the Director-General regarding the conformity to applicable regulations, rules and procedures of recruitment process undertaken for senior-level appointments.

Recommendation 13: HRM in collaboration with KMI, to increase the value of Taleo as a management tool by engaging its reporting and monitoring functionalities where feasible and cost-effective.

Recommendation 14: HRM to (i) require Taleo users in HRM to sign confidentiality statements regarding sensitive information required in performing their official duties; (ii) introduce procedures whereby the Chair of the Evaluation Panel or an HRM representative instruct members of the Panel on their responsibilities with regard to confidentiality of deliberations and recommendations of the Panel; and (iii) regularly monitor access rights to Taleo to ensure user access is consistent with the respective job function.