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Organisation
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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Audit of Personnel Management at UNESCO's Doha Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Results

At the request of the Office Director, IOS conducted an audit of the personnel management in UNESCO's Doha Cluster Office. The audit was initiated following a local newspaper report about allegation of irregularities in the Office. This audit was undertaken to provide assurance on the functioning and the effectiveness of the internal controls in the Office's management of human resources, in particular for recruitment and remuneration of personnel.

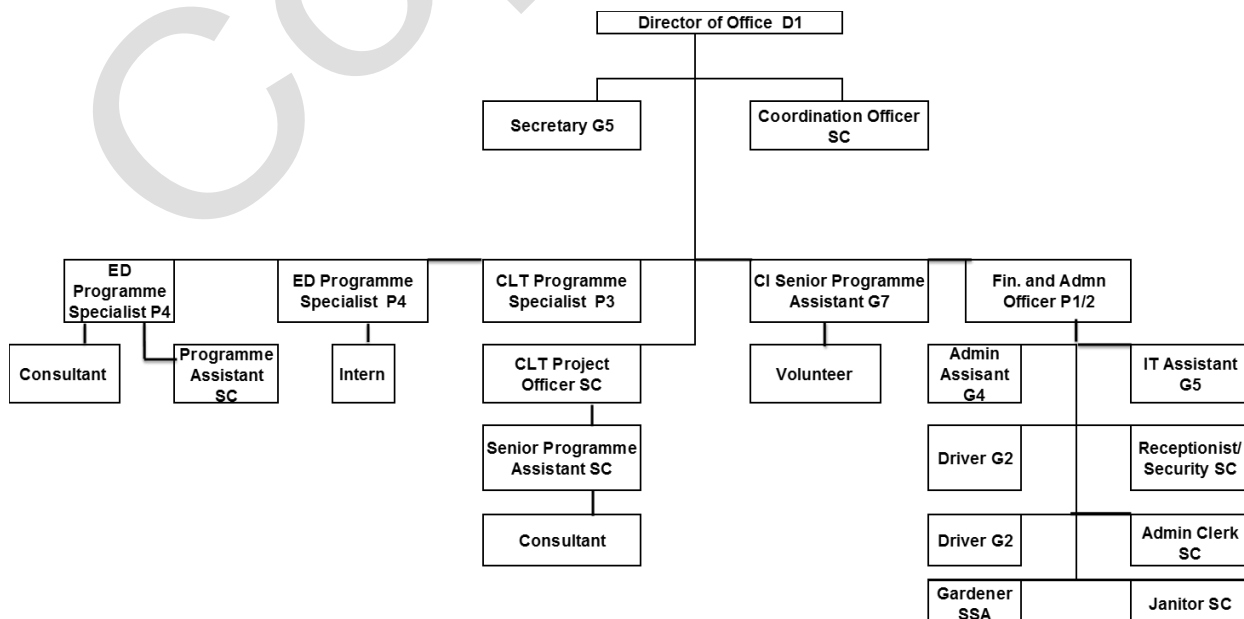
The audit concluded that the Office, in general, followed the recruitment process as required under the UNESCO HR policy for the recruitment of staff, service contractors and consultants. Nevertheless, the audit identified flaws in two staff recruitments conducted by the Office during 2014 and 2015. Errors originated in UNESCO's centralized Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) and were not effectively identified and resolved by the Office due to the absence of its Administrative Officer during the crucial phase of recruitment planning. Since the approval came from HRM in Headquarters, the audit concluded that the Office Director had not acted unilaterally on this point, and that there was no evidence or indication of fraud or collusion in these recruitments.

The salaries paid by the Office to the temporary personnel (service contractors) were within the limits prescribed. There was, however, significant variation between the salaries paid to different contractors for the comparable job descriptions and qualifications. This practice impaired the morale of involved personnel.

The Office completed the required performance assessments of all staff members for the biennium 2014-15 within the time limits prescribed. These contained detailed assessments of work performed and also identified opportunities for improvements. Further, while the Director held regular meetings with programme staff, the meetings involving all staff were not regularly held. Better oral communication between the Director and staff would improve staff relations and avoid workplace misunderstandings.

Background

1. The UNESCO Doha Office has served as the Cluster Office for Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates since 1976, and Yemen joined the Doha Cluster in 2009. The Office is active in the fields of education, natural sciences, culture as well as communication and information. It also maintains strong partnership with private sector and other UN organizations. Headed by a Director (D-1), who also serves as UNESCO representative in the countries of the Gulf and Yemen, human resources of the Office comprise 11 staff and 13 other personnel organized as follows.



Scope, Objective and Methodology

2. IOS conducted an audit of the personnel management in UNESCO Doha Office, at the request of the Office Director. The field work for the audit took place just after the first local newspaper report about certain allegation of irregularities in the UNESCO Doha Office was published. Another similar newspaper article was published just after completion of the audit field work. The objective of this audit was to provide assurance on the functioning and the effectiveness of the internal controls in the management of the Office's human resources, in particular for recruitment and remuneration of personnel.
3. The auditors examined the process of recruitment and determination of salary levels of personnel including fixed-term staff, temporary staff and consultants. The audit also reviewed the personnel management practices such as communication of expected results, day-to-day supervision and feedback, the team-building efforts, and assessment of performance.
4. The audit was performed in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and covered activities undertaken during the period 2015 and 2016 (through March). Methodology was based on a risk assessment conducted during the planning phase of the audit and substantive testing of a sample of recruitments of staff, service contractors and individual consultant contractors. The audit also reviewed the mechanism for individual objective setting and assessment of performance during the biennium 2014-15. In doing this, the auditors considered relevant rules and procedures, examined documentation and interviewed personnel at the Office and in the Bureau of Human Resource Management as well as met with the National Commission of Qatar to UNESCO.

Achievements

5. Performance expectations were clearly established and detailed assessments of performance was done on timely basis.
6. The recruitment process as required under the UNESCO HR policy was followed for recruitment of staff and service contractors, including personnel funded through the Qatar Special Account – Government Contribution to Regional Office. Hiring of individual consultant contractors was also in accordance with the relevant policies.
7. The Office uses appropriate contract types and maintains supporting documentation for the recruitment and selection process.

Challenges and Opportunities

8. While the Office self-assessed its human resources management function to be globally controlled during 2015, the audit concluded that further improvements were warranted, as discussed below.
9. During the biennium 2014-15, the Office completed recruitment of two general service staff. The advertised vacancy notices for both the recruitments indicated incorrect remuneration levels that were substantially lower than the prescribed salaries for these grade levels. In absence of an Administrative Officer, the Office relied on the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) to support these recruitments and, in at least in one of the cases, the incorrect remuneration level was provided to the Office by the HRM. The low remuneration levels advertised negatively impacted a fair and competitive selection for these posts. Further, the minimum requirement regarding the number of years of experience of the candidate in one of the two above mentioned recruitments was less than required for that grade level in the HR Manual. Nevertheless, HRM decided to relax the requirement and consented to the appointments at the corrected remuneration levels. UNESCO HR Manual does not provide for waiving minimum experience requirements set forth in the Manual, and a re-advertisement of the post would normally be required when making appointments at a salary level higher than advertised in the vacancy notice.
10. The salaries paid to the service contractors are within the limits of the local UN salary scales for such posts; however, in one case, the Office paid salary higher than the commensurate level after considering the qualification and experience of the incumbent. There was also

significant variation between the salaries paid to the service contractors doing professional work. This happened as office gradually introduced UNDP salary scales in 2015.

11. Programme staff meetings were held regularly to review progress of programme activities. However, larger staff meetings involving all Office staff were not regularly held and this reportedly impaired the morale of some personnel.

12. Inaccurate budget forecast led to aborting one recruitment process after publishing the vacancy notice and conducting the interviews of prospective candidates.

13. The UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) conducted an assessment of Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) for the Office in November 2015. Some of the key recommendations are yet to be implemented.

Table of recommendations

Recommendation 1: HRM (i) in consultation with BFM to formally establish a backstopping protocol for providing increased support to Field Offices undertaking recruitments during periods when the Administrative Officer post is vacant and (ii) to clarify in the HR Manual whether the required qualifications and remuneration advertised for a post can be waived or modified and, if so, the authority competent to make such decisions.

Recommendation 2: The Office AO, while planning recruitments of service contractors, to prepare a check-list that includes the appropriate level for the position corresponding to UNDP service contract levels for Qatar and analysis of the availability of budget for the position. Further, the Office should closely monitor and consistently apply salary scales to avoid perceptions of unfair treatment among service contractors.

Recommendation 3: The Director of the Office to hold regular staff meetings to improve staff communication and overall teamwork in the Office.

Recommendation 4: The Office to prepare a time-bound plan to implement all UNDSS MOSS recommendations including the installation of shatter resistant film on windows and improved access control.