



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Hundred and ninety-ninth session

199 EX/15.INF.3
PARIS, 15 March 2016
English & French only

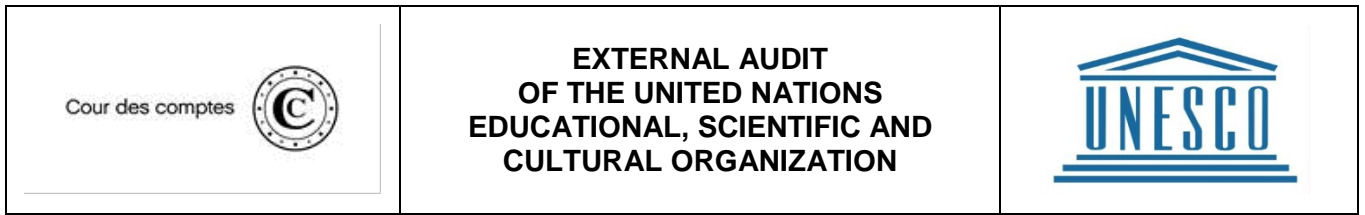
Item 15 of the provisional agenda

NEW AUDITS BY THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR

AUDIT REPORT ON THE UNESCO LIAISON OFFICE IN GENEVA

SUMMARY

In accordance with Article 12.4 of the Financial Regulations, the External Auditor submits his audit report on the UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva. The short form of this report and the comments by the Director-General are contained in document 199 EX/15 Part III.



**AUDIT REPORT
ON THE UNESCO LIAISON OFFICE IN GENEVA**

External Auditor reference: UNESCO-2015-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	2
III. AUDIT FINDINGS.....	4
A. Organization, resources and management of the Office	4
(1) Status of the Liaison Office.....	4
(2) Organization and staffing.....	4
(3) Human resources management.....	5
(4) Financial resources management.....	6
(5) Running the Office.....	9
B. The Office's activities and results	10
(1) The mandate of the Liaison Office	10
(2) The Office Director	12
(3) The sectors.....	13
(4) The perspective of some of the Office in Geneva's partners.....	14
IV. CONCLUSIONS	17
V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	17
ANNEX	

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva was established in 1979 to represent the Organization to the United Nations and to maintain ties with more than 40 United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and international organizations located in Geneva.

2. A team of two auditors conducted an audit of the accounts and management of the UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva from 5 to 9 October 2015. The audit occurred in implementation of DG/Note/11/39 of 7 December 2011,¹ on “enhancing the contribution of UNESCO’s liaison offices”. Samples of the Office’s accounts and documentation were examined, and open interviews were conducted with the main staff members. Interviews were also carried out with several of the Office’s usual contacts, representatives of either Member States or Geneva-based institutions and international organizations.

3. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions,² laid down by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions³ and in application of the texts in force, in particular Article 12 of the UNESCO Financial Regulations and the Annex thereto on additional terms of reference governing the audit.

4. Each finding and recommendation was discussed with the Office management. An oral summary of the main findings was given to the Office Director at the end of the audit. He took cognizance of the draft report and conveyed his observations. His comments on and responses to the audit findings, as well as those of the entities at Headquarters that received the preliminary report, were taken into full account, as appropriate, in the External Auditor’s final report.

¹ Known as an Ivory Note.

² ISSAI.

³ INTOSAI.

II. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 1. Update a permanent file that chronicles the history of the Office and brings together the documents establishing its creation and activities in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 2. Issue a precise description, signed by the Office Director, of the respective functions and responsibilities in the Liaison Office in Geneva.

Consider specializations for each of the two Professional category staff members at the Office, on specific major themes (e.g. human rights, humanitarian action, development) or major organizations in Geneva (e.g. UNCTAD, CERN, WHO).

Recommendation No. 3. Agree jointly on a clear division of the respective responsibilities of the Liaison Office in Geneva and the IBE as regards administrative and financial support.

Recommendation No. 4. Re-evaluate the Liaison Office in Geneva's missions and resources with respect to the specific missions and responsibilities that the organization wishes to entrust to it, factoring in the importance of activities and negotiations taking place in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 5. Target individuals who are dynamic, adaptable and motivated for assignment to Professional posts at the Liaison Office in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 6. Update the job descriptions for Liaison Office in Geneva posts to include the objectives outlined in the Ivory Note. For the Office Director, establish a performance agreement with measurable targets and performance indicators.

Recommendation No. 7. After establishing an exhaustive inventory of the Liaison Office's fixed assets, incorporate all of them into the SAP system.

Recommendation No. 8. Without delay and under the Office Director's direct control, formalize the oversight of telephone use and the charging to staff members of for their private communications.

Recommendation No. 9. Activate the shared centralized database so that the Office's consolidated agenda and important documentation may be recorded therein.

Recommendation No. 10. Issue a formal instruction from the Office Director that defines:

- the Office's operating methods and work (e.g. working hours, punctuality, absenteeism, security, confidentiality, telephone calls and administrative support)
- delegated authority and matters reserved for the Office Director,
- etc.

Recommendation No. 11. Validate, with amendments if necessary, the strategic plan submitted to Headquarters by the Office on 10 February 2015. For every biennium, assign priorities to the GLO that are in line with UNESCO's objectives and the agenda of the United Nations agencies in Geneva. This recommendation also holds true for the other liaison offices.

Recommendation No. 12. In the shared information base, create a shared thematic database of what the Office produces relating to the four functions set out in the Ivory Note.

Adopt a standardized format for reports about events, activities, partnerships and information for Headquarters, in keeping with the Ivory Note.

Centralize the information base recommended above. Organize the data so that activity reports may be drawn up as described in the Ivory Note.

Use these standardized data to assess the performance of staff members on a yearly basis.

Recommendation No. 13. Designate a focal point at Headquarters responsible for following up on the correspondence and sectoral and programme activities of the Office in Geneva Office, and possibly of the Office in New York as well.

Recommendation No. 14. Align the objectives assigned to the Office Director in his mission letter with the functions of the Office in Geneva set out in the Ivory Note. Establish precise and measurable performance indicators for these objectives to be used for the Office Director's annual evaluation.

Recommendation No. 15. Formalize, in the form of a tripartite document, potential collaboration between the IBE and the Liaison Office in Geneva, in coordination with the Education Sector (ED), for each of the functions identified in the Ivory Note.

Recommendation No. 16. Designate the IBE as the first-line point of contact in the area of education, in coordination with the Liaison Office in Geneva and the Education Sector (ED), for all United Nations agencies in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 17. Systematically inform the Liaison Office in Geneva of expert missions from Headquarters or other UNESCO entities.

Communicate to the Office all reports and follow-up action resulting from such missions.

Recommendation No. 18. Consider the possible creation of a second Professional post – by reducing the number of missions from Headquarters – in order to establish a division of tasks at the Liaison Office in Geneva based on sectors, issues and UNESCO's partners in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 19. Transmit to the Liaison Office in Geneva, for its information, all invitations received by Headquarters to sessions or international conferences held in Geneva. Invite the Office to represent UNESCO when no participation from Paris is planned.

Recommendation No. 20. In Geneva, periodically distribute brief explanatory notes on the UNESCO Liaison Office's issues, positions, activities and achievements.

Recommendation No. 21. Ensure the high calibre, knowledge and suitability of the staff assigned to the representation, advocacy and information-brokering roles at the Office.

Recommendation No. 22. Take into better account the intergovernmental aspect of the work and launch support and advice initiatives aimed at the least well-informed Member States.

Recommendation No. 23. Conduct an in-depth strategic and organizational evaluation of the current and desired relationship between Headquarters and the Liaison Office in Geneva.

III. AUDIT FINDINGS

A. Organization, resources and management of the Office

(1) Status of the Liaison Office

1. The UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva is governed by the terms of the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, signed by the Swiss Federal Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 19 April 1946, (letter dated 8 July 1997 from the head of the legal services at the United Nations Office in Geneva). As a result, the Office Director benefits from diplomatic privileges and immunities, and the main Liaison Officer has diplomatic immunity. The presence of the Liaison Office in Geneva (GLO) is therefore covered by the agreement signed between the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and UNESCO.⁴

2. The Liaison Office in Geneva also intervenes, as appropriate, in relations with the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO and with international organizations and agencies (e.g. the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)). The nature of these relations appears to be based more on practice than on formal agreements or precise instructions from UNESCO Headquarters.

3. There is little documentation on these various points, and the documents underpinning them are not readily available.

Recommendation No. 1. Update a permanent file that chronicles the history of the Office and brings together the documents establishing its creation and activities in Geneva.

(2) Organization and staffing

4. Given its limited staffing, namely two staff members in Professional posts (P) and one in a General Service post (GS), GLO does not have an organizational chart (which is understandable) or a description of each person's functions. As a result, the respective tasks and responsibilities of its three staff members are not adequately defined, except in an oblique way by the terms of reference in their contracts or job descriptions drawn up by Headquarters. There is no established division of tasks as regards UNESCO sectors (e.g. ED, CLT, SHS) or according to the organizations based in Geneva (e.g. UNOG, WHO,⁵ CERN) or even as regards the issues treated (e.g. human rights, humanitarian action, health and social welfare).

5. The Office thus relies on a flexible, and even contingent, organization, which requires the total versatility of its two Professional staff members. As a result, the roles set out in the Ivory Note – namely institutional representation, advocacy and outreach, information analysis and brokering, and partnership-building – are de facto carried out by either the Office Director (D-1) or the main Liaison Officer (P-4).

6. It is clear that the small scale of the Office's human resources forces its staff to be versatile. Of necessity, it must follow the agenda of the large organizations in Geneva and current events. By doing so, however, it is in danger of not being sufficiently proactive in the promotion of UNESCO's mandate and positions.

7. A relative specialization of tasks between the two Professionals at the Office would surely allow for improved efficiency regarding specific matters that are central or recurrent in Geneva, such as human rights – a coherent set of issues that require constant monitoring and maintaining close relations – and humanitarian action.

⁴ For further information, please see:

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48886&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁵ World Health Organization.

Recommendation No. 2. Issue a precise description, signed by the Office Director, of the respective functions and responsibilities in the Liaison Office in Geneva.

Consider specializations for each of the two Professional category staff members at the Office, on specific major themes (e.g. human rights, humanitarian action, development) or major organizations in Geneva (e.g. UNCTAD, CERN, WHO).

8. An assistant (G-5) carries out secretarial and logistical tasks. Administrative and financial functions are entrusted to the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), a category 1 institute (see below).

9. The IBE handles administrative and financial management although no agreement or joint description of tasks has been signed. Moreover, the two offices are subject to UNESCO's general administrative and financial rules.

10. The aforementioned Ivory Note does not mention this point, although its Annex B covers the Liaison Office in Geneva. Nonetheless, item 15 of a job description issued in 2004 for the head of the administrative unit of the IBE does mention "administrative support required for the proper functioning of the liaison office" without further details.

Recommendation No. 3. Agree jointly on a clear division of the respective responsibilities of the Liaison Office in Geneva and the IBE as regards administrative and financial support.

11. Compared with the liaison offices of other United Nations agencies and institutions represented in Geneva, the number of staff members at the Office is lower than average:

Table 1: Staffing levels at United Nations bodies in Geneva

FAO	5 staff members	1 intern, $\frac{3}{4}$ consultants
IAEA	1 staff member	n.a.
UNDP	8/9 staff members	n.a.
UNFPA	12 staff members	n.a.
UN-Habitat	3 staff members	n.a.
UNIDO	2 staff members	n.a.
UNOPS	n.a.	n.a.
World Bank	7 staff members	n.a.
UNESCO	3 staff members	1 intern
Average	5 staff members	n.s.

Source: External Auditor and directory of agencies located in Geneva

12. These data must be interpreted with caution, however, since the content of the missions assigned to each of these liaison offices is not known.

13. Unlike the UNESCO Liaison Office in New York,⁶ which has more staff than equivalent offices in that city, staffing at the Office in Geneva is below the average for liaison offices in Geneva. It is difficult to say whether this inversion is the result of a comparative analysis of the missions carried out by the two offices, or the result of former circumstances that have not been re-evaluated.

(3) Human resources management

14. Staffing at the Office remained stable from 2013 to 2015 both in terms of number and grade, with one D-1, one P-4 and one G-5. This workforce stability does not seem to match the increase in tasks over the years. For example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

⁶ Which has eight Professional category staff members and three in General Service posts (GS), including the Secretariat of the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI).

(OCHA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have gained in importance, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has become the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has been established, and climate-related issues have emerged. Although it is in Geneva that many decisions eventually made in New York are prepared,⁷ the Office in Geneva has kept the same staffing levels.

Recommendation No. 4. Re-evaluate the Liaison Office in Geneva's missions and resources with respect to the specific missions and responsibilities that the organization wishes to entrust to it, factoring in the importance of activities and negotiations taking place in Geneva.

15. The GLO was, for many years, a duty station for Professional staff at the end of their careers or at odds with Headquarters. The predecessor of the current Liaison Officer (P-4) held his position in Geneva for 15 years. At the beginning of the 2000s, one of the Office Directors had the grade of Assistant Director-General (ADG). The profiles of the two Professional staff members currently in posts at the Office signal a welcome shift in this respect.

Recommendation No. 5. Target individuals who are dynamic, adaptable and motivated for assignment to professional posts at the Liaison Office in Geneva.

16. The Office makes considerable use of interns to reinforce its human resources. These young people come to gain knowledge and international experience. They are not paid and do not incur additional costs inasmuch as the Internet connection is billed at a fixed price and their work stations are already there before each internship.

17. From January 2013 to September 2015, however, no fewer than seven interns succeeded one another at the Office, for a total of 3,385 work days. For many of them, the internship lasts under four months, often because of the high cost of living in Geneva. This considerable turnover of interns is liable to disperse the efforts of the permanent staff because of the necessary supervision of interns as they learn the ropes at the Office.

18. Staff evaluations are conducted using the new "MyTalent" tool. These assessments are difficult insofar as the contracts for the two Professional staff have general wording do not cover all the missions of the Office as set out in the Ivory Note, and are hard to measure.

19. The job descriptions for posts at the Office have not been modified to take into account changes presented in the Ivory Note. The job description for the Office assistant has not been updated since 2010.

Recommendation No. 6. Update the job descriptions for Liaison Office in Geneva posts to include the objectives outlined in the Ivory Note. For the Office Director, establish a performance agreement with measurable targets and performance indicators.

(4) Financial resources management

20. The Office does not receive extrabudgetary resources.⁸ Its budget for the 2014-2015 biennium amounted to \$92,634. This budget has decreased significantly over recent biennia.

⁷ A saying was repeated to the auditors several times: "You eat in New York but cook in Geneva".

⁸ Resources from voluntary contributions.

Table 2: Budget of the Liaison Office in Geneva (in US dollars)

Biennium	Regular programme allocation
2006-2007	1,527,000
2008-2009	98,082
2010-2011	1,049,500
2012-2013	94,800
2014-2015	92,634

Source: FABS. Note: Staff costs are excluded.

21. The Office does not have an administrative unit, and the accounting of obligations is done by the IBE. The balance as of 29 September 2015, excluding obligations not yet cleared, was \$30,936, which is an implementation rate of 67%.

Table 3: Monitoring of budget implementation (in US dollars)

Budget	Unliquidated obligations	Expenditure	Total expenditure + obligations	Rate of unliquidated obligations	Implementation rate
<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d=b+c</i>	<i>b/a</i>	<i>d/a</i>
92,634.00	22,144.40	61,697.13	83,841.53	24%	91%

Source: FABS

22. The Office's expenditure decreased by 40% owing to a reduction in temporary staff and maintenance costs.

Table 4: The Liaison Office in Geneva's expenditure statement for 2014 and 2015 (in US dollars)

Allocations	2014 (from 01/01/2014 to 31/12/2014)	2015 (from 01/01/2015 to 29/09/2015)	Variation	%
Staff members' mission costs - Air tickets ⁹		1,375.82	1,375.82	
Staff members' mission costs - Per Diem	3,797.81	3,153.96	-643.85	-17%
Staff members' mission costs - Surface tickets	772.83	992.00	219.17	28%
Supern+temp appoint excl replac against vac posts	8,655.79	0.00	-8,655.79	-100%
Electricity	910.79	421.42	-489.37	-54%
Water	109.23	187.83	78.60	72%
Insurance for SSA and SC - GS staff	35.00		-35.00	-100%
Paper purchases		349.54	349.54	
Other supplies - purchases		31.61	31.61	
Published products - purchases		0.00	0.00	
Office furniture - purchases		317.50	317.50	
Computer licences - costs	233.91	464.78	230.87	99%
Postal/Express freight services	331.98	229.95	-102.03	-31%
Telephone	2,937.37	6,713.01	3,775.64	129%
Information system networks	3,505.15	2,232.38	-1,272.77	-36%
Rentals, other than premises	1,386.22	977.58	-408.64	-29%
Premises - maintenance & repairs	14,659.01	4,571.18	-10,087.83	-69%
Other insurance premiums	734.33	0.00	-734.33	-100%
Document production	29.25	332.61	303.36	
Receptions costs	8.46	232.24	223.78	
Bank charges	500.00	506.59	6.59	1%
Total	38,607.13	23,090.00	-15,517.13	-40%

Source: FABS

⁹ The Office budget for air travel during the biennium totalled \$2,400. A sum of \$1,375.82 was spent, representing only one trip. Other journeys made by the Office Director were paid for by the organizations that invited him (e.g. Kuwait fund, Saudi donor).

23. It should be noted that expenditure arising from telephone communications more than doubled between 2014 and 2015 (see below).

24. The monitoring of obligations in the SAP software is difficult, and Headquarters made adjustments without informing the Office. The Office no longer has a budget for its “own actions”. Indeed, the approval of Headquarters is required for any expenditure not part of operating costs. In particular, the Office Director does not have funds for receptions, which is certainly a handicap for an office entrusted with the functions of representation and advocacy.

25. The Office does not have a bank account. Its expenditure is partially settled through the IBE’s bank account at the Union Bancaire Suisse (UBS) in Geneva. Sums owed to the IBE can be seen in the IBE’s clearing account with UNESCO.

26. The petty cash fund was closed on 22 September 2015 for the year 2015. It was not possible to obtain any information about the decision authorizing the creation of this fund, probably prior to 2011, or about its holder or overseer. The balance of the fund was 149.60 CHF¹⁰ upon closure. This sum, which represented an advance received from the IBE, was deposited into the latter’s current account.

27. There is no up-to-date formal inventory of the Office’s fixed assets, and they do not appear in the SAP system.

Recommendation No. 7. After establishing an exhaustive inventory of the Liaison Office’s fixed assets, incorporate all of them into the SAP system.

28. Oversight of telephone communications is not sufficiently formalized, even though the expense of calls increased dramatically during the biennium.

Table 5: The Liaison Office in Geneva’s telephone expenses in 2014 and 2015 (in US dollars)

	2014	2015	Difference	Variation
Telephone	2,937.37	6,713.01	3,775.64	129%

Source: Statement of telephone calls provided by the Office

29. Since no distinction is currently made between professional communications and personal calls, one must be rigorously applied. Every month, all staff members must be asked to indicate their official communications in lists of their calls. All other calls must be considered private and billed to staff members through the IBE.

Recommendation No. 8. Without delay and under the Office Director’s direct control, formalize the oversight of telephone use and the charging to staff members of for their private communications.

30. Mission costs, which are limited, increased by 21% between 2014 and 29 September 2015. A large part of these expenses correspond to the Office Director’s mission expenses (e.g. airplane tickets, per diems) for trips to mobilize funds in Middle Eastern countries.

¹⁰ Swiss francs.

Table 6: Office mission expenses in 2014 and 2015 (in US dollars)

G/L Account Label	2014	2015	Variation	%
Staff members' mission costs - Air tickets	0.00	1,375.82	1,375.82	
Staff members' mission costs - Per Diem	3,797.81	3,153.96	-643.85	-17%
Staff members' mission costs - Surface tickets	772.83	992.00	219.17	28%
Total	4,570.64	5,521.78	951.14	21%

Source: FABS

31. These trips succeeded in mobilizing \$10.2 million through three partnerships.¹¹

32. The missions accounted for a total of 44 days during the period under examination (from 1 January 2014 to 29 September 2015). The time spent was therefore largely offset by the significant financial benefits obtained for UNESCO (\$10.2 million). This result may be put to credit of the Office Director, who has developed an extensive personal network of contacts in the Arabian Peninsula.

33. This effort should be continued – creating partnerships is in fact part of his missions – even if it partially distracts the Director from his functions of representing and managing the Office. This effort is not as marked at the Liaison Office in New York.

(5) Running the Office

34. Staff meetings are held regularly, chaired by the Office Director. The minutes drawn up are clear and precise. A work schedule is drawn up by the assistant and serves as the point of departure for the following weekly meeting. These meetings are used to plan upcoming activities and to exchange information relating to the agenda.

35. The shared space in the Office's IT system for centralizing documents received and produced by each staff member has not been activated. Doing so would provide a chronological database that is accessible to all and would preserve an institutional record of the Office's work.

Recommendation No. 9. Activate the shared centralized database so that the Office's consolidated agenda and important documentation may be recorded therein.

36. Since the Office is a small structure, it is run in a relatively informal manner, which is not a major problem. The sharing of responsibilities is not, however, adequately documented. This is not an insignificant point, as highlighted by the following questions:

- To what level are the Office Director's subordinates authorized to communicate with in terms of representatives of Member States, Geneva-based organizations, United Nations agencies, and the offices and services of the Secretariat?
- When several sectors are concerned, who has the primary responsibility for the project?
- What projects does the Office Director handle directly?
- etc.

¹¹ UNESCO-IBE Project "Historical Textbook Collection entitled "King Fahd bin Abdulaziz" (Phase I, \$1,180,000) from Saudi Arabia; UNESCO Project "Enhancing Access to Secondary Education and Quality Results for Youth Affected by the Syria Crisis, EASE" (\$ 4,054,400) from Saudi Arabia• UNESCO Programme "Bridging Learning Gaps for Youth: UNESCO education response to Syria Crisis" (\$ 5,000,000) from Kuwait.

Recommendation No. 10. Issue a formal instruction from the Office Director that defines:

- the Office’s operating methods and work (e.g. working hours, punctuality, absenteeism, security, confidentiality, telephone calls and administrative support)
- delegated authority and matters reserved for the Office Director,
- etc.

B. The Office’s activities and results

(1) The mandate of the Liaison Office

37. The aforementioned DG/Note/11/39 of 7 December 2011 places the liaison offices under the direct authority of the Director-General. It assigns them the following four main roles and functions:

- institutional representation of UNESCO, to promote its mandate, programmes and activities
- advocacy and outreach relating to UNESCO’s core competencies and priorities, in particular Africa and gender equality
- information analysis and brokering
- building new partnerships, including in post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

38. In a draft annex to the Ivory Note that was apparently never officially released (Annex B), more details are provided about the Liaison Office in Geneva’s mandate. In essence, its specificity is to:

- act as an intermediary between UNESCO and Geneva-based United Nations agencies (e.g. HCR, UNOG, UNCTAD) by providing substantive input in cooperation with the sectors and services concerned
- facilitate official missions and the participation of UNESCO representatives in meetings held in Geneva
- promote UNESCO’s mandate, priorities and programmes to Geneva-based international organizations and NGOs
- disseminate UNESCO’s publications, reports and communications to Member States, the United Nations and civil society in order to improve awareness of the Organization and enhance its visibility
- take part in possible joint initiatives with key partners, in coordination with the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP) and the UNESCO services and units concerned
- inform UNESCO Headquarters and entities by regularly reporting on meetings, transmitting important documents, and provide analyses of important information
- suggest to Headquarters strategies for ensuring that UNESCO remains central in the United Nations system, in particular regarding human rights and humanitarian action
- identify new partners for UNESCO and strengthen existing partnerships.

39. These points are useful but do not give many more details about the Office’s mandate than the general wording of the Ivory Note itself. It would be more effective to describe in more concrete

terms the Office's role in its relations with the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other Geneva-based specialized agencies.

40. Furthermore, in coordination with Headquarters, the Office must, with its limited resources, keep track of the activities of more than 40 United Nations agencies, around 10,000 meetings per year and requests from a great number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹²

41. In February 2015, the Office submitted to Headquarters a draft strategic plan for the biennium, with the aim of enhancing UNESCO's visibility in Geneva among Member States represented there, the United Nations and the many NGOs operating in the city. In short, the Office suggested:

- organizing special events at the Palais des Nations or other sites in Geneva (e.g. International Conference Centre) that relate to the objectives assigned to the Liaison Office, in partnership with Geneva-based United Nations agencies, Member States and NGOs, and open them up to the public as much as possible
- restructuring and revitalizing the Office's website, posting updated information about UNESCO's activities, in particular those of particular relevance to the mandate of Geneva-based United Nations agencies
- using social networks to communicate important messages from the Organization
- regularly disseminating information about the Liaison Office's activities to Member States and United Nations agencies.

42. Headquarters did not formally respond to this plan, which emphasizes visibility and information brokering, but only sent an acknowledgement of receipt. It would be useful for UNESCO's different sectors and its strategic management – and for the Office itself – if the latter were assigned orientations and priorities taking into account UNESCO's objectives in the context of the activities of other United Nations agencies in Geneva, the international agenda and major current issues.

Recommendation No. 11. Validate, with amendments if necessary, the strategic plan submitted to Headquarters by the Office on 10 February 2015. For every biennium, assign priorities to the GLO that are in line with UNESCO's objectives and the agenda of the United Nations agencies in Geneva. This recommendation also holds true for the other liaison offices.

43. In accordance with the Ivory Note, the Office produces an activity report every six months. It also sends Headquarters a periodic review of its activities and, as required, reports on major events, which regularly give rise to responses from the sectors concerned. Since Headquarters has not set a standard format for reports, their form varies depending on the case, resulting in a lack of homogeneity with the report formats of other liaison offices.

44. Paradoxically, increased exchanges of information and emails have resulted in a loss of data. It would therefore be useful to gather briefing notes, major contributions, resolutions, important information and partnerships forged through the Office's activities in a shared thematic electronic database, which the Office assistant could manage.

Recommendation No. 12. In the shared information base, create a shared thematic database of what the Office produces relating to the four functions set out in the Ivory Note.

Adopt a standardized format for reports about events, activities, partnerships and information for

¹² A list of Geneva-based United Nations agencies is presented in the Annex.

Headquarters, in keeping with the Ivory Note.

Centralize the information base recommended above. Organize the data so that activity reports may be drawn up as described in the Ivory Note.

Use these standardized data to assess the performance of staff members on a yearly basis.

45. Correspondence is addressed to the sector concerned and, as needed, to the people in charge of cross-cutting issues such as human rights and climate change. At Headquarters, however, no one is responsible for systematically monitoring the Office's sectoral activities. As is the case for the Office in New York, the Liaison Office in Geneva does not have a consistent single entry-point at Headquarters, i.e. a structure responsible for receiving, distributing and following up on correspondence sent by the Office in Geneva and ensuring that the latter's efforts are pertinent to the updated objectives assigned to it.

Recommendation No. 13. Designate a focal point at Headquarters responsible for following up on the correspondence and sectoral and programme activities of the Office in Geneva Office, and possibly of the Office in New York as well.

(2) The Office Director

46. The responsibilities of the Office Director stem logically from the aforementioned Ivory Note of 7 December 2011. They are to: (i) represent the Organization, (ii) raise awareness of its missions and priorities and promote them in United Nations decisions and programmes, (iii) analyse and relay information to UNESCO Headquarters and other offices; and (iv) develop partnerships. The Office Director's post description does not, however, clearly reflect these four objectives.

Recommendation No. 14. Align the objectives assigned to the Office Director in his mission letter with the functions of the Office in Geneva set out in the Ivory Note. Establish precise and measurable performance indicators for these objectives to be used for the Office Director's annual evaluation.

47. At the auditors' request, the Office Director shared his vision of his responsibilities:

- (i) ensure the long-term performance of the Geneva Office within a strategic framework for action approved by Headquarters
- (ii) carry out constant advocacy and outreach work with the international community and Geneva-based agencies in order to identify sources of support and understand expectations
- (iii) raise awareness of the Office's activities through a communications and information strategy: enrich the Office's website with the support of Headquarters, release newsflashes, use social networks, regularly organize and attend exhibitions, etc.
- (iv) share relevant information with civil society and encourage it to relay the message
- (v) put forward UNESCO's relevant added value to the activities of Geneva-based agencies
- (vi) systematize media relations in coordination with the Office of the Director-General and media services at Headquarters

- (vii) provide Headquarters with information in real time, receive its reactions and incorporate them into the negotiations underway at the United Nations
- (viii) intensify fund-mobilization by suggesting joint projects with UNESCO to potential partners; if required, delegate this task to a consultant
- (ix) optimize working conditions and resources management
- (x) assume fully the roles of liaising, planning and putting to good use sectoral expertise that regularly comes from Headquarters on behalf of UNESCO in Geneva.

48. Above all, in accordance with the Ivory Note, the Office in Geneva performs a liaison role. Transversality and interpersonal skills count most. In Geneva, however, UNESCO's partners are also in search of expertise and added value with regard to the various fields covered by the Organization.

(3) The sectors

49. The Office does not have sectoral experts. In principle, it benefits from the expertise of the sectors at Headquarters, the International Bureau of Education (IBE) and missions from Headquarters.

50. A building owned by UNESCO houses the Office, together with the IBE, which is a category 1 institute with its own governance and headed by a manager at the D-2 level. The IBE has 13 Professional staff members¹³ – experts on education issues – and four support staff in General Service posts (GS).¹⁴

51. After years of limited cooperation, collaboration between the Office and the IBE appears to be gradually returning but remains sporadic. It would be useful to formalize the support that the IBE and the Office are likely to provide one another, under the auspices of the Education Sector (ED), for each of the four tasks listed in the Ivory Note.

52. Several contact people interviewed by the auditors (see below) mentioned their great need for expertise regarding education, training, curricula and teaching skills. It would be worthwhile identifying such needs and determining the extent to which the IBE can help the Office to respond to them and establish long-term collaboration. In turn, the Office's network of relations with United Nations agencies, NGOs and Member States should be made available to the IBE so that it can forge new partnerships.

53. Generally, it might be useful, for reasons of visibility and the optimal use of means, to entrust the IBE with the responsibility, in coordination with the Office and ED, of monitoring matters concerning the education- and teaching-related activities of Geneva-based United Nations agencies or international conferences dedicated to the issue. This arrangement could give greater visibility to the IBE, which seems to have very little locally (outside specialized circles); maximize the impact of education-related expertise, which is sought after in Geneva; and, lastly, reduce the number of missions between Headquarters and Geneva.

Recommendation No. 15. Formalize, in the form of a tripartite document, potential collaboration between the IBE and the Liaison Office in Geneva, in coordination with the Education Sector (ED), for each of the functions identified in the Ivory Note.

¹³ Including seven people paid per project.

¹⁴ Including one paid per project.

Recommendation No. 16. Designate the IBE as the first-line point of contact in the area of education, in coordination with the Liaison Office in Geneva and the Education Sector (ED), for all United Nations agencies in Geneva.

54. During the biennium examined (2014-2015), around 200 missions, corresponding to some 680 days of presence, were carried out by staff from Headquarters. The Office is not always informed of such missions. In full-time equivalents, they represent two or three posts. This point should be considered.

Recommendation No. 17. Systematically inform the Liaison Office in Geneva of expert missions from Headquarters or other UNESCO entities.

Communicate to the Office all reports and follow-up action resulting from such missions.

55. Nonetheless, one cannot help thinking that a reduction in the number of missions sent to Geneva from Headquarters would perhaps free up funding for at least one specialist post at the Office in Geneva. Assuming that education matters are in fact handled by the IBE in coordination with the Office, there would be only advantages if the Office's expertise could be reoriented – as is the case in New York – towards a more sectoral approach to available capabilities. There would still be an Office Director for the tasks of management, representation and analysis. The P-4 post could be reconfigured to cover matters related to culture, communication, information and human rights, for example. A P-3 post – to be created if the Organization finds the funding for it – would be dedicated to the scientific and humanitarian aspects of UNESCO's mandate. Such a structure, entailing the creation of one post and saving the expense of missions, bolstered by IBE support in education matters, would enable the Office to cover the spectrum of UNESCO's responsibilities more effectively in its liaison role with the very many United Nations agencies and international institutions in Geneva.

Recommendation No. 18. Consider the possible creation of a second Professional post – by reducing the number of missions from Headquarters – in order to establish a division of tasks at the Liaison Office in Geneva based on sectors, issues and UNESCO's partners in Geneva.

(4) The perspective of some of the Office in Geneva's partners

56. In open interviews, the auditors met representatives from the following entities:

Member States

Permanent Mission of the Republic of Costa Rica to the United Nations Office
Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations Office
Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations Office

United Nations and international organizations

European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), Scientific Information Service
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Division on
Technology and Logistics (DTL)
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Methodology, Education
and Training Division
World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Marine Meteorology and Ocean Affairs
Division
World Health Organization (WHO), Department of Country Cooperation and
Collaboration with the United Nations System
United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), Office of the Director-General

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Planning, Finance and
Accountability Department
UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE)

Non-governmental organizations

Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (GCHRAGD)
Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEF)
Collège Universitaire Henry Dunant (CUHD)

57. Most of these organizations have a mixed general impression of the Office in Geneva's visibility and activities. Some of them do not know the Office very well; their programme-related cooperation with UNESCO most often occurs directly with Headquarters or Paris-based UNESCO entities.¹⁵

58. In the view of the majority of people interviewed, cooperation with UNESCO involves highly technical discussions, which are easier if carried out directly with Headquarters.

59. At times, the Office is not perceived as a bearer of sectoral expertise.¹⁶ This impression stems partially from its small size and insufficient resources. Lacking an annual update of its orientations and key priorities, the Office can only react and not behave proactively. The consequence of this state of play is that most representatives met by the auditors believe that UNESCO's concerns and strengths are not sufficiently present in Geneva. The Office cannot be held responsible for this because the strategic dimension of its mandate has not been defined.

60. Similarly, the Office's limited resources mean that it does not appear capable of fully meeting expectations. The Office is often on the sidelines of meetings and conferences, and partnership opportunities seem possible. It cannot, however, follow up on all those opportunities and does not appear to have enough resources to make something concrete happen. This situation is the likely result of, until recently, inappropriate management in assigning Professionals to the Liaison Office in Geneva who were at the end of their career or at odds with Headquarters, and, secondly, the insufficient resources available to the Office to keep track of so many issues and partners.

61. Geography also puts the Office at a disadvantage in comparison with the Office in New York. A three-hour train journey separates Geneva and Paris and there is no time difference, which makes a same-day return trip feasible. Contact is immediate, close and quick. This situation reduces the Office's bridging role.

62. In a similar vein, the lack of in-depth interagency work in Geneva, in contrast to New York, leads the various agencies to work in isolation and emphasize the technical aspects of their mandates. This situation, in turn, prompts them to seek out the technicity available at Headquarters rather than the transversality of a liaison office.

63. The feeling is quite different when the institutions have actually collaborated with the Office, most often during the side events of the United Nations Human Rights Council or in specific partnerships. This is the case for the permanent missions of Costa Rica and Kuwait, and the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, which lament the fact that the Office does not enjoy more resources and visibility. Some Member States consider that the international visibility of their joint action with UNESCO is greater in Geneva – where so many United Nations agencies, NGOs and Member States are present – than in Paris.

64. The specific case of CERN should be highlighted. UNESCO was one of its founders at the European Cultural Conference in Lausanne in 1949,¹⁷ and has held an observer's seat with the

¹⁵ For example, WMO is in direct contact with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

¹⁶ "The Office is not in a position to make a difference [...]. We know we can find the specific UNESCO skills that we need in Paris."

¹⁷ The agreement establishing CERN is kept at UNESCO.

CERN Council since 1954. However, out of the last nine Council sessions held since 2010, UNESCO has been represented only twice, the last time in 2012.¹⁸ In the event that the Natural Sciences Sector (SC) or another UNESCO representative cannot attend a Council session, the Geneva Office Director should be invited to represent the Organization. Almost systematically leaving an empty chair can only contribute to blurring the image of UNESCO.

Recommendation No. 19. Transmit to the Liaison Office in Geneva, for its information, all invitations received by Headquarters to sessions or international conferences held in Geneva. Invite the Office to represent UNESCO when no participation from Paris is planned.

65. In the Bureau of the Human Rights Council, there is the sentiment that human rights have not been a priority since the closure, in 2011, of the structure responsible for such matters at Headquarters. Cooperation with UNESCO on such crucial issues is considered not as good as before,¹⁹ although the response is said to have improved since the Human Rights up Front (HRuF) initiative was launched by the Secretary-General.

66. With certain exceptions, the representatives interviewed said that most of their programme-related contacts with UNESCO go through Headquarters. Local contact, nevertheless, is required for the organization of events, regular reminders of UNESCO's positions, selection of the right experts, understanding of a wide range of topics (e.g. human rights, humanitarian action, climate, oceans, new information technologies, intercultural or interreligious dialogue, basic research, education and development) and participation in negotiation sessions on all types of documents. The Office could increase local contact if it were better supplied with substantive positions, attentive focal points at Headquarters and precise and up-to-date guidelines for action.

67. From time to time, the Office should distribute to its partners in Geneva (e.g. Member States, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations agencies, NGO partners) short summaries regarding its activities in connection with UNESCO's positions on the main issues of the moment. Likewise, it would be useful for the Office to provide the same contact people with explanatory notes on all standard-setting and policy documents on issues within UNESCO's remit, first at the draft stage and then after adoption. At early stages in the process, such notes could provide information about the issues and, at later stages, about the implications in terms of public policy.

Recommendation No. 20. In Geneva, periodically distribute brief explanatory notes on the UNESCO Liaison Office's issues, positions, activities and achievements.

68. It is essential to have high-level staff members in the Office who are perfectly versed in the objectives pursued by Headquarters, informed of the most recent developments in the Organization's mandate and well connected with the right contacts in Paris and Geneva. These requirements therefore preclude all long-term assignments in Geneva as well as high turnover of Professional staff members at the GLO.

Recommendation No. 21. Ensure the high calibre, knowledge and suitability of the staff assigned to the representation, advocacy and information-brokering roles at the Office.

69. Advocacy and information activities should not be geared only at United Nations entities. Indeed, the intergovernmental aspect of the work is significant and many States are often at a loss when faced with major issues that fall within UNESCO's remit. The Office's role of offering support and advice to such States should be taken into consideration.

¹⁸ 165th session, CERN/3053, 13 and 14 December 2012.

¹⁹ "We need a stronger counterpart on human rights issues [...]. We need to have UNESCO back on board", OCDH, interview on 9 October 2015.

70. It is in the Organization's interest for the Office to convey, to the delegations of such countries present in Geneva, information about UNESCO's activities and the possibilities of cooperating more effectively with it.

Recommendation No. 22. Take into better account the intergovernmental aspect of the work and launch support and advice initiatives aimed at the least well-informed Member States.

71. These various points of view come from UNESCO's partners, most of them major ones. They express their wish to see a more active and dynamic Liaison Office in Geneva. This view deserves the attention of the Office, and more especially of Headquarters.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

72. In conclusion, if the Organization deems it useful and strategic to be represented and active in Geneva – which the auditors believe – it must therefore provide the means to be present there in a substantive way. This entails engaging in constant interaction that is rich in information, instructions and priorities. On the other hand, if UNESCO attaches no specific importance to what is negotiated and prepared in Geneva, it must in that case assume all the consequences.

73. In both cases – and this is not to detract from the work being performed by the current staff – to perpetuate the current situation would be detrimental in terms of resources and perhaps even in terms of UNESCO's image. It is imperative to evaluate without delay the relations that Headquarters maintains with its Office in Geneva from a strategic and organizational point of view; in other words, to examine the expectations of Headquarters regarding the Office and the appropriateness of the means allocated to it.

Recommendation No. 23. Conduct an in-depth strategic and organizational evaluation of the current and desired relationship between Headquarters and the Liaison Office in Geneva.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

74. The External Auditor would like to thank the management and staff at the Liaison Office in Geneva for their availability and the quality of the information provided during the audit.

End of audit findings

ANNEX

LIST OF UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
- International Bureau of Education (IBE)
- International Computing Centre (ICC)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- International Trade Centre (ITC)
- Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC)
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)
- United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
- United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)
- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
- United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near-East (UNRWA)
- United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
- United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP)
- United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)
- United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN)
- United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV)
- Universal Postal Union (UPU)
- World Bank
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
- World Trade Organization (WTO)