
Improving UNESCO's Category 2 Centre network

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Policy Brief

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United Nations
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United Kingdom
National Commission for UNESCO

Executive Summary

Category 2 Centres are a significant, largely underutilised UNESCO resource. The rapid growth of this network is evidence of Member States' enthusiasm that country-level expertise should support, amplify and influence UNESCO's work. The network as a whole, however, is under growing reputational risk and is placing increased pressure on UNESCO's core resources. Urgent changes are required to address these risks and capitalise on potential benefits.

This brief builds on the findings of recent UNESCO reports on this subject with eight specific, attainable and time bound recommendations. The UK National Commission for UNESCO recommends that UNESCO, in coordination with Member States:

- implement the findings of the 2011 Internal Oversight Services (IOS) Review of the Management Framework for Category 2 Centres;
- include Category 2 Centres in the development of the UNESCO partnership network;
- apply the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Centres;
- develop UNESCO sector strategies for Category 2 Centres;
- strengthen Category 2 status renewal procedures;
- improve the monitoring and transparency of the Category 2 Centre system;
- review all existing Category 2 agreements and restrain the current network growth;
- evaluate and reduce the cost of the Category 2 network to UNESCO.

1 / Background

There are 81 Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO, or Category 2 Centres, across 58 countries. While a good number of Category 2 Centres undertake high-quality work, the network as a whole is in need of reform and consolidation.

Plans to include an item on Category 2 Centres on the 190th UNESCO Executive Board agenda (October 2012)¹ will allow Member States to begin to discuss and agree reform measures at the UNESCO governing body level. Strengthening UNESCO's approach to partnerships is part of the organisation's reform agenda, including developing a comprehensive partnership strategy and implementing relevant Independent External Evaluation (IEE) recommendations. An update to the UK's Multilateral Aid Review (MAR), which is due to be published in early to mid-2013, will also assess UNESCO reform efforts. Reform of Category 2 Centres is an apt way for UNESCO to demonstrate progress in these areas.

The December 2011 UNESCO evaluation of the University of Dundee IHP-HELP Category 2 Centre provided the UK National Commission with direct experience of UNESCO implementing its comprehensive strategy for Category 2 Centres. While the UK has the most experience with water related Category 2 Centres, the issues and recommendations outlined in this brief are advocated in relation to all Category 2 Centres and are not a direct response to the Dundee Centre review.

1. UNESCO Executive Board Decisions, 189 EX/Decisions 10 and 16 (April 2012)

2 / Current situation

The number of Category 2 Centres has grown significantly over the past decade, with nearly half approved in the past four years. Despite their potential, this rapid expansion does not appear to have led to a commensurate increase in outputs or benefits for UNESCO, but rather has catalysed serious resource and reputational implications for the organisation.

These deficiencies have been acknowledged in multiple reports including those by UNESCO Internal Oversight Services (IOS), the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of UNESCO, the UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the UNESCO Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP).² Notably, the recent IOS report *Review of the Management Framework for UNESCO Category 2 Institutes/Centres* outlined nine recommendations for change, covering strategy, management and quality control.

Addressing Risks

As a UN Joint Inspection Unit report noted regarding UNESCO's partners, "there is a reputational risk involved in that all the components of the network are considered by many as UNESCO itself."³ With a large number of Category 2 Centres still not operational years after they have been given their UNESCO designation and others underperforming, elements of the network pose a risk to the reputation of the organisation.

The growth of the network has also increased UNESCO's spending on Category 2 Centres, particularly in the area of governance. There is a lack of clarity at the UNESCO governing body level as to the actual cost to UNESCO of maintaining this network and Regular Programme resources allocated to Category 2 Centres.

Realising Benefits

An improved Category 2 system has the potential for wide-ranging returns. It would not only provide UNESCO with enhanced, cost effective ways of realising its objectives, but it would also increase the benefits of investment in such centres, including the impact and reach of individual centres' work.

The network includes centres which are internationally recognised as leaders in their field, yet only a small portion of their work is reflected in UNESCO's outputs and results. This gap may be attributed to ineffective capturing of work done and a system which limits a centre's ability to be a key strategic 'implementation' tool for UNESCO. Centres have reported that engagement with UNESCO can be difficult and infrequent and that the onus is often on them approaching UNESCO to find out about and become involved in the organisation's work.

2. Reports include: UNESCO IOS Review of the Management Framework for UNESCO Category 2 Institutes/Centres (IOS/AUD/EVS/2011/14 Rev) (Dec 2011); Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO (IOS/EVS/PI/107) (Sept 2010); UN Joint Inspection Unit Review of Management and Administration in UNESCO (JIU/REP/2011/8) (Dec 2011); Executive Board document 189 EX/INF.5 (Feb 2012)
3. Review of Management and Administration in UNESCO (JIU/REP/2011/8) (Dec 2011), pg. 24

UNESCO is grappling with a budgetary crisis and looking for long-term efficiency savings. Category 2 Centres are a rich, untapped resource, which, with reform, could be a reliable, low cost means of realising core organisational objectives. In addition to the sizable collective resources of these centres, they offer local knowledge and access which could support the coordination and dissemination of UNESCO's work at a country and regional level.

Stakeholders

This issue affects all UNESCO Member States, particularly those with established Category 2 Centres or those in the process of establishing one. Category 2 Centres themselves also have a large stake in any changes to the network. Within the UK, improvements to the system would have direct implications for the University of Dundee IHP-HELP Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science and its stakeholders and funders (including the UK and Scottish Governments). UK institutions and individuals collaborating with this and other Category 2 Centres would also be affected.

3 / Options

In light of the current situation, Member States may advocate one of three options regarding the future of the Category 2 Centre system:

Option A:	No action. The current governance and management of the Category 2 system is maintained. The continued underutilisation of the network, potential reputation risk and related issues are deemed acceptable.
Option B:	The Category 2 system is abolished, removing all UNESCO affiliation from centres either through the denunciation clauses in agreements or through a process of non-renewal. The loss of Category 2 Centre contributions is accepted.
Option C:	Reform the Category 2 system to address risks and improve the network's ability to contribute to UNESCO's priorities.

Given the arguments outlined in the 'current situation' section of this brief and recent reports and UNESCO Executive Board decisions, the UK National Commission for UNESCO concludes that maintaining the status quo (Option A) is not a preferred option of the majority of Member States or UNESCO. The growing reputational risk to UNESCO and rising financial cost of the Category 2 network, mean that abolition of the system should be considered. By disbanding the network UNESCO could concentrate its resources on optimising other Member State contributions (for example, via time limited extra-budgetary projects). However, the Commission agrees with the conclusion of other evaluations that many of the current Category 2 Centres have significant potential to contribute to UNESCO and as a result, does not presently recommend the abolition of the network (Option B). Given the need to realise potential benefits while minimising costs and risks, significant reforms to the Category 2 system are required (Option C).

To this end, UNESCO should implement all recommendations contained in the December 2011 IOS Review as soon as possible, reporting progress to the 190th UNESCO Executive Board meeting. UNESCO should also implement additional, complementary measures to strengthen Centre governance and enhance the network. These measures cover seven areas for reform:

1. Category 2 Centres within the UNESCO Partnership Network

UNESCO is developing a comprehensive partnership strategy, as recommended by the UNESCO Independent External Evaluation (IEE). To ensure this strategy establishes a consistent, rationalised approach to all UNESCO partner groups, Category 2 Centres should be included. Common reporting requirements being considered as part of this strategy would also help facilitate monitoring of Category 2 Centres.

Defining Category 2 Centres

A clearer definition of Category 2 Centres and their utility within UNESCO's current 'network' of partners is needed. The only defining characteristic is that these centres are

Direction is needed to ensure a consistent approach to Category 2 Centre governance and monitoring across all UNESCO sectors

not legally part of the organisation, but are associated with it through formal agreements between UNESCO and Member States. A new definition should outline the 'unique selling point' of Category 2 Centres and explain how their contribution to UNESCO differs from other methods of external input, such as the UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks programme. A more narrowly defined designation would assist with feasibility studies, networking and coordination and help limit the establishment of Category 2 Centres where other means of contributing to UNESCO are more appropriate.

2. UNESCO Integrated Comprehensive Strategy

While the current Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Centres (35 C/22) provides an adequate basis for the governance of the network overall, it is vital that it be applied consistently across all centres. To support this, a number of amendments to the strategy and related Category 2 Centre model agreement should be considered, including:

- a clause which requires all centres to comply with relevant sector strategies;
- a defined maximum duration for centre agreements (not exceeding eight years);
- clarification of the minimum frequency of renewal evaluations;
- modification of model agreement Article 15 to remove automatic renewal of centres in perpetuity.

While 35 C/22 provides adequate guidelines for the creation of Category 2 Centres, including feasibility studies, it lacks clear guidance for centre renewals and regular centre reporting. Direction is needed to ensure a consistent approach to Category 2 Centre governance and monitoring across all UNESCO sectors. These points, which may require additions to 35 C/22, are addressed in the centre renewal and monitoring and transparency sections of this brief.

3. Sector Strategies

In line with Recommendation 1 of the IOS review, Category 2 Centre sector strategies should be developed to ensure consistent centre management and utilisation. These sector strategies should adhere to common, cross-UNESCO standards relating to feasibility studies, centre renewals and biennial reporting and be in line with the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy (35 C/22). This requires revising sector strategies which already exist (e.g. for the IHP⁴) or are currently under development. Additionally, all sector strategies should, inter alia:

4. Strategy for UNESCO's Category 1 and Category 2 Water Related Centres (177 EX/INF.9)

- identify how the sector will use centres to contribute to its objectives, including capturing, utilising and disseminating centre outputs. National and regional-level bodies (i.e. National Commissions, IHP National Committees, etc.) should be included in these processes;
- define the responsibilities of relevant UNESCO subsidiary bodies (e.g. World Heritage Committee, IHP Council, Conference of States Parties to a Convention, etc.) in relation to the establishment, renewal, monitoring and direction of centres;
- define a sector-level procedure for assessing new centres and centre renewals prior to their submission to the governing bodies of UNESCO. The assessment framework and standards should be consistent across all sectors and focus on the evaluation criteria outlined in the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Centres (35 C/22)⁵ including:
 - need for proposed area of centre's work, including planned outputs and impact of the centre;
 - what value Category 2 status will add;
 - analysis of possible overlap and duplication with existing centres;
 - long-term financial sustainability of the centre;
 - how design of the centre may support low-cost networking;
 - evaluations should involve relevant UNESCO-related national and regional-level bodies.

Centre Networking

Sector strategies should outline a comprehensive communications and networking framework for cooperation among and between the centres and UNESCO. UNESCO should provide proactive, central coordination for the Category 2 network while also promoting 'bottom-up' initiatives, led by centres. The frameworks should be integrated with UNESCO programmes and initiatives and build on existing efforts in this area, including:

- regular and structured meetings, preferably hosted by a Category 2 Centre, convened digitally or during a relevant UNESCO meeting, such as the IHP Council or World Heritage Committee. Recent meetings of Category 2 Centres in education⁶ are a good example;
- online portals or webpages for centralised information sharing, such as the webpage for World Heritage related centres;⁷
- dedicated focal point at the UNESCO Secretariat for each Category 2 Centre, which may be the sectoral focal points required by the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy (35 C/22).

Approval of Sector Strategies

All sectoral strategies should be developed using the relevant UNESCO subsidiary bodies (IHP Council, World Heritage Committee, etc.) before being submitted for UNESCO Executive Board or General Conference for approval. These strategies should be routinely updated and resubmitted for approval in line with UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy (C/4) planning cycles.

5. 35 C/22 Attachment 1, Guidelines concerning the creation of institutes and centres under the auspices of UNESCO
6. Report on the 2nd Meeting of UNESCO Education Sector Category II Centres, 2011, Seoul
7. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/676/>

4. Centre Renewal

The UK National Commission's report of the Dundee IHP-HELP Centre review provided a summary of recommendations relating to the review process.⁸ It is evident that the issues surrounding centre renewals are not limited to the Natural Sciences Sector and are symptomatic of a UNESCO wide renewal process which is not fit for purpose. The following changes would improve the efficiency of the renewal process:

- development of centralised guidance for centre renewals. To this end IOS Recommendation 6 should be implemented as soon as possible, with progress reported to the 190th UNESCO Executive Board;
- publication of an evidence framework which clearly specifies what information centres must provide for both renewal evaluations and feasibility studies. The renewal process should examine compliance with all elements of the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy (35 C/22) and relevant sector strategies;
- in addition to reviewing past performance, renewal evaluations should include a clear assessment of a centre's plans over the proposed renewal period. The evaluation can then recommend updates to a centre's remit and activities so that they remain in line with UNESCO's priorities and objectives. This would only pertain to the areas of a centre's work which are the basis of the centre agreement with UNESCO, and would not necessarily require an updating of the entire remit of the institution;
- review of the scope of centre activities to ensure they've maintained the regional or global focus required for Category 2 Centres;
- results of all renewal evaluations should be presented to the UNESCO governing bodies for approval (as well as any subsidiary bodies as outlined in relevant sector strategies). This approval should be required before the Director-General proceeds with renewal of a centre agreement.

5. Monitoring and Transparency

Information about the status and reporting of Category 2 Centres is inconsistently available and often difficult to source. Improving this would increase the visibility of individual centres and allow Member States and other stakeholders to access comparable information on all centres. In line with IOS Recommendation 5, UNESCO should make the following information for all centres openly available on a central website:

- feasibility studies;
- centre governing agreements;
- governing board membership and details of meetings;
- biennial centre activity reports;
- renewal evaluation reports.

The World Heritage Centre Category 2 Centre webpage provides a good standard which should be built upon to include all these materials.⁹

8. Independent Observer's Report on UNESCO Status Renewal Evaluation of University of Dundee IHP-HELP Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science under the auspices of UNESCO (Dec 2011)

9. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/676/>

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Routine Centre Reporting

Existing reporting requirements under 35 C/22, particularly biennial centre reports, should be strictly enforced and directly integrated with both renewal evaluations' evidence framework and any additional sector-level reporting requirements. UNESCO should develop clear guidance in the form of templates and, where possible, performance indicators to aid reporting.

Reporting to Member States

Reporting to Member States on the Category 2 network as a whole must also be improved. At the sector level, the World Heritage Centre provides a good standard of practice, where an item on the contributions of Category 2 Centres appears on each World Heritage Committee agenda. This could be strengthened with the introduction of standardised reporting templates and the other practices outlined in the sector strategies section of this brief.

At the UNESCO Executive Board and General Conference level, references to Category 2 Centre achievements in the C/3 should be welcomed, but are not a comprehensive report on the network's activities. Reporting should be expanded to include a regular agenda item with a comprehensive report on Category 2 Centre activities across all sectors. This should be harmonised with any reporting standards envisioned by UNESCO's Comprehensive Partnership Strategy.

6. Review of Existing Centres

As highlighted by the IOS report and the mapping exercise summarised in the UNESCO Executive Board document 189 EX/INF.5, a number of Category 2 Centres have been subject to considerable delay in establishment and remain non-operational. Additionally, a large proportion of centres have agreements which do not conform to the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy (35 C/22) and/or have expired. In line with IOS Recommendations 2 and 7:

- all centres where the governing agreement has expired or where a renewal evaluation has not been completed in the last five years should be subject to immediate review. This may be done by establishing a review committee as permitted by section H.2 of 35 C/22;
- UNESCO should immediately examine all Category 2 agreements with a view to de-designate all non-operational centres, reporting the results to the 192nd UNESCO Executive Board;

Given the rising cost of centre governance and the need for consistent management, the growth of the network should be controlled until reforms have been put in place. To this effect, there should be an immediate moratorium on all new centres within each sector until:

1. all centres in that sector are subject to an active agreement consistent with 35 C/22 or have had their Category 2 status removed and;
2. the sector has developed, agreed and published a sector strategy for Category 2 Centres.

7. Cost of Centres to UNESCO

There is a lack of clarity on the cost to UNESCO of maintaining the Category 2 network. This is supported by the IOS audit report, which recommends that sectors better plan, budget and report on costs and Regular Programme resources allocated to Category 2 Centres (Recommendation 4). UNESCO should present an assessment to the 191st UNESCO Executive Board of the full cost, per sector (including staff time) of:

- centre governance (e.g. feasibility studies, reviews, agreements, governing board membership) and;
- activities that facilitate centre cooperation and networking.

Addressing rising costs

While UNESCO is not obliged to provide any direct funding as part of a Category 2 agreement, there are cost implications. For instance, the current model agreement requires that each Category 2 Centre includes a UNESCO member of staff on its governing board. At current levels, this could represent a time commitment equivalent to a full-time senior member of staff. While such investments may reap large returns, it is essential that costs are accounted for and that the maintenance and growth of the network is not viewed as 'zero cost'.

Consolidating the network will help UNESCO focus its limited resources and secure a higher return on investment, but other changes are required for the long-term viability of the network. In this respect, UNESCO should ensure that:

- current cost-cover requirements are consistent across all sectors. For instance, under their Category 2 sector strategy, water-related centres are required to cover the full cost of evaluations while the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy (35 C/22) makes no reference to this.
- Member States or individual centres should fund the full economic cost to UNESCO of feasibility studies, centre governing board membership and renewal evaluations.

UNESCO should support centre networking, using low-cost mechanisms. Methods being used with other networks, such as National Commissions, may provide a useful model. These facilitation methods and their associated costs should be clearly reported by each sector. Further recommendations on centre networking are outlined in the sector strategies section of this brief.

4 / Recommendations

The UK National Commission recommends that UNESCO improve the focus and management of the Category 2 Centre network, thus increasing the value of the system to UNESCO. A summary of the Commission's core recommendations are:

- 1. IOS Review of the Management Framework for UNESCO Category 2 Institutes/Centres:** UNESCO should immediately implement all nine recommendations proposed in this review, reporting progress to the 190th UNESCO Executive Board;
- 2. Category 2 Centres within the UNESCO Partnership Network:** UNESCO should include Category 2 Centres in its comprehensive partnership strategy and develop a new, clearer definition of Category 2 Centres;
- 3. Integrated Comprehensive Strategy:** UNESCO should ensure that the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Centres (35 C/22) is applied consistently to all centres. 35 C/22 should be updated to ensure full consistency with UNESCO's Partnership Strategy (when developed);
- 4. Sector Strategies:** UNESCO should develop/update Category 2 Centre strategies for all sectors and present these for approval by the 37th UNESCO General Conference;
- 5. Centre Renewal:** The renewal process should include both: a more comprehensive structured evaluation of a centre's past performance and future plans and; be subject to review and approval by UNESCO's governing bodies prior to renewal;
- 6. Monitoring and Transparency:** UNESCO should publish all information regarding the governance and activities of all Category 2 Centres on its website by the 37th UNESCO General Conference;
- 7. Review of Existing Centres:** UNESCO should review all non-operational centres and centres where the governing agreements have expired or have not been subject to renewal in the last five years. Until this process is complete, no new Category 2 Centres within an effected sector should be approved;
- 8. Cost of Centres to UNESCO:** Centres should cover certain governance costs, with UNESCO assuming a greater role in network facilitation. Regular, clearer reporting on the cost of the Category 2 network should begin with the 191st UNESCO Executive Board.

Reform Timetable

Delivery and reporting milestones

	Immediate	190 th Executive Board (Oct 2012)	191 st Executive Board (April 2013)	192 nd Executive Board (Oct 2013)	37 th General Conference (Nov 2013)
A – Internal Oversight Services (IOS) Review		Report progress in implementing the nine IOS Review recommendations	Report further progress in implementing the nine IOS Review recommendations		
B – Partnership Network		Include Cat 2 Centres in draft of UNESCO comprehensive partnership strategy	New definition of Cat 2 Centres published		
C – Integrated Comprehensive Strategy					Updates to Integrated Comprehensive Strategy on Cat 2 Centres agreed
D – Sector Strategies					All Cat 2 sector strategies submitted for approval
E – Centre Renewals		Central guidance on centre renewals and evidence framework published			Results of all renewal evaluations in 2012–13 submitted for approval
F – Monitoring and Transparency			Centre biennial reporting template and performance indicators published		Centralised webpage with comprehensive info on Cat 2 Centres published; Agenda item to report on Cat 2 activities
G – Review of Existing Centres	Moratorium on all new Cat 2 Centres; establish review committee to look at expired centre agreements			Report on review of all Cat 2 agreements, de-designating non-operational centres	Potential reopening of Cat 2 Centre application process
H – Cost of Centres to UNESCO			Publish the full cost assessment of Category 2 Centres to UNESCO		Alignment of Cat 2 Centre cost-cover requirements

References

UK National Commission for UNESCO, Dr Harry Dixon (Dec 2011) *Independent Observer's Report on UNESCO Status Renewal Evaluation of University of Dundee IHP-HELP Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science under the auspices of UNESCO*

UN Joint Inspection Unit (Dec 2011) *Review of Management and Administration in UNESCO* (JIU/REP/2011/8)

UNESCO (2009) *Implementation of the Guidelines and Criteria for Category 2 Institutes and Centres approved in 33 C/Resolution 90 (35 C/22)*

UNESCO (Sept 2010) *Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO* (IOS/EVS/PI/107)

UNESCO Internal Oversight Services (Dec 2011) *Review of the Management Framework for UNESCO Category 2 Institutes/Centres* (IOS/AUD/EVS/2011/14 Rev)

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The views contained in this policy brief are those of the UK National Commission for UNESCO and do not necessarily reflect those of UK Government or the individuals or organisations who have contributed to this report.

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