The preliminary draft Strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters is submitted to the 58th session of the IBE Council in response to the decision taken at its 56th session, during which:

“The IBE Council:

Further recalling that the UNESCO Medium-term strategy for 2008–2013 (34 C/4 approved) has been adopted as a “Rolling Strategy”;

1. Adopts the IBE Strategy 2008–2013 as a “Rolling Strategy”;

2. Requests the Director of the IBE to present a revised version of the IBE Strategy 2008–2013 at the 59th session of the Council in January 2010, consistent with the strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters, including core subjects and elements for peace;

3. Invites the Director of the IBE to associate the members of the Council in the preparation of the strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters, in particular by,
   a) conducting appropriate consultations with Member States;
   b) presenting a preliminary draft strategy to the Council at its 58th session in January 2009, that gives due consideration to resource mobilization.”
1. Introduction

UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education (IBE) finds itself in an entirely paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it is considered to be an important institution, with a clear mission and whose activities are useful and effective; more and more is expected of it and it is required, in particular, to be a “centre of excellence” in the service of Member States. However, on the other hand, its budgetary situation has considerably deteriorated owing to a growing shortfall in the contribution of UNESCO’s regular budget. On numerous occasions, the Director has drawn the attention of the governing body, the IBE Council, to this problem, which has itself expressed its concern on the subject. Indeed, while the importance of the institution in accomplishing the objectives of the Education (ED) Sector’s Major Programme I, and the relevance and the quality of its activities have regularly been evaluated in a very positive way—as much by the Council or the General Conference as by the Member States involved in its programmes or by the external evaluation missions carried out by the Technopolis company in 2005 and the Navigant company in 2006—itss human resources and budget have declined steadily over a ten-year period.

Thus, for the 1998/1999 biennium (29 C/5), while the allocation of UNESCO’s regular budget amounted to US$7,000,000, this allocation—unchanged since 2002—was only US$4,591,000 in 2008/2009 (34 C/5), in other words a reduction of 34.4%. During this same period, UNESCO’s overall budget increased by 12.1% and that of the ED Sector by 3%. As for the IBE’s extra-budgetary resources, while they represented 12% of its budget in 1998/1999, they have been almost multiplied by five and represent, for 2008, 58.2% of the budget and, for the 2008/2009 biennium, 52.6%.

The following table illustrates the evolution of the budgetary situation.

At the same time, the stable human resources (established posts) have dropped from 29 in 2000 to 16 in 2008, in other words a decline of 44.8%.

The ongoing shortfall in the IBE’s human and financial resources places not only its programmes and its activities in real danger, but also, in the short term, the very survival of the institution. This alarming situation drew the attention of the 34th General Conference of UNESCO (2007). The purpose of the present document is, therefore, to respond to its request.
expressed in Resolution No. 4 concerning the IBE. This Resolution:

(…) Encourages the Director-General to continue to strengthen the activities of IBE in the following areas: peace education, science education, philosophy, arts education and education for sustainable development, and requests him to submit to it at its 35th session a strategy designed to make the IBE UNESCO’s centre of excellence for curricula, and a report on the resources required for that purpose¹ in accordance with the overall strategy for UNESCO institutes and centres and their governing bodies, as approved in 33 C/Resolution 90 (…) 

This request corresponds to the follow-up of decisions already adopted during the 33rd General Conference (Resolution 33 C/90) on the “Principles and guidelines for the establishment and functioning of UNESCO Institutes and Centres (category 1) and Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO (category 2)”, of which the relevant points are summarized as follows:

“The General Conference,

Recalling 21 C/Resolution 40.1, 30 C/Resolution 2 and 30 C/Resolution 83,
Having considered document 33 C/19 and in particular the recommendations by the Executive Board contained in 171 EX/Decision 23,
Decides that the principles and guidelines for category 1 and the criteria for category 2 institutes and centres, together with Annexes I and II of document 171 EX/18, as attached to document 33 C/19, constitute the “Overall Strategy for UNESCO Institutes and Centres and their Governing Bodies”²;
Decides that this Overall Strategy shall supersede all relevant prior resolutions by the General Conference on the subject.”

In January 2008, the IBE Council gave the Director of the IBE the mandate of preparing a draft document, in conformity with the Council’s decision, as it appears in the Proceedings and Decisions of its fifty-sixth session:

“The 56th Session of the IBE Council;

Further recalling that the UNESCO Medium-term strategy for 2008–2013 (34 C/4 approved) has been adopted as a “Rolling Strategy”,

1. Adopts the IBE Strategy 2008–2013 as a “Rolling Strategy”;  
2. Requests the Director of the IBE to present a revised version of the IBE Strategy 2008-2013 at the 59th session of the Council in January 2010, consistent with the strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters, including core subjects and elements for peace;  
3. Invites the Director of the IBE to associate the members of the Council in the preparation of the strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters, in particular by,  
   a) conducting appropriate consultations with Member States;  
   b) presenting a preliminary draft strategy to the Council at its 58th session in January 2009, that gives due consideration to resource mobilization.”³

¹ Our emphasis.  
² Idem.  
³ Idem.
2. The justification of UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence in curriculum-related matters

UNESCO’s explicit need to have available an international reference on curriculum-related matters already dates back to the end of the 1990s, for it was at that time that UNESCO’s 30th General Conference (GC), in 1999, attributed to the IBE a “renewed mandate as an international centre specializing in the content of education”. This mandate was renewed and made more specific during the General Conferences that followed, where the IBE is identified as the “UNESCO institute specializing in the content and methods of education” (31st GC), the “UNESCO institute specializing in educational contents, methods, structures and curriculum development processes” (32nd GC), the “UNESCO institute specializing in educational contents, methods, policies and curriculum development processes» (33rd GC), the “UNESCO institute specialized in the content, methods, policies and processes of curriculum development” (34th GC). At each General Conference, the Member States have reaffirmed the importance of the IBE in responding to the needs of their educational policies and in contributing to attaining the objectives of Major Programme I in the field of quality education for all. In fact, the curriculum plays a key role in the design, development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of any educational policy reflecting the present time.

3. The importance of quality curricula

The question of curriculum reform is an ongoing issue and represents a major concern of educational policies in all countries of the world. Indeed, as is pointed out in the IBE’s Strategy for 2008–2013: “The curriculum is a crucial component of any educational process. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, education systems are facing the challenges of the global market and the knowledge economy. National education authorities around the world increasingly address the challenge of improving the quality of learning outcomes through curriculum reform, and curricula must respond to the new demands by providing skills and building competences that are relevant to local and global needs.”

“There are many ongoing discussions internationally with regard to what makes a good curriculum and how to balance tradition and innovation. Despite differences of approach, national education authorities are generally looking into new solutions to improve the quality of learning outcomes based on curriculum provisions that take into account different criteria. For example, curricula:

- need to take into account the learners’ different needs and interests, as well as the local and global contexts; they should foster the whole development of individuals in compliance with their potential, should consider different learning styles and promote learner-friendly approaches.

- should be up-to-date, which means that they should avoid obsolete and irrelevant aspects and integrate in ways appropriate to the context of learners new developments in knowledge, culture, science, technology, economy and other areas of social life.

- should be based on inclusive approaches fostering increased access to quality education and equal opportunities for learning; they should integrate and promote universal values, and promote lifelong learning and competences for learning to live together in a globalized world.”

5 Idem., p. 10
4. State of the art: some characteristics of an institute “centre of excellence”

Assessments carried out in recent years, both in the context of preparing UNESCO’s Overall Strategy for the institutes and those guiding the reform of the ED Sector, have largely contributed to clarifying the nature and role of these institutes in the field of education. Thus, their “identity card” can be summarized as follows:

**Characteristics:**
- Specialized research and training entities;
- Centres of innovation and competence in core subject/mission;
- Repository and source of knowledge;
- Laboratory of ideas for reform and change;
- Clearing-house.

**Functions**
- Provide capacity development and training (external and internal);
- Create, transfer and disseminate knowledge;
- Engage in joint planning with HQ Divisions, with overlapping responsibilities;
- Harmonize institute plans with regional plans;
- Co-ordinate with HQ and regional bureaux;
- Collaborate with organizations related to fundamental expertise.

Even though it is used frequently—both by UNESCO and elsewhere—the concept of a “centre of excellence” has been less clearly defined. However, if we wish to go beyond the rather subjective view of “excellent work”, it is necessary to establish what this concept involves in a more profound way.

Is it possible to identify the **objective criteria** that will enable us to define what a centre of excellence is? Without exhausting the subject, it would seem that the following characteristics are necessarily associated with this title or “label” of a “centre of excellence”:
- An institutional legitimacy based on clearly defined objectives and functions;
- A specific mission;
- A solid and realistic strategy;
- Relevant and effective programmes;
- Appropriate working methods;
- Functional autonomy;
- A wide range of partners;
- Competent human resources in sufficient numbers;
- A budget in keeping with the requirements of the mission.

How is the IBE positioned in relation to these nine criteria?

4.1 An institutional legitimacy based on clearly defined objectives and functions

The institutional legitimacy of the IBE, in the same way as that of all of UNESCO’s institutes and centres, is precisely laid down in the “Overall Strategy for UNESCO Institutes and Centres and their Governing Bodies”, adopted by the 33rd General Conference. Thus, the IBE “must always serve a specific purpose within the fields of competence of UNESCO. It

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6 Document 33 C/19.
must be principally programme-driven, respond to both global and field-based needs, be part of an operational network, have a degree of functional autonomy, be accountable and transparent and have balanced staff and programme costs.”

This same document, in Guideline I/1, lays down the objective and functions of an institute such as the IBE:

Guideline I/1 – Purpose and functions: The purposes which a UNESCO institute or centre (category I) may serve encompass one or more of the following:

(i) to contribute to the conceptualization, design and formulation of UNESCO’s programmes, objectives and strategies, including regional and sub-regional strategies;

(ii) to contribute to the pursuit of UNESCO’s strategic objectives by providing deeper and concentrated resource support and services, especially through policy advice, capacity-building, training and outreach at regional and sub-regional levels with professional communities and counterparts in Member States;

(iii) to serve as a laboratory of ideas, as a centre of excellence and experimentation as well as a standard-setter (e.g. in the areas of classification and accreditation as well as with respect to methodologies), both globally and regionally;

(iv) to function as a clearing-house and reference centre, to advance, deepen and impart knowledge and capacities and to employ novel modalities pertaining to a specific strategic objective or sub-objective of UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy and its biennial programmes and budgets;

(v) to mobilize, in an innovative setting, a critical mass of specialized expertise, know-how and skills that cannot be made available within UNESCO’s regular Secretariat structure;

(vi) to reinforce UNESCO’s overall decentralization strategy, based on a clear delineation of responsibilities and division of labour especially with the field offices, taking into account the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity;

(vii) to enhance UNESCO’s overall visibility, outreach and impact, as well as its public perception.

“UNESCO institutes and centres are not only similar in administrative features, they also discharge similar functions. They are designed to serve as centres of excellence and providers of technical support and expertise in their area of specialization to Member States and other Secretariat units, including field offices. Indeed, one of the largest shares of activity of institutes and centres is devoted to capacity-building in their respective fields of competence in favour of Member States. It is largely through these institutes and centres that UNESCO is able to provide world-class capacity-building and technical support to Member States, as for instance in the area of educational management and planning through the IIEP or in the area of statistical capacities through the UIS. UNESCO-IHE is the world’s leading institute for the training of water specialists and managers. ‘Capacity-building’ in that sense encompasses a broad range of activities, from the training of individuals to institution-building, to policy advice in an institute’s or centre’s technical area of expertise.”

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7 Document 33 C/19, Annex : document 171 EX/18, Principle 1/2 – p.5
8 Idem, Directive I/1, p. 6
9 Idem.
Conclusion: as far as its institutional legitimacy based on clearly defined objectives and functions is concerned, the IBE can be considered as already corresponding to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.2 A specific mission

The specific mission of the IBE has been clearly defined on several occasions by UNESCO’s General Conference (see section 2 above). It is expressed in the following way in the IBE’s Strategy for 2008–2013: “The IBE is the UNESCO institute specializing in educational contents, methods and structures. Its overall mission is to contribute to the attainment of quality education for all. To this end, the IBE builds networks to share knowledge on and foster national capacities for curriculum change and development in all regions of the world. It aims to introduce innovative approaches in curriculum design and implementation, to improve practical skills, and facilitate international dialogue on educational policies and practices. The IBE works in partnership with national education authorities, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, and offers technical assistance, training, policy support and a wide range of resources, tools and materials.”

Conclusion: as far as its specific mission is concerned, the IBE can already be considered as corresponding to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.3 A solid and realistic strategy

Similar to UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013, that of the IBE was adopted by the IBE Council in January 2008 as a “rolling strategy”, after a wide-ranging debate and a positive evaluation of the relevance of its strategic orientations and programming prospects. For the implementation of this strategy, the IBE benefits from a certain number of undeniable assets, which are the outcome of an important revision of its programme and activities, as well as the result of several years of positive experience in the service of Member States. All of the IBE’s strategic orientations, as well as the assets it has available to fulfil its mission, are included in the Annex.

Conclusion: as far as a solid and realistic strategy is concerned, the IBE can already be considered as corresponding to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.4 Relevant and effective programmes

Since the renewal of the institute’s mandate in 1999, the IBE’s programmes have considerably evolved towards a concentration of its activities, with greater relevance and effectiveness. In January 2007, the IBE Council approved the new programme structure and its more readable and easily understandable presentation.

As laid down in the IBE’s Strategy for 2008–2103, during this period: “the IBE will support UNESCO action aimed at attaining quality education for all and promoting the development of quality curricula.”

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10 IBE Strategy 2008–2013, p. 11
The IBE intends to work towards:

- **Enhancing the capacities for the design, management and implementation of curriculum development processes among specialists, practitioners and decision-makers.**
- **Improving the quality of curriculum-making processes and products.**
- **Informing innovative policies and practices in the field of curriculum reform and change.**

With its specialized expertise, knowledge and networks in the field of educational contents, methods and structures, the IBE contributes to the attainment of quality Education for All through: **Capacity development and technical assistance, knowledge production and management, and policy dialogue.**11

### Capacity Development: prospects

“For 2008–2013, the strategic objective is to contribute to the development of the capacities of specialists, practitioners and decision-makers in the design, management and implementation of the quality of curriculum-making processes and inclusive curricula. The IBE will work towards:

- **Consolidating the global network in curriculum development in order to facilitate the development of conceptual orientations and frameworks for quality basic education and sustained collective action in the field of curriculum reform and change at the local, regional and interregional levels.**
- **Supporting countries in processes of innovative curriculum change and effective assessment.**
- **Developing, pilot-testing and promoting the effective usage of a set of training materials and tools for innovative curriculum change and implementation.**
- **Expanding and diversifying forms of training in the domain of curriculum development through partnerships with relevant academic institutions in different regions.**
- **Providing professional support and advice to contribute to improved curriculum development processes and products through action-oriented, participatory approaches and effective partnerships among relevant stakeholders.**12

### Knowledge production and management: prospects

“For the period 2008–2013, the IBE’s strategic objective is to consolidate, enrich and further expand a knowledge base and a variety of specialized information resources on curricula and curriculum development processes to be exploited for a wide range of purposes, including training and informed innovative policies and practices, and to be broadly disseminated and shared for improved action in favour of quality education for all. Capitalizing on its strengths and achievements, the IBE intends to work towards:

- **Building a robust knowledge base, including specialized information resources and a set of studies and trend analyses, on curricula and curriculum development processes in the service of researchers, trainers, practitioners and decision-makers.**

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11 Idem, p. 16.
12 Idem, p. 22.
• Strengthening clearing-house and information services through updated, expanded and enriched databases; seamless access to wide-ranging collections, in particular those related to the curriculum; expanded alerting services; and digitized materials.

• Developing an on-line platform for increased knowledge sharing and collaborative action in the field of curriculum development, intended to support a worldwide network of researchers and practitioners, and more generally the enhancement of the UNESCO knowledge portal.

• Streamlining services and access to materials and resources through collaboration with all the UNESCO constituencies, as well as external partners, in order to maximize efficiency and minimize duplication of effort.”

Policy dialogue: prospects

“For 2008–2013, the strategic objective is to facilitate policy dialogue at the local, regional and global levels for improved curriculum development processes and products. The IBE will work towards:

• Providing support for strengthened dialogue as a means of addressing relevant curriculum development policy issues and promoting constructive change with regard to identified curriculum policy concerns.

• Ensuring that the sessions of the International Conference on Education represent a relevant worldwide forum intended to foster genuine policy dialogue, share information, expand partnerships and renew international commitment towards quality education for all.

• Contributing to build appropriate mechanisms for the dissemination of the conclusions of the 2008 Conference and sustained follow-up actions targeting inclusive education policies and issues.”

Conclusion: as far as relevant and effective programmes are concerned, the IBE can be considered as already corresponding to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.5 Appropriate working methods

Basically, it is the concrete needs and situations in Member States which determine the most appropriate and relevant working methods. In fact, as the IBE’s Strategy for 2008–2013 reminds us: “Decisions regarding the curriculum and the actual learning process are taken at different levels by multiple actors, from teachers in isolated rural schools who have to prepare lessons adapted to the local context for multi-grade classrooms, to experts selecting and organizing specific learning contents, to national teams in charge of the definition of curricular frameworks, and ministers of education who need to discuss new curricula with a range of national and international stakeholders. Most of these actors are not accustomed to value and exploit, or even conduct, research for informing and orientating their decisions. Many researchers and scholars are not accustomed to communicating and disseminating their findings to this particular kind of audience or to the general public. Given its specialized function within UNESCO and as a field-oriented institute, an important role of the IBE is to operate as the interface between educational research and practice, collaborating with a

13 Idem, p. 27.
14 Idem, p. 30
Many institutions throughout the world, either national, academic or even private, are participating in and committed to curriculum reforms. Without minimizing the work carried out by these institutions, it would be no exaggeration to say that, in this domain, the IBE brings an important added value since it is not only able to identify the problems, but also to suggest a holistic vision and to respond very rapidly to Member States’ requests. At the methodological level, “the IBE promotes a comprehensive approach to curriculum development addressing all relevant aspects, from curriculum policies, as part of the overall education decision-making process, to advocacy, development of curricula and learning materials, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of curriculum processes, as well as curriculum assessment. It also takes into account the relationships between the curriculum and evaluation, teacher education and training, teaching and learning strategies, and learning environments.”

Furthermore, its way of working is based on respecting political realities, the diversity of situations facing Member States and a participative approach aimed at empowering all the actors involved in improving education systems. “Instead of imposing predefined models or prescribing solutions applicable everywhere, the IBE facilitates access to different experiences and assists curriculum specialists and relevant stakeholders in gaining new perspectives on complex issues and making their own informed decisions by exploring the advantages and disadvantages of different options in compliance with their own contexts and needs. The IBE’s approach is based on principles, such as: building on existing strengths and achievements; supporting countries in mobilizing the best local expertise they can actually identify; promoting exchanges and knowledge-sharing; making available the most up-to-date information resources; fostering meaningful and productive interactions between local and international experts; and encouraging the ownership, participation and creativity of local decision-makers and curriculum developers.”

Finally, the IBE attaches great importance to South-South and North-South-South cooperation by involving as far as possible the best experts from all regions of the world in its activities.

Conclusion: as far as appropriate working methods are concerned, the IBE can already be considered as corresponding to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.6 A wide range of partners

As a direct outcome of its mission and its methodological choices, it is not the purpose of the IBE to be a major centre of academic research where—theoretically perfect—models are developed to be then transferred to the field. On the contrary, the IBE bases its activities on research-action-training and on the mobilization of the widest possible range of partners and competencies drawn from the international educational community. “The IBE is a small institute in terms of staff and funding but, considering the limited resources available, it can be estimated that its products and services are very impressive. In order to successfully respond to the challenge of a significant mandate associated with modest resources to carry out its mission, the IBE systematically combines its efforts with a wide range of partners, both

15 Idem, p. 12.
16 Idem, p. 11.
17 Idem, pp. 11–12.
within and outside UNESCO. As a result, its field-based assistance and support are normally delivered in collaboration with UNESCO regional and field offices, and in some cases also involve the participation of other educational institutes in order to maximize impact and take full advantage of the rich and diversified expertise and accumulated experience, not only of UNESCO, but also of all its partners. The IBE also collaborates with many academic institutions and research centres in several regions of the world, and implements activities in cooperation with regional, international, bilateral and non-governmental organizations, including, among others, the Central American Coordination for Education and Culture, the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), UNICEF, UNAIDS, the World Bank, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the Open Society Institute.”

As is also stressed in the UNESCO Overall Strategy: “UNESCO institutes and centres maintain, within their fields of expertise, robust and high-level networks of experts and related institutions, which contribute to bolster UNESCO’s outreach towards professional communities, including the NGO communities. Without such efforts, the institutes and centres would rapidly lose their comparative advantage and their standing as international reference institutions, laboratories of ideas and good practices in their areas of competence. It is indispensable that this level of competence and skills be maintained, and that its necessity be acknowledged.”

Three figures will illustrate the importance of the linkage between the IBE and its global partners. Between 2002 and 2007, 2,438 people, coming from 123 countries, participated in the institute’s activities. The Community of Practice of curriculum specialists, for its part, numbered 850 experts or institutions in 94 countries in October 2008. In the context of preparatory activities for the forty-eighth session of the ICE, thirteen regional conferences or seminars were held in the world (three in Africa, three in Asia, three in Europe, two in Latin America and the Caribbean and two in the Arab States); they brought together in total around 900 participants coming from 127 Member States.

Conclusion: as far as a wide range of partners is concerned, the IBE could already be considered to correspond to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.7 Functional autonomy

It has to be admitted that the issue of the IBE’s functional autonomy has, in past years, been a source of tension between the institute and UNESCO Headquarters. It is, in fact, not easy to find an institutional “equilibrium of powers” between the fact that the IBE, according to its Statutes (Article I), is, on the one hand “within the framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (...) an integral part thereof” while, on the other, “subject to the conditions laid down in the present Statutes, the Bureau shall enjoy wide intellectual and functional autonomy within the framework of UNESCO”. Without doubt, some of these difficulties have been based on misunderstandings and on the lack of clarity in the basic texts. The “Overall Strategy for UNESCO Institutes and Centres and their Governing Bodies”, adopted by the 33rd General Conference, has the advantage of considerably clarifying matters in this domain. It underlines both the fact that “Functional

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18 In recent years, significant progress has been achieved in cooperation with all of UNESCO’s field offices and their effective involvement in the IBE’s activities.
autonomy is a key structural and operational requirement and feature of category I institutes and centres” (Principle I/5), that it is an asset, that it allows the strengthening of effectiveness, that it must be based on trust, and that the corollaries of this autonomy are accountability and transparency.

**Guideline I/4:** Institutes and centres shall have a degree of functional autonomy—laid down in the respective statutes and other pertinent decisions approved by the General Conference and in administrative documents approved by the Director-General. The relative autonomy is an asset, allowing the institutes and centres to operate in a more flexible manner and to attract substantial extra-budgetary funding. Yet, the institutes and centres are not independent from the Organization, which must preserve its institutional integrity. They act under the authority of the Director-General and their programme activities are an integral part of UNESCO’s programme.

“The experience with the criteria adopted on an experimental basis in 2001 suggests that the work of institutes and centres is enhanced, not reduced, by autonomy and flexibility, as long as these are exercised in the context of a proper system of governance and accountability, and are related to the prevailing priorities of the Organization. The management of the institutes and centres needs to build on mutual trust and, as outlined above, the recognition that organizational diversity is an asset.

Granting functional autonomy to UNESCO institutes and centres is a strong asset for UNESCO as a whole. Functional autonomy means that the institutes and centres are given sufficient delegated authority and flexibility to carry out their mandate fully and effectively. The degree of functional autonomy varies according to each Category I entity. Arrangements concerning delegation of authority are different, especially in matters of staff management. Governing bodies may be chosen differently and discharge their responsibilities in a somewhat different manner. Functional autonomy as currently conceived and applied tends to support a system based on attaining results rather than on prescribing and enforcing burdensome procedures. Experience shows that the diversity in matters related to functional autonomy appears to work satisfactorily, and that it ensures a sufficient degree of independence in programme design and implementation.

In particular, functional autonomy allows the entities concerned to respond more flexibly to requests and to attract funds which may not otherwise have been directed to UNESCO. In this respect, the performance of most institutes and centres in attracting extra-budgetary funding is praiseworthy.

Functional autonomy should not translate into general rules applicable in all cases, but rather allow the design of diversified approaches, including responsiveness to the communication needs of institutes in different regions and time-zones of the world, while recognizing the need for shared standards in matters related to accountability, transparency, management principles and reporting practices. Ultimately, ‘functional autonomy’ is a matter of mutual trust, relying on a balance between autonomy and accountability. All efforts should be made to keep transaction costs in that regard to a minimum.

The system appears all the more efficient as it is accompanied by ‘checks and balances’ and accountability in the form of audits, regular independent evaluations, and ongoing consultations with UNESCO programme sectors and field units. Most importantly, institutes and centres are subject to UNESCO’s rules and regulations. It is nevertheless recognized that these rules and regulations may at times need to undergo revision and change to adapt to the
different and changing needs of institutes and centres, in order to facilitate their work and proper functioning.”21

Conclusion: as far as functional autonomy is concerned, the IBE could already be considered to correspond to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

4.8 Competent human resources in sufficient numbers

The excellence of an institution depends, to a great extent—beyond the fact that its structures, mission, programmes, working methods and operation should be of high quality—on the excellence, motivation and commitment of the people responsible for the design and implementation of its activities. As is pointed out in the UNESCO Overall Strategy: “The provision of technical assistance and capacity-building activities necessitate a high degree of specialized competence and knowledge, which require long-term investment and approaches. Thus, institutes and centres require a highly competent core staff of professionals in their areas of expertise; the constant updating and upgrading of knowledge and competence; the development of cutting-edge analytical work and capacities; support to a lively professional dialogue through active networks of skilled professionals; and the development and maintenance of (frequently online) databases and information clearing-houses on emerging trends and challenges for practitioners in areas of activity.”22

“The experience gained over the last three years has also shown the critical need for UNESCO institutes and centres to be able to maintain and increase their level of competence in their area of expertise. This level can only be achieved through constant attention to proper recruitment, training and staff development. Present staff competence in institutes and centres is very high, and needs to be preserved.”23

The management of the institutes’ human resources also presents an originality, directly based on the amount of functional autonomy they are granted. Thus, “In accordance with the Appropriation Resolution in the Programme and Budget (C/5) by UNESCO’s General Conference, the posts of category I institutes, whether funded from financial allocations provided by the Organization and from extra-budgetary resources, are not included in UNESCO’s established posts, within the meaning of that appropriation resolution. Consequently, the posts of category I institutes are not subject to the requirements of regular programme posts. Yet, in filling vacant posts, the Directors bear in mind the need to implement a reasonable geographical distribution and pay attention to candidates from under-represented Member States. In accordance with the financial and budgetary autonomy provided through the Financial Regulations of each Institute’s Special Accounts, the Directors decide on the creation or suppression of any post of the institute, within the limits of the budget voted by the governing body. Any new post should be accompanied by a post description, established on the appropriate UNESCO form, and shall respect the classification norms adopted by the Organization.

The UNESCO institutes and centres apply existing staff regulations and rules as well as procedures of UNESCO to their personnel having the status of UNESCO staff members. The Director-General has delegated to each Director authority to manage their personnel up to certain levels. Thus, each institute’s Director can take the decisions concerning the appointment, extension, promotion, and separation from service for all General Service staff

21 Idem, p. 11.
22 Idem, p. 6.
23 Idem, p. 7.
and for Professional staff from grade P1 to P4 with the exception of the Director of UIS who can take decisions for grades P1–P5, in full respect of the above-mentioned regulations and rules. (...)

The Directors have full autonomy concerning the recruitment of supernumeraries, consultants and fee contractors, ALD, local staff or any other personnel not falling under the staff regulations and rules. Here again, the Directors follow the rules, procedures and fees applicable in UNESCO.

The UNESCO policy of staff rotation does not apply to personnel of the institutes and centres and in this respect their posts are not rotational within the mandatory rotation scheme, due account being taken of the fact that the international professional staff of the institutes/centres are generally very specialized, that they cannot exercise their skills well unless they are part of a team, that they require specialized training and are thus not easily replaced. However, international professional staff members of institutes/centres can be part of the voluntary rotation scheme and for that purpose they can apply for other posts within the Organization and in as much as possible such transfer will be encouraged. Posting of a limited number of institute/centre staff members in field offices can also be encouraged if it meets with the agreement of the Directors of the institute/centre and the field office concerned. Rotation of administrative staff in the Professional category may, within the voluntary rotation scheme, apply between the institutes/centres and Headquarters, but in a cycle which will be compatible with the institutes’/centres’ cycle of programmes and budgets, which, unlike the rest of UNESCO, are yearly.

These provisions and practices notwithstanding, it is desirable to review periodically policies and arrangements pertaining to staff administration and management by UNESCO institutes and centres and to harmonize, as required, the degree of delegation of authority.”24

As was shown in the introduction to this document, the IBE’s human resources in “established posts” have, principally for budgetary reasons, diminished by 44.8% over a ten-year period. Meanwhile, over the same period, the requirements in terms of programmes, projects and activities have not ceased to increase. In 2008, the IBE had eight professional (P) posts and eight General Service (GS) posts, or 50% of the total in each category. In comparison, the staff of the ED Sector, which numbers 268 posts, is composed of 77.2% of professionals and 22.8% of General Services. It should be noted that the IBE’s problem is not at all that it has too many GS posts, but rather a serious shortfall in P posts. If the ratio existing in the ED Sector were to be applied, the IBE would normally expect to have twenty-seven P posts and eight GS posts.

It should also be noted that, in order to cope with the serious situation in which it finds itself, in recent years the IBE has had to deal with the temporary recruitment (ALD contracts) of three professionals (two P4 and one P1/P2), as well as a significant number of young professionals engaged through a research assistant grant (BARD). In 2008, the latter amounted to nine persons, to which fifteen interns should be added. Furthermore, one person is temporarily serving under the Service Contract (SC) and twelve persons under the Special Service Agreement (SSA). Finally, the IBE has benefited over recent years from the services of several people made available free of charge by the Cantonal Employment Office of the Canton of Geneva.

24 Idem, pp. 15–16.
Conclusion: as far as competent human resources in sufficient numbers are concerned, the evidence suggests that the IBE does not correspond to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

It is not the quality, competence, motivation or commitment of the staff that is in doubt (both of the evaluations mentioned previously came to the same positive conclusion). It is the actual provision of posts in quantitative terms in the institute, particularly core professional posts, which are insufficient, associated with a detrimental imbalance in the short, medium and long terms as a result of which temporary appointments, appointments of limited duration (ALD), special contracts or research assistant grants constitute the bulk of work contracts. Such a situation of insecurity and lack of professional posts could in no way lead to the institutional stability required to accomplish its mission; it is contrary to both the letter and the spirit contained in UNESCO’s Strategy as described above.

4.9 A budget in keeping with the requirements of the mission

The UNESCO Overall Strategy states that “UNESCO institutes and centres shall normally receive funding under the biannual programme and budget of the Organization, except where their statutes provide for extra-budgetary financing of their activities. Each UNESCO institute and centre, with the exception of IHE, shall receive funding from the biannual Programme and Budget (C/5). Most institutes (except CEPES and UNEVOC) receive a lump-sum allocation, which can be used for staff and/or activities at the discretion of an institute and its governing body. This open allocation leaves the responsibility for ensuring the pursuit of targeted programme priorities and improvements in the ratio between staff and programme costs with an Institute Director and the governing body concerned. (...) The present arrangement of lump-sum allocations to most institutes is also considered to facilitate the raising of extra-budgetary resources. (...) As the provision of extra-budgetary funding by “baskets” is being introduced by some donors, UNESCO for its part will need to ensure full transparency how the funds are being allocated and utilized, providing also an opportunity for access by UNESCO institutes and centres.”

As is emphasized by the IBE’s Strategy 2008–2013, “between 2002 and 2007, IBE activities were financed by the UNESCO regular budget and the funds-in-trust mechanism, as well as by many governments, including Argentina, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Mauritius, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America. For the ambitious strategy of 2008–2013 presented in the following pages, additional efforts will be required in order to mobilize the necessary financial resources.”

For the 2006/2007 biennium, the IBE received a financial allocation from UNESCO’s regular budget amounting to US$4,591,000. It has, in addition, received extra-budgetary resources from within UNESCO (funds-in-trust, etc.) amounting to US$1,233,515. Voluntary contributions (Switzerland, Sweden) reached US$2,010,697 and from various other resources US$171,709. Thus, the total budget of the IBE in 2006/2007 amounted to US$8,006,692. In this total, the part of the regular budget was 57.3% and extra-budgetary resources 42.7%.

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For 2008 (which is a special year due to the organization of the ICE), the IBE received a financial allocation from the regular budget of UNESCO totalling US$2,295,500; it has in addition received extra-budgetary resources mobilized by UNESCO amounting to US$1,277,289 (of which US$350,000 was for the 48th ICE). Voluntary contributions raised by the IBE itself totalled US$ 914,205 and consisted of the contributions of Switzerland and Sweden. Additionally, US$ 595,345 were made available specifically for the ICE (Ecuador, Kenya, Kuwait, India, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, UNICEF and various UNESCO units/sectors). Altogether, this amounts to US$ 5,082,339; the part of the regular budget being 45.2% of the total and extra-budgetary resources 54.8%. For 2009, the IBE will receive from UNESCO a contribution of US$ 2,295,500; UNESCO’s extra-budgetary resources (this is an estimate) should amount to a total of US$ 1,000,000 and anticipated voluntary contributions should amount to approximately US$ 1,320,000. The total provisional budget amounts to US$ 4,615,500. For the entire 2008–2009 biennium, the provisional budget therefore amounts to US$9,697,839; the proportion of the regular budget represents 47.5% and extra-budgetary resources 52.5%. By way of comparison, the total budget of the ED Sector for the same biennium amounts to US$174,050,000; the regular budget represents 62.3% of the total and extra-budgetary resources 37.7%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006–2007</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2008–2009</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular budget</td>
<td>4,591,000</td>
<td>57.34</td>
<td>4,591,000</td>
<td>47.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXB/UNESCO</td>
<td>1,233,515</td>
<td>15.40</td>
<td>2,277,289</td>
<td>23.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary contrib.</td>
<td>2,010,697</td>
<td>25.11</td>
<td>2,340,205</td>
<td>23.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>171,709</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>595,345</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>8,006,692</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9,697,839</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize the disturbing fact that, already for the 2008–2009 biennium, the contribution from UNESCO’s regular budget will no longer be sufficient to cover personnel costs (established posts), the operating costs of the institute and expenditures on Council meetings. The deficit will be US$ 444,000 for the biennium and, if UNESCO’s contribution from the regular budget remains unchanged in the coming years, the foreseeable deficit (and without adding any new posts) will be US$ 497,313 for the 2010–2011 biennium and US$ 993,162 for 2012–2013.

Conclusion: as far as a budget in keeping with the requirements of its mission is concerned, the evidence suggests that the IBE does not correspond to the criteria of a “centre of excellence”.

Two principal elements should be highlighted: the shortfall of UNESCO’s regular budget and its corollary, the present imbalance in extra-budgetary resources which means that, for example, for a number of years all programmes, projects and activities have been entirely financed by extra-budgetary resources. While it is normal that the institutes should mobilize supplementary resources, it is unhealthy for the institution if these are greater than the contribution from UNESCO’s regular budget. This represents, particularly, a threat for the fundamental principle of multilateralism on which the Organization is based.

Finally, it should be stressed that the structural problems of the budget are made worse by day-to-day factors connected with the fluctuation of the dollar; thus, the IBE’s budget is expressed in dollars, while it disburses the major part of its expenditure in Swiss francs.
5. Overall summary

In the introduction to Part 4 of this document, the following question was raised: **How is the IBE positioned in relation to the nine criteria defining what a centre of excellence is?**

As far as the **first seven criteria are** concerned—namely: an institutional legitimacy based on clearly defined objectives and functions; a specific mission; a solid and realistic strategy; relevant and effective programmes; appropriate working methods; functional autonomy; and a wide range of partners—it would seem no exaggeration to state that the IBE corresponds to the norms to which one may refer when defining a “centre of excellence”. Indeed, the texts governing the institute and its activities, whether arising from the General Conference, the Executive Board or the IBE Council, represent an unquestionable reference framework which is put into practice on a daily basis. In addition, the in-depth evaluations carried out at the end of 2005 by the Technopolis company, at the request of IOS, and at the end of 2006 at the request of the ED Sector by the Navigant company have confirmed the largely positive appreciation which, furthermore, the Member States and the beneficiaries of the IBE’s activities and projects repeatedly express about the quality of the IBE’s orientations and services.

While these represent important assets, there remain serious concerns. The conclusion of the evaluation report by Technopolis sums up the situation perfectly: **“What today justifies that the IBE should remain a UNESCO institute, separate from the Headquarters as any other partner in the field of education, is not simply connected with its prestigious history, which saw Jean Piaget at the head of the organization, but is based on what has been accomplished since the end of the 1990s. The reform of the IBE is now almost entirely completed. In UNESCO’s decentralized network, the IBE is in the process of becoming one of the most essential institutions as long as it succeeds in overcoming the remaining challenges and in enjoying attention and adequate resources from UNESCO Headquarters.”**

The worrying institutional weaknesses of the IBE have existed for some time and have been the subject of several actions—unfortunately unsuccessful—designed to overcome the impasse that threatens the very survival of the institution. As has been stated in this document, this mainly concerns human resources and the budget.

6. Towards a strategy aimed at making the IBE UNESCO’s centre of excellence in curriculum-related matters

As this document has already adequately described, the IBE needs **urgent measures** to avoid falling into a situation of deficit, as is already anticipated for 2008/2009. In fact, despite the numerous economy measures carried out, the contribution from the UNESCO regular budget is no longer sufficient to cover the salaries of established posts, the operating costs and the meetings of the Council.

However, the IBE is also in urgent need of a more long-term strategy reflecting the wishes of the 34th General Conference. This strategy should concentrate, first, on the simple application of the relevant texts arising from the UNESCO governing bodies and, second, on the two most pressing problems: the IBE’s shortfall of stable human resources; and its corollary, the shortfall in UNESCO’s regular budget. The implementation of such a strategy would require

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the mobilization of all the partners concerned, namely the IBE Council, the Member States, UNESCO Headquarters (particularly the ED Sector) and the IBE itself.

6.1 Principles

The principles which should guide this strategy are as follows:

**Principle 1:** The IBE—as with all other UNESCO institutes for education—represents an important element in a reformed ED Sector and an indispensable tool in achieving the objectives of UNESCO’s Major Programme I.

**Principle 2:** To fulfill its mission, the IBE should benefit from a solid institutional foundation, depend upon “a body of highly qualified professionals” and, as a result, be provided with an adequate budget.

**Principle 3:** As an institution forming “an integral part of UNESCO”, the IBE should therefore receive, as part of the regular budget of the Organization, an allocation enabling it to cover at the very minimum the staff salaries, the operating costs of the institute, the costs of the meetings of its governing body, as well as a part of its programme costs. As a result, concerning the distribution of UNESCO’s regular budget, it should benefit from financing based on the principles of proportionality and equity.

**Principle 4:** As an institution enjoying “a wide intellectual and functional autonomy”, to carry out its mission the IBE should continue to mobilize extra-budgetary resources. In the first place, as was foreseen in the reference texts, the IBE should have fair access to the extra-budgetary resources made available to UNESCO (funds-in-trust, etc.). In the second place, with the support of its Council and all Member States, the IBE should mobilize the other necessary extra-budgetary resources (voluntary contributions, technical assistance, projects, etc.). However, experience has shown that Member States or other institutions expect an adequate budgetary allocation from UNESCO as a pre-condition for their commitment. Without in the first place the application of Principle 2, it is impossible to escape from the “vicious circle”.

6.2. Concrete proposals

The global budget that could reasonably be estimated to enable the IBE to carry out its mission and to implement effectively the activities foreseen in its Strategy 2008–2013 adopted by the IBE Council amounts to approximately **US$13,600,000 per biennium**, or **US$6,800,000 per year**.

**How could this budget be financed?**

**Scenario 1:** By applying the principles of proportionality and equity in relation to the ED Sector’s budget, some 60% of this figure should be provided by UNESCO’s regular budget and 40% by extra-budgetary sources.

In this scenario, the contribution from UNESCO’s regular budget should therefore be **US$8,160,000 per biennium**, in other words an increase of **US$3,569,000** compared to the present situation.
**Scenario 2:** Taking into consideration that the IBE, as an institute, enjoys wide intellectual and functional autonomy and that, for this reason, it should have equitable access to UNESCO’s extra-budgetary resources while mobilizing its own large sums, it could be estimated that the proportion of the regular budget should be the same as that of extra-budgetary resources and, therefore, reach 50%.

In this scenario, the contribution of UNESCO’s regular budget should therefore be US$6,800,000 per biennium, in other words, an increase of US$2,209,000 compared to the present situation.

What is the purpose of this budget?

First, it is a matter of the rapid recruitment of new professionals so as to create, at the very minimum, the “highly qualified core staff” mentioned in the UNESCO Overall Strategy concerning the institutes. Thus, the recruitment in the short term of two professionals at P4 level, as well as two professionals at P3 level and at least one young professional at P1/P2 level, represents the minimal threshold to set up this “core”. The entry into service of these new staff members implies a supplementary allocation of US$ 1,210,000 (standard costs) as of the 2010–2011 biennium.

Second, taking into account that the simple increase in the cost of living amounts to about 10% for the biennium, US$ 459,100 would be used to compensate for this increase as of 2010-2011.

Thirdly, in order to respect the fundamental principles of multilateralism, in the financing of UNESCO’s regular budget it is necessary to ensure a certain balance between personnel, operating and programme costs (the latter, let us recall, is at present financed entirely by extra-budgetary resources). **According to Scenario 1** above, the remainder of UNESCO’s regular contribution that could be used for financing activities, programmes and projects would amount to US$ 2,359,000 and, according to Scenario 2, to US$ 539,900 for the 2010-2011 biennium.
MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE IBE’s STRATEGY 2008–2013

Contributing to quality Education for All: Strategic orientations

During the new strategic cycle, the IBE will respond to the emerging needs of countries and support them to cope with contemporary and future challenges and opportunities impacting on the quality of education, in particular the contents, structures and methods of learning.

The IBE’s intervention will especially target poor, transition, conflict- and disaster-affected countries with a view to fostering sustainable development, inclusive societies and intercultural understanding.

In contributing to the design and effective implementation of quality and inclusive education curricula, ranging from general frameworks and syllabi to textbooks and other learning resources and strategies, the IBE will pay special attention to particular learning areas such as language, science and mathematics education, and social studies, as well as to cross-curricular issues and dimensions encompassing: learning to live together and peace education; poverty alleviation; gender equality; HIV and AIDS education; sustainable development; information and communication technology (ICT) in education and e-learning.

For 2008–2013, the IBE intends to improve its services and support mainly through: (i) a stronger link between curriculum development and assessment; (ii) the development and effective usage of training materials and tools for innovative curriculum change and implementation; (iii) the expansion and diversification of forms of training in the field of curriculum development, also leading to formal certification through partnerships with relevant academic institutions in different regions; (iv) the strengthening of links between pre- and in-service teacher education and training and curriculum development to facilitate effective curriculum change; (v) the involvement of schools and school networks in processes of curriculum change by linking top-down and bottom-up approaches; (vi) the enhancement of textbook quality in line with innovative curriculum changes and teaching and learning approaches; (vii) the improvement of the knowledge base through analytical added value and the development of an on-line platform for knowledge sharing and collaborative action in the field of curriculum development; and (viii) the reinforcement of policy dialogue as a mechanism of consensus building in curriculum reform processes.

Capacity Development: Assets

Over the period 2002–2007 the IBE worked towards strengthened co-operation between and within regions and countries, creating new opportunities for sharing common concerns, ideas and practices with regard to quality curriculum development and change processes. A considerable amount of experience, expertise, training resources and knowledge has been and continues to be accumulated through the implementation of action-research programmes, field-based action, as well as through seminars and training workshops carried out in different regions; a wide range of curriculum institutions and specialists worldwide are involved in this collective effort.

Capacity-building activities concentrate on the strategic dimension of assistance and advice to, and training of, national teams responsible for curriculum change and development.

processes. In particular, the IBE has contributed to many comprehensive curriculum development processes in post-conflict and conflict-affected societies, such as in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Caucasus Region, Guatemala, Iraq and Kosovo.

Since 2005, IBE networking activities have been focusing on the creation of and support to a Community of Practice (COP) in curriculum development. This unique global network of curriculum specialists, practitioners, national officers and researchers represents: a vehicle for sustained and diversified international co-operation within and across countries and regions, including South-South and interregional modalities of co-operation; a platform for increased exchange, collective production and dissemination of knowledge, as well as collaborative action in the field of curriculum; and a tool for forging partnerships and sharing expertise and experience towards quality curriculum-making processes and products. At the end of 2007—a key year in the development of the Community—the COP comprised over 700 members in ninety countries.

The IBE has increasingly become a facilitator and provider of field-based technical assistance and advisory services, including capacity development, in the context of national curriculum making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes.

IBE support, normally provided in strong partnerships with UNESCO field and regional education offices, is being designed in response to the concrete demands and needs of countries. This ranges from organizing intensive training activities for the enhancement of local capacities and strengths to assisting national education authorities, curriculum agencies and their partners in the context of comprehensive processes of curriculum reform and change. Within the framework of its field-based activities and projects, and on the basis of accumulated experience, international and local expertise, the IBE also started producing customized materials, handbooks and tools for capacity development, targeting the specific competences that curriculum developers and decision-makers need in order to successfully cope with emerging needs and challenges.

Technical assistance and advisory services have also been provided to countries that are currently undergoing comprehensive processes of curriculum change and improvement in the light of the EFA goals, especially with regard to equitable access to quality education or in areas such as learning to live together, human rights education and citizenship education. The IBE also pays attention to some critical elements that have an impact on learning (for example, instructional time, curriculum integration, competency-based approaches), not only at the level of research and information, but also in conjunction with operational activities, as in the case of the countries served by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), and also for Central America.

The high level of integration of its programmes makes it possible for the IBE to offer a comprehensive service which usually combines research, action, capacity development and support to policy dialogue.

An example is the IBE’s programme for HIV and AIDS education, which is part of the UNESCO and UNAIDS co-ordinated response to the pandemic. In contributing to the design and implementation of relevant and sustainable curriculum-based responses for HIV and AIDS education, during the period 2002–2007 the IBE has developed: a clearing-house providing access to selected materials and good practices; a set of tools, included in a manual for integrating HIV and AIDS education into the curriculum, for analysing existing educational resources, identifying promising approaches already tested elsewhere, and highlighting good practices; as well as a capacity-building component mainly targeting
countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to promote the exchange of good practices, the design of training modules, the definition of guidelines for country-level implementation, and the enhancement of policy dialogue and partnerships.

Another example is the project *Curriculum innovation, poverty alleviation and peace education*, covering nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger and Rwanda). Launched in 2004 at the request of the participating countries, it involves national teams of high-level curriculum specialists from the Ministries of Education. Adopting a participatory approach combining research, action and training, the work with the national teams focuses on the development of capacities for: analysing the complex interrelations between the basic education curriculum and poverty; identifying the responses that the curriculum could bring in terms of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge that learners need to overcome poverty and live meaningful and productive lives; and defining the most appropriate strategies for curriculum change. Moreover, through the project, an ongoing dialogue and exchange of expertise has been established among countries, the IBE, as well as with other UNESCO and international experts.

The project *Curriculum change and social cohesion in conflict-affected societies* (2002–2004) was also an example of collaborative action-research. The aim of the project was to develop a better understanding of the issues that determine legitimate and sustainable processes of change in the school curriculum with a view to enhancing social cohesion.

**Knowledge Production and Management: Assets**

The IBE has a long tradition of producing and disseminating comparable information on education systems. This tradition has been reshaped according to the new mission defined at the end of the 1990s, and during 2002–2007 the IBE progressively focused on support for training, applied research and decision-making in the field of curriculum development.

As was confirmed by the external evaluation of the institute carried out at the end of 2005, the IBE’s comprehensive set of resources on curriculum development is unique and highly valued within UNESCO and by external stakeholders; the provision of practical information and knowledge on curriculum development processes is also particularly appreciated. Furthermore, the IBE’s clearinghouse function in this area is one of its most valuable assets and a source of added value.

The comprehensive set of resources on curriculum development is comprised of databases, reports, studies, working papers, publications, specialized collections and tools. Through its *Observatory of Educational Trends* and the *Resource Bank* the IBE compiles, produces and disseminates quality and up-to-date information and analyses on education systems, existing curricula, curriculum development processes and learning materials from around the world, together with examples of good practices and innovations. This knowledge base—consisting of a wide range of specialized resources—can be exploited for a variety of purposes, including training and decision-making, and facilitate informed dialogue on specific educational and curriculum issues.

Both the Observatory and the Resource Bank support action in favour of EFA by contributing to the identification of trends in curriculum development and good practices and to their broad dissemination, thus informing curriculum development policies and practices. During the period 2002–2007 the IBE commissioned and conducted specialized studies on diverse curricular topics, such as textbooks, instructional time, educational aims, competences and
competency-based approaches in curriculum-development processes. The IBE also encouraged international researchers and practitioners in national contexts to draw upon its cross-national compilations of curriculum information and resources, not only to facilitate broader dissemination but also to generate intellectual debate.

Since 2002, the IBE has also contributed to the Global Monitoring Report on EFA through commissioned thematic studies and compilations using the data made available by the Resource Bank and the Observatory. These studies and trends analyses, based on official information on education systems worldwide, have been carried out in collaboration with international researchers and specialists and in close co-operation with the Monitoring Report team.

Key components of the IBE’s clearing-house function are on-line databases, such as World Data on Education, the Country Dossiers and Curriculum Materials and Good Practices concerning HIV and AIDS education. The sixth edition of World Data on Education (2006/2007), also available on CD-ROM, contains the profiles of 161 education systems and a considerable wealth of information on curricula and the organization of curricular content, including data on instructional time. The Country Dossiers offer access to a variety of information resources on education in each country, including links to on-line curricula and curricular resources; since 2007, the database has been fully integrated into the UNESCO portal, thus contributing to the enhancement of specialized services offered by the Organization. The fourth edition of the Curriculum Databank for HIV and AIDS Education (2007), also available on CD-ROM, provides access to over 550 documents including curriculum-related resources, teaching and learning materials, teaching aids and case studies of good practices.

The IBE website, created in 1996, has become an essential tool for expanding access to specialized resources, products and services. The website is continuously developed in order to offer enhanced and easier access to information, which is also made available in different languages so as to reach a wider audience (an average of 1.3 million unique visitors in 2007). The website is also the backbone for IBE communication and is a method to collect, preserve, create and share multilingual knowledge. It is user- and service-oriented, providing relevant content to constituents, as well as the general public. Given the rapid progress in computer technologies, the website is now ready to be transformed into a dynamic online collaborative platform for curriculum development, at the service of the worldwide network of researchers and practitioners and, more generally, the UNESCO knowledge portal.

Most of the publications and thematic series produced by the IBE are made available through the website. These include the Educational Practices series, proceedings and reports of meetings focusing on curriculum development, monographs describing relevant innovations, and working papers intended to share interim results of ongoing applied research on curriculum issues. The IBE also produces Prospects, UNESCO’s quarterly review of comparative education, and Studies in Comparative Education, a long-standing series which focuses on educational issues and trends within a comparative perspective. Through its website, the IBE also gives access to the digitized series of the National Reports on the Development of Education, submitted by countries from the earliest sessions (1930s) of the International Conference on Education. This is a unique collection which has been exploited over decades in a wide range of studies and trend analyses by researchers and scholars worldwide.

The IBE Documentation Centre collects and makes available materials and information resources pertaining to the content of education, curriculum development and education
systems. Originating in the International Library on Education which was started with the creation of the IBE in 1925, the collection includes historical materials on school systems as well as educational movements of the first part of the twentieth century. There are over 100,000 books and documents in the collection, and over 100 current journal titles. Over the period 2002–2007 systematic efforts have been made to build up a comprehensive collection of curricula and curriculum-related materials. The collection’s historical depth and wide geographic span make it an important resource for researchers and practitioners interested in curricula and education systems.

Taking full advantage of new technologies, the Centre has developed alerting services and digests of online resources including reports, publications, websites, and news—pertaining to curriculum development, education systems and educational trends—which are regularly made available to the IBE network of curriculum specialists in almost ninety countries, as well as other education specialists. The Documentation Centre also maintains and develops the *UNESCO-IBE Education Thesaurus*, a tool for indexing and retrieving educational data recorded in electronic databases, which is used by many educational documentation centres around the world. The IBE’s documents and publications are systematically integrated into the database UNESCO Documents and Publications (UNESDOC/UNESBIB), thus enriching UNESCO’s platform for access to and the use, dissemination and sharing of knowledge in the field of education. For example, during 2006–2007, IBE documents and publications have been downloaded more than 300,000 times from UNESDOC.

**Policy Dialogue: Assets**

Curriculum development and the definition, selection and organization of educational contents encompass both a technical and a political dimension. The school curriculum reflects changing philosophical and ideological principles and integrates a variety of social, political and pedagogical assumptions. As a process, curriculum development, reform and change require the construction of a shared vision; appropriate communication strategies; wide-ranging partnerships; and dialogue, consultation and negotiation among different stakeholders at different levels.

The policy dialogue dimension is therefore embodied in all of the IBE’s field-based activities intended to support curriculum development processes and to assist fragile, transition and post-conflict countries in the development and implementation of new curriculum frameworks. Moreover, the worldwide network of curriculum specialists (Community of Practice), established in 2005, has an important role in orientating and facilitating constructive intellectual debates, policy dialogue and the development of conceptual orientations and frameworks for quality basic education.

At the global level, the major contribution of the IBE in this area is the *International Conference on Education (ICE)*, whose sessions have been organized by the institute on behalf of UNESCO for many decades. Convened on a regular basis, the sessions of the Conference have been the first and, for a long time, the main forum for world-level policy-dialogue between ministers of education, particularly during the period 1934–1970. The ICE is an important occasion for ministers of education to discuss issues of quality, equity and inclusion. Other partners and stakeholders, such as researchers, practitioners and representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, usually participate actively in the dialogue.

The two most recent sessions of the ICE, i.e. the forty-sixth and the forty-seventh sessions,

The 2001 and 2004 sessions of the Conference were also a significant means for strengthening collaboration, expanding partnerships and renewing international commitments in favour of quality education for all. For example, the preparation of the 2001 session benefited from contributions by ministries of education, national commissions for UNESCO, research and training centres of several countries, academic institutions, partner agencies and organizations, as well as the active collaboration and support of various UNESCO units, including central divisions, education institutes, regional education offices and other services.

The IBE has also organized follow-up activities to the most recent ICE sessions in order to further disseminate the outcomes of the Conference. For example, the Second Tele-Congress of the Education of Young People and Adults, which took place after the forty-sixth ICE session, was held simultaneously in more than 200 focal points in Brazil and one focal point in Geneva using new communication technologies. It involved more than 15,000 participants and can be considered as a model for scaling up the promotion of educational innovations, best practices and policy dialogue. The results of the forty-seventh ICE session were discussed at the occasion of the National Education Forum held in the state of Coahuila, Mexico (November 2004), attended by more than 1,000 participants.

In accordance with the recommendations of the forty-sixth ICE session, starting from 2003 the IBE has also provided training in policy dialogue, mainly aimed at encouraging: the elaboration of a common vision for education; and the usage of tools supporting the decision-making process, such as sectoral analyses, negotiation, communication, dialogue with all the stakeholders, as well as the mobilization of partnerships.

A total of eight training modules have been prepared, in addition to the publication of ten case studies on different experiences in Africa. These activities have been carried out in collaboration with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and they offered an opportunity for sharing experiences and acquiring new competences to about seventy ministerial high-level officers from several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and Togo).