SIXTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION


POLICY DIALOGUE AND THE ICE

8.5
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1. Following the adoption by the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference of the Strategy to make the IBE UNESCO’s Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Curriculum (36 C/Resolution 18), the IBE Council at its 61st session (Geneva, January 2012) decided to set up a Working Group (WG) composed by one representative of each of the six electoral groups, in addition to the IBE Director and one representative of the Education Sector. The IBE Council gave to the WG the following mandate in line with point B5 of document 36 C/18: “the IBE should promote policy dialogue, with particular emphasis on the International Conference on Education (ICE) as a major policy dialogue forum for Ministers of Education.”

2. The Council elected as members of the WG the representatives of Bahrain, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Senegal and Switzerland, and decided to entrust the function of Chair of the WG to Switzerland. The Council also decided to exceptionally delegate to the Steering Committee in between sessions of the Council the power to take the necessary consensual decisions on programme priorities, organizational structure, policy dialogue, and governance for implementing the CoE Strategy, on the understanding that the members of the Steering Committee shall consult and reflect their respective groups’ opinion before taking decisions.

3. In introducing the main outcomes of the work on this issue, the Chairperson of the Working Group recognized that the WG did not produce a specific proposal and that the ICE funding mechanism is yet to be determined. The WG, however, was able to reach a consensus on several significant aspects. In particular, bearing in mind that policy dialogue is essential, the WG proposed to maintain the ICE as a global ministerial conference also open to the participation of other important actors and stakeholders, within the perspective of enriching the ministerial dialogue and expanding the scope of the debates to encompass broader societal concerns. The WG also recommended ensuring a regular holding of the ICE, preferably every four to six years, in order to periodically analyse and discuss from different points of view themes and topics related to educational quality, equity, access and inclusion. Furthermore, the WG suggested fostering the involvement of the Education Sector in a well-planned process of organization of future ICE sessions in order to better contribute to the overall programme implementation of UNESCO’s priorities. Finally, with regard to the funding mechanism – which remains a key issue – the WG recommended that Member States and possibly other stakeholders should be asked to make staff available (for example through secondment) for two years before ICE sessions to compose an organizational team. The IBE governing body shall also play a stronger role in the preparation of the Conference.

4. In the ensuing discussion, the participants agreed on the relevance of the ICE for policy dialogue, which should also be linked to the core activities and functions of the IBE. Some participants stressed the need to avoid overlapping and duplication, be more specific and focused, and be concerned about effectiveness and results, although it is not easy to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of global conferences, including the ICE. Participants also reiterated that the ICE is part of the CoE Strategy and should be aligned with the programmatic work of IBE. In conjunction with this, and taking into account that the ICE is not the only way to promote policy dialogue, it was observed that additional work is still needed in order to explore a broad range of policy dialogue
opportunities, including high-level meetings at regional and national level, as stated in point B5.4 of document 36 C/18. With regard to the frequency of the ICE, several suggestions were made ranging from every 3 to 10 years, with a preference for a 5-year timeframe, even if this would mainly depend on the actual needs and themes to be discussed. The representative of the UNESCO Education Sector expressed his agreement with most of the WG conclusions and suggested to avoid organizing the Conference before 2015-2016, as in this way there would be enough time to further clarify issues related to the ICE format, themes, frequency, and especially the funding mechanism. He also proposed that the ICE might be organized every 8 years to be in line with the new budget and programming cycle of the Organization, although some participants considered that such a timeframe would be too long.

5. Therefore it is proposed that the IBE Council adopts the following recommendation:

- **Takes note** of the mandate given to the Working Group (point B5 in document 36 C/18);
- **Acknowledges** the report of the Working Group;
- **Takes into account** the comments from the members of the Steering Committee at its meeting in September 2012, comments from observers and from the representative of the Director-General of UNESCO at the Steering Committee meeting, and the ensuing consultations carried out by the President of the IBE Council;
- **Requests** the IBE Director to work out a long-term comprehensive plan for policy dialogue, including the ICE, based on the following:
  - The mandate from the General Conference regarding policy dialogue, including the ICE, contained in point B5 in Document 36C/Resolution 18;
  - The report of the Working Group, the External Programmatic Review (July 2011), the Rapid Organization assessment of UNESCO-IBE (July 2011), the comments of the Steering Committee (September 2012), the ensuing consultations carried out by the President of the IBE Council, and the comments of the IBE council at its 62 session (January 2013);
  - The ICE should be organized by the IBE in close coordination with the Education Sector and in partnership with other international organizations;
  - The frequency of the ICE should tentatively be every 5-8 years, depending on the need and usefulness of such conferences in view of IBE’s programmatic priorities, the more comprehensive policy dialogue context, and the international agenda in the field of education;
  - There should be close alignment between various policy dialogue options, including the ICE, and the long-term strategy and programme priorities of the IBE;
  - The format of the ICE as a ministerial policy dialogue forum should be considered in view of the theme, other policy dialogue options, expected results, and available financial and staff resources needed for the organization of such a conference.
- **Requests** the IBE Director to present the above-mentioned long-term plan for discussion and adoption at the 63rd session of the IBE Council (January 2014).