

**SIXTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION**

Geneva, 5-7 February 2014

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR POLICY DIALOGUE AND THE ICE

Comprehensive Plan for Policy Dialogue and the International Conference on Education (ICE)

The 62nd session of the IBE Council (January 2013) requested the IBE Director to work out a long-term comprehensive plan for policy dialogue, including the ICE, for discussion and adoption at the 63rd session of the IBE Council (February 2014), based on the following documents:

- the mandate from the UNESCO General Conference regarding policy dialogue, including the ICE, contained in the 36 C/Resolution 18 (“The IBE should promote policy dialogue, with particular emphasis on the International Conference on Education as a major policy dialogue forum for Ministers of Education”);
- the report of the IBE Council’s Working Group on policy dialogue and the ICE;
- the External Programmatic Review (July 2011);
- the Rapid Organization Assessment of UNESCO-IBE (July 2011);
- the comments of the Steering Committee (September 2012) and the ensuing consultations carried out by the President of the IBE Council;
- UNESCO/BIE/C.62/Decisions; and
- the comments of the IBE Council at its 62nd session (January 2013).

bearing in mind the following principles:

- 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 five to eight years, depending on the need and usefulness of such conferences in view of the IBE’s programmatic priorities, the 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.

Background: the IBE Council’s Working Group on policy dialogue and the ICE

Following the adoption of the IBE’s Centre of Excellence strategy, the IBE Council at its 61st session (Geneva, January 2012) set up a Working Group (WG) composed of one representative of each of the six electoral groups, the IBE Director and one representative of

the Education Sector. The Working Group discussions focused on the above-mentioned mandate from the UNESCO General Conference contained in document 36 C/18:

The Council elected as members of the WG the representatives of Bahrain, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Senegal and Switzerland, and entrusted the Chair to Switzerland.

The Council also decided to delegate exceptionally 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 Strategy to make the IBE UNESCO's Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Curriculum, on the understanding that the members of the Steering Committee shall consult and reflect their respective groups' opinion before taking decisions.

While not producing a specific proposal or determining the sources of funding for the ICE, the WG recommended that:

- the ICE be maintained as a global ministerial conference, open also to the participation of other important actors and stakeholders, in order to enrich ministerial dialogue and expand the scope of the debates to encompass broader societal concerns;
- the ICE be held regularly, preferably every four to six years, in order to analyse and discuss themes and topics related to educational quality, equity, access and inclusion;
- the Education Sector be involved in the organization of future ICE sessions;
- Member States and possibly other stakeholders be asked to make staff available (for example, through secondment) for two years before ICE sessions to strengthen the team in charge of the organization; and
- the IBE Council play a stronger role in the preparation of the Conference.

In the ensuing discussion, participants:

- agreed that the ICE is part of the CoE Strategy and relevant for policy dialogue, provided that it is aligned with the core activities, functions and programmatic work of the IBE;
- stressed the need to avoid overlapping and duplication, be more specific and focused, and be concerned about effectiveness and results, while acknowledging that assessing the outcomes and effectiveness of global conferences is not easy;
- suggested that, since the ICE is not the only way to promote policy dialogue, the IBE should explore a broad range of policy dialogue opportunities, including high-level meetings at regional and national level, as stated document 36 C/18; and
- offered several suggestions with regard to the frequency of the ICE, ranging from every three to ten years, with a preference for a five-year timeframe, with the provision that this would depend on actual needs and on the topicality of proposed themes.

The representative of the UNESCO Education Sector:

- expressed his agreement with most of the Working Group's conclusions;
- suggested that the next session of the ICE not take place before 2015-2016, in order first to further clarify issues related to the ICE format, themes, frequency and funding;
- proposed that the ICE be organized every 8 years, in line with the new budget and programming cycle of the Organization.

A general framework for policy dialogue

The principal purpose of a policy dialogue in curriculum innovation and development led by the IBE is to share among UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders key research outcomes, innovative curricular experience, exemplary case studies and other good practices in the field, to the end of enhancing the awareness of Member States and stakeholders of the range of possibilities available to them in their own curricular innovation and development processes. A policy dialogue led by the IBE would offer Member States new perspectives on complex curriculum issues, so that they can make decisions about curriculum change according to local conditions, through an informed consideration of the comparative advantages of different possibilities and strategies. Key aspects of policy dialogue thus enable the IBE to map and interpret regional and national trends to ascertain more clearly curriculum practices, developments and needs in local contexts. Policy dialogue should thus continue to strengthen South-South cooperation by broadening access to existing experience and expertise and by identifying innovative Southern solutions to identified problems and challenges.

The IBE believes that flexibility within its policy dialogue framework is important, so that it remains both needs-driven and an aspect of the Institute's work where the IBE might contribute to leading the discourse.

Policy dialogue is therefore a transversal aspect of the work of the IBE. It features in and across many of the IBE's programmes as a key means of strengthening partnerships and enhancing networking and collaboration globally:

- ✓ The IBE's Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development, given its very nature, is an important forum for the establishment and continuation of policy dialogue.
- ✓ The IBE's Curriculum Support Services to Member States, both long-term and tailored, generally include both specific policy advice to Member States and the generation and sharing of insights based on experience in those countries. Policy advice of this nature has recently influenced to a substantial degree, for

example, the development of a national policy of inclusive education in Colombia.

- ✓ The IBE's Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development provides a platform for policy dialogue, facilitating the sharing of visions, approaches, experiences and information related to curriculum innovation and change.
- ✓ The IBE's Clearinghouse Services include the dissemination of relevant research findings to inform innovative and effective curriculum policy and practice.
- ✓ Other services in support of policy dialogue include the IBE website, which provides user-friendly access to a range of resources and information, serving as an essential means of knowledge sharing and dissemination, supplemented by the IBE's Documentation and Alert services.
- ✓ The IBE also makes available in support of policy dialogue a highly valued set of resources that include the *International Collection of Curriculum-related Materials*, which provides online access to curricula and curriculum frameworks from around the world; databases such as *World Data on Education* and the *Country Dossiers*, with a strong focus on curriculum matters; the *Digital Library of National Reports 1932-2008*; and the *Glossary of Curriculum Terminology*, a working reference tool that can help to stimulate reflection among all those involved in curriculum development initiatives.
- ✓ The IBE serves as a knowledge broker in support of policy dialogue, partnering with university-based researchers and other research networks to make the latest research conclusions, good practices, policy proposals and trends in the field accessible to leaders of curriculum innovation and development globally. To these ends, the IBE produces, among other publications in the field: policy briefs that include, for example, notes on the revision of curriculum policy frameworks, on curricular and learning quality, on inclusive curricula, and on the validation of curricula; the journal *Prospects*; the book series, *Studies in Curriculum and Comparative Education*; the *Educational Practices Series*, in collaboration with the International Academy of Education; and the *Working Papers on Curriculum Issues*.
- ✓ A recent opportunity to enhance the IBE's ability to lead the discourse was its hosting of a three-day meeting of some 20 curriculum experts from around the world (September 2013). The principal purpose of the meeting was to assist the IBE in identifying key contemporary curricular issues, challenges and trends across the globe.
- ✓ Senior staff members of the IBE also contribute to policy dialogue through their participation in international conferences in the field, such as the triennial World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES; the IBE Director is a co-opted member of the Executive Committee), the biennial

conference in international education development of the UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET) (currently co-organized by one of the IBE's Senior Programme Specialists), and the annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). The IBE's participation in such conferences enables its professional staff both to contribute to policy dialogue in these forums and to gain new insights from the research community for further contribution to dialogue in the policy community.

In accordance with the CoE Strategy, and particularly the recommendation to “develop a methodology to systematically and regularly assess trends in global, regional and national needs and priorities”, international and regional conferences on education should constitute an important aspect of the IBE's work in policy dialogue. An international conference on education should be part of a series of high-level meetings at regional and national level, each of which would be focused on identifying and addressing more regionally specific trends, priorities and needs.

The current policy context and key associated questions

It is likely that the education-related goals in the post-2015 development agenda will include a commitment to quality education for all. The IBE would welcome such a commitment in the post-2015 development goals, since the Institute believes that (1) educational quality should be understood in terms of the quality of student learning, which depends to a great extent on the quality of teaching; and (2) that good teaching and learning are in turn greatly enhanced by the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum. Key questions at the start of the post-2015 educational development period will thus have to do with the development and provision of curricula that underpin quality teaching and learning, and with what enhances learning outcomes most effectively. Such questions should accordingly inform the principal themes to be addressed in forthcoming international and regional conferences on education.

Given the IBE Council's position that the frequency of the ICE should tentatively be every five to eight years, and that the holding of the ICE should depend on the need and usefulness of the conference in the light of the IBE's programmatic priorities and on the policy dialogue context and international agenda in the field of education, it seems that such a conference might appropriately be planned for 2016— eight years after the 48th ICE session, and the first year of the post-2015 development period.

An International Conference on Education in 2016

The IBE believes that an ICE, tentatively scheduled for 2016 and that addressed those questions, would indeed inform its own work in supporting Member States in the development and provision of curricula that would assist teachers in enhancing learning outcomes.

The IBE Council underscores the above-mentioned General Conference mandate set down in 36 C/Resolution 18 and the view expressed in the WG discussions that the preparation of an ICE session should not detract from the Institute's core activities, functions and programmatic work. The Council would thus be willing to support the IBE Secretariat's preparation of an international conference in 2016, provided that questions related to its resourcing (in terms of both financing and the human resources needed for the organization) are resolved first. Should a decision be made to organize an ICE session in 2016, the IBE Council would request Member States, donors and other partners together to contribute, possibly by mid-2014 and not later than the end of 2014, a sum of USD 3.5 million towards the cost of organizing both the 49th ICE session in 2016 and a series of high-level meetings at regional/sub-regional level in the years preceding and following the Conference. The IBE Council would request Member States, donors and other partners to contribute sufficient financial resources on receipt of a brief funding proposal drafted by the IBE Secretariat. The IBE Council would also request the IBE Director not to dedicate any of her or other IBE staff's time to mobilizing resources for the organization of the ICE beyond what is necessary for the preparation of such a funding proposal. The IBE Council would further request that Member States, donors and other partners contribute to the cost of organizing the ICE and the associated regional/sub-regional meetings in addition to, and not at the expense of, the funding that they would otherwise have contributed to the core activities and programmatic work of the IBE.

The location of future international and regional conferences on education

The IBE Council proposes that the 2016 ICE session be held in Geneva. As mentioned, the Conference would be preceded and followed by a series of high-level meetings, each of which would focus on regional/sub-regional trends, priorities and needs. The IBE Council recognizes that, should the requisite funding not be made available for the IBE to organize the ICE in Geneva, it would be possible to invite proposals from Member States to host the Conference in their countries.

The nature of future international and regional conferences on education

The IBE Council proposes, in conclusion, that future international conferences on education be structured and oriented in such a way as to maximize the possibilities for in-depth discussion of substantial issues, questions and debates. This would mean a less formal and a less bureaucratically heavy format than has been the case in past conferences, to create a more open space for genuine and spontaneous dialogue among ministers of education and other leaders of curriculum development, so as to enable serious engagement with the difficult questions faced in the field. The aim would be to encourage high-level discussion focused on research-based policy options and other inputs to policy development that reflects thinking that is 'out of the box', creative and thought-provoking.

The IBE Council would also like to see a greatly enhanced use of new technologies in the Conference so as to enable, for example, stakeholders not physically present in the Conference venue to participate in the discussions.

Altogether these concluding comments are intended to shape a series of conferences that would genuinely support the IBE's core activities, functions and programmatic work, and that would respond more appropriately to the policy dialogue context and international agenda in the field of education and curriculum. These constitute the IBE Council's priorities in charting a way forward for an ICE that is consistent with the IBE's strategy to become a centre of excellence in curriculum.