



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 March 2022

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixty-second session

Organizational session, 21 April 2022

Substantive session, 31 May–1 July 2022*

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda**

Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations in the evaluation of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to establish triennial reviews of the implementation of decisions taken by the Committee on the basis of in-depth evaluation studies (A/37/38, para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the four recommendations emanating from the 2019 Office of Internal Oversight Services evaluation of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (E/AC.51/2019/5) were implemented.

The recommendations addressed various aspects of the Department's relevance and effectiveness in executing its mandate, as well as efficiency considerations. The triennial review has determined that all four recommendations were implemented. Evidence of positive outcomes as a result of the implementation of the four recommendations was also found.

Recommendation 1 addressed the need for the Department to enhance and harmonize its information technology applications. Several mechanisms exist within the Organization to collect and address feedback from clients and managers which have been used to inform improvements and upgrades to its information technology applications. These enhancements are part of an ongoing process that has led to greater effectiveness, efficiency and harmonization of information technology applications. These were highlighted by the Committee of Conferences during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as they allowed for business continuity. This recommendation was implemented.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** E/AC.51/2022/1.



Recommendation 2 addressed the need for the Department to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation function. In 2019, DGACM developed an evaluation policy after extensive consultations among colleagues of the evaluation, analysis and monitoring team from the four duty stations. The evaluation policy details the evaluation process, assigns roles and responsibilities for developing and conducting evaluations, and provides for the establishment of follow-up mechanisms to ensure that recommendations are implemented. In 2022, a revised evaluation policy was developed, which added new language clarifying the independence of the function. The 2022 policy is currently being circulated to duty stations for review and comment. This recommendation was implemented.

Recommendation 3 focused on the need for the Department to address external factors affecting its ability to plan, along with proposed solutions for consideration by the Committee on Conferences. Since 2019, the Department has made yearly presentations to the Committee on Conferences, in which trends in budget and workload, as well as solutions, have been presented. The Committee, through its draft resolutions, has also advocated for greater Member State compliance. This recommendation was implemented.

Recommendation 4 addressed the need for the Department to formulate and implement a plan for actively and concretely supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Department focused on Sustainable Development Goal 12, Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. The Department has steadfastly worked to minimize its paper production over the years and recently completed a self-evaluation at Headquarters on the topic highlighting substantial reductions. This recommendation was implemented.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-ninth session, in 2019, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (E/AC.51/2019/5).

2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and the positive overall assessment of the work of the Department. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 51 to 54 of the report (A/74/16, para. 523).

3. The present report is a triennial review of the status of implementation of the four recommendations contained in the evaluation. The review also addresses, where possible, the extent to which the implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.

4. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;

(b) Analysis of relevant data, documents and reports obtained from the Department on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Remote interviews conducted with a purposive sample of staff of the Department.

5. The present report incorporates comments received from the Department during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Department for its comments, which are reproduced in the annex to the report. OIOS expresses its appreciation to the Department for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of the report.

II. Results

6. OIOS made four recommendations to the Department, namely that it: (a) develop appropriate feedback mechanisms to enhance and harmonize its information technology applications; (b) strengthen its monitoring and evaluation functions; (c) address external factors affecting its ability to plan, along with proposed solutions, for consideration by the Committee on Conferences; and (d) formulate and implement a plan for actively and concretely supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. In its triennial review, OIOS determined that all four recommendations had been implemented and found evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting therefrom. In addition, evidence was provided by the Department of its ability to adapt and maintain operations despite the unprecedented challenges brought on by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This was mainly the result of the Department's investment in information technology improvements prior to the onset of the pandemic. The status of implementation of each of the four recommendations is described below.

Note: The sources used in the preparation of the present evaluation are available for consultation in the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Recommendation 1
Enhancement and harmonization of information technology applications

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

In order to plan and manage its work in an effective, globally integrated manner, the Department should ensure that existing information technology applications and resources, any enhancements to those applications and any future applications are informed by:

- (a) A consultative, transparent, client-focused and needs-based feedback mechanism that ensures that the applications maintain their enterprise systems-based approach (and thus facilitate the collection and analysis of data against standardized key performance indicators at a global level), while also accommodating services that are provided only in a particular duty station (see recommendation 2);
- (b) The results of any reviews and corresponding agreements to harmonize workflows across duty stations;
- (c) Functional linkages to ensure the necessary programmatic and/or technical synergies across applications and interfaces (e.g., linking eMeets with gDoc 2.0);
- (d) A clear and systematic roll-out plan that includes an iterative beta-testing and revision process, as well as training of and support to users.

Indicators of achievement: feedback mechanism and roll-out plans established and implemented; results of harmonization reviews and agreements incorporated

9. In line with the recommendation, the Department has maintained or developed a number of mechanisms to ensure that its information technology systems are informed by regular feedback from clients, end users and other relevant stakeholders. Even prior to the OIOS recommendation, the Business Analysis Section of the Department had organized two workshops on the topic of the harmonization and governance of information technology services, the first in November 2018 in New York and the second in February 2019 in Geneva. An information technology advisory board, with representation from all duty stations, was established as a result of the workshops. The board met in March and October of 2019. In 2020, the advisory board was replaced with the Programme and Project Review Board, which according to its standard operating procedure, is responsible for high-level quality control and quality assurance with regard to proposed programmes and projects; for monitoring of ongoing projects; and for closure of completed projects funded through various sources of funding available to the Department.

10. The Programme and Project Review Board consists of senior representatives from all divisions and duty stations of the Department. The Board reviews proposals for new projects, verifies project alignment with the Department's mandate and regularly reviews project road maps, delivery and budgets. On a quarterly basis, project executives make presentations to the Board and discuss future integration needs. Since its establishment, the Board has met 10 times. A review of minutes from a 14 October 2021 meeting showed participants vetting and discussing different road maps, including for projects such as the interpreters assignment programme (eAPG 2.0) and the project on the *Journal of the United Nations*, and discussing achievements and progress, such as those related to gText, Indico, Unite Conferences,

gDoc 2.0 and gMeets.¹ In interviews, staff members reiterated the importance of the Board in the enhancement of information technology applications and described the meetings as the “pinnacle of the project life cycle”, wherein systems undergo a critical review to identify and find solutions to challenges and to vet new proposals. Only after detailed scrutiny of justifications, plans and resource requirements were resources distributed to projects.

11. The Department employs a number of other means to disseminate information and solicit feedback. These include regularly circulated “highlights reports”, in which achievements are reported and upcoming new releases and the progress of testing are described. Some projects published additional online newsletters or provided specific feedback channels, such as the gText newsletter. In addition, four “yammer forums” were created in 2020 in gText to provide a space where users can make suggestions, vote for system changes and communicate with other users on various projects.² The suggestions arising from these forums were discussed with local coordinators during weekly meetings and used for sprint planning purposes.

12. For gText, regular meetings with project teams took place at the four duty stations and regional commissions to discuss issues and planning. For example, weekly business transformation meetings were held with business change champions from the four duty stations to review needs, specific workflows and operational changes.³ Monthly meetings were also held with staff of the United Nations agencies using the systems, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, the International Maritime Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization, who provided feedback on the functionality of these programmes. For new features, a small group of users was invited to test functionality and provide feedback, which was then incorporated into the development cycle prior to the roll-out to all users.

13. Several significant enhancements have been made to the Department’s information technology systems over the years. For example, the gDoc 2.0 planning dashboard and agendas module was rolled out in January 2021, based on a significant amount of feedback through user stories.⁴ The new dashboard replaced the legacy documents information management operations system (DIMO), and the Documents Management Section has moved to this new platform for all its planning, forecasting and slotting of documentation.

14. A new module on the e-deleGATE platform, called the iGAEAD meeting proceedings module, was designed and built in 2021 to capture the proceedings of all entities to which the Department provided intergovernmental services. The module made available the full procedural record for each individual meeting, and all data was available for downstream processing of official documentation and the *Journal of the United Nations*. The analytical module, as part of the Indico platform, was

¹ The minutes of the eighth meeting of the Programme and Project Review Board, held on 14 October 2021, were reviewed. The minutes of the ninth meeting, held on 8 December 2021, were also shared with OIOS, but they were not yet approved and final. The contents of the discussion and project review were similar to those of the eighth meeting.

² These include eLUNa, eLUNa Search, eLUNa Editorial and UNTERM.

³ These have included, for example, the focal point meeting on eLUNa, December 2021; the focal point meeting on indexes, November 2021; and the focal point meeting on terminology, October 2021.

⁴ According to the Department, the dashboard was developed between July 2019 and August 2020 based on user requirements, with 116 user stories processed. During the user acceptance phase for the planning dashboard, from August to December 2020, an additional 100 user stories were processed, and after roll-out a further 120 stories were processed to address user issues and add enhancements.

developed in December 2021 in response to a lessons-learned exercise. The exercise highlighted the need to strengthen the ability of Indico to generate operational statistics and dashboard-like information to strengthen its response to information needs expressed by subsidiary bodies of the various clients. A working group consisting of Indico clients was formed in the summer of 2021 to facilitate the process. A review of minutes from a June 2021 meeting of the Indico project board showed that several entities had migrated to the second version of the platform by that time, including the Economic Commission for Europe, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Global Communications, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

15. Harmonization across duty stations, applications and processes has also taken place. The design of gDoc 2.0, for example, enhanced the existing gData systems that provide monitoring and reporting solutions for senior management in the Department. This covered documentation workflows across the four duty stations, requiring the harmonization of modules to register and process document requests to enable both data- and work-sharing. Automated data from the source systems (gDoc 1.0, gDoc 2.0, the Documents, Conference and Production Management System (DCPMS), eAPG, gMeets and Umoja) flow to gData 2.0, which was used for monitoring and reporting in the four duty stations and in the finalization of the 2021 conference management report and the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences from 2019 to 2021 (see [A/74/121](#), [A/75/89](#) and [A/76/80](#)).

16. The Department provided numerous other examples of enhancements it had made, such as automating multilingual content from the source document through agenda cards. The new system replaces a time-consuming manual process of uploading agenda information for the content management system of the *Journal of the United Nations* in the six official languages of the United Nations, by extracting data available in the source document that contained the agenda of an intergovernmental body through the document storage in gText. The validated file is then uploaded to the content management system and made available to clients as agenda cards. Another enhancement was through the adoption of the gMeets system, the central tool for managing the spectrum of meeting-related activities in New York. The gMeets system is utilized throughout the lifecycle of mandated meetings, from the review of draft resolutions for conference-servicing implications, to calendar planning, through execution and post-implementation evaluation. The system connects with multiple mission-critical systems, such as the Unite Conferences portal, eAPG and the *Journal of the United Nations* at United Nations Headquarters, which relies on gMeets for meeting information, and others.

17. This recommendation was implemented.

18. The speed with which all services of the Department adapted at the onset of and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is noteworthy. The enhancements that the Department has made over the years resulted in minimal disruption to business continuity. At the briefing given to the Committee on Conferences in August 2020, representatives of the Department noted both the challenges brought on by the pandemic and the solutions the Department had employed, such as remote simultaneous interpretation, which enabled a quick and smooth transition to remote work, and making all the tools required to edit, translate and format United Nations official documents available online. In a briefing to the Committee in September 2021, representatives of the Department noted that, as the result of enhancements by the Department, it was possible to support multilingualism throughout the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly as well as hundreds of calendar and extrabudgetary meetings. This adaptability was acknowledged in the 2021 report of

the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, in which it was stated that in record time, remote simultaneous interpretation platforms were identified, tested and procured, enabling meetings management teams to start programming and planning virtual and hybrid (part virtual, part in-person) meetings in a matter of months. The translation services transitioned almost immediately and seamlessly to fully remote operations thanks to the Department's long-standing policy of investing in and developing state-of-the-art, web-based tools to support the largescale production of high-quality, multilingual documentation (see [A/76/80](#), para. 1). The transition to fully remote documentation management during the pandemic also went smoothly and business continued uninterrupted. This was a result of the Department's long-standing policy of investing in and developing a suite of web-based tools for managing the workflow and supporting the large-scale processing of official multilingual documentation across the four duty stations (*ibid.*, para. 21).

Recommendation 2
Strengthen monitoring and evaluation

19. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The Department should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation function through the revision and implementation of its policy, in tandem with the implementation of the Secretary-General's reforms contained in paragraph 61 of document [A/72/492](#) as they evolve. Such a revision should, at the minimum:

- (a) Detail the frequency, approach and assigned roles and responsibilities for developing strategic monitoring and evaluation plans, and the governance arrangements for reviewing and finalizing these plans at the level of senior management;
- (b) Identify the overall approach to determining the level of evaluative effort required for various duty stations, work streams and specific policies and initiatives (e.g. lesson-learning sessions, after-action reviews, assessments, surveys, management reviews or evaluations);
- (c) Articulate specific focal point responsibilities within each duty station to ensure sufficient monitoring and evaluation coverage in all four locations, in consultation with the respective Directors-General;
- (d) Stipulate the governance arrangements for ensuring a sufficient degree of independence of the self-evaluation function, adequate resourcing of evaluation and incorporation of evaluation results in programmatic decision-making;
- (e) Articulate the ways in which monitoring data will be systematically used to inform programme planning and decision-making globally and within individual duty stations.

Indicator of achievement: policy containing these elements revised and implemented

20. The Department's evaluation policy was approved by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and became effective on 1 December 2019. In January 2022, the Department revised its evaluation policy, consistent with instructions contained in the administrative instruction entitled "Evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat" ([ST/AI/2021/3](#)). The revised draft is currently being reviewed by the four duty stations.

21. The 2019 policy, on which the 2022 evaluation policy builds, presents the Department's framework for planning and conducting self-evaluations and reporting on and using the results from those evaluations. It establishes a standard template to

be used for all evaluations and sets the stage for global evaluations to be conducted, such as the evaluation on language and desktop publishing and text processing across all four duty stations of the Department of January 2022 and the upcoming 2022 evaluation on workload-sharing.

22. The 2019 policy also sets out the roles and responsibilities for developing strategic monitoring and evaluation plans and the governance arrangements for reviewing and finalizing those plans at the senior management level. It documents roles for policy owners; strategy owners; evaluation, analysis and monitoring teams in Geneva and New York; and evaluation, analysis and monitoring staff in Vienna and Nairobi. The policy also outlines follow-up mechanisms. In particular, it stipulates that a final report should be prepared by evaluation, analysis and monitoring teams/staff members and disseminated to relevant programme managers for comments and feedback before finalization.

23. The Department's standard operating procedure of 1 December 2019 on establishing a plan for an evaluation outlines the process of establishing an evaluation plan to share information about evaluations carried out by the four duty stations and common evaluations. Evaluation, analysis and monitoring teams/staff members prepare the plan annually in consultation with senior management.

24. With regard to independence, the policy stipulates that an evaluation may address any aspect of the programmes, processes and policies of the Department that may benefit from analysis and recommendations for improvement and new ways of working. Staff of the Evaluation, Analysis and Monitoring Unit in New York indicated during interviews that they were a specialized, independent, but internal, team. They saw benefits to being internal to the Department, such as being able to ensure that recommendations are implementable and are consistent with agreed key performance indicators. The 2022 planned evaluation of the workflow of General Assembly resolutions is an example of an independently identified evaluation topic. This came about as a result of monitoring by the Unit, in which the need for increasing coordination in that area was noticed.

25. The Evaluation, Analysis and Monitoring Unit regularly monitored the key performance indicators and included information thereon in the annual conference management reports distributed to the Secretary-General and the United Nations offices in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences. In addition, information derived from monitoring was used to inform programme planning and decision-making. For example, interviewees noted that the non-calendar meetings that were serviced by the Department fell outside of its mandate. The increase in the demand for servicing of such meetings became apparent through monitoring and evaluation. The Department carried out an evaluation of non-calendar meetings unrelated to the intergovernmental process. To recover the costs of non-mandated conference services, such as for meetings, conferences and events not integral to mandated intergovernmental processes and for which the Department is not provided funding in the programme budget, a cost recovery mechanism is employed at Headquarters and the duty stations. Cost parameters are developed by the Department using prior period expenditure as a baseline for the current financial period. All cost recovery revenue and expenditure transactions are recorded, managed and reported in Umoja.

26. An enhanced cost recovery module to automate processes and workflow managed by the Department is being designed and planned for implementation for meetings, conferences and events that are not integral to mandated intergovernmental processes. The adoption and roll-out of the innovative solution will allow for harmonized, streamlined and standardized cost recovery processes across the four duty stations and will be integrated with Umoja.

27. Planning, supporting and servicing meetings for business continuity during the pandemic (2020 and 2021) involved more complex conference servicing structures and multiple service providers, including various departments and offices in New York and the other three duty stations. The innovative approach to planning, billing and conducting meetings on a cost recoverable basis is currently being integrated into the Department's applications within the United Nations enterprise systems, such as Umoja, but further integration is warranted. Prior to full integration, the cost recovery mechanism is being streamlined and automated within the Department to include a user interface consolidating multifaceted business processes which will ultimately result in a single bill model, incorporating and itemizing service provision and recovery cost elements. Such automation of billing requires close coordination with all service providers to find consensus on a way forward.

28. According to interviews, the 2022 policy will reflect comments made by OIOS in its biennial review of the Department's evaluation function, including the need to further highlight the importance of the independence of the evaluation function. The new policy includes independence as a guiding norm for evaluation in the United Nations system and stipulates that the evaluation team should ensure that the conduct of the evaluation is functionally independent within the Department. The new policy also indicates that evaluation recommendations should be more concise, timebound and actionable, so that they can be more easily monitored and measured. Another update worth noting in the 2022 revised draft policy is the inclusion of a section on ethical and gender considerations.

29. Interviews with staff of the Evaluation, Analysis and Monitoring Unit in New York revealed other benefits of updating the 2019 evaluation policy. It has led to a more collaborative spirit within the team and across the duty stations. Interviewees explained that working on the policy was the first step toward combining all of the evaluation resources and creating a global team spirit, which helped them create and monitor key performance indicators with a more global perspective. Interviewees also noted that the 2019 policy included an approved evaluation template, which ensured consistency in the structure of evaluations, in the phrasing of the goals of evaluations and in how the evaluation reports were presented. This was cited as being enormously helpful in ensuring that all evaluations were held to the same standard, degree of rigour and quality. It has helped staff think about ways to maximize the value of the evaluation and how to improve as a result.

30. A review of a select number of recent evaluations across New York, Geneva and Vienna⁵ revealed that the evaluation policy of 2019 was consistently applied. The evaluations showed consistency in format and overall structure, and all followed the evaluation template presented in the evaluation policy. Importantly, the structure includes a forward-looking element, which in the selected evaluations took the form of recommendations and/or lessons learned. In addition, the policy outlines screening criteria used by OIOS. The evaluations met all of the screening criteria and demonstrated that quality assurance had been achieved.

31. This recommendation was implemented.

⁵ Self-evaluation of non-calendar meetings, October 2018; self-evaluation of the impact of the Department on Sustainable Development Goal 12, January 2020; evaluation of the provision of services for non-calendar meetings (Meetings Management Unit/Planning, Coordination and Meetings Section), March 2020; factors influencing translation throughput productivity, December 2020; self-evaluation of editorial productivity, United Nations Headquarters, January 2022; and self-evaluation on language and desktop publishing and text-processing across all four duty stations of the Department, January 2022.

Recommendation 3**Address external factors affecting the Department's ability to plan, along with proposed solutions, for consideration by the Committee on Conferences**

32. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

The Department should strengthen its ability to plan for capacity, quality and contingencies by presenting to the Committee on Conferences, for its consideration, the factors identified in the present evaluation with corresponding proposed solutions.

Indicator of achievement: presentation made to the Committee on Conferences

33. In line with the recommendation, the Department made annual presentations to the Committee on Conferences, in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The presentations were similar in nature, providing an overview of general trends—the Department's increasing or stagnant workload, which it handled with a budget that remained limited. Innovations and solutions for addressing these trends were also presented. In 2019, these included revamping and modernizing language recruitment examinations so that they were fully remote and introducing self-paced online training for language staff, as well as further enhancements to the eLUNA tool that led to, among other things, increased translation productivity. Similarly, the 2020 presentation to the Committee on Conferences described innovations undertaken by the Department to plan for capacity, quality and contingencies, along with other issues. Important solutions were also noted in the 2021 presentation, including innovations in meetings management, such as the one-stop-shop, as well as performance enhancements to the *Journal of the United Nations* to improve accessibility and user experience.

34. A review of reports of the Committee of Conferences from 2019 to 2021 ([A/74/32](#), [A/75/32](#) and [A/76/32](#)) revealed that many of the issues raised during the presentations and in the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences were acknowledged by the Committee and included in the corresponding draft resolutions. For example, at its opening meeting, on 8 September 2020, the Committee on Conferences considered several sections of the 2020 report on the pattern of conferences ([A/75/89](#)), including the analysis of the utilization of conference-servicing resources by United Nations organs, leveraging technology in meetings and new developments in documents management. The Committee recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution in which the Assembly would reiterate its request to intergovernmental bodies to review their meeting entitlements and to plan to adjust their programmes of work on the basis of their actual utilization of conference-servicing resources in order to improve their efficient use and to achieve optimum utilization of conference services. The Assembly would also encourage the Secretary-General to enhance the efficiency of conference servicing (see [A/75/32](#), annex I, and General Assembly resolution [75/244](#)).

35. In its 2021 report, the Committee of Conferences commended the Department for the innovations it had introduced in 2020 in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the provision of International Sign interpretation on a fully remote basis for the first time, an important step towards ensuring accessibility (see [A/76/32](#), para. 3). It recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution (*ibid.*, annex I), in which the Assembly would commend the Department for its innovative approaches in providing technical secretariat support and in managing meetings and documents. The Assembly would urge intergovernmental bodies to make provisions for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States in their programmes of work and to notify the Department, well in advance, of any cancellations so that unutilized resources may be redistributed elsewhere. It would also urge Member States to improve their compliance with regard to a number of

different elements: low interpretation utilization factors, meeting utilization based on entitlements, informing the Secretariat of late starts and unplanned early endings of meetings and underutilization of resources. The resolution of the Assembly on the pattern of conferences was adopted on 24 December 2021 (resolution [76/237](#)).

36. This recommendation was implemented.

Recommendation 4
Cross-cutting issues

37. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

The Department, through internal and external consultations that it deems necessary, should formulate a plan indicating how its business operations might explicitly support any relevant Sustainable Development Goals. The plan should contain, at the minimum:

- (a) The specific Sustainable Development Goals that it intends to support for a set strategic planning period, for example Goal 12, Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, and any other Goals, through its business practices;
- (b) The concrete ways in which it intends to contribute to those Goals through existing and additional actions or initiatives;
- (c) How it will monitor its contributions (see recommendation 2);
- (d) How it will roll out the plan internally to ensure maximum departmental awareness of the overarching plan and the specific roles and responsibilities assigned, and thus ensure the plan's ultimate success.

Indicators of achievement: consultations undertaken; Sustainable Development Goals plan developed and implemented

38. The Department accepted this recommendation and stated that it was applicable to the Department only inasmuch as it was limited to Sustainable Development Goal 12 (see [E/AC.51/2019](#), annex). Prior to the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 12, the Department took steps to achieve sustainable practices in its publishing operations and continues to align itself with the now-adopted Goal. It set up a working group between 2008 to 2009 with the participation of all four duty stations as well as relevant stakeholders, such as publishing entities in the International Atomic Energy Agency. The working group drafted a declaration at its first workshop⁶ and produced a code of ethics for sustainable publishing practices. Around the same time, the Department began using web-based tools to facilitate access to official documents, such as a simplified search engine and mailing list for document delivery using Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology. According to the Department, the current number of email subscribers receiving United Nations documentation stands at 26,791.

39. In January 2010, the Department issued an information circular on availability of official documents to Secretariat officials ([ST/IC/2010/2](#)), which was updated in 2019 ([ST/IC/2019/7](#)). The information circular effectively discontinued the distribution of printed copies of United Nations documents to Secretariat officials at Headquarters. In April 2011, the Secretary-General issued a decision (No. 2011/9), in which he stated that the Department would reduce the number of publications by a

⁶ The Declaration states: "We, the participants in the Environmental and Sustainable Publishing Workshop held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York commit ourselves to implement the agreed principles and outcomes of our collective and collaborative work to ensure that our output meets the highest environmental and sustainable standards".

minimum of 30 per cent, the length of reports by 10 per cent and the hard copy distribution of reports, documents and publications by 50 per cent (using 2010 as the baseline) by replacing them with electronic versions by 2013. Today, limited numbers of hard copies of the *Journal of the United Nations* are produced for the Member States and only during the main part of the General Assembly (daily roll numbers are as follows: Arabic, 10; Chinese, 1; English, 75; French, 20; Russian, 2; and Spanish, 20).

40. According to information gathered from interviews, regardless of the ongoing work in this area, the OIOS recommendation gave the Department the opportunity to monitor more regularly its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 12. In 2020, it conducted a self-evaluation to assess measures taken to achieve the Goal. The evaluation focused on assessing the reduction in printing volumes, identifying the number of meetings held in PaperSmart mode and identifying other business areas where resource and energy efficiency could be promoted.

41. In the evaluation, the Department noted that the number of meetings held using PaperSmart had increased significantly since its introduction in 2011. In addition, the number of page impressions drastically decreased (by 76 per cent in 2019 compared with 2011) following the implementation of the print-on-demand and PaperSmart models.

42. In the evaluation, the Department described several examples of printing reduction across the four duty stations over the past decade. For example, in New York, the Correspondence Unit sent correspondence via email, and online platforms were being used extensively by the Protocol and Liaison Service. In 2019, the United Nations Office at Geneva opened its United Nations documents help desk at its main distribution counter, where digital documents were uploaded onto delegate-provided memory sticks and training was provided on how to find documents online and via the official document system. This was expected to further decrease demand for printed copies. The Conference Management Service at the United Nations Office at Vienna also adopted a sustainable approach in 2019 which included reducing the environmental footprint of high-level events by limiting the printing and distribution of documents to on-demand only or one set per delegation. In addition, all Member States received official correspondence via email through the web-based eCorrespondence application. These efforts significantly reduced the number of documents printed and made printing available on demand. The Division of Conference Services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi also focused on programming agility with respect to documentation and made efforts to allow intergovernmental meetings and other clients to obtain high-quality official documents in an accessible format.

43. In addition to efforts to reduce paper use, the Department introduced remote examinations for language professionals (see para. 33 above), which reduced travel-related carbon emissions and expanded the accessibility of the examinations for persons with disabilities and those living in remote areas. It also established a fully electronic documentation management and processing workflow, and the process of assessing conference servicing implications contained in draft resolutions has switched from a paper-based to a web-based workflow.

44. In the evaluation, the Department also noted several other efforts, including the Documentation Division joining the United Nations recycling programme, the Department participating in existing Secretariat-wide initiatives and following Organization-wide guidance on sustainability, the launching of the digital version of the *Journal of the United Nations* and the holding of the 2020 meeting of the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications in virtual format (owing to the COVID-19 pandemic), for which the Department refrained from printing a single document.

45. Certification from the International Organization for Standards (ISO) relating to standards for environmental management systems (ISO 14000) has been implemented in all duty stations except New York. After relocating to the library in 2019, printing operations were set to have ISO certification, but it was put on hold owing to the pandemic. The team hopes that it will be completed in 2022.

46. This recommendation has been implemented.

III. Conclusion

47. The Department took important steps to implement the four recommendations, which have led to several positive outcomes.

48. A number of key enhancements were made to the information technology systems following the receipt of considerable feedback and input from end users. These enhancements have undergone rigorous and regular scrutiny by the Programme and Project Review Board. An evaluation policy was established in 2019, which has brought consistency and professionalism to the Department's evaluations across the duty stations. The policy will be updated this year to clarify issues of independence and provide clearer recommendations. Regular presentations to the Committee on Conferences have taken place, resulting in the Committee's consistent advocacy for better compliance by Member States, as well as recognition of the Department for its astute improvements and innovations to its systems. Finally, the Department has made significant strides in reducing its paper production and upholding Sustainable Development Goal 12.

49. The frequent efforts by the Department to improve its systems and seamlessly continue business operations through the pandemic have been praised. In his 2021 report on the pattern of conferences, the Secretary-General notes that, "although the number of meetings serviced was smaller than in previous years, the complexity of those that were held was considerably greater, requiring far more effort from the Secretariat's meetings management and interpretation teams". He notes further that "the fact that all calendar bodies were able to continue their work and that the Secretariat's key performance indicators for conference management declined only slightly in 2020 is testimony to the dedication, flexibility and sense of service of United Nations staff, who responded to the crisis by going above and beyond expectations to ensure the delivery of high-quality multilingual conference services and hence the continuation of the essential work of the United Nations during this exceptional year" (see [A/76/80](#), paras. 2 and 3).

50. While significant progress has been made, recent self-evaluations have highlighted areas where the Department should continue to strengthen or build its capacity. The evaluations identified opportunities for increased modernization, standardization and harmonization for different practices across duty stations. For example, in the self-evaluation on language and desktop publishing and text-processing, the Department highlighted the need to harmonize the processing of workload and the calculation of productivity. It also recommended that workload-sharing be considered for optimal capacity utilization within and between duty stations, noting that standardized formatting tools should be used in sharing workload across duty stations. In the evaluation on editorial productivity at United Nations Headquarters, it was noted that, to strengthen productivity, the pilot editing workload standard of 13 pages per staff member per day must be met. A new stage of the pilot was expected to be launched this year, during which each duty station would develop a plan to review working methods, improve practices and adopt new technologies in order to consistently meet the standard. Furthermore, increased cross-assignments should be encouraged in order to help manage workload and develop staff skills.

Successful implementation of the recommendations listed in each of the evaluations will improve the Department's efficiency and increase its productivity.

51. Finally, although the Department has significantly reduced its printing, in its self-evaluation on measures taken to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12, the Department noted that it should continue its plan of action in this area, which includes further reducing the demand for hard copies of documents and decreasing the number of printed documents by posting documents and other information on e-deleGATE in a timely manner, gaining certification in ISO 14001 for United Nations Headquarters and assessing how business continuity plans can be adapted to ensure responsible consumption and production.

Annex***Comments received from the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management on the draft report**

This is in reference to your memo of 23 February 2022 transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of recommendations on the evaluation of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for review and formal comments.

The draft report was carefully reviewed, and I am pleased to inform you that the Department is in agreement with its content. My colleagues and I look forward to seeing the final report.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Ms. Zainab Latif and Ms. Jessica Alexander for their professionalism and excellent coordination of this exercise.

Thank you for the continuing collaboration and cooperation between our two offices.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.