



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2022/014

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

**Some aspects of strategic planning and
operational arrangements need to be
strengthened**

20 May 2022

Assignment No. AE2021-310-02

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism (CLM) at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the effective management of CLM's operations. The audit covered the period from January 2019 to June 2021 and included a review of risk areas relating to: (a) strategic planning; (b) programme management; and (c) regulatory framework.

CLM clients were generally satisfied with its services as shown by the high satisfaction level in survey results (96 per cent positive rating in the 2020 survey), and the growing demand for its training programmes over the years. However, some aspects of strategic planning and operational arrangements need to be strengthened.

OIOS made five recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, CLM needed to:

- Determine key operational, financial and performance data that should be reported regularly to help provide insight on performance and inform strategic decision-making;
- Establish Memoranda of Understanding or other form of written agreement with all clients to clarify the obligations of all parties;
- Prepare section level annual work plans outlining the activities and outputs planned for the year and annual performance reports showing the extent to which the activities and outputs in the work plans have been achieved;
- Coordinate with the Information and Communications Technology Service for upgrading or developing a new registration tool for language training programmes; and
- Strengthen the arrangements for engagement of consultants by using Inspira for recruitment of new consultants, verifying the credentials, qualifications and experience of new consultants before they are added to the roster, and formalizing the procedures for management of the roster.

UNOG accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism (CLM) at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

2. CLM is a section within the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) at UNOG. It is mandated to support individual and institutional growth and performance through a range of training courses and the administration of recruitment tests and examinations. CLM had three units aligned to the various aspects of its mandate: (i) the Language Training Programme Unit; (ii) the Management and Communication Unit; and (iii) the Examinations Unit.

3. The Language Training Programme Unit offers language courses in the six official languages of the United Nations to promote multilingualism within the Secretariat and improve the language skills of staff and eligible non-staff such as representatives of permanent missions to the United Nations. The total number of registrations for the language training courses from January 2019 to June 2021 was 9,579 (3,566 in 2019, 3,622 in 2020 and 2,391 up to June 2021).

4. The Management and Communication Unit offers knowledge and skill-based courses in French and English in the areas of leadership and management, besides technical and substantive programmes. During the period January 2019 to June 2021, the Unit conducted 284 knowledge and skills-based courses. The Examinations Unit manages and administers local and international tests and examinations across the Secretariat including language competitive examinations, the Young Professionals Programme examinations, various General Support recruitment and skills examinations, and language proficiency examinations.

5. In pursuance of its activities, CLM coordinated with internal and external stakeholders. This included partnering with various Geneva-based United Nations organizations and stakeholders to, among others, co-create: (i) a career development programme for emerging women leaders known as EMERGE; (ii) the UNOG Knowledge and Learning Commons – a space to collaborate and share knowledge on issues of multilateralism and professional development; and (iii) the Geneva Innovation Movement – an association to shape actionable pathways to innovation to enable impactful contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, staff of CLM co-chaired three learning networks: the Geneva Learning Network; the International Organizations Coaching Network; and the Learning Lab (a community of practice for learning managers in the Secretariat).

6. CLM is headed by a P-5 level staff who reports to the Chief, HRMS. As of August 2021, CLM had 24 posts including 19 regular budget posts (1 P-5, 1 P-3, 3 general service and 14 language teacher positions); and 5 posts funded by extrabudgetary resources (1 P-4 and 4 general service). The language teacher positions are a special category of staff positions for full-time language teachers. CLM also engaged part-time teachers on consultancy contracts to address gaps in the capacity of full-time language teachers.

7. CLM's total expenditure for 2019 and 2020 was \$8 million of which \$5.4 million (67 per cent) was funded by regular budget resources and the rest (\$2.6 million) by extrabudgetary resources. The budget for 2021 was \$4.3 million (\$2.8 million regular budget and \$1.5 million extrabudgetary). Extrabudgetary resources included fees charged on a cost recovery basis for participants whose posts are funded by extrabudgetary resources, and for non-staff participants.

8. CLM also received additional regular budgetary resources from United Nations Headquarters for the centrally coordinated training programmes. These had decreased over the years from \$603,766 in 2012 to \$295,957 in 2020 and \$210,100 in 2021.

9. Comments provided by UNOG are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

10. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the effective management of CLM's operations.

11. This audit was included in the 2021 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to potential financial and operational risks that could affect the achievement of CLM's objectives.

12. OIOS conducted this audit from August 2021 to January 2022. The audit covered the period from January 2019 to June 2021. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered risks areas relating to: (a) strategic planning; (b) programme management; and (c) regulatory framework.

13. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical review of data; and (d) sample testing.

14. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic planning

Need to enhance the analysis and use of data for performance monitoring and strategic decision making

15. CLM faces funding and staffing challenges and risks in its operating environment. These include, among others: (i) dependence on part-time teachers necessitated by a high demand of training needs that cannot be absorbed by full time teachers, and lack of flexibility in engaging full time teachers to deliver courses outside a pre-established work and leave schedule; (ii) the reducing funding levels of regular budget resources provided by Headquarters for the centrally coordinated training programmes, leading to more reliance on funds from paying participants to fund new courses or upgrades; (iii) uncertainties regarding the level of fees income expected, which is dependent on the proportion of paying and non-paying participants in training courses; and (iv) the diverse range of client organizations and staff that CLM serves which could make it challenging to synchronize their training needs.

16. CLM's clients were generally satisfied with services received, as shown by the high satisfaction level in survey results (96 per cent positive rating in the 2020 survey), and the growing demand for its training programmes over the years. Summer courses increased from 3 in 2016 to 25 in 2020, and the total number of registrations for language training programmes increased from 2,785 in 2012 to 3,622 in 2020. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CLM reconfigured its language training catalogue in a limited time period to ensure business continuity. It was able to move all its 90 language training courses and about 80 per cent of its knowledge and skills-based courses from "face-to-face" to virtual delivery mode between mid-March and end of June 2020.

17. To effectively manage the risks, it is essential for CLM to effectively use data to inform and support its operations in line with the Secretary-General's Data Strategy. HRMS recognized the risk of insufficient access to complete and timely business information in its risk register, and in 2020 initiated a nine-month human resources analytics training programme for its staff that included staff from CLM. CLM used data on registrations for training courses and results of surveys to inform its decisions on which courses to prioritize for change, and the nature of changes to be made. There were further opportunities to enhance the analysis and use of data, as discussed below.

(a) No reports were prepared on key operational and performance data and analysis of trends. The registration data, for example, could be disaggregated to show registrations by category of course participants such as paying and non-paying participants, or Secretariat and non-Secretariat staff, that CLM could use to support its budget submissions. Trend analysis of the level of registrations in each category of participants and course capacity utilization rates could also provide useful insight on course uptake and inform decision making on the funding model.

(b) With the move to online classes following the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be useful to track the number of participants based outside of Geneva as this could help inform decisions such as the extent to which to continue with the online classes post the pandemic.

(c) CLM designs and develops the language training programmes in six languages in alignment with United Nations Language Framework with the help of its language teachers. In 2021, CLM designed 34 new courses: Arabic (7); Chinese (5); Russian (5); Spanish (4); English (7); and French (6). Such new courses are key for CLM to continue to fulfil its mandate and designing them can in some cases involve significant time resources of full-time language teachers. Data and trend analysis of the staff resources used, and costs incurred in developing the courses, number of people trained, course capacity utilization rates, and fees received could provide useful insight on investment and returns for the various courses that could aid planning and decision making.

(1) The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should determine key operational, financial and performance data that should be reported regularly to help provide insight on performance and inform strategic decision-making.

UNOG accepted recommendation 1 and stated that CLM was already collecting a multitude of data but will consider additional data to be collected and enhance collection through polls.

Need to establish written agreements with all clients

18. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed more staff from diverse locations to participate in training programmes, which was positive. However, the extent to which CLM should extend its learning services to field staff of its Geneva-based clients and to non-Geneva based organizations was not clearly defined in Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with its clients or other formal documents. Some organizations headquartered in Geneva advertised CLM's language courses to their staff and personnel globally, and this could include staff not administered by UNOG. As enrolments go through the organizations' headquarters, CLM did not know the details and location of the field-based participants. This could be addressed by the various organizations providing such details to CLM.

19. Additionally, at the time of the audit, MOUs between UNOG and its clients were at draft stage in respect of four entities. UNOG's Financial Resources Management Service explained that these clients were not willing to sign the MOUs despite their regular follow up. CLM also provided services to some clients without MOUs, including a private university that collaborates with the United Nations System Staff

College. An MOU or other form of written agreement is necessary to formalize the relationship with all clients and clearly articulate the obligations of each party.

(2) UNOG should ensure that Memoranda of Understanding or other form of written agreement are established with all clients of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism to clarify the obligations of all parties.

UNOG accepted recommendation 2 and stated that MOUs will be signed with the remaining entities, and that CLM will make sure that MOUs will be signed with new clients seeking its services.

There were ongoing efforts to improve response rates to the end of course surveys

20. CLM was not able to undertake comprehensive biannual learning needs analysis as recommended in the United Nations Learning Strategy due to resource constraints. The last comprehensive learning needs analysis was done in 2014 for the knowledge and skills-based programmes and in 2015 for the language training programmes. CLM indicated that the results of the end of course surveys and discussions with clients provided useful input to the needs assessment that mitigated the absence of the comprehensive learning needs analysis. However, response rates to the surveys were low varying between 45 and 54 per cent in 2019 and 2020 for language training programmes and between 28 and 38 per cent for knowledge and skills-based programmes. The fact that CLM relies on the end of course surveys underscores the need to explore measures that could improve the response rates to the surveys. In 2021, CLM reinforced the need for comprehensive feedback and got some success with the response rates increasing to 61 per cent for language training programmes and 50 per cent for the knowledge and skills-based programmes. CLM stated that that it would continue to earmark sufficient time for conducting end of course surveys and strive for higher response rates.

B. Programme management

Need for section level work plans

21. At the beginning of every performance cycle, CLM staff prepared individual work plans with suitable performance objectives and deliverables. CLM also prepared a yearly calendar of its training courses indicating course duration and the mode of delivery, among others. Other than the calendar of training courses, CLM did not prepare section level work plans outlining all other outputs and activities it was pursuing in the year as required by Section 6.1 of STAI/2010/5 and STAI/2021/4. Such work plans help to guide the work of the section and provide the basis for measuring performance. For example, CLM had several initiatives to upgrade language courses or develop new courses. Having clear activities and outputs in section level work plans would guide implementation and provide a basis for performance monitoring.

22. Annual work plans would also help in supporting budgets in line with results-based management principles. In addition, the work plans would provide the basis for identifying and clearly articulating the annual activities and outputs of multi-year projects. A good example of this was the Harmonization of Language Programmes project which is a large ongoing project that started in 2018 and in the same year received the Secretary-General's award in the category of multilingualism. The award was to both the Language Training Programme at UNOG and the Language and Communications Programme at United Nations Headquarters principally for creating the United Nations Language Framework – a reference tool for learning and assessment in the six official languages within the United Nations.

23. In 2020, the Language Training Programme Unit developed a three-year six-fold action plan for the remainder of the project, with completion targeted for the end of 2023. The remaining elements

included, among others, developing and piloting the United Nations level exams, and aligning the local language training programme courses to the United Nations Language Framework. The COVID-19 pandemic affected progress in implementing the project as efforts were diverted to revamping courses to be delivered virtually, but CLM indicated that the project was back on track. The activities related to the project were included in the individual work plans of the language teachers. In addition to this, incorporating the planned activities in an annual section work plan would help to clearly show the consolidated activities and deliverables planned at the section level and facilitate monitoring of progress against the three-year six-fold action plan.

(3) The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should prepare: (a) section level annual work plans outlining the activities and outputs planned for the year; and (b) annual performance reports showing the extent to which the activities and outputs in the work plans have been achieved.

UNOG accepted recommendation 3.

Need to strengthen the information technology tool used for registration of applicants

24. CLM had developed an in-house information technology-based tool for registering applicants for the language training programmes (registration tool). The registration tool was launched in 2018 and had helped in eliminating the need for paper-based registration. This was instrumental for the enrolment process in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, OIOS' review of registration and reimbursement procedures for a sample of 19 cases showed that the registration tool did not have adequate validation controls that would help in ensuring that the applicants had submitted all the documents required before they are enrolled in the courses. In two of the cases sampled, the applicants did not have a valid proof of payment and in five cases, the applicants did not have a valid identity card. In one other case, CLM did not meet the goal of reimbursing the fee paid by the participant within eight weeks after the receipt of all required documents.

25. The gaps were largely attributed to technical limitations in the registration tool and related to it, the labour-intensive procedures performed by one staff in reviewing the applications as well as the absence of an independent review of the applications. At the time of the audit, CLM had taken corrective action and initiated independent review of the reimbursement requests before they were sent to the Financial Resources Management Service. CLM was also aware of the technical limitations in the registration tool and indicated that since its implementation in 2018, the tool had been constantly improved and new features implemented and that it was working on developing another tool to address its inadequacies. It is essential for CLM to consult and/or coordinate with the UNOG Information and Communications Technology Service (ICTS) in developing the new tool to help ensure that it is optimal and aligned with established policies and standards and other information technology initiatives planned by the Division of Administration.

(4) The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should coordinate with the Information and Communications Technology Service for upgrading or developing of a new registration tool for language training programmes.

UNOG accepted recommendation 4 and stated that HRMS would add the tool to the ICTS projects list. The involvement of ICTS in the enhancement of the existing tool or development of a new registration tool will be subject to the availability of resources.

C. Regulatory framework

Arrangements for engagement of consultants need to be strengthened

26. CLM's budget for staff and consultants accounted for about 98 per cent of its total budget. Therefore, OIOS' focused on reviewing matters relating to recruitment and management of staff and consultants. From 2019 to 2021, CLM recruited two full-time language teachers, one for French and the other for Spanish. OIOS' review showed that the recruitments were done in accordance with the established procedures. No significant exceptions were noted except for delays in recruitment beyond the established target of 120 days from issuance of job opening to selection. The recruitment of the French teacher took 241 days while that for the Spanish teacher took 177 days. The delays were attributed to the absence of the Coordinator of the Language Training programme and the posts being placed under recruitment freeze.

27. With regard to consultants, CLM engaged 23 part-time teachers through consultancy contracts of which 21 were selected from the roster of pre-qualified candidates and the other two were recruited following a competitive selection process. OIOS observed the following which showed that CLM had established some good practices in the recruitment of consultants, but they could be further strengthened.

(a) The pre-qualified candidates placed in the roster added their profiles in Inspira, and their selection was done in Inspira in line with the established procedures. The use of the roster is a good practice that allows for timely and efficient recruitment. It would be beneficial for CLM to formalize the management of the roster by defining the criteria for adding and removing candidates from the roster.

(b) The recruitment for the two consultants who were not in the roster of pre-qualified candidates was done in a competitive manner and the evaluation process properly documented. However, the recruitment process including the advertisement of the job openings and evaluation of the candidates was done outside of Inspira. The job openings were advertised through professional language teachers' networks which is a good practice. However, job openings for more than six months need to be also advertised through Inspira in line with UNOG guidelines for recruitment of consultants in order to provide an equal opportunity to any interested candidates not in the professional language teachers' networks. Evaluating the candidates in Inspira as required would also improve efficiency. Further, CLM did not perform verification of credentials, qualifications and experience of the selected candidates.

(c) The terms of reference of the consultants did not have measurable performance indicators and the deliverables were vaguely defined. CLM took corrective action in July 2021 and revised the standard terms of reference of consultants to make them more focused and accountable, and to align them with those used by the Language and Communications programme at United Nations headquarters.

(d) In 2020, contrary to the requirement that consultants recruited as part-time teachers should be recruited locally, two of the consultants recruited during the COVID-19 pandemic were based outside of Geneva. The consultants' emoluments were incorrectly paid at the Geneva remuneration rates instead of the rates for the duty station they were working from. One of the consultants left after summer 2021 and in the course of the audit CLM took corrective action and adjusted the remuneration rates of the second consultant to those of the duty station they were working from. As these were exceptions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and there was no evidence that they were systemic, OIOS is not raising a recommendation on this issue.

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| <p>(5) The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should strengthen the arrangements for engagement of consultants by: (i) using Inspira for recruitment of new consultants;</p> |
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(ii) verifying the credentials, qualifications and experience of new consultants before they are added to the roster; and (iii) formalizing the procedures for management of the roster.

UNOG accepted recommendation 5 and stated that CLM undertakes to strengthen the process for engagement of consultants/individual contractors. A job opening could be advertised regularly in Inspira. This would enable better outreach, transparency in the process, including selection and assessment, as well as maintenance of the roster for such positions. The Hiring Manager and HRMS will work together on the process. The Hiring Manager will request a number of required references before the start of the contract. The reference documents will be part of consultant/individual contractor files.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

28. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNOG for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
Director, Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

| Rec. no. | Recommendation | Critical ¹ / Important ² | C/ O ³ | Actions needed to close recommendation | Implementation date ⁴ |
|----------|---|---|----------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should determine key operational, financial and performance data that should be reported regularly to help provide insight on performance and inform strategic decision-making. | Important | O | Receipt of evidence that CLM has determined additional operational, financial and performance data that should be reported regularly such as registration data by category of participants, costs incurred in developing courses and data on course utilization rates. | 30 April 2023 |
| 2 | UNOG should ensure that Memoranda of Understanding or other form of written agreement are established with all clients of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism to clarify the obligations of all parties. | Important | O | Receipt of evidence that MOUs or other form of written agreement have been established with all clients. | 30 April 2023 |
| 3 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should prepare: (a) section level annual work plans outlining the activities and outputs planned for the year; and (b) annual performance reports showing the extent to which the activities and outputs in the work plans have been achieved. | Important | O | Receipt of evidence that CLM prepares section level work plans and performance reports showing the extent to which the activities and outputs in the work plans have been achieved. | 31 December 2022 |
| 4 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should coordinate with the Information and Communications Technology Service for upgrading or developing of a new registration tool for language training programmes. | Important | O | Receipt of evidence of action taken to strengthen the information technology tool used for registration of applicants. | 31 December 2022 |
| 5 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should strengthen the arrangements for engagement of consultants by: (i) using Inspira | Important | O | Receipt of evidence that CLM has strengthened the arrangements for engagement of consultants to include the use of Inspira to advertise job | 30 April 2023 |

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

³ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁴ Date provided by UNOG in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | for recruitment of new consultants; (ii) verifying the credentials, qualifications and experience of new consultants before they are added to the roster; and (iii) formalizing the procedures for management of the roster. | | | openings; performance of reference checks for new consultants before they are added to the roster; and formal procedures for the management of the roster. | |
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APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

| Rec. no. | Recommendation | Critical ¹ / Important ² | Accepted? (Yes/No) | Title of responsible individual | Implementation date | Client comments |
|----------|---|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 1 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should determine key operational, financial and performance data that should be reported regularly to help provide insight on performance and inform strategic decision-making. | Important | Yes | Chief CLM | 04/2023 | CLM is already collecting a multitude of data but will consider additional data to be collected and enhance collection through polls. CLM will report back to OIOS on outcome. |
| 2 | UNOG should ensure that Memoranda of Understanding or other form of written agreement are established with all clients of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism to clarify the obligations of all parties. | Important | Yes | Chief CLM | 04/2023 | MoUs will be signed with the two remaining entities. CLM will make sure that MoUs will be signed with new clients seeking its services. |
| 3 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should prepare: (a) section level annual work plans outlining the activities and outputs planned for the year; and (b) annual performance reports showing the extent to which the activities and outputs in the work plans have been achieved. | Important | Yes | Chief CLM | End 2022 | Related to 2022-23 budget cycle derived from PPBD documents and UNOG DG's Compact. |
| 4 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should coordinate with the Information and Communications Technology Service for upgrading or | Important | Yes | Chief CLM | End 2022 | CLM/HRMS will add the tool to the ICTS project list. ICTS involvement in the enhancement of the existing tool or development of a new |

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at the United Nations Office at Geneva

| Rec. no. | Recommendation | Critical ¹ / Important ² | Accepted? (Yes/No) | Title of responsible individual | Implementation date | Client comments |
|----------|---|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| | developing of a new registration tool for language training programmes. | | | | | registration tool is subject to the availability of resources. |
| 5 | The UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism should strengthen the arrangements for engagement of consultants by: (i) using Inspira for recruitment of new consultants; (ii) verifying the credentials, qualifications and experience of new consultants before they are added to the roster; and (ii) formalizing the procedures for management of the roster. | Important | Yes | Chief CLM | 04/2023 | CLM undertakes to strengthen the process for engagement of consultants/individual contractors. A JO could be advertised regularly in Inspira. This would enable better outreach, transparency on the process, including selection and assessment, as well as maintenance of the roster for such positions. Hiring Manager and HR will work together on the process. The Hiring manager will request a number of required references (degrees, and references from employers) before the start of the contract. The reference documents will be part of Consultant/Individual Contractor files |