

CAPACITY BUILDING

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Centres of Excellence:  
**STRATEGIC REVIEW  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
THE FUTURE**

Report



Telecommunication Development Sector





# **Centres of Excellence: Strategic review and recommendations for the future**

*December 2014*



The *Centres of Excellence: Strategic review and recommendations for the future* report was prepared by the BDT Human Capacity Building Division within the Projects Support and Knowledge Management Department (PKM).

Substantive inputs to the report were provided by ITU experts Gladys Ogallo and Dr David Souter. Helpful inputs and suggestions were received from colleagues in the regional and field offices of ITU, as well as from the regional steering committees of the existing Centres of Excellence



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## Foreword

I am pleased to present to you this document on the *Centres of Excellence: Strategic review and recommendations for the future*. The document is the outcome of a review study on the Centres of Excellence project which was carried out in fulfilment of Resolution 73 of the World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC-10). It contains recommendations that will be implemented in the post-project phase of this exercise commencing with the next planning cycle after WTDC-14. These recommendations were presented to the Group on Human Capacity Building (GCB), which was established under Resolution 40 of WTDC-10, and was endorsed by the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG). This strategy will help the Telecommunication Development Bureau to fulfil one of its key objectives which is to strengthen institutional and human capacity for its members.



To guide the implementation of this strategy, the *Operational processes and procedures for new ITU Centres of Excellence strategy* has been developed. This document provides a step by step process on how the new centres will be selected and function.

The strategy document is available online at <http://academy.itu.int/news/item/1152/>.

I hope that you will find this document informative and valuable. I look forward to the participation of all stakeholders, and in particular training providers, in making this strategy successful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brahima Sanou'.

Brahima Sanou  
Director  
Telecommunication Development Bureau



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## **Introduction**

### **Background**

The ITU/BDT Centres of Excellence programme was launched in 2001 with the aim of strengthening capacity-building in telecoms/ICTs, initially in Africa and subsequently also in other emerging and developing market regions. It has been implemented to date in two phases (the first from 2001 to 2006, the second from 2007 to 2012), with funding initially from the TELECOM Surplus Fund, more recently from the ICT Development Fund. These funding arrangements came to an end in 2011. The project was further extended until December 2014.

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) resolved in 2010 that ‘the activity of ITU Centres of Excellence should be continued, and strengthened with priorities determined by consultation with ITU membership,’ and asked the Director of BDT to ‘carry out a comprehensive analysis of the programme, organizational and financial activity of ITU Centres of Excellence and, if necessary, develop a plan of action to improve their work.’

This report has been commissioned by the Director of BDT as a contribution to that analysis. It is divided into four sections:

- Section 1 outlines the history and achievements of the Centres of Excellence programme to date, and the opportunities and challenges which it presents today.
- Section 2 discusses the main strategic issues and options (objectives, principles, governance structure) which need to be decided when formulating the programme for the future.
- Section 3 outlines the structure and arrangements for a New Programme of Centres of Excellence.
- Section 4 addresses the financing requirements for the New Programme.

The report is accompanied by an Executive Summary while three annexes, indicate the proposals for implementing aspects of the approach adopted in the report.

### **Terms of reference and methodology**

The terms of reference for the study were to take stock of the current status of the Centres of Excellence capacity building initiative:

- review and define the objectives and strategy of the Centres of Excellence in light of current realities;
- develop policies for the Centres of Excellence that are in line with the proposed strategy, taking into account the resources available to ITU to manage and monitor the network;
- define the selection criteria for Centre of Excellence institutions that will guarantee that only institutions of repute are part of the network;
- develop the mechanisms for using the selection criteria to select network institutions in a manner that is objective, fair and transparent;
- propose a financing and sustainability model for the Centres of Excellence that recognizes the constraints of the current ITU-dependent model; and
- recommend how best to create an effective network of training partners and how these institutions can leverage their strengths - in particular, how the Centres of Excellence can leverage the unique capabilities of universities.

The study was undertaken during September and October 2011, and drew upon the following:

- face-to-face discussions with the Director of BDT; the Chief, Projects and Initiatives Department, BDT; and all personnel directly involved with the Centres of Excellence programme within the Human Capacity Building Division of BDT;
- telephone discussions with selected ITU Regional Directors;
- telephone discussions with Regional Coordinators of the Centres of Excellence programme;
- questionnaire responses from Centres of Excellence (23 Centres responded to the study questionnaire);
- supplementary telephone interviews with selected Centres;
- telephone interviews with selected clients of the programme (organisations whose personnel are trained at Centres);
- face-to-face discussions with one Centre which has been part of the programme since its inception (AFRALTI) and to some of its clients in one case study country (Kenya);
- telephone interviews with selected specialists in ICT training in developing countries; and
- desk research on Centre of Excellence material provided by ITU/BDT and on other training and capacity-building initiatives on telecoms/ICTs in developing countries.

The terms of reference asked for an output report including the following elements:

- a clear strategy and framework for the Centres of Excellence in a self-sustaining environment;
- key policies, processes and practices that will underpin that strategy;
- the tools to be used to manage the processes, for example, the tools for selecting and evaluating the training delivery partners (nodes) of the centre of Excellence;
- an articulation of the roles and responsibilities of ITU within this framework;
- an implementation plan for transitioning from the current Centres of Excellence scenario to the new framework. In particular, how to deal with the current Centres of Excellence in the network and prospective Centres of Excellence that want to join.

Each of these points is covered in the following sections of this report.

## **Section 1: The Centres of Excellence programme to date**

The first two sections of this report consider the Centres programme and options for the future from two angles:

- Section 1 reviews the experience of the programme to date and the perceptions of existing Centres and clients concerning its record, value and achievements.
- Section 2 reviews the objectives of ITU and its Members in maintaining a Centres programme into the future, the context within which that programme will be implemented, and key questions which need to be clarified in establishing a New Programme.

The terms of reference for this report suggest that the most important starting point for a revised Centres of Excellence programme must be the capacity-building needs of ITU Members today and in the future, based around an understanding of current circumstances and trends. However, the experience, record and achievements of the Centres programme, since its inception in 2000, have established the programme identity in the minds of ITU Members and represent a significant legacy which is likely to influence their thinking. In considering how the programme should work in future, it is important to understand how we have reached the current state of play. This section:

- summarises the evolution of the Centres programme to date;
- outlines the programme as it stands today and summarises the strengths and weaknesses of that programme as it is perceived by stakeholders; and
- describes the changing context for the telecoms/ICT sector and capacity-building over the decade in which the programme has been active, and some of the resulting implications for today.

As will be seen from this account, the Centres programme has evolved substantially over a decade, from its initial objective of building institutional capacity at a small number of key potential Centres of Excellence at the end of the last century, to a thinly-spread training support facility today. This evolution has been only partly driven by formal decision-making at WTDC or Director level in the BDT. To a large extent, it has resulted from decisions about annual programming and the structure and content of Centres' work which have been taken by Regional Offices and regional steering groups with administrative and limited policy support from the Human Capacity-Building (HCB) division in BDT. The programme has been funded to date from the TELECOM Surplus Fund and its successor ICT Development Fund, resources which may not be available in the future.

The following tables/diagrams summarise the evolution of the Centres of Excellence programme over the past decade.

These tables and diagrams show that:

- there has been a steady increase in the number of Centres throughout the period of the programme;
- this has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of activities undertaken annually per Centre;
- the number of participants in Centre activities has fluctuated significantly over the years, peaking at a total of over 4 000 in 2004.

**Table 1 – Number of Centres/nodes by region, 1999-2011**

	AFR	AMS	ARB	ASP	CAR	CIS	EUR	LSP	Total
1999	2	1	1	1					5
2000	2	4	2	1					9
2001	2	4	2	1					9
2002	2	4	2	4					12
2003	2	4	3	4		3			16
2004	2	4	3	4		3			16
2005	2	7	3	4		3			19
2006	2	15	3	4		3			27
2007	6	18	4	5		3	5		41
2008	6	22	4	5	6	6	5		54
2009	6	23	4	6	6	6	5	6	62
2010	6	23	4	6	6	4	6	6	61
2011	6	23	4	6	6	4	6	6	61

**Table 2 – Number of activities by region, 1999-2011**

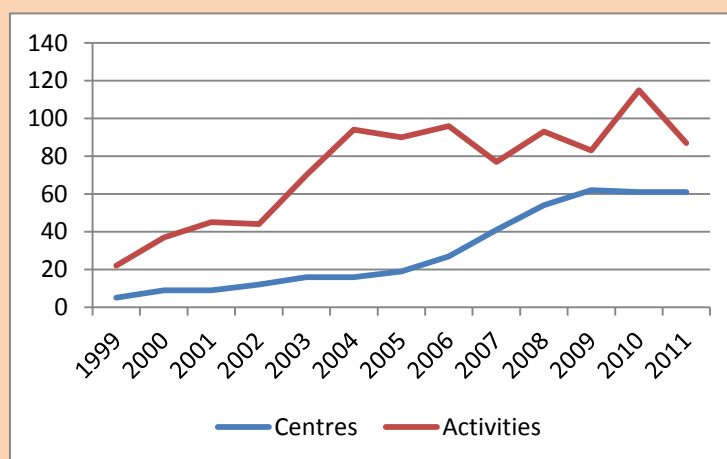
	AFR	AMS	ARB	ASP	CAR	CIS	EUR	LSP	Total
1999	6	4	3	1			8		22
2000	8	4		3		7	15		37
2001	22	8	3	7			5		45
2002	20	12	6	5			1		44
2003	26	23	7	2		6	6		70
2004	34	25	11	3		8	13		94
2005	38	19	11	1			21		90
2006	36	43	6				11		96
2007	15	42	5	7		4	4		77
2008	8	42	8	14	2	10	9		93
2009	2	25	5	17	6	13	5	10	83
2010	24	34	9	10	9	9	9	11	115
2011	25	21	5	11	6	6	2	11	87
<b>Total</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>953</b>

**Table 3 – Number of participants by region, 1999-2011**

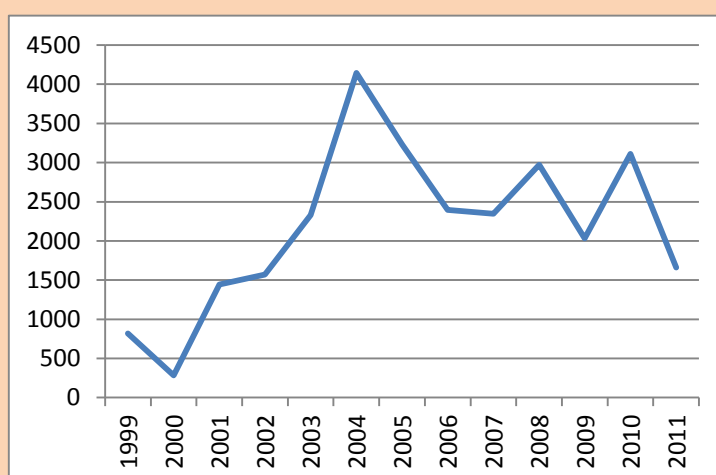
	AFR	AMS	ARB	ASP	CAR	CIS	EUR	LSP	Total
1999	78	255	95	29			363		820
2000	133	107		45					285
2001	469	375	143	154			303		1444
2002	473	499	440	120			40		1572
2003	697	716	483	40		215	180		2331
2004	1136	1094	943	73		449	450		4145
2005	871	831	517	17			992		3228
2006	717	1125	278				277		2397
2007	363	1238	178	209		151	207		2346
2008	223	1195	213	435	30	601	275		2972
2009	33	659	81	386	159	270	150	293	2031
2010	553	825	161	314	227	523	201	307	3111
2011	575	483	115	253	98	138	no data	no data	1662
<b>Total</b>	<b>6321</b>	<b>9402</b>	<b>3647</b>	<b>2075</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>2347</b>	<b>3438</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>28344</b>

The figures presented in Tables 1 to 3 are illustrated graphically in Figures 1 and 2.

**Figure 1: Number of Centres and activities, 1999-2011**



Source: ITU

**Figure 2: Number of participants, 1999-2011**

Source: ITU

### 1.1 Phase 1 – 1999-2006

The Centres of Excellence programme began in June 2000 as an initiative to use TELECOM Surplus Funds in order to build the institutional and training capacity of two training institutes in Africa – AFRALTI, in Kenya, for Anglophone countries, and ESMT, in Senegal, for Francophone countries. Neither of these was ‘excellent’ at the time the programme was initiated. On the contrary, both were recognised as having substantial institutional, educational and financial weaknesses. Rather, the aim was to build them up to a standard that could be described as ‘excellent’ and to secure their sustainability. It was hoped that they would contribute to capacity-building at a senior level and that they would extend beyond training to research and consultancy roles, thereby gradually increasing their value to ITU Members on the continent.

Substantial financial and management support was given to both institutions. Each was allocated seed funding of USD 1.33m, to ‘cover costs of transforming into a Centre of Excellence, such as engagement of experts, staff development, institutional support, and the engagement of Project Coordinators.’<sup>1</sup> This high level of external funding had a substantial effect on both Centres during the first phase. By 2007, each had greatly extended its reach and range of capacity-building work (more courses, more participants from more organisations in more countries) and greatly improved its financial position (to sustainability in the case of ESMT and near-sustainability in that of AFRALTI). Centre activities represented a significant volume of work for both Centres.

From both institution-building and training volume perspectives, the considerable investment made in ESMT and AFRALTI had, therefore, paid significant returns by 2006. Neither institution, however, had improved the quality of physical facilities to a standard that would attract high-level participants, or reached beyond training to research and consultancy capacity.

The introduction of these in-depth interventions in Africa led to demand for expansion of the Centres of Excellence programme into other regions. These other regional programmes were less clearly concerned with institution-building, more with the implementation of substantive training programmes build around the capabilities of selected Centres (sometimes known as ‘nodes’ but usually referred to in this report as ‘Centres’).

<sup>1</sup> Mike Nxale, ‘Centres of Excellence Project for Africa: Impact Assessment Study Report’, 2007.

- The Arab region programme began in November 2001, initially funded for three years, subsequently extended annually to 2007.
- The Asia-Pacific programme, like that in Africa, began in June 2000 but broke down in 2004 and was not revived until November 2006 at the start of phase 2.
- The Americas region programme began in June 2001, and engaged a larger number of Centres, as many as 15 by 2006. Between 2001 and the end of the first phase in June 2007, it implemented 157 online courses and 9 face-to-face programmes, training 5898 participants.
- A project document for Centres in Europe and Union in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was signed in 2003, but the two regions were divided, with separate budgets and governance structures, at the end of 2004. By the end of the first phase in 2007, Centres in these regions had implemented 38 activities and trained a total of 1448 participants.

Already, by the end of Phase 1, substantial differences had emerged between the implementation of the programme in different regions, responding to different circumstances and to differing preferences in regional memberships. These are described later in this section.

## **1.2 Phase 2 – 2007-2012**

The second Phase of the Centres of Excellence programme began in 2006/2007, building on the legacy of the first Phase but introducing significant changes in structure and organisation. The emphasis in programme objectives shifted from institution-building to regional networks of Centres capable of delivering a significant volume of training. The number of Centres increased in all regions, one result of this being that the number of activities per Centre has fallen to low levels, with Centres sometimes undertaking just one or two activities each year. It was hoped that regional Centres would develop synergies and would work together to deliver coherent programmes of work determined through the regional steering committees in which they themselves participated. The Arab (ARB) and Asia and Pacific (ASP) regions developed different administrative structures from other regions, based around national Centres/nodes rather than individual training institutions.

Capacity-building work within Phase 2 has focused on a number of broad thematic areas which have varied to some degree between regions. The most important broad themes have been:

- Policy and regulation
- Business and management
- New technology and services
- Rural communications and universal access

Some regions have added additional areas such as network security (Africa) and spectrum management (Africa and Asia-Pacific).

In 2010, a total of around 130 activities were implemented by 60 Centres, providing training for some 3000 participants. Activities during the second Phase have been subsidized by between USD 4000 and USD 10 000 per event, so that the total cost of the programme to the ICT Development Fund has run at between USD 750 000 and USD 1 200 000 *per annum*. This does not include the cost of administration by ITU, which is absorbed in the general ITU budget allocations for HCB and for Regional Offices.

Regions have seen the following developments during the second Phase:

- The African region has expanded from two to six (now seven) Centres, with a more diverse range of institutions including the university sector and a Telco training centre. There was a severe dip in work within the programme in 2008/2009 but the number of activities and participants has since recovered. The number of activities at the initial institutions (AFRALTI and ESMT) has fallen markedly since the first Phase, and the programme now plays a minor part in

their overall activity range. In the case of AFRALTI', for example, its training academy and other work for Cisco now dwarfs the Centres programme in financial and institutional significance.

- A separate 'region' of Lusophone and Spanish-speaking countries in Africa (the LSP region) was established in 2007 and has six Centres. It is funded separately from the main Centres programme, through contributions from the Portuguese and Spanish governments. As things stand, these contributions will come to an end at the end of 2012.
- The Arab region has adopted a structure built around selected national administrations acting as Centres for individual thematic areas of work within the region, supported by a variety of training entities within their territories. This has allowed greater specialisation of Centres than in most other regions.
- The ASP region has also adopted a structure built around selected national administrations acting as Centres for specified thematic areas of work. Nodes, which are associated with and deliver training in these thematic areas, are subsidiary to these national Centres and can be added to the programme by the regional management (steering) committee. These nodes are encouraged to deliver some activities outside their home venues. The ASP region also has a number of 'partners', some of which provide financial support (e.g. the Australian government), others expertise (e.g. APNIC, some vendors), and some logistical support.
- The Americas region (AMS) has continued to base its programme around distance learning rather than face-to-face activities, and has approved a much larger number of Centres than other regions, including universities rather than specialist telecoms/ICT training institutes. By 2011, there were 23 approved Centres in the region, most of them universities, the majority delivering just one or two activities each year. The regional steering group decided in 2011 to drop 9 Centres from the programme as they were no longer active within the programme.
- A new Caribbean programme was initiated in 2007. It now has six centres and has been delivering between five and ten activities each year.
- The European programme has continued during the second Phase, delivering courses for a group of countries within Central and Eastern Europe. It now has six centres and is delivering less than ten activities each year.
- The CIS programme has also continued during the second Phase. It now has four Centres and is delivering between six and thirteen activities each year.

### **1.3 The current state of play**

The current (second Phase) Centres programme is coming to an end during 2011/2012. No commitment to continued funding from the ICT Development Fund and no funding provision has been made to date from within other ITU budgets. WTDC called in 2010 for the Centres programme to continue based upon forward-focused ITU priorities. The following paragraphs summarise the state of the Centres programme at the end of its second phase, and review the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as perceived by respondents to the consultation which has been undertaken for this report. Financial and related issues are addressed later, in Section 4.

At present, the Centres of Excellence programme includes 61 Centres. The current distribution of Centres by region and the level of activity undertaken in 2010 are set out in Table 4. (The comparison between 2010 and previous years can be seen in Table 2 above.) As with Tables 1-3, data in this table have been provided by HCB following requests to Regional Offices. These data are essential for the strategic planning, evaluation and monitoring of the programme and need in future to be systematically maintained in BDT, alongside data resulting from evaluation processes (see below).



**Table 4: Centres of Excellence activity by region, 2010**

Region	2010				
	Centres	Activities	Participants	Events/ Centre	Participants/ Event
AFR	6	24	553	4.0	23
AMS	23	2134	825	0.9	39
ARB	4	9	161	2.3	18
ASP	6	10	314	1.7	31
CAR	6	9	227	1.5	25
CIS	4	9	523	2.3	58
EUR	6	9	201	1.5	22
LSP	6	11	307	1.8	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>3111</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>31</b>

There have been no standard criteria for selection of Centres, the only attempt at using systematic selection criteria having been undertaken in Africa at the transition between the first and second phases of the programme. There is currently a list of some seven institutions which have applied or asked for Centre status.

The growth and diversity in the number of Centres has significant implications for the programme.

- The large number of Centres, together with the varying responsibilities of HCB and Regional Offices, makes it difficult for BDT/HCB to manage the programme effectively. From an operational point of view, there is no centralised information resource on Centres in ITU HQ, and no centralised evaluation of programme outcomes. This makes it difficult for HCB or BDT more generally to exercise strategic direction (see below).
- The large number of Centres also means that individual Centres now undertake only a small amount of activity for the programme. As a result, Centre status – which carries significant prestige – is being granted by ITU for very limited return, while the Centres themselves gain little financial value from participation in the programme and so have little incentive to devote much attention to it. The ITU continued role in identifying and funding training experts also means that Centres activity can be quite peripheral to the institutions which have been granted Centre status and to their personnel.

The tables above and other data show the following significant characteristics of the programme as it stands today:

- The majority of activities are concerned with technical and managerial issues within the telecoms/ICT sector. These range across quite a wide range of topics. However, the programmes which are selected to run do not seem to be based in any region on systematic needs assessment or market research or on clearly identified ITU priorities. Centres themselves have considerable influence over the selection of activities.
- The large majority of participants are at the middle management or middle technical level. Almost no activities are aimed at the top tiers of management which were original targets for the programme when it was first introduced. The level of training and quality of facilities in many Centres are not adequately suited to top management programmes.
- The majority of participants work for telecoms operating companies (often multinationals) and regulatory agencies, with a minority coming from other government agencies and other organisations. In some cases, participants have been attending from academic institutions. There is no evidence of strong efforts to target particular groups of personnel who might be considered in most need of Centres training (for example, those from LDCs or those in areas of

work that particularly require efforts to improve their skills). In addition, as discussed below, telecoms operating companies and most regulators are financially well-endowed today, arguably more so than ITU itself, which raises questions about the appropriateness of current funding subsidies.

- Most Centres are undertaking very small numbers of activities within the Centres programme, in most cases far too few to have a significant impact on their income or range of work. On average, Centres undertook less than two activities each in 2010. As noted above, the volume of Centre programme work for AFRALTI, one of the first two Centres, is now much lower than it was during the first phase and is insignificant compared with the work it undertakes as a Cisco Networking Academy. Centres cannot realistically be expected to devote a high level of attention to activities which have become peripheral to their main areas of work or income-generation.

Overall management of the programme is currently undertaken by ITU/BDT/HCB, although in recent years this has been in practice more of an administrative than a strategic function, focused on issuing invitations to activities, supporting the selection of training experts to participate in activities, and invoicing fees. Operational management of the programme has been undertaken through Regional Coordinators, *i.e.* Regional Office staff who play this role alongside other functions. Annual programmes of activity have been determined at regional level, through meetings of Regional Steering Committees (or equivalent), made up of representatives of Centres within the region, of regional Member States and of ITU (BDT/HCB and RO).

The Centres programme is currently the main activity of the HCB division in BDT, although this also undertakes work concerned with ITU Academy and Internet Training Centres as well as Hyderabad Action Plan capacity building activities. HCB indicates that the Centres currently represents a substantial part of its workload.

Agreed activities have generally been funded by ITU/BDT/HCB, through the ICT Development Fund, at cost levels which seem to average around USD 4000 for online courses and USD 10 000 for face-to-face courses. Where fees are charged, which is the norm in some regions, these seem to average around USD 100 for online courses and USD 250 to USD 500 for face-to-face courses. In Africa, this would appear to be about half the fee for comparable courses in commercial training institutions. Allocation of these fees varies (see below), but, where invoicing and fee recovery are undertaken by HCB, the cost in staff time and other resources probably exceeds the income generated.

The mandates and responsibilities of Regional Steering Committees are not standardised, but they have generally sought to identify issues and allocate courses for delivery among Centres within the region through an annual programme. There are a number of differences in the way in which different Regional Offices implement the programme. Among the most significant of these are the following:

- In most regions, the programme is structured around individual Centres which have been granted the status of Centres of Excellence over the years. Activities in a particular area of capacity-building may be undertaken in any one of these regional Centres. In two regions, however – ARB and ASP – the primary role as Centres or nodes has been allocated at a national level, with different national administrations taking responsibility for one of the four or five areas of capacity-building within the programme as a whole.
- In most regions, the majority of activities have been face-to-face training events or workshops held in a specified location, usually but not always the Centre of Excellence itself. In the Africa region (AFR), almost all activities are conducted in this way. However, one region – AMS – has conducted almost all of its activities online, while several regions have a mix of online and face-to-face activities. This variation has resulted from decisions taken at regional level rather than as the result of centralised strategic decision-making. The relative merits of the two approaches have not been evaluated within the programme.
- There are some significant differences in the types of institutions holding Centre status. In AMS, these are almost all universities. In other regions, the majority of Centres are non-university training institutes, including commercial training centres, centres which are managed as

international bodies, and the training centres of telecoms businesses or regulatory agencies. Some are highly specialised in a particular area of activity (e.g. the cybersecurity agency IMPACT).

- Different regions have adopted different arrangements for the charging and management of fees. In the AMS region, for example, fees have been distributed according to a formula (70% to the Centre, 30% to the ITU Regional Office). In other regions, some – usually most – activities charge fees, though this is not always the case. In some regions, clients evidently expect ITU-sponsored activities to be free of charge, even where they pay considerable sums for training courses elsewhere. As with other aspects of regional diversity, present arrangements concerning fees seem to have evolved without strategic planning or intent.

While there is a strong case for regional diversity within an overall capacity-building programme, in order to respond to differing regional circumstances, priorities and demand, the degree and uncoordinated character of the regional diversity that has evolved within the Centres programme makes it considerably more difficult for ITU to achieve strategic direction and coherence for the programme, undermining its overall effectiveness. Regional variations will remain necessary and valuable, but they should be thought-through at global as well as regional level, should be based on capacity-building need rather than administrative convenience or programme history, and should not undermine the overall coherence of the programme.

Most Centres that responded to the questionnaire for this report and/or took part in interviews were keen to remain as Centres. Their principal stated reasons for valuing Centre status were:

1. The value of the ITU brand. Many Centres indicated in interviews and questionnaire responses that association with ITU gave them added stature in their national/regional capacity-building markets. Centre of Excellence status implied to other stakeholders that they were recognised by ITU for the quality of their work. This is a valuable brand and marketing asset for them. The problem for ITU in this is that it is not backed up by any quality assurance process, and that the institutions concerned are undertaking work which ranges well beyond their ITU activities. The ITU therefore appears to outsiders to be endorsing activities of which it has no knowledge and for which it has no responsibility.
2. Access to experts resourced through ITU *i.e.* to specialist training personnel who deliver activities within the programme, who are identified by ITU through its roster of experts and paid by the programme to deliver activities in the Centres. In practice, access to these specialist personnel means that Centres themselves do not necessarily require expertise in the issues on which they are delivering Centres of Excellence activities: they may not have this or see any need to acquire it in the course of their work within the programme. This again raises questions about the extent to which the ITU brand is being used for marketing purposes. Reliance on non-regional experts identified by ITU also undermines efforts to build local capacity to deliver quality training within Centres and their regions.
3. Access to other ITU events and activities, such as study groups, which some Centres said provided them with additional expertise and access to additional resources.
4. The opportunity to network with other Centres within the region. This was one of the stated objectives of the second Phase of the programme, but it is quite difficult to assess how far it has actually come about. Regional steering committee meetings offer an opportunity for face-to-face networking between Centres but there is much less evidence of them sharing curricula and other resources or building joint activities, either within or outside the Centres programme. The current process for activity allocation also introduces an element of competition between Centres, which may inhibit networking and collaboration.

Centre status therefore has significant value for Centres themselves, particularly in terms of brand recognition and marketing. Three-quarters of those that responded to the study questionnaire described Centre status as 'very important' to them, in spite of the low level of activity that most were undertaking in the programme. However, this value does not necessarily reflect value to ITU and its Members, nor

does it necessarily reflect 'excellence'. As the number of activities undertaken per Centre diminishes (a product of growth in the number of Centres), there is less incentive for Centres to invest in ensuring that Centre activities are of a high standard, especially where there is no mechanism for evaluation or quality assurance which may lead to the loss of Centre status. In these circumstances, ITU has effectively lost control of the use of its brand/name by Centres, which poses a significant element of reputational risk.

Alongside this, it should be recognized that the programme as it stands is valued, in general terms, by ITU Members. This is clear from comments made by Members and from the endorsement of the programme by WTDC in 2010. It has delivered, over the past decade, around 950 activities which have been attended by close to 30 000 participants from organizations in Member States throughout developing countries and emerging markets. This is a considerable body of work, which has contributed to ITU Members, client organizations (those whose personnel have participated in Centre activities) and participants.

This report is not primarily concerned with assessing the value of work which has been done to date but with identifying the structure and approach for a successor programme which will meet current and future needs and will achieve financial sustainability. Having said that, it is felt that the current programme is delivering less for ITU and its Members than it could deliver if it were restructured and reoriented towards ITU priorities.

As is clear from the description above, the programme has changed substantially in character since it began a decade ago.

- It was originally intended to build institutional capacity and thereby establish 'excellence' in a small number of training centres, and then, as the first phase progressed, sought to provide a framework for the delivery of capacity-building across a wider range of regions and institutions.
- In the second phase, it has become more of a vehicle for implementing a volume of training determined by the overall level of subsidy available from the ICT Development Fund through a selected group of approved Centres in each region. The desire to achieve synergies through regional networking during the second phase has been partially achieved through regional steering committees, but the limited amount of funding available has also led to competition between Centres within regions.
- Although the original intention was to focus on high-level personnel, in practice most of the participants in Centres activities are middle managers from telecommunication operating companies and regulatory agencies.
- The number of activities currently undertaken by each Centre each year – rarely more than four – is too low for the programme to have much impact on the way in which individual Centres work, particularly where Centres are institutions such as universities with very wide-ranging areas of activity.

Discussions and analysis of experience suggest that the programme has evolved spontaneously along these lines rather than as a result of strategic planning by ITU.

There have been different interpretations of the vision, definition and governance of the Centres. Information-gathering regarding the Centres and their activities has not followed a standardized format.

The future programme should be built around:

- a much clearer set of objectives established by WTDC and BDT;
- a clear commitment to demonstrated excellence and quality assurance;
- a focus on a smaller range of priority issues for ITU and its Members;
- a clear administrative structure at both global and regional level;
- coordination with other BDT and ITU programmes; and
- a developing partnership between ITU and other stakeholders to support the delivery of Centres programmes.

These dimensions of the future programme are discussed in general terms in Section 2 and form the basis of the New Programme that is described in Section 3.

#### **1.4 The changing context for the ICT sector and capacity-building**

All of these challenges point to the need for a more strategic approach to be taken by ITU to the programme, aimed at maximising its value to ITU and Members. An important part of this is ensuring that the programme is in tune with current and future needs.

The paragraphs above show how the Centres of Excellence programme has changed over the ten years since its introduction. The context for the ICT sector and for training and capacity-building within it has also changed dramatically within that period.

These two sets of changes have not necessarily been consistent. Change in the ICT sector has been driven by rapid developments in technology and markets. The evolution of the Centres of Excellence programme has been driven more by institutional arrangements within ITU and between ITU and Centres. The New Programme which is to be established now needs to be much more responsive to changes in the sector and in the wider training and capacity-building context of which the Centres form a part.

##### ***The changing ICT sector***

The changes which have taken place in the telecoms/ICT sector since 2000 are well-known in ITU and do not need to be discussed here beyond listing those which have had most substantial impact on capacity-building needs. In particular:

- Sector restructuring – built around liberalisation, privatisation and independent sector regulation – has continued during the decade. Almost all national telecommunication markets are now substantially competitive.
- Very rapid growth in mobile networks and services has extended the reach of networks from limited areas to the large majority of territory in most developing countries and has expanded markets from business/government/wealthy groups to mass markets including the majority of adults.
- Data communications, including the internet, have transformed telecommunication services, changing the priorities of network operators, service providers and consumers.
- The potential of broadband to deliver greatly enhanced services and developmental value has become critical to telecoms/ICT policymaking and planning.
- There is increasing convergence between telecoms and other ICT markets in technology, business organisation, consumer behaviour and regulation.
- The range of actors in telecoms markets has changed substantially, with the growing importance of wireless/mobile operators, the globalisation of telecoms operating businesses, the advent of new internet-based businesses, and the growing/changing role of regulators.

##### ***Telecoms/ICT capacity-building***

These changes in the underlying structure of the telecommunication sector have had a profound impact on the capacity-building requirements of telecoms actors and on the range of sources which can meet those requirements. Five changes in particular affect the wider context for telecoms/ICT capacity-building within which the Centres work.

- The range of actors in the telecoms sector requiring training and capacity-building has widened markedly. As well as a communications ministry or ministries and regulatory agency or agencies, a typical national communications market now includes a range of competing businesses providing networks (international, backbone, local access, fixed and wireless), services (voice, data/internet, niche services, new services and applications which exploit telecoms networks such as mobile money, m-health and social networks), and points of access (ISPs, cybercafés,

etc.). The potential customer base for Centre services is both larger and more diverse as a result, and in particular extends beyond the traditional core users of Centre training (telcos, regulators and ministries of communications).

- The range of issues which concern potential users of Centre services has likewise broadened and changed as technology and markets have evolved. Several generations of new technologies, networks and services have been introduced since 2000, from ADSL to broadband, VoIP to IPv6, NGNs to WiMAX, leading to new priorities in technical capacity-building. These technologies have changed the nature of longstanding capacity-building themes – such as rural communications, universal access and spectrum management – and of policy and regulatory interventions. New issues at the interface between telecoms/ICTs and other aspects of public policy have become increasingly important – including cybersecurity, intellectual property and the regulation of mobile transactions. Priorities for ITU and for Centre clients are in a constant state of flux.
- The economics of the customer base for Centre participants has changed considerably. A majority of participants in Centre activities come from telecoms operating companies and regulatory agencies. In 2000, many of the operating companies that made use of Centre services were national state-owned fixed network enterprises with limited financial resources. Today, most operating companies are part of global multinational businesses with very high levels of investment and revenue. Regulatory agencies, too, have become more substantial organisations with much higher levels of revenue derived from licences, fees and other sources. Both groups can and do pay for capacity-building from other providers which is much more expensive than that offered by the Centres. The case for subsidising their participation in Centre activities is very limited.
- There is now a much more diverse range of training opportunities available to potential Centre clients. At the high end, there are many international courses offered by academic and commercial training providers which cover similar ground to those offered by the Centres. In many countries and all regions, universities and other training institutions offer technical and management courses in telecoms which often compete with those provided by the Centres. In almost all countries, there is now a range of local commercial training, often of a high standard and quite often accredited (at least by vendors), in both telecoms/ICT areas and in general management competencies. The model of the Cisco Networking Academy, which offers accredited standard training in internet-related technical competencies through franchised local institutions, has considerable attractions in developing country markets.
- There has been a significant change in the qualification requirements of both public and private sector employers, which implies a shift in the relationship between academic qualifications and continuing professional development. Many professional and management jobs are now advertised as requiring a masters-level degree. Postgraduate degrees are also becoming requirements for promotion within organisations. This change in employer requirements – which is not always well-justified – has changed attitudes among participants. It has reduced the perceived value of generic continuing professional development of the kind offered by the Centres, which does not lead to formal qualifications that are of career value, suggesting that the work of the Centres may be better focused on specialist courses and ‘hot topics’. It has also raised the desire, among participants, for some kind of formal certification or accreditation of courses that they attend, though this too can be hard to justify or achieve (see Section 3).

These changes in the ICT sector and in ICT capacity-building provide the underlying context for this review. The third phase of the Centres programme should not seek to replicate what has been done in the past, but should respond to the present and future capacity-building needs of the ICT sector and potential clients in developing countries. It should add to the available range of affordable capacity-building opportunities rather than duplicating or competing with those that are already well-provided. It should be clearly identified as a New Programme.

This New Programme, which should be implemented from 2013, should address the weaknesses described in this Section. In particular:

1. It should have clear objectives which are consistent with ITU priorities and apply across all regions (while allowing for regional diversity where this is appropriate).
2. It should have a clear management structure in which strategic leadership is exercised by ITU/BDT and operational management undertaken through Regional Offices.
3. There should be clear and tough criteria for Centre status. Excellence in future should mean excellence where, at present, it does not.
4. Centres should have strong incentives to perform to high standards within the programme, including delivery of a substantial amount of programme activity. High standards should be ensured by strong measures for quality assurance.
5. The programme should be financially self-sustaining, rather than drawing on core ITU funds.

Sections 2 and 3 of this report set out ways in which these objectives can be achieved. Section 4 addresses appropriate financial arrangements for a New Programme.



## **Section 2: Principles for the new programme**

### **2.1 The value of the programme to ITU and Member States**

The history of the Centres of Excellence programme, described above, is one of two starting points for considering how the programme should move forward in the future. The other starting point, which is ultimately more important, is to assess the value which a Centres programme should bring to ITU and Member States. This value should be substantial, justifying the significant use of ITU administrative and other resources and the use of the ITU name and reputation. The New Programme should be concerned to deliver value in the future rather than to sustain the programme that has been in place so far.

If the Centres programme is to have value to ITU and Member States, it must add significantly:

- to the existing range of capacity-building resources which are available to the telecoms/ICT sectors of Member States; and thereby
- to the management and performance of those sectors.

It should also add to the portfolio of capacity-building work which is undertaken by ITU as a whole and integrate with other ITU priority activities. It should not merely duplicate capacity-building work which is undertaken elsewhere in ITU or by other organisations and training providers. That would be a waste of resources and a missed opportunity.

There are three main ways in which significant added value could be achieved. The Centres programme will be worthwhile only if it meets one or more of these criteria. It could add value by:

- a) building the institutional capacity of training providers in countries/regions where these are in limited supply or of poor quality (the purpose of the original Centres programme to develop ESMT and AFRALTI);
- b) offering capacity-building of higher quality than is available in existing training institutions in a country/region, where existing standards are judged to be of insufficient quality for the good of the sector; and/or
- c) offering capacity-building on themes that are of high priority to ITU and of high significance to Member States, in which ITU is able to deliver capacity-building to a standard which at least matches and preferably exceeds that offered by alternative providers.

Insufficient funding is available to undertake substantial institution-building of the kind which was undertaken with ESMT and AFRALTI at the beginning of the first Phase. This is not therefore a feasible option for the programme in current circumstances. However, if the programme is implemented carefully, it can make a significant non-financial contribution to the institutional capacity of Centres and to the diversity of capacity-building available within particular regions and sub-regions.

Without systematic comparative analysis between courses within the programme and those available from other providers, it is not possible to make a definitive judgement on the relative quality of Centre and other activities. However, in most countries/regions, the evidence does not suggest that current Centre activities are superior to alternative training or capacity-building opportunities (though they may be cheaper).

The limitations of the Centres programme suggest that most value will be derived by ITU and Member States from a programme which is more tightly focused on capacity-building in particular areas of the telecom/ICT sector than has been the case to date, in particular on themes:

- that are of high priority to ITU (as identified by the Plenipotentiary Conference, WTDC or other sector conferences);
- that are of high significance to Member States, especially developing countries and perhaps especially LDCs (least developed countries) and SIDS (small island developing states);



- where capacity-building opportunities from alternative providers are in short supply or of poor quality; and
- where ITU is able to deliver capacity-building to a high standard using its own resources or specialist expertise from other sources available to it, including its roster of experts.

A more focused programme would also provide an opportunity for institution-building at a pedagogic level if it included ‘train-the-trainer’ activities and the transfer of curricular and other resources.

## 2.2 A new programme

The Centres of Excellence programme has already gone through two generations/Phases, with distinct mandates. In the first Phase, from around 2000 to 2006, it focused on institution-building and the development of a programme of activities in Africa and then in other regions. In the second Phase, which is now coming to an end, it has been more concerned to provide volume training, with relatively few activities supported at each of what is now a large number of designated Centres. The foundation of the Centres programme needs to change again, partly because continued funding along past lines is no longer available, but mostly because it is no longer providing a service of the quality and value required by ITU and its Members and because change is needed to position it appropriately for the future.

The New Programme should be more than just a third Phase of Centres activity. It should be a Programme which provides an opportunity for renewal and revitalisation of the Centres concept, for the emergence of new ideas and objectives and for new ways of working which are attuned to current and future capacity-building needs as well as new financial realities. Although it should build on the achievements of the past, it should not be bound by them. It should be a positive move ahead, focusing on future needs rather than the legacy of the past. It should seek to achieve genuine excellence in capacity-building, targeted on clear ITU objectives.

The principles put forward in this section of the report recommend a framework, structure and *modus operandi* for a New Centres Programme along these lines. Establishing this will allow ITU:

- to focus on themes and activities which are of high value to ITU and of particular relevance to developing countries over the next four years and beyond;
- to target particular groups of priority participants; and
- to introduce a new contractual relationship with Centres of Excellence that meet clear selection criteria and performance standards; and
- to move towards a more systematic framework of ITU-accredited high-quality capacity-building courses and workshops.

The approach proposed here would allow continued regional diversity, which has been valued by Members and which provides the flexibility required to address the diverse needs of businesses, government agencies and other users of the programme in different regions. However, it would ensure that regional variation took place within a coherent global structure for the programme as a whole, enabling diversity to enhance capacity-building outcomes rather than for administrative or political convenience.

It is envisaged that, at least in time, the New Programme that is proposed in this report should not have a substantial financial cost to ITU, other than costs related to the management and quality assurance responsibilities, and management time which will continue to be required in Geneva and in Regional Offices. Transitional financial arrangements will probably be necessary. These are discussed in Section 4.

In the New Programme and the contractual agreements signed between ITU and Centres selected for that Programme:

- the concept of ‘excellence’ should be central and clearly demonstrated by all Centres – it should not merely be a claim or aspiration;

- there should be clearly stated roles and responsibilities for ITU and for Centres, including delivery and quality targets for the latter;
- activities which are undertaken by the Centres should be managed through well-publicised annual programmes which focus on ITU priorities and those of regional stakeholders, and on areas where ITU can add specific value which is not readily available from other sources;
- activities should be self-financing, achieving cost-recovery through either fees or sponsorship; and
- activities should clearly enhance the brand and reputation of ITU as well as of the Centres.

These objectives and the structure of the programme should be set out in a clear, agreed statement of intent against which performance can be evaluated at the end of each programme cycle.

The following paragraphs address six questions or principles which are central to the character of a New Programme, and whose implications are central to the recommendations made in Section 3. These six questions are as follows:

1. What do ITU and the programme mean by 'excellence'? Is this the right term for the programme?
2. What themes or issues should be priority targets for the programme?
3. What categories of personnel should be its priority participants?
4. What types of activities should be undertaken? Should fees be charged for them?
5. How should the term 'Centre' be understood within the new programme?
6. What arrangements are required to ensure 'excellence' is achieved, maintained and delivered?

### **1. The name of the programme**

During the course of the study, two names for the new programme came up, each with powerful and valid arguments to support its consideration. One argument was to retain the name Centre of Excellence, while another argument was to change the programme to Centre of Expertise. Proponents of retaining the name 'Centres of Excellence' have argued that the name has been used for this programme since it was launched at the end of the last century. It has therefore acquired a strong legacy of perception: people think they know what 'Centres of Excellence' are and what they can expect from them – which is not necessarily what ITU intended or what it wishes to project in future.

On the other hand, proponents of changing the name to Centre of Expertise have argued that a change of name along these lines would imply continuity but also make clear that the New Programme is distinct from its predecessors; would distance it from the perceived devaluation of the term 'excellence' with which some feel the existing programme is associated; and would align Centres more specifically with particular themes of activity – a central aspect of the New Programme that is recommended in Section 3.

There is no definition of 'excellence' in the current Centres of Excellence programme. In practice the term has been used ambiguously.

- In its early days, the programme aspired to establish 'excellence' as part of institution-building at AFRALTI and ESMT, rather than reflecting actual 'excellence' at those institutions.
- More recently, it has been used by ITU to assert high standards for particular courses which have been undertaken within the programme, though there has been little practical validation that courses are genuinely 'excellent'.
- Some Centres have also used their 'Centre of Excellence' status for marketing purposes, as if it represented a broader endorsement by ITU of the 'excellence' of their training and capacity-building work in general.

Centres have not been required to demonstrate 'excellence', either in selection criteria used to draw them into the programme, or in targets or standards for performance, or through monitoring and evaluation. Applicants for Centre status have not been subjected to proper scrutiny by ITU, and very few, if any, applicants have ever been rejected. Nor has performance been properly scrutinised. Those few institutions that have lost Centre status have done so because they have not delivered any projects within the programme rather than because they have underperformed. It is difficult to see, therefore, on what basis 'excellence' is currently being claimed, either for courses or for the Centres themselves.

This poses significant risks to ITU brand. If users find that courses/Centres which ITU has labelled 'excellent' are delivering poor or average performance, this will diminish trust in ITU, and also make the status less valuable to other Centres. Centres are also able, at present, to use their status as a marketing device in contexts which have nothing to do with ITU. As the leading international agency in the telecommunication sector, ITU should be careful to retain full ownership of its brand and ensure strong positive perceptions of its role and judgement among stakeholders. Quality assurance is essential if ITU brand is to be protected and promoted, and should be central to the way in which the New Programme is envisaged and implemented.

There are two options available for naming the New Programme:

- The first is to retain the term 'Centres of Excellence'. If this is retained, then 'excellence' must in future mean 'excellence'. High standards must be established and maintained (see below).
- The alternative would be to rebrand the New Programme as 'Centres of Expertise'. This would clearly mark a distinction between the New Programme and its predecessors, would make it easier to introduce a new selection process for Centres, and would fit more closely with the focusing of Centres activity on priority themes (e.g. 'Centre of Expertise in Spectrum Management') which is recommended in Section 3. If the name is changed in this way, 'excellence' should be retained as the critical criterion for quality assurance.

A suggested definition for a Centre of Expertise is set out in Box 1 below:

**Box 1: Defining Centres of Expertise**

*A Centre of Expertise is a premier institution which works with ITU to deliver excellence in training and capacity-building in an assigned and specific field of ICT, policy or regulation. A Centre of Expertise must be able to achieve demonstrable real-world results consistent with the unique requirements, standards and capabilities of ITU, through capacity-building activities that enhance the performance of participants and their employing organisations and contribute to social and economic development.*

Choosing the name 'Centres of Expertise' would make the meaning of 'excellence' less critical from a branding point of view, but should not otherwise affect the points above. Whether they are described as Centres of Excellence or as Centres of Expertise, ITU chosen Centres should offer high, reliable and consistent standards of performance which attract users because of their excellent quality and the value of the expertise to be derived from them. Quality assurance which guarantees 'excellence' – rather than financial subsidy – should become the primary reason for organisations whose personnel attend activities, and for individual participants, to select Centre of Excellence activities rather than alternatives.

Centres should therefore deliver courses and workshops which are among the best available, rather than activities of average quality which claim 'excellence' for purposes of marketing. 'Excellence' should imply that an activity is in some way special. It should be defined as including high standards for:

- the quality of capacity-building and training activities (workshops, face-to-face and online courses, and other activities);
- the subject expertise and pedagogic abilities of lecturers and other personnel involved in the delivery of activities; and
- the quality of facilities, equipment and accommodation.

A suggested definition can be found in Box 2 below.

**Box 2: Defining excellence**

*Excellence means that Centres should guarantee to deliver high standards in three key aspects of capacity-building:*

- *in the quality of content, which should be delivered by genuine experts, appropriate for the needs of participants; should be up-to-date, reliable and insightful; and should be supported by high-quality written and audio-visual materials;*
- *in the quality of teaching/training, which should be undertaken by skilled practitioners, who are responsive to participant needs, use appropriate pedagogic methodologies, engage the interest and involvement of participants, and provide high-quality supporting materials;*
- *in the quality of facilities, including training venues and domestic facilities (food and accommodation), pedagogic resources and required technical equipment (including telecoms equipment where relevant), which should be up-to-date, well-maintained and appropriate for the activities concerned.*

*Excellent capacity-building should meet the professional needs of participants and thereby contribute to improved performance of their employing organisations and to national social and economic development.*

*ITU should be confident that Centres provide activities which are within the top 25 per cent of comparable activities within their regions in order to merit the designation of excellence. Excellence should be ensured through compliance with quality assurance processes.*

This has the following implications for the selection of Centres and implementation of Centres activities.

- Centres must be selected on the basis that they can consistently deliver ‘excellence’.
- The term ‘Centre of Excellence’ or ‘Centre of Expertise’ should apply only to those activities which are undertaken within the programme, and not applied generally to other work of an institution that has been granted Centre status.
- Performance must be monitored and regularly evaluated to ensure that this standard of ‘excellence’ is achieved and maintained.
- There must be a procedure for removing Centres that fail to meet these expectations from the programme.

However, having considered the arguments for and against changing of the programme name from Centre of Excellence to Centre of Expertise, it is our recommendation to retain the name Centre of Excellence for the following reasons:

- The Centre of Excellence has become a brand name in its own right and is recognized as such globally.
- Most Centres of Excellence programmes have been well received for their quality and relevance.
- The Regions and ITU membership have expressed their appreciation for the work of the Centre of Excellence, and have requested for its continuation (WTDC-10 Res. 73).

In view of the above recommendation, any Centre of Excellence will be qualified by the theme for which it is selected as already stated earlier, e.g. Centre of Excellence in Spectrum Management.

## **2. Programme themes**

Should the Centres programme focus on a set number of specific themes, or should it range widely over the broad terrain of telecoms and ICT capacity-building? If so, on what themes should it focus?

At present, in most regions, activities within the programme fall into four or five broad categories:

- Policy and regulation
- Business and management
- Technology
- Applications
- Rural telecommunications and universal access

In effect, these cover the whole range of activities that might be undertaken within a telecoms/ICT capacity-building programme.

As noted above, the delivery structure for these themes is significantly different in different regions. In two regions – ARB and ASP – national administrations have been selected to coordinate specific themes, with one or more participating national institutions. In other regions, a variety of Centres which have been selected at regional level may offer activities across the range of themes. A few Centres such as IMPACT have highly specialised expertise and confine themselves to their specialisms.

The critical choice to be made here concerns whether the programme should support activities across the whole range of potential telecoms/ICT capacity-building, or whether it should focus available resources and support on specific areas which are priorities for ITU or BDT as a whole (such as cybersecurity) or which have particular resonance in specific regions (such as emergency telecommunications in the hurricane-vulnerable Caribbean). The following factors have been considered here:

- In many countries, there is now a wide range of different capacity-building opportunities available to local companies, agencies and individual participants. This is particularly so in generic business training (such as marketing and human resources), but in many countries is also the case where industry-specific technology, policy and regulatory training is concerned. It would be more productive for ITU to focus its resources on areas of capacity-building which are not well-covered by commercial and academic training providers in the regions concerned. In addition, ITU should avoid undercutting the viability of national ICT capacity-building sectors, whose development is in the interest of all stakeholders and should be encouraged by ITU.
- The programme has limited resources. Even if activities are restructured on a financially self-sustaining basis, which offers scope for more activities to be undertaken, the number of activities which can be handled through the programme will be relatively small. A scattergun approach, in which a wide variety of topics is included on the grounds that this is easy to arrange at existing Centres or fits with those Centres' preferences risks dissipating the value of the programme and duplicating capacity-building which is already being offered by commercial and academic providers. It is certainly not the best way to use available resources. The programme will add more value if it focuses on clear and specific priorities which are of agreed importance to ITU and its Members.
- Both of these points are particularly relevant to the general management training activities which have been undertaken within the programme. The ITU expertise lies in the telecommunication environment, not in general management training.

Therefore the New Programme should focus on a defined range of specific priority themes which are identified by ITU/BDT/WTDC and implemented through a four-year programme cycle. It is suggested that these themes should be selected according to four criteria:

- They should be areas of work which ITU regards as of high priority for telecoms/ICT globally or for telecoms/ICT sectors in developing countries. By their nature, these will have been identified as priorities by the Plenipotentiary Conference and WTDC. Examples of such issues might be cybersecurity, spectrum management, the deployment of broadband networks, and the implementation of IPv6.
- They should be areas in which ITU can make available high levels of expertise (either in-house or through external consultants on its roster of experts) and in which it has comparative advantage

because of its global responsibilities. Examples might be taken from the work of ITU specialised Standardisation and Radiocommunication Sectors. Work on these themes could be funded from programmes within these Sectors where Centres offer suitable facilities for delivery, a point discussed further in Section 4. These Sectors also have their own capacity-building programmes with which greater synergies should be encouraged.

- They should be areas which are important to developing countries, and (with some variation) to developing countries within particular regions. There should be some scope for regional variations in priorities to accommodate differences between regions, arising for example from different levels of development or from special circumstances such as those of small island states.
- They should be areas in which there is insufficient or inadequate training available from commercial or other providers within the region concerned, and where ITU is well-placed to fill this gap. This will maximise the value added by the Centres of Excellence, while reducing the risk that the programme will undermine the viability of local commercial training enterprises. It also provides an opportunity for the programme to build up expertise within regions and so reduce dependence on external experts and curricula.

Priority themes change over time, rapidly in the case of ICTs, and it is essential that the programme should change its focus in response. Therefore a maximum of four to eight priority themes should be selected on a four-year programme cycle, consistent with the WTDC schedule, and that these should change from one cycle to the next as priorities and needs change with the passage of time and the development of technology and markets. It would be possible to have some regional variation in the themes selected, to accommodate regional priorities. Programme cycles should begin at the beginning of the calendar year following a meeting of WTDC, to allow time for the selection of Centres and other new programme requirements to be put in place. Details as to how this might be arranged can be found in Section 3.

There are two further advantages to focusing quadrennial cycles on high-priority themes:

- It will enable the association of Centres of Excellence activity with particular areas of work undertaken by an institution rather than implying that the institution as a whole has ITU endorsement.
- It will make it easier to build synergies between the programme, other aspects of BDT capacity-building such as the ITU Academy, the capacity-building and policy-oriented work of other ITU Bureaux, and the activities of Study Groups. This would better integrate the Centres into the ITU overall work and help to build a more coherent understanding of the ITU role amongst stakeholders.

The themes that are agreed for a four-year cycle should emerge from dialogue between ITU and stakeholders, including needs assessments undertaken by HCB and Regional Offices at global and regional levels (see also Section 3). The Group on Capacity-Building Initiatives which is being established following Resolution 40 of WTDC 2010 should also play a role, alongside this needs assessment, in developing recommendations to WTDC, which is where priority themes for the forthcoming programme cycle should be decided.

A number of themes have emerged in discussions with stakeholders, which suggest the scope and scale of themes which would be appropriate. These need to be sufficiently focused to represent clear priorities, but also sufficiently broad to sustain a coherent programme of activity over a four-year period. Examples of the appropriate scale, which might be appropriate for consideration now include:

- Regulation policy and practice
- Spectrum management
- Broadband policy, development and deployment
- New wireless technologies



- Cybersecurity
- Human resource development in the ICT sector.

Themes of this scope and scale would allow Centres to offer both general courses, covering the theme as a whole and suitable for quite large ranges of potential participants, and more specific one-off courses and activities which are designed to meet the needs of particular client groups or of particular challenges. General courses could be designed for use across all regions and in a number of Centres, using ITU-identified experts and ITU Academy resources as well as local personnel, while more specific courses could be designed on a one-off *ad hoc* basis to address issues of particular local importance. This is discussed further in subsection D and Section 3 below.

The ITU is at present between meetings of WTDC, and the new Programme will need to be developed during 2012, when current funding arrangements come to an end. BDT/HCB should instigate a process to identify appropriate priority themes during the first quarter of 2012, so that the New Programme can be initiated during 2013 and 2014. This will give time to gain experience and learn lessons that might be needed before the 2014 WTDC.

### 3. Programme participants

It was originally hoped that the Centres programme would target the capacity-building of top-tier personnel in ministries, regulatory agencies and telecommunication businesses. In practice, however, it has proved difficult to attract senior personnel to the programme, and most activities have been oriented towards training at a lower managerial or technical level within organisational structures. A few senior level activities have been undertaken but these have not generally been held at Centre premises.

There are a number of reasons why it has proved difficult to attract senior personnel to activities within the programme. In particular:

- Senior personnel have particular capacity-building needs and preferences. Their time available is usually short, and they therefore prefer two or three day activities to the longer activities which are typical of those delivered through the Centres.
- They are reluctant to attend events labelled as 'training', implemented as part of training programmes, or held at training institutions, particularly if these are institutions to which they would send more junior personnel. Their preference is usually for events with those that they consider to be their peers.
- They have other opportunities to share experience with their peers, including other ITU events (for example TELECOM events, the Global Symposium for Regulators and the Global Industry Leaders' Forum that precedes it), events organised by other global or regional agencies (such as the GSMA Mobile World Congress and regional regulatory association fora), and high-level capacity-building activities which are held out of their own regions.
- Most of the Centres of Excellence lack the facilities and prestige which are likely to attract senior people. They find it easier to develop activities for more junior staff which build on existing programmes of work than to design one-off events for senior managers. Discussions for this report suggest that the 'Centres of Excellence' brand cannot be used successfully to cover *both* high-level events that would attract very senior personnel in government and business *and* training for lower-tier management and technical personnel. It would also be very difficult to elevate the programme from its present level of participants to a more senior level, because of the way in which it is currently viewed by stakeholders. It is therefore suggested that the New Programme should focus on management tiers below the top level of management.

There is, however, a strong case for ITU to mount more systematic activities aimed at senior managers in government, regulatory agencies and telecoms/ICT businesses, not least in the same priority themes that are selected for the Centres programme. One option would be to develop a distinct high-level capacity-building programme of events, which might be called ITU Leadership Fora. As indicated above, events of this kind would need to be:

- targeted specifically at the top tiers of management – in government, regulatory agencies, operating companies and other telecoms/ICT organisations – with participation restricted by levels of seniority;
- resourced by international experts of high standing;
- held over relatively short periods (two to three days), and often in conjunction with other ITU events attended by top tiers of management;
- held in high-quality facilities and accommodation.

The ITU will give serious consideration to instituting an ITU leadership programme along these lines, aimed at senior personnel from developing countries. This might be done in association with an external funding agency or agencies such as the European Commission, the World Bank or regional development banks.

#### **4. Programme activities**

The activities undertaken within the Centres programme vary significantly from region to region, but also share significant commonalities. The following paragraphs are concerned in turn with:

- global and regional programming of activities;
- activity subjects/content and modes of delivery;
- accreditation of programme activities; and
- fees and subsidies.

#### **Global versus regional programming**

At present:

- the broad parameters of the Centres programme are managed by BDT/HCB in Geneva;
- regional programmes are developed annually at regional steering group meetings involving representatives of ITU Geneva, Regional Offices, regional member-states and Centres/nodes;
- the implementation of regional programmes is overseen by Regional Offices and BDT/HCB.

This has allowed the programme to evolve in markedly different ways in different regions. In the Americas region, for example, it consists almost entirely of online activities which are delivered by universities, while in the African region it is almost entirely delivered through face-to-face programmes which are implemented by specialist ICT sector training institutes. In most regions, the training institutions that act as Centres/nodes report directly to the Regional Office, but in the Arab and Asia-Pacific regions there is also a national tier within the Centres structure in which individual country administrations have been allocated responsibility for particular themes within the programme by regional steering groups.

There are significant advantages in both global consistency and regional diversity, and it is envisaged that the New Programme will build on both. However, in any programme of this kind, it is important that the brand has a strong and clear identity to its stakeholders. This implies a need for greater consistency and coordination, particularly in determining the strategic direction of the programme and in means of implementation.

One of the biggest challenges with the programme as it stands is the need to streamline its activities in a more focused and coordinated manner, so that Centres undertake only activities they have superior competencies in. This will add value to ITU or its Members. and constitute 'excellence'.

The new programme will develop as follows:

- The programme will run on a four-year cycle, based around the timing of the WTDC.



- Each four-year cycle should focus on no more than four to eight core themes which are of high priority to ITU and Member States.
- Each region should be able to adopt up to four regional themes in place of four of these global themes that have been chosen, provided that these address regional priorities which are at least as significant in their regions as the global priorities that they replace.
- Centres should be selected for a single four-year programme cycle according to their ability to deliver activities within one or more of the themes adopted in their regions. There should be no more than six Centres per region).
- Annual programmes of activity should be agreed by regional steering groups, according to assessments of regional needs and priorities. Centres should not have the primary role in determining the content of these programmes.
- Activities should be well-publicised and promoted well in advance of delivery, in the same way as academic and commercial courses from other providers.

### **Activity subjects and mode of delivery**

The present programme is, as discussed above, mostly focused on courses and workshops for technical and professional middle-management personnel. These can be categorised in two main ways, according to content and mode of delivery.

From a content perspective, courses and workshops can be divided into three main groups:

- a) those which deal with particular industry-specific issues (*e.g.* spectrum management, rural communications, regulation, cost modelling);
- b) those which are concerned in general terms with broad management subjects such as finance and human resource management;
- c) those which are concerned with the application of general management subjects such as finance and human resource management to the telecoms/ICT sector.

The overarching determinant of whether particular activities are undertaken within the New Programme will be their relevance to the themes selected by WTDC. Within this overarching thematic framework, the appropriateness of different activities for inclusion in the New Programme should be determined by the value which can be added by an ITU programme and by the availability or otherwise of comparable training opportunities from alternative providers.

- Group a) above includes some industry-specific topics which are of high priority for ITU, in which ITU has particular expertise, or where there is little alternative commercial training available. However, at present, the programme is also delivering courses and workshops on topics on which alternative commercial and academic training is widely available.
- General management subjects in group b) above are usually well-covered by commercial and academic training institutions. The case for ITU allocating resources to the design and delivery of general management courses of this kind has to be made, and it is unlikely that they will be better than local alternatives.

The New Programme should focus activities in categories a) and c), but not b). It is therefore proposed that:

- The New Programme should prioritise courses and workshops on issues which are of high priority for ITU (as determined by WTDC), in which ITU has particular expertise, or where there is little alternative commercial training available (see subsection a) above).
- It should not support activities which compete with other existing commercial or academic capacity-building providers where these are already of adequate standard. On the contrary, ITU

should welcome and encourage the development of high-quality independent telecoms/ICT capacity-building by academic and commercial providers.

Like other training providers, the Centres programme has made use of three main modes of delivery:

- i. One-off face-to-face courses or workshops which are designed to meet the specific needs of a specific group of potential participants. These should respond either to demand expressed by the regional ICT sector or to needs as perceived by ITU in Geneva or in Regional Offices.
- ii. Standard face-to-face courses which address a common and widespread demand for capacity-building in a particular thematic area (such as spectrum management), which can be designed either by ITU or by individual Centres, which can be delivered to a common standard across regions or across the whole ITU membership, and which can be repeated in different locations and over time without a great deal of new curriculum material being required.
- iii. Standard online courses, which address the same issues as ii. above, but which are delivered over a longer period of time through distance learning. Almost all activities in the AMS region are of this kind, and online courses make up a significant proportion of activities in most other regions.

The programmes of work which have been agreed by regional steering committees in most regions have been quite heavily concentrated on face-to-face courses of a type which has become conventional in telecoms/ICT capacity-building. There is scope for more innovation in delivering these, for example through the introduction of intensive immersion courses. Online courses also seem to have been quite traditional in style, and do not seem to be making use of the more sophisticated distance learning approaches that are increasingly used in universities.

The risk with this type of programme is that it relies too heavily on what the institution that has Centre status already does rather than offering something special that is strongly and positively branded for ITU. This may be a particular problem with online courses where Centres programme work forms only a small part of the work of large universities.

These three modes of delivery are all appropriate for the New Programme. However, there is need to improve curricula and modes of delivery if courses are to achieve 'excellence' in today's capacity-building context. In particular, there is a need for:

- more consistency in the delivery of activities on particular themes (which is essential for any proper process of certification or accreditation);
- new types of course which address a different range of needs;
- more dynamic and creative use of online tools to enhance the experience of participants, including online seminars, discussion fora etc.

These are discussed further in Section 3.

### **Certification and accreditation**

There has been some discussion recently in BDT about the awarding of certificates for participation in ITU-sponsored courses. At present, certificates are issued at the conclusion of many Centres programmes, either by ITU or by the Centres, but these are usually a record of attendance, not based on any test of knowledge gained. Certificates of this kind are valued by participants but have little value for ITU or for employers.

Regional offices hold the view that issuing certificates of attendance should not be discontinued, as it is a good visibility for ITU. They further argue that the membership in the regions have come to expect the certificates, based on the many years this practice has been in place. They recommend, however, that issuing certificates of attendance be delegated to Regional Directors. It is however felt that the practice of issuing certificates for participation be discontinued within BDT. Only certificates issued of achievement shall be issued and signed for by the Director BDT. This will make it clear that there is a greater value attached to the certificates signed by the Director compared to those signed regionally.

The issue of accreditation is more substantial. At present, the Centres programme delivers activities which would generally be described as continuing professional development rather than academic or quasi-academic study. These activities are not generally accredited through academic institutions and do not provide participants with direct opportunities to progress to academic qualifications, though where universities are delivering activities as Centres there may be some element of accreditation involved in certain cases.

There is some support for a move towards academic accreditation within ITU, and this study has explored the feasibility of this proposal.

Academic accreditation can take different forms, but must be based around verifiable standards of student performance which an accrediting university or other institution is confident meet its requirements and will not diminish its qualifications. Four approaches to accreditation have been considered:

- One approach is for the delivery organisation (in this context the Centres plus ITU) to cede the qualification process to an academic accreditation agency such as an examination board and, in effect, adopt curricula which have been designed by that agency/board. This would constrain the content which ITU is able to deliver through the courses concerned, and may not suit regional or professional/practitioner requirements. The external agency would almost certainly require at least oversight and probably management of some kind of examination process.
- The second approach is one in which the accrediting agency cedes the assessment process to another body such as the delivery agency (ITU or Centres in this case), but with a high level of oversight which is intended to guarantee that standards do not fall below those in the accrediting agency. The ITU itself does not have the capacity to manage this, and so the assessment work would need to be undertaken by Centres. An accrediting university would consider the credibility of each Centre when deciding whether to expose itself to the reputational risk involved in ceding accreditation along these lines.
- A third approach which is emerging amongst business schools is for them to form an association which defines the academic standards that are required and provides accreditation to its members. In some ways, that is quite similar to the ITU selection of some institutions as Centres of Excellence, but is subject to the same issues of validation: would ITU be able to ensure 'excellence' for accreditation purposes when it has not necessarily been able to ensure it in the current programme?
- A fourth approach has recently emerged which is oriented more explicitly towards continuing professional development rather than traditional academic courses. This is built around a combination of self-assessment by delivery institutions – which in the case of the Centres programme could be a combination of ITU and Centres themselves – with peer review. The organisation which has developed this approach – Open ECB Check – has established partnerships with a number of UN agencies, including FAO, UNITAR and UNU, with the World Bank, and with ICT-related international development agencies including SPIDER and IICD.

Most of these approaches would be difficult to apply to the short courses which have made up the bulk of Centres programme activity to date and will continue to predominate in the New Programme. These courses are too variable, offer too narrow a range of learning opportunities, and are expensive for accreditation agents to validate. There is therefore little to attract conventional accreditation agencies to do so. However, the fourth model described above is explicitly intended to support such courses. BDT will explore the possibility of establishing an accreditation arrangement with Open ECB Check, with the aim of implementing this fully from 2015 if the Open ECB Check approach seems suitable for ITU needs.

Longer courses, where delivery can be standardised through common curricula and examination processes, would be more likely to be of interest to universities that offer accreditation, provided that Centres programme activities are able to meet their academic criteria. A move towards an academically accredited programme would therefore require a move towards longer and more standardised courses. Some suggestions concerning this are made in Section 3.

## **Fees and subsidies**

There is at present no consistency about the charging of fees across the Centres programme. Fees are more likely to be charged in some regions than in others. Within regions, they may be charged for some activities but not for others. Where they are charged, they appear to be significantly below market rates, which means that they may not be sufficient to cover costs, particularly if the costs of collection are taken into account. Invoicing and collection of fees may be undertaken by ITU centrally or by the Centres directly. Where it involves significant use of ITU staff time, it is clear that is not cost-effective.

The views of Centres and participants concerning fees and subsidies can be summarised as follows:

- Many participants at Centres of Excellence activities come from organisations – telecoms businesses and regulators – which are financially well-endowed, can readily afford to pay market prices for training, and do pay substantial fees and logistical costs (travel, accommodation and subsistence) for training in contexts other than the Centres programme.
- Nevertheless, many user organisations appear to expect ITU activities to be free to ITU members, or at least to be heavily subsidised by ITU (see below).
- Anomalies sometimes occur when the same programme is offered by different parts of ITU at different rates, depending on whether it is offered by the Centres programme (at a fee) or through another programme (without fee).

The ITU has scarce resources, certainly compared with previous phases of the programme. Funds may not be as readily available to subsidise the Centres programme either from the ICTDF or ITU operational budgets. The question of future financial arrangements for the programme is addressed further in Section 4, but it should be said now that the New Programme should seek, as soon as possible, to operate on a basis of financial self-sustainability through cost-recovery, which can be achieved by a mixture of fees and sponsorship of Centres activity. It is central to the concept of the New Programme set out in Section 3 that this should attract participants because of its excellence rather than because it is cheap or subsidised. Whatever transitional funding arrangements are required, financial self-sustainability is a critical factor in the medium and longer term.

Some ITU Members have argued that Centres activities should, as a matter of principle, be free to Members, *i.e.* subsidised by ITU budget which is derived from membership contributions. This argument cannot be sustained, for the following reasons.

- The overall ITU budget is limited. Centre activities can only be provided free if other activities are not undertaken. This would require a judgement by ITU/BDT (or by WTDC) that Centre activities were more important than alternative possible uses of the funds available, specifically other activities which are currently underway.
- Making Centre activities free to Members would limit the number of activities that could be undertaken to those which could be accommodated within the available budget. A programme built around fees and sponsorship is less constrained.
- Not all ITU activities and facilities are free to Members. It is normal for membership associations like ITU to offer some services in return for membership contributions and others for additional payment. Requiring all services provided by ITU to be free to Members would, in practice, limit what it is able to do.
- The fee element is only one part of the cost of participating in a Centres programme or any capacity-building activity. Participants travelling across national borders are likely to incur much higher costs in travel, accommodation and subsistence than they do in fees. Fee subsidies do not therefore act as an incentive except for participants from host cities/countries.
- The ability of clients (*i.e.* those organisations that employ participants) to pay for activities has changed greatly since the early days of the Centres programme. The use of scarce ITU resources to subsidise profitable telecommunication businesses and financially well-endowed regulatory agencies would be very questionable. In terms of meeting ITU objectives (such as making

expertise available to those who would not otherwise be able to afford it), it would be more effective to focus available resources by targeting them on potential participants who are genuinely unable to support participation – for example, those from government agencies in LDCs and small island states. While it may be difficult to apply a needs test in this context, as with other fellowship arrangements, it is better to do so than to use scarce resources on universal subsidies.

As noted above, ITU and its Members should see the Centres as sources of quality training rather than of cheap training. Those organisations that can afford it should not be subsidised in order to encourage their attendance; they should attend because the Centres programme offers good training at a fair price.

At the same time, there is scope for developing partnership and sponsorship arrangements with other organisations, including international development agencies, other ICT sector agencies and commercial businesses (for example along the model of the Cisco Networking Academies and of the BDT Internet Training Centres programme). Partnership/sponsorship arrangements provide scope for activities to be implemented on a fee-free basis, or for subsidies/fellowships to be made available to organisations/participants that genuinely cannot afford fee payments. Financial arrangements building on this approach are discussed in Section 4.

## **5. The meaning of ‘Centre’**

Like that of ‘excellence’, the definition of ‘Centre’ within the programme is required.

In its earliest days, the programme was concentrated at two ICT-oriented training institutions in Africa, for which it was very important in providing institution-building support (including facilities) and increased volumes of work. Many of today’s Centres are much more wide-ranging institutions, such as universities, where the majority work has little or nothing to do with ITU or with the Centres programme. The volume of work undertaken by each Centre within the programme is now very low – typically three or less activities each year – and so forms a small part of their activities. This is true even of the original two institutions in Africa, for which other partnerships are now much more important.

The result is that the status of ‘Centre of Excellence’ is currently being granted by ITU, on the basis of a very small amount of activity, to institutions which can then exploit it to promote themselves more widely. The value of ITU association for branding purposes was mentioned by many of the Centres which gave evidence as one of the most significant advantages to them of Centre status, and it is very important for ITU that this should not be abused. It is inappropriate for ITU to allow its name, logo and reputation to be used so loosely by organisations which are well outside the range of its authority.

It is obvious that the ITU designation of an institution like a university as a ‘Centre’ within this programme should not extend to the university work as a whole – for example, to its work in sociology, law or even electrical engineering. The ITU has no way of validating its quality in delivering courses and workshops outside the programme, and should not appear to do so. At the very least, the title of ‘Centre of Excellence’ should be confined to the department or institute within the larger institution/university which is working on the programme. It would further deal with this problem if ‘Centres’ were defined more precisely, so that Centre status was associated with one or other of the themes which has been selected by WTDC for a four-year programme cycle (see subsection B above).

A separate issue arises concerning the different model for managing the programme which has been adopted in the ARB and ASP regions, and to which the ASP region is particularly committed. In this model, some of the functions of Centres have been taken by selected national administrations, each of which has responsibility for a particular theme within the programme (e.g. for regulatory training), with that theme being delivered by one or more in-country training providers which are responsible to the national administration at least as much as to ITU.

There are advantages and disadvantages in this approach, but has a number of significant concerns about it. Advantages include the possibility of drawing together expertise from a range of stakeholders within a particular country. There may be, however, some disadvantages. These include the risk that training may be based around a single country model which may not be suitable for other countries in the region; the

risk of politicisation of the programme; the possibility that the adoption of particular host countries as Centres may make it difficult for participants from some countries to attend activities (for cultural, political or financial reasons); the difficulty of enforcing quality assurance in the absence of a competitive selection process; and the challenge which an alternative model of this kind poses to the overall strategic direction of the programme.

The strategy adopted in this report is for a competitive model for the selection of Centres. However, it is recognised that there is strong support for this alternative model in that region, and there is a case for testing that model within the New Programme. Where Administrations are interested in the activities the Centre/s of Excellence, they should do so by supporting and/or “underwriting” the centres that are competitively selected within their jurisdictions.

## **6. Quality assurance**

The final questions to be considered here concern evaluation and quality assurance. In order to ascertain that Centres programmes deliver excellence, there is need to establish criteria for assessing standards of excellence or performance as well as develop key performance indicators or benchmarks for either programme content or teaching standards in agreements between ITU and individual Centres. Where possible, attempts could be made to assess the impact of Centres programmes to the performance of the participants in their work places.

Many of those consulted during this study regarded the lack of quality assurance as most unsatisfactory. There is a strong sense among stakeholders that the programme should seek to deliver outcomes which are at least above average, and preferably substantially so, not just because the programme claims to deliver excellence, but also because excellence is something that ITU should seek to achieve throughout its work.

This deficiency in the programme must be addressed as a priority in any New Programme. Quality assurance measures need to be put in place:

- in the selection process for Centres;
- in the contractual arrangements for the delivery of programme activities;
- in the evaluation of activities and Centres; and
- in the overall evaluation of programme outcomes.

Modalities concerning this are included in Section 3, and suggested approaches to specific quality assurance challenges can be found in annexes to the report.

### ***The quality of expert trainers***

Quality assurance also needs to be applied to the selection of experts who are recruited and paid by ITU to implement Centres activity. This area of the programme also requires review. As the roster of experts used for this purpose is also used outside the Centres programme, the review may need to be more wide-ranging.

The specific concerns on this are as follows:

- Firstly, information that is derived from self-registration should be properly tested. If an expert is to be selected for an assignment, it is important that ITU is able to validate the information that s/he have provided about her/himself by checking qualifications, seeking references and interviewing the expert concerned by telephone. In a sector as fast-moving as telecommunications, it is also critical to ensure that experts have up-to-date knowledge of the issues with which they will be dealing: some experts on the database may be relying on experience that has become quite old, especially if they have retired from business, government or regulatory agencies.



- Secondly, selection criteria to be used in selecting experts for a specific assignment need to be clear (though in many cases this may be prior experience as an expert in similar assignments). The selection process should assess the suitability of experts according to four critical factors:
  - a) their familiarity with and expertise concerning the topic for the activity concerned, including the extent to which their knowledge is up-to-date;
  - b) their pedagogic abilities and skills – *i.e.* their ability to teach/lecture/lead a capacity-building workshop, which are as important as a) in determining the quality of the activity for participants;
  - c) their familiarity with the regional context concerned – in order to avoid the significant risk, especially with industrial country experts in developing regions, that training will be based around inappropriate industrial country models and experience;
  - d) the quality of their training materials.
- Thirdly, there needs to be a systematic evaluation of the performance of experts. This should be based not just on evaluation forms submitted by participants at the end of activities, but on comments sought from activity organisers and from comments/reports requested from the expert themselves on the activity concerned. These should be systematically evaluated, to ensure that underperforming experts are not rehired on the basis that they have already undertaken similar work for the programme.
- Fourthly, the fee structure for experts needs to be addressed. There are UN limitations with ceilings imposed on fees which can be paid to consultants/experts. This has not been revised for many years, and is now far below fee levels paid in the marketplace. In some cases, daily subsistence allowances now exceed fee payments, which is unsustainable. Experts with high levels of expertise will be increasingly unwilling to undertake activities unless they offer significant other benefits (such as access to potential customers). Retired experts, who may have less grasp of recent developments, are more likely to be interested in consultancy work which is paid at such rates. In either case, experts are unlikely to devote enough additional time to preparing materials for the specific activity audience, and this reduces the quality of the experience for participants. While there is appreciation of the UN fee constraints which are outside the control of ITU, it is important that programme managers address the implications spelt out in this paragraph.

One further point needs to be made about the provision of expertise. While it is clearly valuable for Centre activities to benefit from the participation of global experts, there is a significant risk – as noted elsewhere in this report – that their materials and expertise will be derived from very different telecommunication environments to those which the participants face in their working lives. In particular, there is a risk that experts from outside the regions in which activities are taking place will draw on models and experience from advanced industrial countries whose technology and network provision, markets and regulatory practice are markedly different. The Centres programme should require that course materials are prepared with direct relevance to the regions in which they are to be delivered, should make greater use of regional experts, and should encourage the development of regional case studies for use in courses and workshops.

## **Section 3: A new programme**

This third section of the report presents the recommendations adopted for the New Centres Programme, to be developed during 2014 and implemented from January 2015. It draws on the analysis and options in Sections 1 and 2 and would, meet the objectives of ITU and its Members, address the priority needs of Centres programme clients, and improve the institutional and training capacity of the selected Centres. Issues concerning financial arrangements are discussed in Section 4.

### **Objectives**

The New Programme should seek to meet the following five core objectives:

1. It shall add value to ITU, its Members and other stakeholders, deploying expertise and enabling activities which would not otherwise be available and which will improve the performance of governments, regulators and telecommunication businesses.
2. It should be built around issues and activities which are of high priority to ITU and which address priority issues in ITU regions.
3. It – and individual Centres – should demonstrate genuine excellence through high standards of content and delivery, and should be fully monitored and evaluated for quality assurance.
4. It should enhance the ITU brand and avoid reputational risk to ITU.
5. It should become financially self-sustaining within a relatively short period of time, requiring no long-term direct financial support from ITU and requiring strategic rather than administrative support from ITU personnel.

The New Programme shall be distinct from its predecessors, building on their experience but focusing on the needs of ITU and its Members today and in the future. In the short term, ITU should introduce much stricter criteria for Centres' participation in the programme and implement strong quality assurance processes. In the medium to longer term, ITU might consider the viability of moving towards substantive accreditation for Centre programmes, which would help to guarantee their long-term credibility and require/enable external quality assurance guarantees. However, for reasons discussed later in this section, it is not recommended that migration to an academic programme can or should be the sole route forward for the programme.

### **Overall structure**

The New Programme shall be managed on a four-year cycle, consistent with that of WTDC and BDT operational planning and implementation. Each new cycle shall begin at the start of the calendar year following a WTDC meeting.

A maximum of eight focus themes for each four-year cycle of the Centres programme shall be agreed at each meeting of WTDC. The Group on Capacity-Building Initiatives, which is being established following Resolution 40 of WTDC 2010, should contribute to this discussion. The themes which are selected by WTDC should provide the framework for the subsequent selection of Centres and for the implementation of programmes of activities over the four-year cycle. Each cycle may be different from those before and after.

The principal role of ITU in the New Programme shall be to develop the programme strategic direction and to ensure the quality of Centres and their activities. It shall not be involved in the financial management of Centres activities. Overall programme planning and coordination should be a responsibility of the HCB division of BDT in Geneva, but should be undertaken in consultation with Regional Offices. Operational management of the programme should be the responsibility of Regional Offices. Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment shall be a joint responsibility of HCB and Regional Offices. See also the section on 'The role of ITU' below.



## **Focus themes**

As indicated above, there should be a maximum of eight focus themes for the programme within each four-year cycle. These focus themes could be concerned with any aspect of the telecoms/ICT sector (policy/regulatory/technical/business/management/application), but shall be selected according to the following criteria:

- They should be issues of high priority to ITU Members and other stakeholders, as established through consultation.
- They should be of high priority to ITU/BDT, in terms of the ITU overall programme of work and decisions taken by the Plenipotentiary Conference and WTDC.
- They should make a distinctive additional contribution to the range of training and capacity-building which is currently available in the marketplace. They should make effective use of specialist expertise within ITU/BDT or expertise to which it has access.
- They should add significant value to selected Centres, participants and their employing organisations.
- They should contribute to the development of training, research and expertise within developing regions and to the capacity of national/regional training sectors.
- They should promote the ITU brand and reinforce the ITU reputation.
- They should contribute to the achievement of overall ITU/BDT goals and should synergise with other ITU capacity-building programmes (in BDT and other bureaux).

Regional diversity has been an important element of the Centres programme during its second phase. As discussed in Section 2, it is important to balance the coherence of the programme at a global level with responsiveness to regional priorities. For this reason, each Region should have the option of replacing up to four of the agreed global themes with regional themes. These should be identified through dialogue about priorities and needs between Regional Offices and regional stakeholders, including regional telecommunication associations (e.g. regional associations of regulators). This consultation should form part of the global needs assessment which is undertaken before recommendations are made to WTDC (in a normal programme cycle).

## **Regional coverage**

The regional coverage of the Centres programme has grown gradually over the years since the programme started, and has become more diverse, with a total now of eight regions. Of these, three (AFR, AMS and ASP) cover very large geographical areas with very large populations, three cover substantial but smaller geographic and demographic areas (ARB, CIS and EUR), while one covers a relatively small area with a small population but a large number of nation-states which share many common characteristics (CAR). One 'region' is based on linguistic rather than geographic identity and has been established separately because it is funded by the governments of Spain and Portugal rather than through the ICT Development Fund.

This regional structure builds on the ITU regional organization, with the following suggestions:

1. The number of Centres appropriate for any particular region is dependent on the number of countries, population size and diversity. Proposals for the number of Centres per region are made below.
2. The distinct identity of the LSP region has its own structure of linguistic communities. Its separate funding is also due to expire at the end of 2012. The LSP 'region' should be incorporated in the AFR region, with the particular linguistic needs of Lusophone and Spanish-speaking countries addressed within the structure for Centres in that region (also see below).

3. Although the CAR region is much smaller in population terms than other regions, its cultural, geographic and linguistic distinctiveness means that there is a strong case for its being treated separately from the AMS region, and this should continue. A strong case could also be made for addressing the needs of the Pacific island states separately from the rest of ASP. As both the Pacific region and CAR are characterised by large numbers of small island states, a case could also be made for bringing these two areas together in a SIDS region, with Centres in both the Caribbean and Pacific. While not consistent with ITU regional organisation, this might prove a more effective way of addressing the requirements of small island developing states in areas such as emergency communications. This is discussed further below.
4. The Europe region is also distinctive in that it is in practice only concerned with some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where the telecommunication sector is well advanced. Some of those who commented on the programme for this review held the view that the Europe region should not form part of the New Programme. This may be considered to be a political choice for ITU, but it would be difficult to justify ITU funds being allocated to the Europe region at the expense of other regions. This comment should be considered in the light of the financial recommendations made in Section 4.

### **3.1 Functioning of the Centres**

#### **Selection of Centres: Distribution**

It is important to achieve greater clarity in identifying exactly what is meant by the term 'Centre'. This is at present ambiguous, causing confusion and potentially risking the ITU reputation.

The term 'Centre' should normally apply to a single geographically located institution. Exceptionally, it could apply to a group of institutions working collectively through a single contract or MoU (along the lines of Centres in ARB and ASP within the current programme), or to an organisation which is not geographically located. For the programme to be worthwhile, each Centre must be able to undertake a significant amount of Centre programme work. The large number of Centres which have been approved under the second phase means that many Centres are undertaking too little Centres of Excellence work, with the result that they are likely to pay too little attention to the programme effectiveness. In practice, 'Centre of Excellence' status has become more valuable to them as a marketing label than as a source of programmed activity. This is most obviously a problem in AMS, which has by far the largest number of Centres at present, including a number which have not recently been active in delivering training. The present large number of Centres also poses a substantial administrative burden on ITU.

For both these reasons, the number of Centres should be substantially reduced to a level which is manageable and which offers more distinctiveness to those Centres which are selected. The different size of existing regions has been noted, and the number of Centres per region should reflect this. To increase the commitment of Centres to the programme, it would also be sensible to aim for each Centre to undertake a minimum of three activities annually.

This report proposes that:

- the total number of Centres worldwide in the New Programme should not exceed thirty;
- the number of Centres in each of the AFR, AMS and ASP regions should not exceed six;
- the number of Centres in each of the ARB, CIS and Europe regions should not exceed four;
- the number of Centres in the CAR region should not exceed two.

In interpreting these numbers, it is suggested that:

- In order to maintain coverage of the four to eight themes selected for each four-year cycle, it is likely that some Centres will be selected to undertake programme activity in more than one theme. Where no Centre is able to undertake work to the necessary standard in a particular theme within a region, participants from that region should be able to make use of Centres

activities offered in other regions (particularly online activities). ITU may wish to designate out-of-region Centres to play this role as part of the selection process for each cycle.

- Attention needs to be paid to linguistic requirements in the AFR region. In this region, the selection criteria should also pay attention to linguistic regions, with a minimum of two selected Centres primarily providing activities in each of English and French and one Centre providing activities primarily in Portuguese. There will be a need for collaboration in course delivery using multi-language common curricula in this region in order to maximise the value and quality of training provided through a manageable number of Centres. This may, for example, involve a Centre responsible for (say) spectrum management delivering activities in more than one language, using the venue, facilities and personnel of a Centre that primarily uses a different language to facilitate delivery.

### Selection of Centres: Process

There is currently no consistent selection process for Centres and no scrutiny of applicants for Centre status to establish whether they are able to deliver activities to a standard that can be considered 'excellent'. The present, largely *ad hoc*, arrangements for the selection of Centres are not effective in ensuring excellence. In their place there should be a clear selection process, based on a competitive application process and active verification of performance standards before appointment. Competition and verification together are essential to maintain quality. The standard of Centres should be consistent across the programme globally, and should not vary between regions.

It has been proposed above that the New Programme in each region should address four to six focus themes within each four-year WTDC cycle. In line with this, it is decided that:

- Centres shall be selected for, and only for, the period of the WTDC cycle (i.e. for four years beginning at the start of the calendar year following a WTDC meeting. A separate selection process will take place for each four-year programme cycle. There should be no presumption that an institution which has been a Centre in one programme cycle will continue to hold Centre status in the next cycle.
- Each Centre shall be selected as a Centre of Excellence for one or (at most) two specific focus theme(s) (e.g. Centre of Excellence for Spectrum Management).
- There shall be only one Centre per theme in each region during each cycle. Given the limited amount of work available through the programme, it is better to focus competition on the application process rather than on the implementation of Centres of Excellence activities (where it currently occurs through steering group meetings). There should, however, be collaboration including, where appropriate, sharing of venues – especially where there are multiple language needs (in Africa).
- Institutions which win Centre status shall be entitled to use their designation of *Centres of Excellence* only in respect of the focus theme(s) with which they are concerned and of the work which they undertake within the programme. The term should not be used to imply ITU endorsement of their work in other areas. (It should be noted that many current Centres said that they wanted Centre status to apply to them as institutions rather than to their ITU programmes. This would pose unacceptably high reputational risk to ITU and should be strongly resisted.)

The status of 'ITU Centre of Excellence' carries considerable reputational value. It should not be given or taken lightly. The application process for Centre status should be competitive. It should take place every four years, in the three months following the selection of focus themes by WTDC.

Applicants for Centre status will be invited to submit proposals presenting their case for selection and their proposed approach to delivery of Centre activities in one or two of the selected themes. They will be expected to show:

- an established record of excellence in training and capacity-building (content and delivery);

- expertise in the relevant focus theme(s); and
- a commitment to working with ITU to ensure continuing and improving standards of excellence in performance.

Selection will be meritocratic with the understanding that there should not normally be more than one Centre within any one Member-State, in order to encourage diversity of provision. It will use a balanced scorecard approach, based on the criteria set out above, plus where applicable criteria concerned with the quality of venue, accessibility to target groups (on basis of cost including cost of travel and accommodation, gender equity *etc.*) and financial sustainability. Suggestions for a balanced scorecard approach are set out in an annex to this report.

The outcome of the selection process should be a contractual relationship between ITU and each Centre which sets out roles and responsibilities for both parties. The programme will only succeed if there is agreement and clear understanding between ITU and individual Centres about their expectations. This is particularly important because of the changing financial arrangements for the programme, which mean that the relationship between ITU and Centres needs to be reconfigured as one of mutual advantage.

### **3.2 ITU support for Centres**

Centre status has been sought by a significant number of institutions to date. There has not generally been a systematic selection process (except in the case of the second phase expansion in the AFR region). Prospective Centres have not been required to demonstrate excellence, while some institutions with high reputations have not sought Centre status (perhaps because they have felt that they do not need the reputational boost implied). The ITU wishes to attract high-quality proposals from institutions with strong reputations. In order to do so, it will need to offer Centres added value in terms of workload, reputation and programme support.

As indicated earlier in this report, the Centres believe that they derive benefit from the programme in four main ways:

1. The association with ITU helps them to establish their credibility and market their courses. (In other words, they use the status to enhance their branding.)
2. It gives them access to expertise recruited through ITU, which allows them to run better courses.
3. It gives them access to ITU study groups and so to more information.
4. It enables them to network with other Centres.

These four factors were mentioned more by Centres in their responses to this review than were the ITU contributions to the financial viability of courses and access to ITU Academy resources, though these should also be considered current benefits to Centres. In particular, ITU financial support for the provision of trainers from ITU roster of experts has been important in enabling Centres which have limited resources of their own to deliver activities of the kind required.

While the ITU financial input is, in practice, relatively small, its loss may therefore nevertheless have a significant impact on the willingness of prospective Centres to bid for Centre status in the New Programme. In this context, the potential for ITU to secure sponsorship for New Programme activities and to make use of the Centres as venues for delivery of other ITU programmes which are supported by operational budgets, could well be significant. Early efforts should certainly be made by ITU to seek potential sponsors during 2012 onwards, alongside or even before the process for selecting Centres is undertaken. This is discussed further in Section 4.

The ITU, therefore, will need to offer significant value to Centres in order to attract applications from institutions with a high reputation and high potential to deliver activities of sufficient quality – institutions whose participation is important in ensuring excellence. Aside from funding, ITU can offer the following benefits within a contractual relationship of the kind envisaged:

- support for the development and marketing of courses through the Centres of Excellence programme (see below);
- provision of ITU Academy resources and in-house expertise (from all ITU Bureaux);
- support in the identification of experts/trainers to lead or participate in Centre activities;
- promotion/marketing of Centres of Excellence activities through its Regional Offices and within the ITU membership;
- development of a regional network of Centres and of global networks of partners addressing the same focus theme in different regions;
- limited use of the ITU brand and logo in support of Centres of Excellence activities only.

Existing Centres value the role which ITU plays in identifying (and then supporting the involvement of) experts who can be brought in to lead training activities for them. There is clearly an important role here which BDT/HCB should continue as and where it is required by Centres. However, there are reservations about this:

- The main aim of the Centres programme is to build capacity within regions. Rather than relying on external experts, the programme should seek to build the capabilities of local experts who have closer understanding of regional needs. The programme should be managed with the aim of achieving a reduction in the number of events requiring ITU to provide external expert assistance over the course of each programme cycle.
- ITU shall put in place selection, validation and evaluation processes are in place to ensure the subject expertise and pedagogic skills of those who are nominated by ITU to play this role. The fee rates for experts also appear to be inconsistent with those that experts can obtain from other training providers. These rates need to be reviewed regularly, and adjusted where necessary and possible to ensure that expertise of the right standard is available. Further comment on these issues can be found in the final subsection of Section 2 above.

These ITU responsibilities within proposed contracts or MoUs need to be taken seriously, and will require significant input from HCB and Regional Offices, as will the quality assurance process described below. They will play an important part in attracting higher-quality institutions to join the programme.

### **3.3 Contractual obligations of Centres**

It is essential that agreements between Centres and ITU have contractual force. The ITU also needs to have much more information about selected Centres. This shall be gathered systematically and consistently by HCB.

Each Centre shall sign a formal contract with ITU which sets out its commitments to the programme. These contracts should commit Centres to:

- a. deliver a minimum specified number of activities, within the relevant focus theme, annually and over the four years of the programme cycle;
- b. cooperate with the Regional Office and other Centres to programme activities in a way that suits the needs of participants and users, through an agreed annual regional programme;
- c. ensure that delivery reaches at least a minimum level of performance, set out in the contract, which is defined as 'excellent' and which can be measured through identified performance indicators;
- d. work with ITU to monitor and evaluate performance, and ensure excellence through a process of quality assurance;
- e. engage with other Centres in the regional and global networks as set out above.

Contracts should also set out the process for removing Centre status from an institution that fails to comply with its obligations, in particular those relating to the delivery and quality of courses.

Some regional coordinators have argued that it will be difficult to sign contractual agreements, or even memoranda of understanding, with potential providers which are government agencies because these will require signature at a senior level in government. This is not a good reason for avoiding a contractual relationship between ITU and Centres.

It is central that Centres shall be selected through a competitive process. If government agencies wish to bid to act as Centres, then they should do so on the understanding that they must make commitments to deliver activities to the standards required in the competitive tendering process which are the same as those that commercial providers would be required to make. If they are not prepared to do so, then the selection process would not be genuinely competitive and ITU would have too little assurance that quality standards will be maintained. In the case of government departments, it may be possible to make binding agreements through memoranda of understanding rather than formal contracts, but, if they are not able to make enforceable agreements of this kind then, regrettably, institutions which are government agencies shall not be considered in the selection process. Enforceable standards must be universally applicable if the competitive process is to be fair and to deliver the quality assurance that ITU requires.

### **3.4 Regional programme of work**

An overall four-year framework for the programme at regional level shall be agreed following the selection of Centres for the programme cycle. This will set the framework for the four annual programmes of work that will subsequently take place.

The overall framework shall be developed in conjunction with the programme range of stakeholders, including not just ITU Regional Officers, client communities and Centres but also regional telecommunication associations (for example, regional associations of regulators). Annual programmes shall be agreed at annual steering group meetings or in discussion between the Regional Office and Centres, following their selection, in the final quarter of the year preceding the implementation period of each programme year. The programme year shall run from January to December, in order to allow continuity when programme changes occur at the start/end of the WTDC cycle.

At present, annual programmes are agreed at physical 'steering group' meetings of ITU personnel and Centres, in some cases with other participants from ITU Member States. Two issues arise in this context.

- Firstly, annual programmes should reflect the needs of ITU and its Members, not the interests and preferences of the Centres. The ITU priorities and the needs of programme users (client organisations and participants) should be given priority in the development of programmes, with Centres responding to those needs rather than agreeing amongst themselves what should be included in the programme. The right mix of participation is important, with the Centres playing a subsidiary role.
- Secondly, regional steering group meetings are expensive in travel, accommodation and opportunity cost. Where ITU funds these meetings it is difficult to justify at present levels of programme activity if their purpose is merely programme management. However, programme coordination may be difficult to achieve virtually, and there is potential networking value in annual meetings of Centres.

These annual meetings should be seen primarily as networking events at which Centres and other stakeholders can exchange information and discuss capacity-building issues in order to add value to their work and improve performance. This networking value should be as important as reaching agreement on the programme, and the opportunity should be taken to schedule discussions about capacity-building issues in the meeting rather than building it primarily around programme management.

The ITU shall not finance the attendance of any participants in these meetings other than ITU personnel. This is an inappropriate way to use of the limited funds available to the programme.



At present, regional programmes are poorly publicised and marketed, with organisations being invited to send participants to individual activities rather than considering and responding to the opportunities provided by the programme in a more structured way alongside other capacity-building opportunities. Marketing of the New Programme should be much more proactive and less bureaucratic.

Because courses will in future normally be self-financing (see Section 4), it should be possible to undertake a higher level of activity per Centre than at present, where this meets the needs of participants and users. Wherever possible, the programme should be agreed and publicised in time to allow government agencies and companies to consider their options before closing annual budget cycles. This should include advance information about future years' programmes.

Once programmes are agreed, they should be publicised and marketed through an annual (regional) on-line programme brochure, together with proactive marketing online. Client organisations should be encouraged to plan their engagement with Centre activities systematically. The ITU should work with Centres to market activities to ITU Members and other stakeholders within regions.

### **Target participants**

For reasons discussed in Section 2, the Centres programme does not provide a viable platform for capacity-building of senior executives. Very senior managers are reluctant to undertake what is perceived as 'training' or to take part in 'training activities' at what they consider 'training centres' for more junior staff.

Nevertheless, it is clearly important for ITU to address the capacity-building needs of senior executives as well as those at lower levels. It is suggested that this should be done through a separate programme of activities specifically aimed at the needs of very senior personnel, offering the opportunity for them to discuss issues at a high level with one another and with global experts. These activities could be called ITU Leadership Fora. They could/should cover the same focus themes as the Centres of Excellence, enabling the two initiatives to be coordinated with one another.

Separating capacity-building for senior executives in this way will allow the Centres programme to focus on middle to senior management and technical capacity-building in the focus areas selected by WTDC and regions. This is where it is likely to be able to make a difference. Three further points are worth making in this context.

- The programme is intended to have regional as well as national value. The opportunity to share experience between countries is an important part of the value of face-to-face activities implemented by the Centres. However, a large proportion of participants in some activities at present come from host countries. Regional Offices and Centres should make it a priority to ensure that activities are accessible to participants from across their regions, if necessary by agreeing to deliver some activities away from Centres' home countries (as is already done in some cases).
- Numbers of participants are important in face-to-face activities. These are unlikely to be cost-effective in groups of less than 10 participants, while the quality of participation and experience-sharing is likely to fall if numbers exceed 25. Numbers for online courses can be significantly higher, provided that they do not reach a level which exceeds the capacity of the Centre to provide adequate training support. This should be monitored through the quality assurance process described below. In the case of online activities, the quality of the online learning system and tutorial support is of great importance.
- Some existing Centres have used the programme to provide additional learning opportunities for students within universities. This is not a priority group for ITU, and the Centres programme should not be used to supplement academic learning for university students. Activities should focus on telecoms/ICT sector practitioners' needs. Ensuring that participation is very largely derived from the telecoms/ICT sector should form part of quality assurance.

Where it becomes clear during the selection process for Centres that no applicant Centre meets the criteria for providing excellence in one or more of the themes selected for a particular region, a Centre from another region working with the Regional Office to provide expertise in that thematic area may be selected. This may be based around online delivery. It should also provide an opportunity for ITU to support institution-building in the region which has proved unable to meet programme needs from its own resources.

### **3.5 Programme activities (courses and workshops)**

Not all capacity-building work undertaken by the Centres takes the form of courses or workshops, but these provide the bulk of Centre activities and are likely to continue doing so.

To justify the title of 'Centre', selected institutions should undertake a minimum of three or four activities per year. This is more than most Centres currently undertake, but is realistic if the number of Centres worldwide is reduced as recommended above. If they do not undertake that level of activity, they are unlikely to have sufficient commitment to the programme.

It is proposed that four or five styles of activity (see below) should be available within the programme, with the distribution of these being determined at regional level. All regions should include a mix of activity types, rather than relying solely on online courses (as at present in the AMS region), which are not appropriate for all purposes, or on face-to-face courses. This would help to make the programme more widely accessible and to meet more diverse needs. The ability and willingness to deliver both face-to-face and online courses (or to develop capacity for both) should feature in the selection criteria for Centres.

It is suggested that that the main styles of activity undertaken within the programme be as follows:

#### **A. One-off courses and workshops**

These will address specific issues, within the programme chosen themes, which are of particular importance to the region, individual countries or particular groups of personnel. They are especially suitable for 'hot topics' for which there is a substantial and urgent need for capacity-building within a region: an important reason why the option of such workshops should be available in all regions, including AMS. By definition, one-off courses are likely to be delivered only once or once per region, to meet a time-specific requirement. They are therefore likely to be more expensive to design and deliver, and this will need to be reflected in the cost structure. They can, however, have substantial value in extending capacity and sharing experience across a region, and in meeting regional priorities.

Course/workshop materials will need to be developed for specific deliveries, but should also be made available through ITU Academy. Expertise is likely to come from within the region and from external/global experts.

#### **B. Standard face-to-face courses and workshops**

These will be more general courses, which seek to build capacity in focus themes and/or specific aspects of those focus themes. They might be implemented at different levels of skill requirement (intermediate; advanced). Their aim would be to build region-wide capacity to address issues of high priority to ITU and to regional members.

Courses of this kind could be developed by individual Centres or based around common core curricula which have been developed by ITU and associated experts, including expertise from the Standardisation and Radiocommunication Bureaux, and approved by ITU through the ITU Academy. Such core curricula would then be supplemented when a course is delivered by the addition of region-specific material and a regional focus to course/workshop discussion. Delivery expertise may come entirely from within the region, though the inclusion of external/global participants is likely to make events more attractive to participants.



### C. Train-the-trainer activities

Where standard courses like those above are delivered, regional programmes should include ‘train-the-trainer’ activities which are designed to spread expertise across the region and build the capacity of national training institutions, including the Centres, to train local personnel in broad telecoms/ICT issues. These ‘train-the-trainer’ activities would fit well with a ‘human capacity development’ theme if that were chosen as one of the themes. Capacity-building of their own staff was also suggested as a future programme target by a number of Centres in their responses to this study.

The ITU should seek to use the Centres programme to reduce the dependency of selected Centres on external experts recruited from other continents through ITU or other agencies, and see this is a way in which it can continue to fulfil an institution-building role within the programme. Train-the-trainer activities would provide a stronger legacy from each four-year programme cycle, and help to build a network of relevant training professionals within the region which could continue to add value into the future. Such a network could be supported by experience-sharing and question-and-answer fora within the ITU Academy.

### D. Online courses

These courses will be delivered through the ITU Academy and/or through Centres’ own online training facilities, making use of those facilities which are capable of higher-specification training delivery and interactivity. As with the face-to-face courses described at B above, these will be mostly standard courses, which could be developed either by individual Centres or based around common curricula developed and accredited by ITU. The best approach may be a combination of the two, with Centres developing specific material to supplement a core framework curriculum that has been developed for ITU by global experts and which can be accredited at global level. In this model, all delivery material should be subject to ITU scrutiny and approval before use. This will be essential if courses are to be considered for academic accreditation (see below). Standardised core curricula will also help to enable delivery of courses in different languages, for example in the three main global languages in use in Africa.

Although online courses will be agreed through regional programmes, it should, as at present, be possible for courses to be undertaken by participants from all regions. *Suggestion: a general management certificate or diploma course.*

In addition to courses based on focus themes, it is proposed that it should be considered to develop a management certificate or diploma course, aimed at personnel who are moving from specialist responsibilities to more general roles where they need to have a more thorough understanding of the ICT sector as a whole. There are two points of career transition at which this might be required: as people move from junior to middle and from middle to more senior management tiers.

An online course of this kind would need to have a good deal more substance than the short courses described in D. above, requiring the equivalent of about thirty full working days for completion. It would also need to have academic credibility, with certificates or diplomas being awarded on the basis of examined work. It could be delivered by Centres through the ITU Academy but would need to be based closely on a common curriculum approved by ITU, preferably in association with an academic institution and accredited either through such an institution or a body such as Open ECB Check (see below). It could provide a transitional route to associating the programme with university qualifications in future programme cycles (see below).

## 3.6 Certification and accreditation

There is no consistent practice regarding certification of Centre activities at present.

Certification of courses is popular because it is seen by participants to add value to employment prospects. The issue should therefore be taken seriously, not lightly. At present, however, where certificates are issued at the end of courses – sometimes by ITU, sometimes by Centres, sometimes by the

two together – they usually only indicate that a participant has been present during the course. This is not a proper indication of learning outcomes.

Certification of week-long courses is worthwhile. Certificates which are issued for the signature of the Director should be associated with some kind of achievement-based test of acquired learning rather than being issued merely for attendance. ITU shall develop guidelines for the certification of courses and these shall be part of the Implementation guidelines for this strategy.

A more substantial issue concerns whether it would be useful for the programme to move towards some kind of academic accreditation for at least some of the courses which are delivered. The broad options for accreditation have been discussed in Section 2.

Activities such as those which currently take place within the programme and which are described above can be delivered by a variety of different institutions, including universities, and university delivery is common in the AMS region. However, almost all programme activities at present are continuing professional development rather than academic courses, and are oriented towards practitioner skills rather than academic qualifications. Most are also short courses, for which academic accreditation is not normally awarded (or cost-effective given the investment that needs to be made in it by both training institutions and accreditation agencies). Moving towards academic qualifications would involve a significant shift in the direction of the programme towards longer courses which are more academic in character, examined and lead to formal qualifications.

There are possibilities for moving towards accreditation for continuing professional development. One option for this, Open ECB Check, has recently become available and has secured participation from a number of UN agencies and ICT sector organisations. The Open ECB Check system is based on a combination of critical self-assessment and peer review. HCB will discuss the experience of the Open ECB Check accreditation process with other UN agencies that are associated with it, and should discuss the options available for accreditation processes with Open ECB Check itself, before deciding whether it provides a suitable forum for accreditation of Centres programme activities.

Academic accreditation would require agreement with one or more universities. The 30-day online certificate or diploma courses suggested in the 'Programme Activity' section above could be an initial step in that direction. A course such as this might be able to secure accreditation as a credit towards established academic degrees (as has been the case with similar face-to-face courses in the past). Obtaining accreditation is not simple, however, and would need to be discussed with appropriate bodies over a period of time.

The final destination could be ITU-accredited degrees at designated 'Centres of Academic Excellence'. For reasons of credibility, the institutions chosen would need to be considered 'excellent' by other universities in the field. Such academic courses could complement, rather than displace, the wider range of Centre activities described above. Reaching this point would take significant time and preparation, and it could not be implemented during the present WTDC cycle.

It is suggested that if ever ITU moves in this direction, it should do the following during the present cycle so that it is ready to move forward from the start of the next cycle in 2015:

- develop a strong relationship with a small number of universities of high standing, probably no more than one per region;
- identify academic or semi-academic courses that would be suitable for accreditation;
- design and develop curricula for appropriate courses, either using ITU experts or (preferably) in conjunction with universities whose accreditation is anticipated;
- agree accreditation arrangements for the qualifications proposed with appropriate universities before the start of the subsequent WTDC cycle in 2019.

### **3.7 Quality assurance**

It will be critical to the success of the New Programme that it upholds and demonstrates 'excellence'. This requires a strict process of quality assurance. Ensuring the quality of the programme shall replace subsidisation of courses as the main activity for ITU personnel involved:

- The selection criteria for Centre status should require demonstration of and commitment to high standards of excellence in content, training staff and facilities. Competition for Centre status should help to assure standards, but shortlisted institutions should as a minimum be visited and critically reviewed for validation purposes before they are approved.
- Contracts with Centres should include standards/targets for performance, with key performance indicators, and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.
- Centres, teaching staff and participants should complete standardised evaluation forms at the end of each activity, allowing comparative benchmarking of activities across the programme as a whole. The Regional Office should assess these after an event and provide feedback to Centres with any concerns about performance. Evaluation outcomes should be reviewed systematically by ITU to compare the performance of Centres with one another.
- Each Regional Office should review the overall performance of the Centres in its region annually, and set necessary targets for improvement.
- HCB should introduce a quality assurance process for the experts.
- The overall performance of Centres and the programme should be reviewed one year before the end of the programme cycle, as part of preparation for the recruitment and selection process for Centres for the next programme cycle. This should be undertaken by HCB in conjunction with external evaluators, with findings reported to WTDC.

Approaches to these aspects of quality assurance are discussed further in annexes to this report.

### **3.8 Synergies with other ITU Sectors**

Capacity building activities should be promoted more proactively and dynamically than it has been the case to date. They should be promoted in much the same way as they would be promoted by commercial or academic providers, particularly as the intention is that they should be financially self-sustainable. Promotion should be built around annual regional programmes, which should be promoted through brochures and direct marketing of courses to potential clients. The programme should not only rely on formal invitations to Members and Sector Members which are issued by ITU in Geneva or Regional Offices.

HCB shall integrate the Centres more closely with other capacity-building programmes within BDT (the ITU Academy and Internet Training Centres). These are seen at the moment as essentially distinct areas of activity - although the Academy is presumed to overlay capacity-building work as a whole and acts as the delivery mechanism for online courses delivered by the Centres; and although Centres of Excellence may also act as Internet Training Centres or have Networking Academy relationships with Cisco. They should appear to the outside world as one element within a strong brand of BDT Capacity-Building work.

Coordination between the capacity-building work of BDT and that of other ITU Bureaux needs to be improved. It is essential to improve coordination in this area across ITU in order to maximise the return that ITU and its Members obtain from the activity which is undertaken and the investment of ITU resources. The ITU Academy which was established as an umbrella initiative integrating all training activities across ITU, seeks to achieve that goal. In particular:

- The expertise of the Standardisation and Radiocommunication Bureaux should be used in the design, development and delivery of Centre of Excellence activities which relate to their areas of responsibility.

- The three Bureaux should develop a common overall strategic approach to capacity-building which enables programmes to focus on particular areas of responsibility. This will require regular review by Bureaux personnel overseeing capacity-building work. The capacity-building work of all three Bureaux should be promoted collectively, and this would be helpful to Members/users.
- As the ITU Academy develops into a common platform for the dissemination of capacity-building and other materials from across ITU. It will require considerable investment to bring it up to the necessary standard for this, including more interactive approaches to distance learning of the kind which are now widely used by universities. There is a good case for developing the Academy as a demonstration of the potential of online learning platforms, though this may require an external partner.

As discussed in Section 4, the Centres should provide suitable venues for the delivery of capacity-building activities within other ITU programmes, including programmes funded from operational budgets. This could form a significant part of the financial sustainability of Centres under the New Programme.

### **3.9 Partnerships and networking**

Partnerships between the programme and external organisations – international agencies and private companies – offer one or both of two potential benefits:

- They provide potential access to expertise which would not otherwise be available.
- They provide opportunities to secure funding which can support the Centres programme, individual events and/or fellowships.

The benefits of such partnerships can be seen, for example, in the role which Cisco, Microsoft and others have played in BDT Internet Training Centres programme. ITSO has played a role along similar lines within the Centres of Excellence programme in the last two years in Africa and the Caribbean, and the Centres programme also has funding partnerships with the Australian, Spanish and Portuguese governments.

Sponsorship and other partnerships which are concerned with funding are discussed in Section 4. As well as financial partnerships, however, the New Programme would benefit from Regional Offices and Centres developing stronger links with other ICT and capacity-building stakeholders within their regions, using these as sources for assessing needs and priorities, as resources which can be drawn upon for expertise and for curricular material such as case studies, and as vehicles for marketing of Centres programmes. Four groups of regional organisations in particular could add significant value to the programme if it were able to develop partnership relationships with them. These are:

- academic institutions and their regional associations, including Regional Research and Education Networks (for example the UbuntuNet Alliance in Africa);
- regional telecommunication associations, such as those of regional regulators;
- regional businesses associations in the telecoms/ICT sector, such as national and regional ISP associations and consumer bodies; and
- regional research associations, such as LIRNEasia in the ASP region and DIRSI in South America.

It has been an aspiration of the Centres programme since 2007 to develop networks of training institutions within its regions. Efforts to do this have been mostly built around meetings of regional steering committees, and these provide opportunities for ITU to organise discussion around issues of wider importance to capacity-building than the programme alone. Whether networks of Centres develop beyond this will depend on the extent to which networking activity is seen to add value to the institutions concerned. Where Centres have little in common, they are relatively unlikely to network collectively, although bilateral partnerships may develop between them.

It would be worth ITU investing more in this kind of networking activity. One possibility would be the development of an online forum through which Centres can exchange ideas, views and materials

concerning their activities and capacity-building in the ICT sector in general. There are no guarantees concerning whether a forum of this kind will work, and this should be tested first in dialogue with Centres and other stakeholders, but it may be possible to integrate something of the kind within the framework of the ITU Academy.

### **3.10 Transitional arrangements**

Transition from the present programme to the New Programme needs to take place within the next year, as current funding to support activities from ITU itself is available for only a limited further period (with some variation between regions). Financial transition arrangements are discussed in Section 4.

This final part of Section 3 is concerned with the necessary timetable for transitional arrangements at a programme organisation and management level. The proposed timetable is also illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3 at the end of this Section.

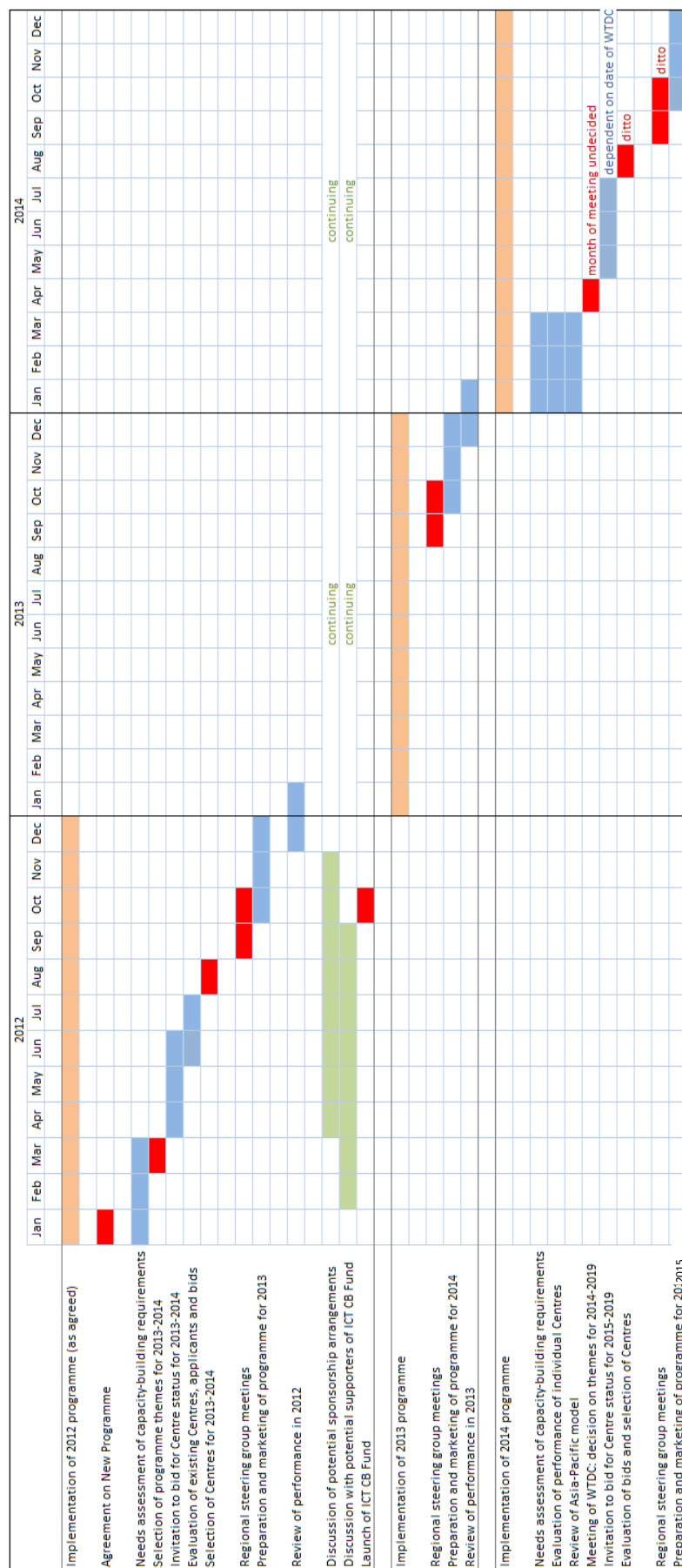
It is desirable to move to implementation of the New Programme as soon as possible. Delays, including long transition periods, are likely to confuse users of the programme and undermine its long-term credibility. It would be better to effect a clean, quick transition.

However, it is essential to allow an interval during which HCB, Regional Offices and existing Centres can adjust and prepare for the New Programme to be introduced. In addition, regional steering group meetings have been held in the latter half of 2011 which have agreed proposed programmes for the coming year on the assumption that the programme will continue along current lines.

It is therefore recommended that the programmes of work which have been agreed by regional steering groups for 2012 should proceed as planned up to end of 2014 subject to available finance. The intervening period should be used to prepare thoroughly for the implementation of the New Programme from the beginning of 2015.

The timetable for this, illustrated in Figure 3, would be as follows:

- The decision should be taken to move towards a New Programme by the beginning of January 2015.
- The selection of Centres for the implementation of programme themes for 2015 and 2018 should take place between WTDC 2014 and December 2014. New applicants should be encouraged to make proposals alongside existing Centres, and both will be fully evaluated as part of the selection process.
- The ITU should actively seek, as soon as programme themes have been agreed, to establish partnerships and sponsorship agreements with members and external bodies, along the lines discussed in Section 4, which could provide appropriate financial support for New Programme activities during 2015 and 2018.
- Regional steering committees should meet as usual according to their agreed schedules.
- The New Programme should begin in this form from the beginning of January 2013, with two annual programmes being undertaken in 2013 and 2014. The management and quality assurance processes described above should be fully implemented during this period.
- The performance of all existing Centres should be fully evaluated during 2013 and 2014.
- BDT Management should agree themes for the next programme following WTDC 2014.
- A competitive process for selection of Centres for the next programme cycle should be held following the selection of themes for 2015-2019 at WTDC in 2014. The number of Centres should be reduced to a maximum of 30, with a maximum of six per region. There should be no assumption that existing Centres will continue into this new programme.

**Figure3: Proposed schedule for current WTDC cycle (2012-2014)**

Source: ITU

## Section 4: Financial arrangements

### Introduction

The ITU has identified the Centres programme as a way in which it can improve the standards of performance within the telecoms/ICT sector in developing countries and has invested its authority and reputation in its success. For the programme to fulfil the expectations that are implicit in these decisions, it needs to make a significant measurable contribution to the capacity of target beneficiaries and to their subsequent performance in delivering communications services and in contributing to economic growth and social development. Unless the Centres programme has positive measurable outcomes of this kind, it will be failing to meet the ITU expectations.

Section 3 of this report described a New Centres Programme which can fulfil these objectives, *i.e.* which can make a significant contribution to capacity-building in developing countries and thereby contribute to better ICT sector performance to the benefit of consumers and national development.

The first decision to be taken is, therefore, to raise the standard of the Centres programme to the required level by the introduction of a New Programme along the lines described in Section 3. The second decision concerns how such a programme should be financed. That challenge is discussed in this final section of the report, which recommends a flexible approach to financial arrangements in the short term, aimed at securing the programme medium- and long-term sustainability without on-going subsidy.

It should be emphasised here that the changes recommended in Section 3 are necessary irrespective of changes in financial arrangements for the programme. The improvements in tailoring, quality and management of the programme that have been described would be required even if current financial arrangements could continue indefinitely. If training standards are not good enough to match those for comparable training in the academic and commercial sectors, then they should have no place within the Centres Programme. The discussion of future financial arrangements, from both ITU and other sources, which follows this introduction, should be understood on that basis. In particular, it should be emphasised that, even if new funding is found for the programme from ITU sources, that should not be interpreted as grounds for continuing with present arrangements for programme implementation.

### Background

Quality capacity-building initiatives require financial as well as reputational investment. The circumstances surrounding financial investment in capacity-building in general, and the Centres programme in particular, have changed greatly since the programme was initiated at the end of the last century. Three points, made earlier in this report, need reiterating here.

- Firstly, when the programme began, it was initially concerned with institution-building at selected Centres in Africa. High levels of financial investment – well over USD 1 million each – were made in the Centres at AFRALTI and ESMT, with the aim of elevating their facilities, expertise and capabilities. This level of investment contrasts markedly with the current situation in which small-scale subsidies are provided to some (but not all) Centres to undertake some (but not all) programmes. These subsidies amount to around USD 4 000 per online course and USD 10 000 per face-to-face course, covering the costs of tutorial expertise and thereby lowering the fee level that would otherwise be required from participants. In some regions, where fee levels are sufficient or where external sponsorship is available, ITU subsidy is not currently required. The total cost of programme subsidy has been running at between USD 500 000 and USD 1 200 000 per annum, though this does not include the employment and other overhead costs of ITU personnel time spent on Centres activity in Geneva or in Regional Offices.
- Secondly, the restructuring of telecoms businesses and markets means that most significant organisations in the sector in most countries are now able to afford high-quality training and other capacity-building offered by academic and commercial providers. The majority of



participants in Centre activities come from telecommunication operating companies and regulatory agencies. Most significant Telcos at national level are part of multinational telecommunication businesses. Many, perhaps most, regulators are now financially relatively well-endowed, often thanks to licence and spectrum fees. Both groups not only can afford high-quality training for their staff in international training markets: they actively take advantage of these opportunities. There are no good grounds for ITU subsidising training for companies or regulators that are simultaneously paying high-end prices for international training courses, at the expense of other potential beneficiaries that cannot do so.

- Thirdly, ITU financial input to the Centres programme to date has come from the TELECOM Surplus Fund or its successor ICT Development Fund, with some additional resources from external agencies either in the form of finance (e.g. AusAid, Industry Canada) or in kind (e.g. ITSO). These sources provide the annual financial input of some USD 500 000 plus which ITU has contributed to the Centres programme in recent years. However, this financial basis must change as funds are unlikely to be available from the ICT Development Fund. No alternative funds are currently allocated within the ITU operational budget for the present WTDC cycle. A revised approach to funding is therefore required, based either on the programme becoming self-financing or on it using funds from other sources – which might be sources within or outside ITU.

The following paragraphs consider these financial options and their implications. In summary, they recommend that, in future, individual activities as well as the overall programme should be run on a self-sustaining basis, *i.e.* that they need to bring in sufficient income to cover costs. This income can be derived from three sources:

- from fees contributed by participants and their organisations for course participation;
- from sponsorship and partnerships between ITU, Centres and other organisations;
- from the use of the Centres to deliver activities within other ITU programmes (whether programmes of the BDT or other Bureaux) which have separate funding but which also fit into the priority themes selected for the Centres' programme cycle.

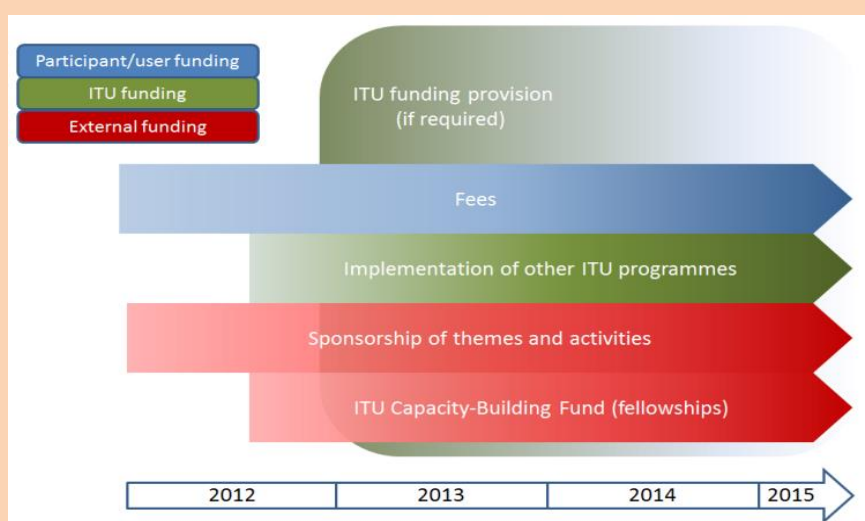
In the event that funding cannot be obtained from these sources, ITU needs to make a clear decision between two options:

- a. to abandon that particular area (theme or regional programme) of Centres activity, or
- b. to subsidise the implementation of Centres activity from ITU resources, which would imply reallocation of funds from other areas of work.

Option b) should not be considered a long-term solution but may be required on a short-term interim basis, through a provision on which the programme can draw if necessary. In that eventuality, a clear assessment should be made to ensure that the value of the Centres programme activity being funded to ITU/BDT and its Members is greater than that of alternative uses from which the necessary funds would need to be redeployed.

The overall structure of these recommendations in this section is set out in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4: Proposed financial arrangements for current WTDC cycle (2012-2014)**

Source: ITU

The training and other capacity-building work which is undertaken through the Centres Programme should attract participants for reasons of quality, not finance – because the training provided is good, not because it is cheap or free. There is no advantage to ITU, its Members, or course participants in ITU providing activities which are below the standard of those available from academic or commercial providers. Financial arrangements for the programme should therefore be those required to a) maintain/secure excellence and b) ensure that activities are affordable to those (relatively few) potential participants whose organisations are too poorly financed to enable them to participate.

It is recommended, as an underlying principle for the New Programme, that all Centre activities should be implemented on the basis of cost-recovery. The costs to be recovered should include the full costs of training provision (venue, expert fees, training materials, project evaluation). Participant fees should be the default mechanism for cost-recovery, with the proviso (see below) that funds may also be received from other sources internal or external to ITU, particularly sponsorship.

The principal difference between this and the present position is that ITU currently subsidises the travel, accommodation and fee arrangements for training experts, up to a maximum of between USD 4000 and USD 10 000 per activity. Under a fee-based cost-recovery arrangement, the cost of the expert should be included in the fee charged to participants. In the case of an activity with 25 participants, this would amount to a sum of between USD 160 and USD 400 per participant, adding between 50% and 100% to the current fee cost (but a much lower percentage of total attendance costs, which include travel and accommodation). Evidence suggests that Centres programme activities currently undercut the fee costs of comparable commercial training provision by about this sum, and so this would bring them up to the level of costs which is routinely paid by the majority of Centre clients sending staff on capacity-building activities.

Although ideally costs of quality assurance processes should be added to activity costs, however it is felt that these are costs that could legitimately be covered by ITU for which a financing plan though a Program fund has been recommended. The recommendations for the New Programme may lead to some increase in administrative costs, principally as a result of the introduction of a cost recovery charging mechanism, but should also lead to reductions in other areas, such as the issuance of invitations to activities and fee collection processes, where staff time is unproductively deployed at present.

The starting point for all proposed Centre activities – as discussed in regional steering committee meetings – should be an accurate costing for the activity, which establishes the level of fees or sponsorship required for cost recovery. Activities should be budgeted and fees set in order to secure cost recovery, as they would be by an academic or commercial provider – although the absorption of

overheads by ITU, if this continues, and the absence of a profit margin should mean that the cost of Centre activities should be lower than the cost of comparable activities from commercial training businesses. Accurate costing of activities should be provided by Centres and validated by Regional Offices.

#### **4.1 Fees**

It is recommended that the default means of cost-recovery for Centre activities should be the payment of fees for participation.

As noted in Section 2, some ITU Members have argued that Centres activities should, as a matter of principle, be free to Members, *i.e.* subsidised by ITU budget which is derived from membership contributions. This argument is not sustainable, for the following reasons:

1. The overall ITU budget is limited. Centre activities can only be provided free if other activities are not undertaken. This would require a judgement that Centre activities were more important than alternative uses of the funds available.
2. Making Centre activities free would severely limit the number of activities that could be undertaken to those which could be accommodated within the overall budget.
3. Not all ITU activities and facilities are free to Members. It is normal for organisations like ITU to provide both free and fee-paying services to Members.
4. The fee element is only one part of the cost of participating in a Centres activity. Participants travelling across national borders are likely to incur much higher costs in travel, accommodation and subsistence than they do in fees.

In any event, the majority of participants in Centre activities come from telecommunication businesses and regulatory agencies which can and do afford much higher fees for training from commercial and academic providers. The New Programme should not provide financial support for participation by those whose organisations can readily afford full commercial training rates elsewhere. Subsidising such organisations reduces the level of activity that can be undertaken overall and reduces the opportunity for such subsidies as are available to be directed at those countries and organisations that genuinely need them.

#### **4.2 Sponsorship and other external funding sources**

The principle of regarding fee payment as the default mechanism for cost recovery does not mean that fee payment is the only way in which Centre activities can or should be financed. On the contrary, it is recommended that ITU should take advantage of the year 2012, before implementation of the New Programme, to explore three potential funding sources, all of which are already established within the ITU capacity-building portfolio. These are:

- a) to make use of the Centres to deliver activities within other ITU programmes, including those of other Bureaux, which are included within other ITU operational budgets;
- b) to seek sponsorship of particular activities or themes, at global or regional level, from Members, Sector Members and other organisations which have an interest in capacity-building that will improve sector performance;
- c) to establish an ICT Capacity-Building Fund to finance fellowships which support the inclusion of participants who would not otherwise be able to take part in Centre activities (or, indeed, other ITU capacity-building activities).

The following paragraphs comment briefly on these three potential funding sources.

### **4.3 Participation in other ITU programmes**

It seems in principle quite likely that, if the themes chosen by BDT for Centres activity are derived from ITU priorities, these will coincide with priority programmes of other ITU Bureaux – for example in areas such as cybersecurity and spectrum management. In the past, there has been very little coordination of capacity-building work across Bureaux. In particular, the Centres have not been used much by other Bureaux as venues/providers for their capacity-building work. Centres that deliver genuine excellence and meet the quality assurance requirements recommended for the New Programme should be suitable venues/providers for capacity-building programmes from all ITU Bureaux. Where such programmes are funded by other operational budgets, those funds would be available to support activities undertaken in the Centres. BDT should seek out such opportunities in discussion with other Bureaux.

### **4.4 Sponsorship of Centres programme themes and activities**

Sponsorship arrangements already play a significant part within the Centres programme. The governments of Spain and Portugal, for example, finance LSP regional activities. Funding from the Australian government has supported a number of activities within the ASP region. The international satellite agency ITSO provides in-kind support for Centre activities relevant to it that are undertaken in the AFR and CAR regions, through a partnership agreement with ITU.

There is significant potential for similar arrangements to be developed within the New Programme, with a variety of partners providing either financial sponsorship (to cover costs and, in effect, implement fee waivers) or in-kind support (e.g. through the provision of expert trainers or equipment). Such support could be provided either for one of the themes selected by WTDC (either globally or at regional level) or for individual activities or groups of activities (including, perhaps, individual Centres, though care would need to be taken to ensure this did not subvert the competitive selection process).

Where fee waivers are concerned, fees would need to be fully costed in order to avoid additional costs falling on ITU. A partnership process might be formalised as follows:

- When the annual programme cycle is agreed, ITU could invite partners/sponsors for particular focus themes, at either global or regional level. These might include Member States (e.g. through bilateral development agencies or communications ministries), Sector Members (e.g. through corporate social responsibility budgets), industry associations (such as the GSMA), international development agencies and regional telecommunication associations (e.g. regional regulators associations). Partnership/sponsorship agreements with industry associations or groups of companies would be particularly welcome as they would reduce the risks of partiality associated with sponsorship by individual companies.
- There should be a standard MoU for such partnership agreements.
- Sponsors for programme themes should be awarded recognition in the programme as, say, ITU Centre of Excellence Partners and their support for Centres, activities or participants recognised in promotional and other materials.
- Sponsors may also be available for particular activities. Where no global or regional sponsorship agreement exists, Regional Offices should explore the possibility of sponsorship with national governments, businesses and other actors within their regions.

Sponsors of themes or activities may wish to make these fee-free for all participants. This may also be a requirement of programmes funded from the operational budgets of other ITU Bureaux. In these circumstances, sponsors may wish to consider the possibility of including some fellowship funding to cover the travel and other non-fee costs of participants who would not otherwise be able to attend, where their attendance would be particularly valuable. It would be important, however, to base this on a strict assessment of need, in order to ensure that subsidies were not directed to profitable or financially advantaged enterprises and organisations.

There are two significant risks in this kind of sponsorship, against which ITU should protect itself. It is important, firstly, that the desire for sponsorship should not override the principles for selecting themes and prioritising activities that have been described in the previous section. Themes should be chosen first, and then potential sources of sponsorship explored for the selected themes.

The second major risk in sponsorship arrangements is that commercial partners will exploit the relationship to secure advantage over their competitors (who may also be ITU Sector Members). The ITU cannot afford to allow itself to become a marketing vehicle for businesses in competitive markets. Strict requirements concerning this will need to be built into Memoranda of Understanding with programme partners.

#### **4.5 An ICT capacity building fund**

The third proposal for external funding concerns the possible establishment of an ITU Capacity-Building Fund, which could finance fellowships for participants who would not otherwise be able to attend Centre activities (or, for that matter, other ITU capacity-building activities). Depending on resources and decisions taken by ITU, this might cover some or all of the travel costs incurred by participants as well as fees. The basis on which fellowships are awarded will need to be decided by ITU. Fellowship funding should be focused on those who actually need it and should not be available to all, in particular that:

- fellowship funding should be available only to personnel from organisations which can demonstrate clear financial need, for example those from communications ministries in small island LDCs, and should not be available to personnel from commercial businesses or from well-funded regulatory agencies;
- the costs of individual fellowships should be carefully controlled (either to fees only or, if travel and accommodation costs are included, then on a restricted basis – economy airfares, actual expenditure below DSA rather than UNDSA rates, no dual payment of subsistence by the Fund and by employers, etc.).

ITU Regional Offices should identify target countries/institutions whose personnel are likely to gain most if they participate in Centre activities on a subsidised basis and so to return most value to their countries/organisations.

Contributions to a Capacity-Building Fund could either be made for Centre/ITU HCB activities in general or linked to particular themes, regions or countries. Contributors could be acknowledged as ITU Capacity-Building Partners, alongside the sponsors of activities at b) above.

It is recommended that the opportunities for introducing an ITU Capacity-Building Fund during the first six months of 2012 be explored and, if this proves likely to be successful, should launch the Fund during the second half of 2012 alongside preparations for the launch of the New Programme in 2013.

It is suggested that contributions to the Fund be sought from:

- ITU members and sector-members, on a voluntary basis;
- multilateral and bilateral development agencies and international financial institutions such as regional development banks (along the lines of funding by the Australian, Spanish and Portuguese governments and agreements which ITU has had with the European Commission, the World Bank, etc.);
- international communications organisations, including for example, regional associations of national regulators;
- international communications business associations, such as the GSM Association; and
- individual communications businesses (along the lines of the Cisco Academy programme), bearing in mind the need to ensure that ITU does not appear to support one competing business (or Sector Member) against another.

There is no real evidence at present on which to judge whether a Capacity-Building Fund of this kind will attract support from Members, Sector Members or outside agencies. Whether it can do so will depend on evidence that the Centres programme is being revitalised and upgraded along the lines proposed in this report, showing that it can clearly deliver excellence in future and thereby improve the capacity of personnel in national telecoms environments to the advantage of the sector as a whole – in a way which meets the development and/or corporate responsibility objectives of potential funders. The new process for selection of Centres and for quality assurance will be critical evidence in this context.

The effort which ITU puts into promoting the concept of a Fund will also be critical. A strong, clear proposition for a Fund should be agreed and promotional materials developed by the end of third quarter 2012 and followed up by systematic approaches to potential contributors, led by the Director of BDT. It is important for ITU to explore the willingness of ITU members and sector members to support the New Programme through a Fund during 2012, before the New Programme comes into effect, with an initial target of, say, USD 100 000 and the sub subsequent aim of increasing available funds incrementally over the following three to four years as the programme proves its effectiveness.

To generate momentum, it will be important to secure a minimum of three significant contributors before the formal launch of the Fund: this should form a primary target for the first six months of 2012, and will require input from senior management in BDT.

#### **4.6 Transitional financial arrangements**

This final subsection is concerned with ensuring transition of the Centres programme from its current status into the New Programme envisaged in this report. The programme as it stands at present requires some USD 500 000 per annum in financial contributions from ITU, in addition to staff time and other non-financial resources. This funding has mostly been used to finance the participation of external experts in Centre activities. In the New Programme these costs would be included in the costs to be recovered through funding of specific activities, whether through fees or sponsorship.

One major concern is that it will be difficult to secure sufficient new funds from these sources, at least in the transition period, to maintain the programme viability. The risks are included in a risk assessment which has been included in an annex to this report. The two principal risks from a financial point of view are:

- a) that participants and their organisations will be unwilling to pay fees (or significantly higher fees); and
- b) that ITU members and external agencies will be unwilling to contribute sufficiently to Centres activity either through sponsorship or through a nascent Capacity-Building Fund.

These risks will be highest in the transition period between the existing and New Programmes. As and when the Centres programme demonstrates improved performance and quality, it will become more attractive to both fee-paying participants and sponsors.

These concerns are well recognised and there is need to plan for a more gradual transition in financial arrangements should this prove necessary. The critical objective for ITU is to bring about much-needed improvements to the Centres programme which will deliver better value for ITU and its Members and achieve financial sustainability in the medium to longer term. Turning the programme around is not something that can be achieved overnight. It may require some additional financial investment from ITU in the shorter term, should insufficient fee and sponsorship income emerge within that period. The ITU should make provision for this eventuality, in order to enable a smooth transition from the present programme to a more successful future. This should, however, be a short-term strategy: the objective of securing financial sustainability on the basis of cost-recovery is crucial for the long-term health and viability of the Centres, and should be pursued resolutely from the start. Any additional financial provision from ITU – other than funding of specific activities from ITU operational programme budgets, where this occurs – should be drawn on only if it proves necessary and should not be regarded as an on-going financial resource.

The proposed approach to financing the transition from the current to the New Programme is therefore as follows.

1. The New Programme should establish a clear objective of achieving financial self-sufficiency, through cost-recovery, as soon as possible and certainly by 2015. Cost-recovery, for this purpose, should include all activity costs but not the administrative support for the programme which is provided by ITU staff. All activities should be designed to secure cost recovery on this basis, through fees and/or sponsorship, as described above. Where sponsorship is not available, fees should be charged which are sufficient to recover the costs of the activity as a whole, including those resulting from the participation of external experts.
2. During 2012, 2013 and 2014, BDT should seek sponsorship of programmes/activities and contributions to an ICT Capacity-Building Fund which will provide additional financial resources for the New Programme. These opportunities for Members, Sector Members and other organisations to make contributions should be systematically promoted on the basis that the New Programme will offer substantially higher quality activities than are available at present and so meet the objectives of potential funders for significant sectorial and developmental value.
3. HCB should also seek opportunities in 2012, 2013 and 2014 to use the Centres to implement programmes that are included within the operational budgets of other ITU Bureaux. Discussions on this with other Bureaux should begin early in 2012.
4. At present, ITU provides about USD 500k per annum in financial support to the Centres programme, which mostly covers the cost of external expertise in Centre activities. For reasons described in the main body of the report, this should not be taken as a benchmark cost for the programme. During the remainder of the current WTDC cycle, HCB should seek to move the programme as quickly as possible towards full cost-recovery. Wherever it is possible to implement Centres activities on a basis of full cost-recovery during 2012, 2013 and 2014, that opportunity should be taken. Gradual increases in fees towards the rates charged by commercial providers should be a key part of this approach.
5. It would be sensible for HCB to set minimum targets for cost-recovery based around this figure for new financial arrangements. It is suggested that it might be appropriate for half of this figure to be recovered through higher fees for better quality activities, with the remaining cost secured through sponsorship and contributions to a Fund. Targets for external sponsorship and Fund contributions, including funding from other ITU programmes, might therefore be a minimum of USD 100k in 2013 rising to USD 250k in 2015. The HCB ability to deliver against these targets will depend critically on demonstrable improvements in the quality of Centres activities during 2012, 2013 and 2014, and on the effort which is put into securing funding from these sources.
6. This transition will not be easy and will inevitably be gradual. The task of achieving self-sufficiency based on full cost recovery on the part of the Centres will be a challenge in 2013 and 2014. This implies that there may be a need for continued financial support from ITU during the period to 2015. It is recommended that ITU should need to make an interim financial provision to support the Centres programme through this transitional period, of up to USD 400k in 2013 and USD 200k in 2014.
7. This provision should be a short-term fall-back arrangement, while sponsorship agreements and the ICT Capacity-Building Fund are developed. It should not be drawn on if not required, and should only be drawn on to the extent that it is required. It should certainly not be seen as an opportunity to continue on a 'business as usual' basis. It is clear that the programme as it is currently operating is not offering maximum value to ITU and its Members, fails to deliver promised excellence, needs to be redesigned around real value for money (*i.e.* around quality rather than cheapness), and to become financially self-sustainable. The targets set out in points 5 and 6 need to be sufficiently challenging to ensure this.

8. If it proves impossible to achieve the targets in points 5 and 6 before the next programme cycle begins in 2015 that will imply that the programme itself may not be viable in the longer term because there is insufficient real demand for a general programme of this kind. In that event, a decision on continuance will need to be taken by WTDC in 2014. That decision will need to consider whether ITU is able to continue providing financial support to the programme during the next WTDC cycle rather than relying on cost-recovery to enable financial sustainability. This in turn will mean assessing the value of the Centres programme against other areas of possible ITU activity and expenditure, an assessment which is beyond the scope of this report.





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