

## A REVIEW OF UNHCR STAFF TRAINING

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### AIM AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

At the request of the Senior Management Committee, a review of UNHCR's staff training programme was undertaken to assess whether the present organisation and direction of training in UNHCR are able to advance UNHCR's strategic and operational goals effectively. In particular, the review concentrated on assessing if the training programme is able to respond adequately to the demands made by the ongoing overhaul of UNHCR's structure through the Delphi project, and by the reorientation of its human resources approach through the introduction of the new Career Management System.

From the outset, the review maintained two different perspectives. Firstly, in order to identify the main strategic and long-term issues, it examined some of the fundamental assumptions underlying the design and application of the training strategy. The purpose was to generate ideas which may help to develop the strategy further. Secondly, in order to assess the impact of the strategy in practice, the review analysed the overall management of training and other relevant operational dimensions, as well as the practical results of the strategy over the past decade. This included a study of the value of the investments made in training and of its cost-effectiveness.

In performing the review, key documents generated over the past twenty years were reviewed and interviews were held with UNHCR senior managers and a large number of staff, who are directly involved in training. In addition, in order to allow comparison with the training approaches and results of other international organisations, extensive discussions have also taken place with the staff development departments of a number of United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva, Turin, New York, Washington, and Rome.

The review was carried out by, Alan Simmance\*, a consultant with extensive experience in the training field and a former UNHCR staff member, and Fedde Jan Groot, a UNHCR staff member seconded to the UNHCR Evaluation Unit. In addition, Philip Sargisson a consultant with broad experience in training and organisational development provided input regarding professional developments in these areas. Final editing was done by George Gordon-Lennox.

*\*Alan Simmance, the consultant who jointly carried out this evaluation, sadly passed away on 23 May 1999 after a short illness. Since leaving UNHCR in 1987, Alan carried out several evaluation studies and could always be relied upon for his insight and high degree of professionalism. His charm, warmth and sense of humour will be sorely missed by us all.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

1. The first systematic efforts to provide training to UNHCR staff in a career development perspective began some 20 years ago with the appointment of the first Training Officer. Prior to that time, only UN language courses were regularly available to UNHCR staff members. Training expanded rapidly thereafter and by 1982 had been extended to include functional training conducted by other UNHCR organisational units in such areas as protection, programme management, resettlement, electronic data processing and emergency response. For most of this period the training function was located within the area of Administration and Management, which included personnel services.
2. Among milestones in this first decade of UNHCR staff training activities was the launching in 1985 of a separate Emergency Management Preparedness Training programme (EMPT) conducted by the Emergency Unit. The EMTP has developed steadily ever since, providing UNHCR with a growing core of trained staff for rapid deployment in emergencies. This programme gave a new impulse to training in UNHCR, and undoubtedly contributed to the realisation by senior management of the need to develop a more comprehensive and higher profile approach to the Office's rapidly evolving training needs. This in turn led to the creation in 1987 of the Training Service, which has since been re-titled Staff Development Section (SDS).
3. The growing concern of senior management with staff development was demonstrated by the decision to temporarily detach the newly-created service from the human resources sector and make it an autonomous unit reporting directly to the High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner. Headed by a senior official, it was responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of training policy, proposing training plans and guidelines, and developing and conducting an integrated training programme. Most importantly, the new service had full control over the training budget.
4. Over the next few years, significant progress was made in the development of training materials, the creation of a network of training co-ordinators, the training of trainers, the institution of management training. By 1990, there were 27 training "focal points" at Headquarters and 34 Training Co-ordinators in the field. Some 80 staff had been trained as trainers or training managers. The then Head of the Training Service could say, with some justification, that "more had been done to provide joint training and staff development opportunities over the last thirty months than at any other time"<sup>1</sup>.
5. The early 1990s saw a further consolidation of training activity, including a significant

expansion in the development of training materials, creation of a pool of in-house trainers, and extension of the training network to cover all field offices. A Training Recording System (TRS) was instituted to provide a database to track and maintain information on all training undertaken by UNHCR staff members<sup>2</sup>.

6. Following an internal review of the role and structure of the Office in early 1990, responsibility for overseeing the Training Service was transferred from the Deputy High Commissioner to a newly-constituted Division of Human Resources Management with the aim of keeping the processes of recruitment, career development and training in close proximity to each other.

### Training today

7. Among the most significant developments in the past 12 years is the fact that an annual budgetary allocation of 2% of overall staff costs is now devoted to training. The design and delivery of training has been progressively decentralised, with each Division having at least one section which deals with training either exclusively or as a major part of its functions. The training options available to staff cover a wide variety of functional areas, a number of new training initiatives have been launched and new learning techniques are being explored.

8. Today UNHCR spends more than US\$ 5 million annually on training all categories of staff in a wide variety of subjects ranging from the traditional refugee protection and programme management areas to such skills as communication, negotiation and external relations, computer literacy and skills to manage and implement change. The training volume measured in numbers of person-days has risen sharply over the past few years, to more than 8,000 participants in 1997 in one or more, sometimes several, training events a year, organised by 17 different "training providers".

9. Indeed it may safely be said that today staff training permeates almost every facet of UNHCR's activities world-wide.

## **OVERVIEW**

10. The volume and diversity of training programmes which have been developed in UNHCR over the past 12 years are impressive. The impetus given to training by the creation of the Training Service, coupled with the progressive decentralisation of training activities, are largely responsible for these achievements.

11. The high quality of some of these programmes is undoubtedly one of the most positive results of decentralisation. Courses, workshops and seminars, as well as more innovative methods of training, are managed by autonomous training providers within various work units responsible for specific functional areas. The close relationship between individual training providers and their particular subject area largely ensures that the most effective response to specific training needs is provided.

12. Despite these achievements, training in UNHCR has not lived up to its early promise, nor kept pace with the progress made in other agencies. While reliance on a number of autonomous training providers has in principle been positive, many shortcomings can be attributed to over-reliance on decentralisation.

13. With many different managers responsible for a wide variety of different activities, priorities have often become blurred, and training is no longer focused as sharply as it should be on UNHCR's overall effectiveness. The absence of a strong central co-ordinating body linking training to the organisation's global strategic objectives has compounded this weakness.

14. The move away from central control and co-ordination has meant that initiatives

taken by training staff have either not received the active endorsement of senior management, or have been inadequately implemented. Operational goals are not being translated into performance requirements and training priorities because there is no mechanism for this purpose. Decentralisation has turned into fragmentation, with the attendant dangers of overlapping and lack of focus.

15. These failings were recognised in 1997 by the Training Advisory Board (TAB), composed of representatives of all UNHCR training providers. Concerned with the tendency for staff members to pick and choose from a broad list of training courses according to their individual preferences, the TAB made a series of recommendations for a new Training Strategy. At the outset they made it clear that "training must be linked inextricably to the Organisation's overall strategy" and urged that annual training priorities be set by a mechanism endorsed by senior management.

16. A large number of areas were identified as training priorities, a great many of which were proposed as mandatory. Indeed, so many areas of training in UNHCR were considered mandatory, that this in itself would seem to militate in favour of the urgent establishment of a mechanism for setting priorities.

17. On the other hand, certain of the TAB's recommendations require further thought. For example, the strategy proposes that offices in the field be provided with a fixed amount under the administrative budget for training purposes according to the number of staff concerned. It would seem more effective if the allocation of training funds were based on and guided by organisational priorities and an informed priority-setting central authority, rather than on fixed amounts.

18. Aside from these reservations, both the strategy, and the outstanding recommendations of the 1992/93 Task Force on Training, contain vital proposals for the further development of the training effort. Indeed, had the TAB's key proposals been uniformly followed up, the result would undoubtedly have gone a long way to sharpening the focus on essential skills required to meet UNHCR's objectives. Unfortunately, because accountability for monitoring the implementation of the strategy was not clearly assigned, many of these recommendations have not yet been implemented.

19. The Staff Development Section is not in a position to put these proposals into practice because, due to the progressive decentralisation of training budgets, it can no longer claim to bear overall responsibility for training and staff development. Indeed, most of UNHCR's training goes on independently of SDS. The Section controls no more than a quarter of the overall training budget and the language training component accounts for much of that. This has contributed to the virtual disappearance of central co-ordination and quality control of the organisation's training activities. The inevitable result is duplication of effort and a failure to set and apply professional standards.

20. Without a central co-ordinating body, resources have sometimes been used inefficiently and professional standards are sometimes not met. A dozen or more training providers are often simultaneously organising training events. In some cases these events are organised on behalf of the same audience, in near-complete isolation from one another, without any consistent joint efforts aimed at reducing costs. Furthermore, average costs vary proportionally per person-day by as much as one to ten between different training programmes.

21. The relationship between human resources management and the training effort is another key element in the Training Strategy. The Strategy calls for creation of a clear link between training and individual staff development and performance. The Career Management System (CMS) with its competency profiles and new system for performance evaluation, was clearly intended to become the main channel for the identification of individual training needs, particularly as regards career path training.

Not to implement this element of the Training Strategy risks jeopardising the successful introduction of a revised or re-modelled career management system in the future. There is also a need for managers to provide more leadership, not only assuming accountability for the performance of staff, but also coaching and stimulating team performance, and identifying training needs when required to meet goals.

22. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of training on individual staff members is another way in which training can be made more effective and course design improved. It is not enough to simply record participation in training events as is now the case. UNHCR should now move ahead with the introduction of testing and other forms of assessments to ensure that participants have actually acquired or improved their skills and knowledge. Jointly with the further implementation of CMS, successful passing of these tests could in some cases be made a condition for onward career development and new postings. Efforts should also be made to analyse and evaluate the effect of training on UNHCR's overall operational effectiveness.

23. UNHCR's training efforts can be greatly enhanced by taking advantage of new trends and concepts in the training field. There are many different ways available to cut down on the current exclusive reliance on formal modes of training, which should ideally only fill in the gaps that are not met by the natural learning process. Other training media can be substituted for the present over-utilised workshops and classroom-based training. The training experience and methods of other agencies both within and outside the UN system can provide new ideas in this regard which could usefully be adapted to UNHCR's needs.

24. The dual role of training as an important factor in organisational learning as well as in individual staff performance should be recognised. Training events such as seminars can provide a forum where issues, operational policies and problems are thoroughly discussed. Feedback from such events can contribute to the organisation's efforts to identify where it is going wrong, to learn lessons, and to identify best practices. This in turn can help in generating new organisational initiatives.

25. Training clearly has a pivotal role to play in combining attainment of organisational goals with improved individual staff performance, as well as in promoting imaginative new solutions to operational problems. Moving towards this aim will require a strong, centrally located mechanism with clear responsibility for the overall management of training activities. This mechanism would have the capacity to set priorities and to allocate budgets to functional areas. It would develop policies and set standards, as well as monitor both compliance and equitable access to training by gender, grade and duty station. The introduction of new approaches could thus be achieved without compromising the positive merits of decentralised training delivery.

26. A reinforced SDS would control the allocation of most of the global training budget, with the exception of emergency management and preparedness training. The actual delivery of training would remain decentralised, but SDS would be responsible for close co-ordination and the provision of technical expertise. All Divisional and Regional training programmes would be subject to consultation with and approval by SDS, as would individual training requests.

27. To play the role envisaged, the SDS will need the necessary human resources and expertise to play a true co-ordinating and strategic planning role, as well as to offer training providers the necessary skills in preparing training materials, developing curricula and teaching methods. Instead of the often uncontrolled expansion of recent years, UNHCR's aim should be to have a properly functioning central unit, that would be fully equipped to restore a coherent and co-ordinated training environment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **Recommendation 1**

28. Training should be linked, through a strong central co-ordinating body, to the achievement of UNHCR's overall strategic objectives.

- . Renewed and urgent efforts should be made to ensure the endorsement by senior management of a mechanism whereby annual operational goals serve as a basis for setting training priorities as proposed in the first recommendation of the UNHCR Training Strategy;
- b. Staff development should be given a more central role in the organisation, with direct links to senior management and to overall policy planning and development.
- c. A re-vamped SDS should be empowered to exercise strong central budgetary and quality controls, with the aim of promoting more cost-effective and improved training methods, and eliminating duplication of effort and inefficient use of resources.
- d. The new SDS should have the responsibility and authority to manage the organisation's overall staff development programme, whilst maintaining the positive achievements associated with decentralisation of design and delivery across various functional subject areas of training.
- e. Training should be more deeply involved in the organisation's efforts to identify where it is going wrong, to learn lessons, and to identify best practices.

## **Recommendation 2**

29. Training should be integrated into a Human Resources Strategy:

- . The key role of training in ensuring attainment of the objectives of the Career Management System (CMS), in particular as the instrument of assessment of staff development needs, must be recognised.
- b. Efforts should be made to more systematically align training programmes with career paths. This will require the design of mandatory training curricula associated with specific career paths, as proposed in the Training Strategy. Serious consideration should be given to the introduction of testing and verification of training results.
- c. Organisers of training should make more use of the revised system for recording training activities, which is currently being developed. Training records (database and statistics) should be used systematically for the monitoring, planning and improved targeting of their programmes.
- d. The relationship between staff development and other components of human resources management, such as recruitment, career development and retrenchment, needs to be developed. The objective should be to reduce reliance on formal training and to help ensure recruitment of staff with the needed skills.
- e. The new policy on gender equity in training programmes should be revisited so as to ensure that guidelines to promote training as an instrument to increase the proportion of women in the higher grades are consistent with other established policies.
- f. Taking into account the recently issued policy on language training, UNHCR should develop a more comprehensive approach to this issue by co-ordinating the approach to language training with other components of human resources management strategies (See report on Language and Induction Training in Annex I, under separate cover).
- g. A comprehensive review of the need for induction training should be organised, and a new strategy should be designed, linking induction training more closely to

the recruitment and postings processes. Supervisors should be encouraged and supported to assume a more active role in introducing new staff to the organisation and to their jobs.

### **Recommendation 3**

30. UNHCR should take advantage of new approaches to training:

- a. SDS should increasingly move beyond the current exclusive reliance on formal modes of training, to take advantage of non-formal and non-organised learning.
- b. SDS needs to develop greater understanding of how natural learning processes work in the organisation, with a view to identifying as priority training programmes only those learning needs which cannot be met through everyday working experience. Existing alternatives to formal training, such as distance learning, computer-based training, on-the-job training, mentoring, and coaching, should also be further developed.
- c. SDS should pool ideas, resources, experiences and lessons learnt by training providers throughout the organisation, with a view to making training more effective.
- d. Inter-agency contacts, both within and outside the UN system, aimed at exchanging ideas and experiences, should be intensified and systematised. This should include support for joint training projects, as well as provide new models for the management of training .

### **Recommendation 4**

31. A systematic approach should be taken to monitoring and evaluating the impact of training:

- a. The contents and impact of selected individual training programmes, in particular in the fields of protection, programme management, people-oriented planning, and management development, should be analysed, with a view to identifying duplication and overlap between these training programmes, and proposing remedial action.
- b. Assessments should be made of what trainees retain of the subject matter of the training, as well as of the impact on their professional competence and their actual performance.
- c. The effect of training on UNHCR's overall operational effectiveness and on the quality of its operations and programmes should also be analysed.

## **I. USING TRAINING TO IMPROVE ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

32. In most organisations, training is intended to benefit the organisation through the results of improved job performance by the individual rather than to assist the individual in achieving his or her own particular goals and objectives. This idea has been reflected in various UNHCR documents over the years. The following is a sampling of UNHCR definitions of training:

- an instrument for the improvement of job performance (UNHCR draft training policy, 1986);
- a support function and catalyst to help achieve the overall goals of the Office, serving the mandate, strategic considerations and objectives of the organisation (Working Group on Training, 1987);
- an instrument of staff development and a means of enhancing UNHCR's capacity to deliver its mandated activities in a changing environment (Training Advisory Board, 1995);



- a structured learning activity aimed at developing or improving the competencies required by staff in their current or forthcoming functions, for the benefit both of the staff members and the organisation (Task Force on Training, 1993).

33. The notion of training as a way to improve organisational performance was expressed particularly forcefully in the report of a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) evaluation of UNHCR in September 1992<sup>3</sup>. The evaluation concluded that: "decisions on training have not related to organisational needs, such as improving performance or ability to respond to emergencies .... training tends to relate more to individual needs, preferences and related agendas such as visibility and access to career steps, than to improving competence or job performance. Currently, investments in training are seen as organisational expenses rather than as strategic investments for the future." The CIDA conclusion was that "UNHCR should develop a training strategy that acknowledges training as a way to improve organisational performance."

34. This assessment may not have fully taken into account the fact that the EMTP programme from 1985 onwards was directly aimed at improving UNHCR's capacity in responding to emergencies. It must also be recognised that most other training activities had at least been initiated in relation to perceived organisational needs. The CIDA study's finding nonetheless underlined the need for an in-depth reappraisal of training in UNHCR.

35. The appointment in 1992 by the High Commissioner of a Task Force on Training launched a wide-ranging examination of the training process in

UNHCR. Virtually every positive development that has since taken place in terms of training culture, strategy and activity can be traced to the recommendations of the Task Force.

36. It would seem, however, that a number of the task force's key recommendations are far from fully implemented. It is questionable, for example, whether:

- UNHCR has become a performance-driven organisation;
- UNHCR has established a comprehensive and high-quality management development programme<sup>4</sup>;
- the Training Section has provided – or been given the resources to provide – specialist facilitators to strengthen the capacity of work units through training and other means;
- a comprehensive career planning system has been put into operation;
- induction training has been strengthened to ensure an effective introduction to policies and procedures for all new staff, with special emphasis on the functional responsibility they are to assume;
- a comprehensive programme has been developed to prepare staff on reassignment.

37. The Task Force drew up an Action Plan which envisaged the achievement of its goals by the end of 1995, with a Steering Committee under the chairmanship of the DHC to oversee both the implementation process and its final evaluation. The Steering Committee was never appointed<sup>5</sup> and the Training Advisory Board which was appointed in 1995 was not given the authority which the Task Force had envisaged.

38. If implementation of its recommendations is still far from complete, the work of the 1992-93 Task Force on Training nevertheless remains a major achievement. It was ahead of its time and is hardly less relevant today than in 1993. The pursuit of its objectives remains a valid goal.



## II. LINKING TRAINING WITH ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES

39. UNHCR's Training Strategy, as proposed by the Training Advisory Board in June 1997, again made it clear that "to be effective, training must be linked inextricably to the Organisation's overall strategy"[6](#), and it placed the responsibility for ensuring a culture of learning on all, from the SMC to individual staff members, in a context of team values and shared objectives. Furthermore, the strategy recognised the "crucial" role of senior management when it formulated as its first proposed action: "Endorsement by SMC of a mechanism whereby annual priorities are set for strategic operational directions, communicated to the Training Advisory Board as a basis for training priorities"[7](#).

40. Had the proposed mechanism been put in place, it would no doubt have established an effective linkage between global objectives and training priorities, leading to a process whereby the objectives are analysed, areas of involvement identified, and performance requirements defined. Adjustments of training priorities could have been made in an ongoing, co-ordinated and transparent way. More effective monitoring of implementation and compliance would logically follow. Unfortunately, in January 1999, when SDS prepared an update on the implementation of the Training Strategy[8](#), the establishment of such a mechanism was "still awaited". As a result, the overall training programme has lacked focus and coherence.

41. In the meantime, the Training Strategy also referred to two basic documents: the "Delphi Plan of Action"[9](#), and "UNHCR Strategy towards 2000"[10](#), both of which pointed to gaps and other areas which merited support through training. The following areas were identified as training priorities: fostering of analytical skills, transfer of "lessons learned" at all levels of the organisation, skills in managing resources, communication and team-working skills, negotiation and external relations, skills to manage and implement change, skills to manage stress and to ensure the security of staff.

42. Of these priority areas, a number were selected and proposed as mandatory. Indeed, it would appear that there is hardly any area of training in UNHCR which has not been considered mandatory, other than Emergency Management Training and language courses. A closer look at some of these training areas provides a good illustration of the effect of this lack of focus. For example, although the fostering of analytical skills topped the list of "priority" training[11](#), this was apparently the last time it was mentioned and no one has ever heard of it since. In contrast, emergency management training and language courses have, paradoxically, continued to prosper.

43. Another example concerns the relatively small volume of Security Awareness Training delivered during the past years, despite the fact that this is one of the areas which was declared both a priority and mandatory. A start has been made: UNHCR has developed a set of training modules and a workshop curriculum for security awareness training, and training providers have been trained. This must have represented a significant initial investment, and it would appear that the Staff Safety Section (which is responsible for security awareness training) intended to provide a substantial volume of training, but was limited by budgetary constraints and a lack of commitment to its objectives both from elsewhere in the organisation and among some of the staff directly concerned.

44. A further consequence of the weak linkage between training and the Office's global strategy is that UNHCR has not taken advantage of other potentially important benefits which training and staff development can provide in defining knowledge and skills, lessons learned and best practices, and required attitudinal change. The present concept of staff development and training as a "one-way learning street", a simple instrument to deliver knowledge and skills, overlooks this vital role.

45. Greater emphasis on innovative and participatory training would, on the other hand,

help the organisation in better defining its strategic objectives and areas of intervention. Practice has shown that the operations plans, improved materials, new relationships and "advice to management" which often emanate from training events can markedly alter the organisation itself. This aspect of staff development and training is not sufficiently recognised and developed in UNHCR, which therefore misses an opportunity to capitalise on much of its potential.

### III. DEVELOPING NEW WAYS OF LEARNING

46. In the policy documents on training generated in UNHCR over the past few years, there is a growing awareness that the concept of "training" has become inadequate to describe many of the activities currently undertaken under the heading of staff development, let alone indicate directions for the future. The term "learning" has found its way increasingly into the vocabulary of staff development, in UNHCR as well as in many other organisations. This development stems from dissatisfaction with previous concepts of training as "a Chinese menu of courses and workshops" from which staff may choose according to their appetite and tastes, but without necessarily any relevance to considerations of performance management or organisational objectives. Earlier perceptions also carried with them a host of counter-productive associations, such as the workshop as a perk, as a periodic entitlement, or a reward for hard work.

47. Implicit in the concept of "learning" is, first of all, that the staff member, rather than the trainer or the organisation, is responsible for his/her development. The role of the organisation is to foster a process of continuous learning, not only by offering carefully planned training and development opportunities, but by encouraging and supporting a culture of learning. This is intended to imply, *inter alia*, a much reduced reliance on formal workshops as the preferred means for the delivery of training, as the training effort is spread through the organisation, into a variety of job categories, and to remote locations. Other approaches have been introduced, such as self-study materials, distance learning, on-the-job training, checklists, videos, computer-based training, and direct experience through missions or secondment. Plans to link training to specific career paths, the initiative to prescribe mandatory training, as well as the verification of training, are other elements of a new flexibility in training approaches.

48. In addition, there has evolved a wider concept of the learning process, based on the premise that most of a staff member's learning happens in ways over which the organisation exercises virtually no control. This natural process of learning occurs, for instance, in the daily working relationship between supervisor and supervisee, between colleagues with more and those with less experience, and as a result of rotation, missions, and debriefings.

49. Ideas related to staff development have advanced further with the appearance of the concept of the "learning organisation", to which many organisations, including UNHCR, aspire<sup>12</sup>. This concept denotes an organisation's ability to learn from what it does, to correct itself and, if necessary, to realign itself in response to the need to remain relevant and competitive in a rapidly changing environment.

50. During recent years, UNHCR has tried to integrate these concepts into many of its strategies and policies. "Project Delphi" and the "change management" process which it spearheaded were intended, *inter alia*, to transform UNHCR into a learning organisation. Similarly, the Training Strategy emphasised the need to develop alternative means of delivery of training, while, as has been seen, CMS established a linkage between performance management and staff development.

51. The development and implementation of most other initiatives (such as training linked to specific career paths, mandatory training, other means of delivery and verification of training) have remained below initial expectations. There have been isolated, often ambitious, initiatives by a number of individual training providers in their

own area of responsibility. For example, many have been developing learning materials for distance learning, others have produced training CR-ROMs. Much more could be done, however, to pool ideas, resources and experiences and lessons learnt, for the benefit of all. A good deal of duplication has also occurred. Some other training providers have, on their own account, developed improvised systems to measure the impact of their programmes on operations, such as the sections responsible for POP and protection training.

52. The potential of the concept of the wider learning process has unfortunately remained largely in the shadows. UNHCR could make more effort to understand how this process works, to identify natural learning opportunities and to ensure that the learning process happens as effectively as possible. This can be systematically approached firstly, by listing the various significant ways in which a staff member will learn during his/her career, and, secondly, by reviewing the policies and activities which might have a bearing on the learning process. The organisation might then redesign or reinforce these policies and activities to ensure that maximum learning benefit is drawn. Ultimately, it should lead to an approach in which the organisation should have to engage in formal training only to the extent that learning needs cannot be met through a natural process.

53. UNHCR should also invest greater effort in ensuring follow-up to the various training action plans which have been developed. These plans envisage, in addition to such techniques as computer-based training and use of self-study materials, the increased use of on-the-job training programmes, coaching, mentoring, and learning through briefings and debriefings.

#### **IV. REDUCING FRAGMENTATION**

##### The Training Recording System

54. Any review of UNHCR's current training activities requires reference to and analysis of statistics and other available data. Since 1987, UNHCR has maintained a data management system to record training events and other information relevant to the organisation of training activities. The operation of this Training Recording System (TRS) is the responsibility of SDS. It is used for the registration of training events, each of which is recorded in Course Summary Lists, and includes such information as, *inter alia*, the venue and dates, the participants, summary of evaluations filled out by participants, and the numbers of NGO, government, UNHCR trainees and/or participants from other UN agencies. The TRS can be considered as a reasonably reliable record of UNHCR's global training effort, except in the case of language training and induction where systematic record-keeping has been weak.

55. Another statistical tool is the Personnel Database, which is part of a separate system, called PIOUS (Personnel Information On-line Update System) managed by the Personnel Data Unit, to which the TRS database can be linked. A more or less automatic link ensures that a staff member's participation in a training event is recorded on the person's Fact Sheet. Other linkages are also possible, such as one which has made it possible to compare and analyse data from both systems to produce the findings presented here.

##### Training Providers

56. The decentralisation of training has allowed the development of a wide range of training programmes, as can be seen from the following review of the various training providers currently operating in UNHCR. The term Training Provider refers to a section or unit in Headquarters, which organises and delivers staff training activities, either as its exclusive function, or as a major activity among several others. A training provider may or may not have staff specifically assigned to training functions. Training activities

are usually charged to UNHCR's Training Budget but, in some cases, training providers have access to other funding sources, such as Trust Funds or project funds under regular programmes.

57. With the exception of the Staff Development Service (SDS), all training providers are integrated parts of work units responsible for a specific functional area within the organisation: protection training is organised by the Protection Support and Oversight Section within the Department of International Protection, emergency management training by the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, financial management by the Division of Resource Management, and so on.

58. The close relationship which exists between these training providers and their particular subject area is no doubt responsible for the high quality of some programmes and for the enthusiasm with which they are implemented. It also plays an important role in the effort to ensure that any training programme constitutes an effective and appropriate response to a training need in a given functional area.

59. Problems appear, however, at the level where co-ordination of the overall training effort is supposed to take place, and where different training programmes are compared with each other. As will be illustrated below, in particular, the weakness in overall co-ordination of training has led to duplication of efforts, and to inefficient use of resources. The conclusion is that, if a reinforced central monitoring and co-ordinating function for training existed, UNHCR staff would be likely to benefit from more and/or better training, for the same outlay or even less.

60. Currently, there are 17 different Training Providers in UNHCR. Data collected over a three-year period (1995-97) shows how these providers rank in terms of volume of training delivered. Two elements have been used to measure training output: first, the number of participants per event and, second, the number of days the training activity lasted. The "training volume" is arrived at by multiplying these two figures. A three year period was chosen in order to compensate for the often considerable annual variations in the volume of training delivered. The result of this analysis shows that in terms of volume of training organised over this three-year period, excluding language training and induction-briefing, seven providers are responsible for two thirds of overall training (see Table below).

61. It would also have been useful to ascertain whether or not significant differences in expenditure exist between the major training providers. Any such differences, apart from obvious ones related to the volume of training for which each is responsible, might have provided an indication of the degree to which effective use is being made of available resources. Unfortunately, the records do not allow any reliable comparison as, from year to year, expenditure is reported under categories which often differ from those used for the recording of training volume.

### ***Table I***

*Ranking of Training Providers according to Volume of Training delivered 1995-97  
(excluding language training and induction)*

<b>Training Provider</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>% of overall volume</b>
Protection Training and Support Section	Protection Training	15
Policy and Planning Section	Admin/personnel issues	10
Staff Development Section	Communication Skills (74%) General Management (2%) External Studies (0.7%)	10
Emergency Preparedness & Response Section	Emergency Management	9
Various Sections	Technical/Sectoral Issues	8
Policy and Training Unit	Finance Management	7
Snr. Coord. Section	Programme Management	7
Snr. Coord. for Refugee Women	People Oriented Planning	7
Others (excluding Language training and induction)		27

### Streamlining of training programmes

62. There appear to be a number of overlaps and duplications in content between the various training programmes. For example, negotiation and mediation skills training is offered as part of the Protection, the Communication Skills, and Management Skills Training programmes, with different training providers duplicating the same training content on behalf of, potentially, the same audience. Another example is the Programme Management Training programme, which contains elements taken from the People Oriented Planning programme. Without proper co-ordination, duplication of effort cannot be avoided. Even if overlaps are identified, it is unlikely that a solution can be found in the absence of an impartial intermediary, or an appropriate forum where the problem can be addressed.

63. Such duplication of effort should come as no surprise. Training programmes are usually designed in response to a need felt in a specific functional area. Once a programme is in use, any modifications to its contents are the result of a monitoring and evaluation process undertaken, whether systematically or not, by the particular training provider responsible for the programme. Neither in the design phase, nor in the subsequent implementation-monitoring-evaluation-modification phases are programme contents judged by persons other than the individual training provider. There is no mechanism for the critical evaluation of the contents of each training programme, neither in respect of its original design, nor during its subsequent evolution, through comparison with other training programmes.

64. Recently, some initiatives have been taken to try to address some of these issues. For example, the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women has taken steps to assess the feasibility of "mainstreaming" relevant aspects of the People Oriented Planning Training Programme into other, existing training programmes in the fields of protection and programme management. Such initiatives merit support, and UNHCR should consider a more systematic review of the contents of other individual training programmes with a view to identifying and finding solutions for duplications and overlaps. The appropriate body to conduct comparative reviews is SDS.

## **V. MAKING TRAINING COST EFFECTIVE**

65. In seeking to assess the cost-effectiveness of training, data on annual expenditure and the implementation of training activities were compared. This analysis covers the years 1991 to 1997, and it is limited to disbursements made against the Training Budget, which contains allocations intended to cover the costs of training programme

activities, such as: travel and DSA of participants and resource persons, contractual fees (consultants), costs for the development and production of modules and other training materials, training supplies, and tuition fees in the case of external studies. Staff costs, either of staff assigned to SDS or to any of the other training providers in UNHCR, are not included.

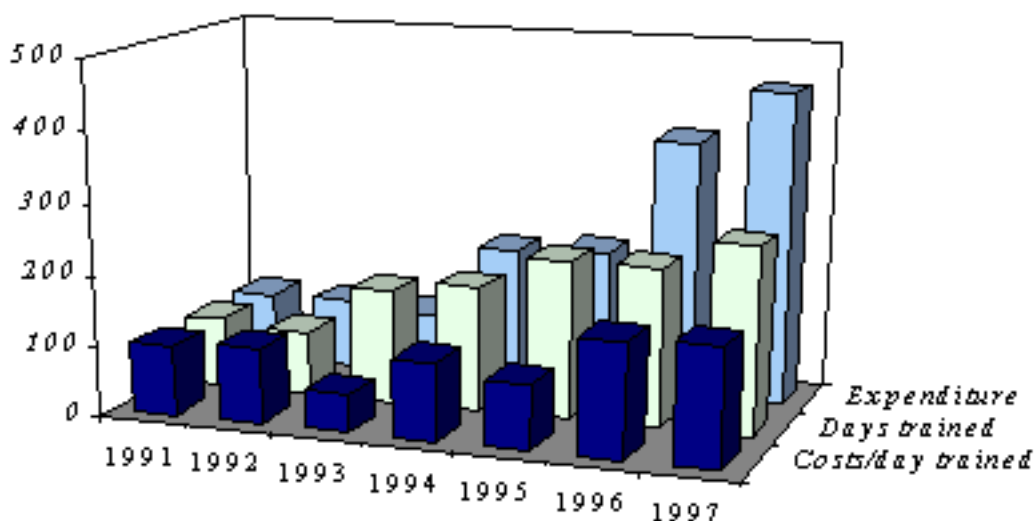
66. As the record of actual training activities, the Course Summary List was used as the best available source. This list may not present the total picture, but a comparison with the records kept by major training providers shows that, except for language training and induction briefing, the overwhelming majority of training events was accurately recorded.

67. Caution is nonetheless warranted regarding the use of the available expenditure figures as an indication of real training programme expenditure. For instance, disbursements recorded for travel and DSA do not necessarily reflect the total expenditure, as participants' travel and DSA were often charged to the ABOD of the office where the staff member was assigned. Any Trust Funds used for the development and delivery of specific training programmes (such as the significant Canadian Trust Fund earmarked for the design of the Financial Management Training Programme) are also not reflected in the Training Budget. Sometimes, new training programmes are part of a wider initiative, through which they are also funded, as is the case with the Supply Chain Training Programme, which is part of the Supply Chain Project, and charged thereto. The conclusion is that actual expenditure figures on training must be considerably higher than are shown by the records consulted for this comparison.

68. The figures on expenditure and volume of training activities are presented in the graph overleaf. In comparing these data, it should be borne in mind that the data on training volume do not include language training, whilst the expenditure figures do. However, any effect which this would have on the results of the comparison is negligible, as language training has represented a relatively constant proportion of the overall training effort during the period under review (some 10%). The data show that, between 1991 and 1997, the volume of person/training days increased by a factor of 2.5, whilst the corresponding figure for expenditure was at least 4.5.

Graph 1

**Relative change in training expenditure, days trained and costs per day trained (1991=100)**



69. It was not possible to ascertain with certainty from the available data what factors

were responsible for this significant increase in training costs, but the following elements must be taken into account:

- Design of new programmes. Since the decentralisation of training, many new training programmes have been developed, requiring initial investments not only in design, but also in the production of training modules, computer based training methods, etc, often requiring the services of outside consultants. These investments are reflected only after a delay in the volume of training delivered. At first glance, this seems to explain the disparity. However, a major part of the development of new programmes where this would apply was financed through external Trust Funds, or through other UNHCR budgets. In addition, the span of seven years covered by this analysis should have compensated for the lapse of time between up-front investment and subsequent implementation. Finally, during the period under review, average consultant fees have reportedly fallen considerably and would not appear to have played an important role.
- Inefficient use of resources. The uncoordinated way in which training is managed, without prioritisation, combined with the process of allocation of funds to a large number of training providers, would seem to point to the inefficient use of resources as a probable cause. A growing number of training providers compete each year for a slice of the Training Budget. So far, the range of training providers has only grown; it has never been decided to discontinue, phase-out, streamline or merge programmes, once these have been initiated. In the allocation process administered through the Training Advisory Board (TAB), individual providers are assessed primarily on the basis of the previous year's level of expenditure and rate of implementation. In the absence of other major criteria, this assessment process gives rise to an inflationary tendency: in order to ensure that the highest possible allocation is received, the previous year's allocation must be shown to have been spent, or better still, overspent. Obviously, this cannot but lead to an inefficient use of funds.

70. Costs vary widely between various uncoordinated training activities. A necessarily superficial assessment shows that the average cost per person/training-day ranges between less than US\$200 and more than US\$2,000, with large fluctuations from year to year and between different training programmes. A dozen or more training providers are simultaneously organising training events, in some cases on behalf of the same audience, in near-complete isolation from one another, without any consistent joint efforts aimed at reducing costs. This could, for instance, be achieved by combining events, organising back-to-back events, by designing joint standards, by selecting the most cost-effective venues, and other means.

## **VI. ENSURING ACCESS TO TRAINING**

71. Ever since the inception of its staff training programme in the early 1980s, UNHCR has offered a wide range of training opportunities to all categories of staff and its efforts to do so have provided a clear impetus to the expansion of the training programme. It may be assumed that, from the outset, all staff were intended to benefit from appropriate training and that subject areas were chosen which target all major fields of work. Another assumption is that, for all staff within the same category, it was intended that equal access to appropriate training should be guaranteed.

72. If there is inequality in access to training, this may be attributable to several factors, of which the following three have been examined: gender, grade, and duty station. In the case of gender, this analysis seeks to ascertain whether female staff participate in training to the same extent as male staff. As regards grade, it seemed important to know whether a staff member at, for instance, the D-1 level has as much opportunity to benefit from training as a colleague who is a P-2.

73. In respect of duty station, the ease of communication between a staff member and

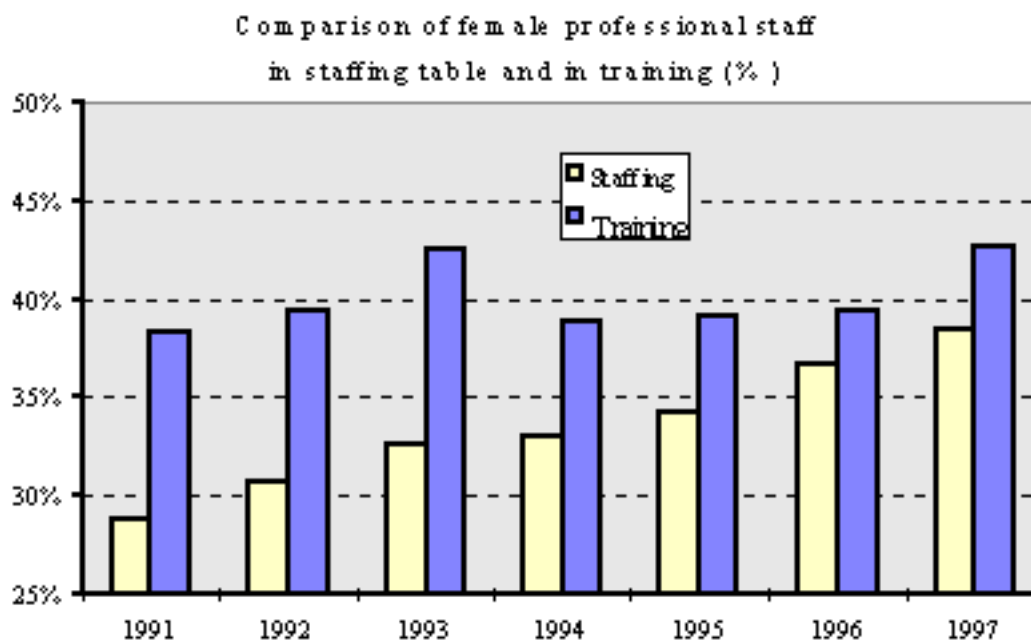


Geneva may be a factor influencing the opportunity to participate in training. This may also depend on the ranking of the duty station on the hardship scale or on its hierarchical position, i.e. whether or not it has the status of Office of Chief of Mission or Branch Office, Sub-Office, or Field Office. While the available records do reflect participation of staff in hardship duty stations, they unfortunately do not from the hierarchical perspective.

### Gender

74. The available records on training beneficiaries and the general staff data for the years 1991 to 1997 indicate that, at the professional level, while the number of women staff as a proportion of total staff increased from 29 per cent in 1991 to 38 per cent in 1997, the number of women beneficiaries of training as a proportion of total training beneficiaries increased from 38 per cent in 1991 to 43 per cent in 1997. Conversely, whereas men constituted 71 per cent of professional staff in 1991, they represented only 62 per cent of training beneficiaries. By 1997, the proportion of male professional staff had fallen to 62 per cent and that of training beneficiaries to 57 per cent. The gap had therefore narrowed over the years but with women, training beneficiaries still a higher proportion of the total number of female staff than was the case with men. Table II illustrates the position.

*Table II*



75. At the General Service level also, the proportion of women among GS staff at Headquarters varied between 81 per cent in 1991 and 73 per cent in 1997, while the corresponding proportion of women among total training beneficiaries was between 88 and 90 per cent (see table III). In the field, the discrepancy was even greater with the average proportion of women among total GS staff as 34 per cent over the period 1991-97, while the average proportion of women training beneficiaries was 68 per cent. (See table IV overleaf).

*Table III*

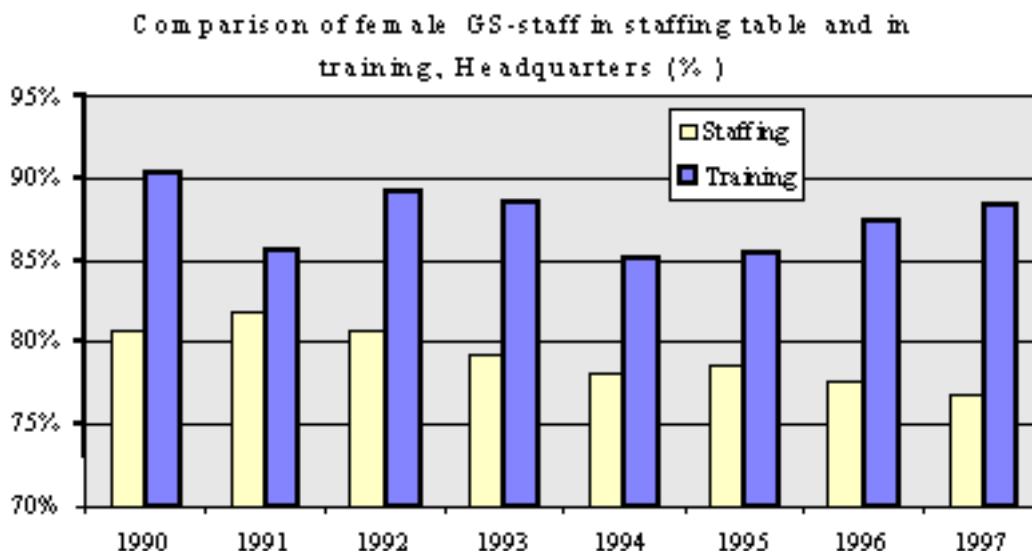
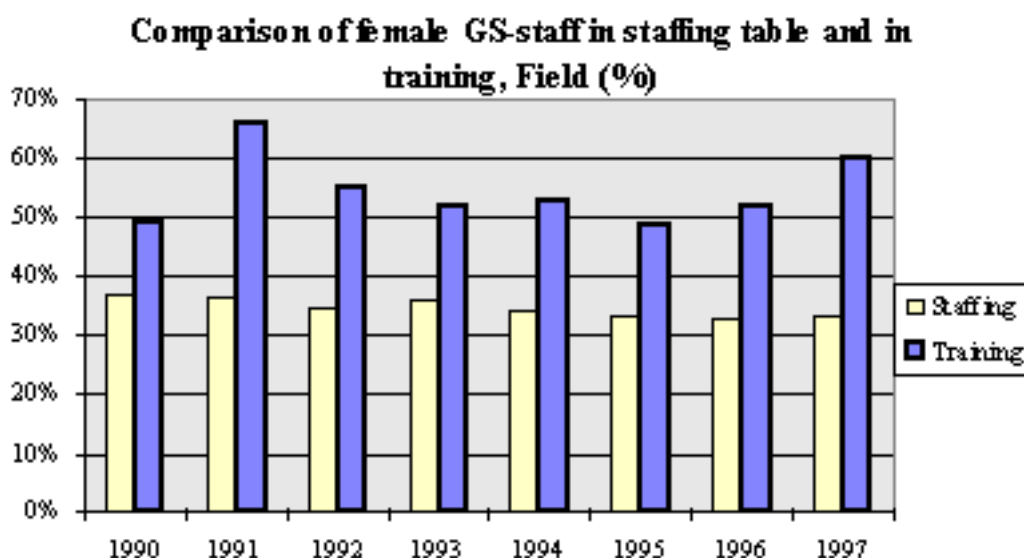


Table IV



76. In general, therefore, it can be said that over the years since 1991 a higher proportion of women staff have participated in training than their numbers as a proportion of total staff would have justified for simple "gender equity" to be achieved. Nevertheless, among professional staff at least, the comparative over-representation of women as training beneficiaries has been progressively reduced.

77. It should be noted, however, that recent proposals by the Working Group GAGE on "gender equity" and endorsed by senior management have complicated, and perhaps even confused, the picture. These proposals call, *inter alia*, for guidelines to be circulated to all training providers with a view to ensuring equal participation by men and women in all training sessions<sup>13</sup>. No guidelines to this effect have yet been issued<sup>14</sup> and there are a number of operational reasons why the feasibility of introducing them is doubtful, to say the least.

78. Firstly, as any training organiser will confirm, there is never merely one but a variety of considerations which have to be taken into account when the list of participants for a training event is being prepared. Each training event and its contents are designed according to criteria such as the functional competencies of trainees and their professional level, post grade, job category, language skills, and others. Even so, the aim of ensuring a high degree of participation by women on training courses has

already been met to an extent which makes it doubtful whether the automatic application of a 50/50 rule would have much additional impact.

79. Secondly, equal participation of men and women in all training sessions is likely to result in the eventual total obstruction of the training effort, with most eligible women having been trained, leaving a residue of men who cannot be trained as no more training sessions with a 50/50 balanced group of participants can be held.

80. Thirdly, as most of UNHCR's training effort is focused on the lower professional grades, where the proportion of women on the staff is around, or even above, 50 per cent, the application of the 50/50 principle will have the opposite effect to that intended as it will advance the career development of men rather than that of women. This will be even more the case where staff in the General Service category are concerned.

#### Grade

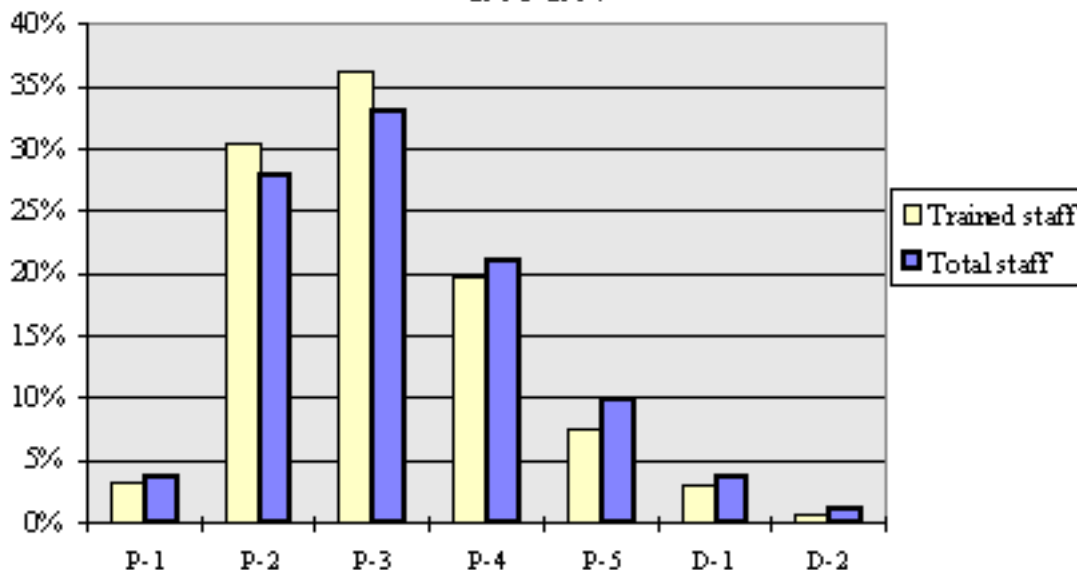
81. The records for the years 1991-1997 reveal that, for staff in the professional grades, UNHCR's training efforts were, to a large extent, distributed evenly over the grades. In a sense, this is a remarkable achievement. However, there is proportionally more training provided for staff at the P2 and P3 levels than for those in other grades (see table overleaf). This is to be expected if the organisation sees itself as the custodian of a set body of knowledge, skills and attitudes, to which novices are introduced through training.

82. The above view implies that staff who have been with the organisation long enough to have progressed to the senior grades, have largely completed the absorption of this complex of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and their need for training and learning is therefore much reduced. This, however, contradicts the overall objectives of the UNHCR Training Strategy, which aims to promote the development of a culture of "continuous learning at all levels of the organisation as a *sine qua non* [to enhance the organisation's operational effectiveness in a challenging and evolving environment]"[15](#).

83. In other words, the strategy acknowledges that the body of required knowledge and skills is rapidly changing, and that staff need to adapt continuously to new challenges. The second overall objective of the Training Strategy, placing training and learning in the context of the new Career Management System, "reinforce(s) competency development and provide(s) quality learning and development opportunities to meet needs at all levels."[16](#)

#### *Table V*

**Professional staff trained and total professional staff by grade,  
1990-1997**



84. It follows that the training effort should be more equitably spread over the grades than is at present the case. An additional argument is that the competencies of the new UNHCR manager, which the Management Development Programme seeks to foster, emphasise managing performance. This suggests that supervisors need to acquire through training more knowledge of the key functional competencies of the staff under their supervision. If there were ever reasons to focus training on the more junior grades at the expense of senior professional staff, these have lost much of their force.

#### Duty station

85. The data reveal that professional staff assigned to duty stations in the D and E categories are significantly under-represented as participants in training, and those in category C slightly so. Conversely, those assigned to Headquarters or to locations in the A or B categories are over-represented. Also the degree of representation varies. The greater the hardship associated with a staff member's duty station, the less likely it is that he/she has participated in training in a given year. This finding has a special significance if one realises that, in fact, the trend should be the reverse: not only has the proportion of staff in hardship duty stations grown over the past years, most staff on whom training is focused (staff in the P1-P3 grades) are proportionally more represented in categories D and E duty stations than in the higher categories.

86. During the early 1990s, professional staff at Headquarters had a much greater chance of participating in training activities than staff in other duty stations. During these years, approximately a third of professional staff was assigned to Geneva, whilst they represented more than half of the training beneficiaries over the same period. However, this over-representation of HQ-based staff was gradually corrected over the following years.

87. This leads to the following observations on the issue of access to training by gender, grade and duty station, which are reflected in the overall conclusions and recommendations of this study:

- a. The new policy on "gender equity" in training programmes should be revised and redesigned after a more careful analysis. UNHCR should ensure that guidelines to promote training as an instrument to increase the proportion of women in the higher professional grades are not in conflict with other established policies.
- b. Record keeping should be improved to enable a more rigorous monitoring of

access to training, as well as to allow for improved targeting of training. At the same time, organisers of training should make more use of existing records for the monitoring and planning of their programmes.

- c. Inequitable targeting is sometimes an unwanted effect of existing policies and practices. Obtaining reliable information is a pre-condition for introducing corrective measures to address, for example, the problem of access to training by staff assigned to certain categories of duty stations. In contrast, i.e. when UNHCR wants specifically to target a particular category of staff, reliable records are indispensable in the design of effective measures and approaches.

## **VII. INTEGRATING TRAINING WITH HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

88. This chapter focuses on staff development as an integrated component of human resources management and particularly on its most recent expression in the introduction of UNHCR's new Career Management System (CMS). It also examines links with other elements of an integrated human resource management strategy, such as recruitment, training in support of a career path approach, mandatory training, rotation and reassignment, and retrenchment.

### The Career Management System

89. The development of CMS has its origin in the Report of the Task Force on Training, which was issued in February 1993. The Task Force recognised that the usefulness of training as a tool to help strengthen an organisation's effectiveness depends upon certain conditions, the most important of which is "the existence of the right management culture, combined with a number of performance-related systems for the management of human resources".

90. The report highlighted the need to build a performance-driven culture within UNHCR. In addition to introducing a new direction for the organisation's human resources management policies, it went on to suggest concrete steps which should lead to the achievement of desired goals. It proposed several mechanisms for the implementation of the new ideas, such as structured objective setting by each work unit or field office, the establishment of competency profiles defining the skills needed for each job category, and a new system for performance evaluation. Both the staff member and his/her supervisor should be accountable for identifying gaps in performance, and for ensuring appropriate training to address any major shortcomings. The CMS would offer a channel for the identification of individual training needs, through the submission of Career Development Plans (CDPs). The introduction of CMS established for the first time an effective mechanism linking training needs assessment with a (potentially) improved system of performance appraisal. However, due to serious delays in implementation, it has so far had no impact on the assessment of training needs.

### Delay in CMS implementation

91. During almost a year prior to the start of the implementation of CMS, a programme of intensive training was undertaken in order to familiarise staff with CMS and its various components. The training was intended, in particular, to ensure that each staff member would be sufficiently prepared to engage in Step I of the system (i.e. objective setting, selection of competencies, and defining career development plans), before mid-1997.

92. The first full CMS annual cycle extended over the period from September 1997 until the end of August 1998. The result has so far remained well below expectations, with a variety of reasons for the disappointingly low rate of implementation. Firstly, the procedures are unnecessarily complicated and cumbersome, with far too many different competencies. In the case of many GS posts, the need to formulate objectives

separately from selecting competencies should be superfluous as both often coincide. There is clearly a need for streamlining the procedure and standardisation of many of the system's components, such as job descriptions and objectives.

93. Secondly, a number of factors tend to erode the discipline which is required for the system to perform as intended. In this respect, there are no clear sanctions to ensure that managers take CMS any more seriously than they did the old PER system. In addition, a perceived lack of built-in confidentiality in the procedure may also have contributed to a low level of compliance, as may the fact that the procedures are extremely time-consuming.

94. Thirdly, UNHCR's planning cycle involving the development of the Country Operations Plan, is not synchronised with the CMS cycle. In view of the fact that the two are intimately linked, maintaining two separate cycles adds an unnecessary burden to staff. Without aligning both exercises, CMS will continue to be seen as repetitive and duplicating other serious and time-consuming tasks.

95. Fourthly, CMS presumes the existence of a certain management culture in UNHCR, or at least that an appropriate management culture would be developed in which the manager sees him/herself not only as being accountable for the performance of staff under his/her supervision, but primarily as the coach of staff who are entrusted to his/her supervision and leadership. Although the Report of the Task Force on Training was very clear on the importance of the right management culture as a necessary condition for the successful implementation of performance-related human resources management systems, not enough was done to ensure that this element would be developed in combination with the introduction of CMS. The continued existence of a management culture which is inconsistent with the fundamental principles underlying CMS has remained unaddressed.

#### Expectations and Risks

96. The high expectations placed on the CMS and the associated CDPs as an instrument for the assessment of training needs, have not been met. Staff who have submitted CDPs in the expectation of gaining access to training as a result may have participated in training, as requested, but this should be ascribed to other factors, rather than to the systematic application of CMS procedures. The risk remains that disappointed expectations among staff regarding CMS may act or militate against the successful introduction of a revised or re-modelled career management system in the future.

97. From the experience of the past two years, it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding the capacity of SDS to respond effectively to the individual expression of training needs. Any evaluation of the mechanism by which CMS and, in particular, the formulation of CDPs, was intended to function as an effective tool for the identification of training needs, will have to await an adequate degree of implementation.

#### Other Components of Human Resources Management

98. The comprehensive analysis of the relevant aspects of performance management as the basis for planning staff development, as presented in the Training Strategy, tends to assume that all gaps in performance can be addressed through training, and that training is always the appropriate response. As the following examples show, training is not always appropriate, resulting in unjustified expectations, and diverting attention from the adoption of a more effective and successful response.

#### Recruitment

99. It is remarkable that the Training Strategy, while underlining the significance of

linking training with an integrated human resources management strategy, ignores recruitment as the important first step of human resources management. Through the application of recruitment criteria, the Organisation determines the knowledge, skills and attitudes, and professional and personal profiles with which new staff arrive. Recruitment is a process which ultimately identifies which basic competencies a training strategy can assume to exist among outsiders who become staff members. The Training Strategy should consider a mechanism whereby experiences in performance management and staff development can influence the formulation and application of recruitment criteria, and vice versa.

100. UNHCR has been repeatedly obliged to launch sudden and unplanned recruitment drives at moments when large numbers of staff were needed for emergency operations. Recruitment under such pressure and urgent conditions is far from ideal, and can never be a substitute for an effective recruitment policy. The nature of UNHCR's work, involving unplanned responses to new refugee situations, may explain the predicament.

101. UNHCR should nevertheless explore new strategies to gain more control over the recruitment process. Several past initiatives have been aimed at actively seeking out, selecting and recruiting staff according to the strict application of the highest standards. The current recruitment freeze provides an ideal opportunity to reconsider these initiatives. Another useful approach to address sudden staffing requirements would be the expansion of the existing operational partnerships and standby arrangements with NGOs, other UN Agencies, and donor governments.

102. There is evidence that if existing recruitment criteria were more rigorously applied, the need for training would be modified or reduced. A good example is the criteria in respect of linguistic competencies, which stipulate the need for a command of two official UN languages, but are often not applied. Moreover, if recruitment followed the existing criteria more strictly, staff development could focus on more advanced performance requirements rather than on meeting deficiencies that the recruitment process overlooked.

103. UNHCR may also wish to review and modernise the existing recruitment criteria. For instance, the updating of P-11s to reflect the contemporary need for both professional and GS staff to be conversant with the computer software used in UNHCR, would reduce the need to provide basic computer skills training once they are recruited, and would bring UNHCR in line with long accepted practice in the outside world.

104. Finally, UNHCR may wish to consider establishing links with selected higher educational institutions, to benefit from pre-recruitment academic preparation in humanitarian assistance and related themes.

#### Career Paths, Mandatory Training and Verification

105. The report of the Task Force on Training of 1993 and the Training Strategy of 1997 both contained proposals for the identification of career paths and the development of appropriate learning curricula, associated with these paths. These concepts are being partially realised with the introduction of CMS. However, UNHCR and its staff would derive a potentially much larger benefit if career paths were designed jointly with the development of mandatory training requirements as well as a means of verification to ascertain that curriculum contents have been successfully learned.

106. Verification of training results is related to the wider issue of the evaluation of the impact of training. Verification of training, i.e. the assessment of the extent to which the learning content has been understood and absorbed by each individual trainee through tests and examinations, should become an integrated component of human resources management strategies, including the preparation for rotation and reassignment



between functions and/or locations, and the granting of promotions.

107. For reassignment, in addition to the above, a comprehensive approach should be developed with an institutional requirement to ensure that there is an overlap, allowing the outgoing incumbent to brief and coach the newcomer. Briefing packages should be developed containing guidelines, up-to-date policies and procedures, location-specific and other relevant information. Supervisors should be made accountable for ensuring that proper orientation and necessary training takes place on reassignment.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

108. The Training Recording System (TRS), was intended to monitor the implementation of training activities and, as has been noted, can be regarded as a reliable overview of training activities. Furthermore, a new monitoring system, designed by a consultant contracted by SDS, will hopefully be introduced in the near future. Tracking training activities and participation in them logically leads to evaluation of the impact of training both on individuals and on organisational goals. At present, evaluation is limited to participants filling out a form at the end of a seminar, usually referred to as "participants' feedback evaluation".

109. Some recent efforts have nonetheless been made by individual training providers to take evaluation to higher levels:

- the organisers of protection training have sought to trace the results of their training efforts by monitoring trends in decisions on refugee eligibility;
- People-Oriented Planning (POP) trainers have asked course graduates to provide a short essay detailing how the training has led to concrete changes in their work;
- the emergency management training unit has sought to ensure that a large proportion of trainees were actually deployed to emergency situations within a few months of having participated in emergency management workshops.

110. Such initiatives should now serve as models for a more systematic evaluation of the extent to which training and staff development further the goals of the organisation. This approach should be applied to all areas of training in the organisation, with the Staff Development Section taking the lead, providing technical guidance and support to training providers. The experience of several other organisations, such as the World Bank, UNICEF and UNDP in evaluating the impact of training could also provide useful examples for UNHCR to follow.

111. As a first step, UNHCR should introduce testing to ensure that training participants have acquired the prescribed knowledge or improved their skills. This approach would be a logical and direct consequence of the introduction of CMS, as it provides a measurable and objective link between training and improved performance on the job. Ultimately, the outcome of pursuing impact evaluation at various levels should be the development of an integrated system of objective setting, training programme design, delivery and evaluation of the results of training, in close co-ordination with performance management.

### Retrenchment

112. It would be consistent with the intentions and fundamental orientation of the Training Strategy if staff development were also used to prepare staff for possible employment outside UNHCR, and help them maintain an adequate level of marketability. A staff development programme, which takes these objectives into consideration, also helps to ensure that the organisation can rejuvenate itself on a regular basis with the minimum of individual hardship. If UNHCR had developed its training strategy with these considerations in mind, both the organisation and its staff

would have been able to face the current employment crisis with greater confidence. UNHCR staff who are currently temporarily in need of placement might well have benefited from training, which would help them to improve their employability either in or outside the organisation should they decide to seek a career elsewhere.

## **VIII. LEARNING LESSONS FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

113. Comparison of the training programmes of other United Nations agencies and other international organisations with each other, and with that of UNHCR, shows that many similarities exist. Each agency has had to face the same major challenges. Issues such as the design of training strategies and priorities, decentralisation of training, and the evaluation of the impact of training on the organisation's output and effectiveness, are common to all. In most cases, solutions and approaches developed by other organisations provide useful lessons and examples for UNHCR.

114. An example of a common element, shared by virtually all organisations, is the positioning of training within a Division of Human Resource Management (or, as in the case of the ICRC, in a wider Resource Management department). Most organisations have developed a decentralised system of design and delivery of training, accompanied by decentralised budgets, balanced by a large measure of central control. Another striking communality is the impetus which training has received from change management processes, or from a change in an organisation's leadership, sometimes occurring in combination.

115. In the actual design and delivery of training, there is a growing emphasis on a wider learning approach as opposed to a continued exclusive reliance on organised, formal training interventions. There is a general effort to move away from the predominance of classroom-based training and to take advantage of new technology, for instance to encourage distance learning. In training design and delivery, all organisations rely heavily on the services of, often the same, outside consultants.

116. Finally, all agencies are exploring the feasibility of developing a more systematic approach to impact evaluation but, with the exception of the World Bank and to some extent UNICEF, none has managed to conduct systematic evaluations beyond the regular exercise of having post-workshop evaluation forms filled out by participants.

117. Apart from the similarities, there are also differences between UNHCR's training programmes and those of most other agencies. Unlike UNHCR, many other organisations have created a central function carrying overall responsibility for the management of training, strategically positioned in the organisation's structure with direct links to senior management and to overall planning and policy development. These entities have been assigned the authority to manage the organisation's overall staff development programme, notwithstanding the often high level of decentralisation of design and delivery across various functional subject areas of training. Associated with comprehensive responsibility for the overall staff development programme, is the assignment of the necessary level of authority. The training departments are rightfully perceived as fundamental to the functioning of their organisations, and enjoy high visibility and status.

118. Most agencies have systematically linked the design of training strategies to the global objectives of their organisation, in an attempt to move away from a loose set of training programmes with only limited relevance to the organisation's needs. Although UNHCR recognised the importance of this linkage in its Training Strategy, it fell short of creating a mechanism through which this might be assured. In most other organisations, as a first step, senior management develops the global strategic objectives, including delineating areas of involvement and performance requirements to support their achievement. Subsequently, as a second step, these decisions are communicated to training departments, which translate them into the training strategy

and training priorities.

119. On several recent occasions, UNHCR has declared itself "a learning organisation". As the examples of other agencies show, this is not limited to the provision of a certain volume of training. The organisation's operational systems must be designed to ensure that the maximum possible advantage is taken of the learning opportunities offered by the daily functioning of those systems. A learning organisation is one which forces itself to take the lessons of past experiences seriously, and actively seeks to identify, take advantage of, structure and reinforce learning in its daily life.

120. As the experiences of other agencies show, lessons learnt exercises, programme and operations planning processes, annual programme reviews, programme evaluations, mission and assignment debriefings, and hand-overs can all be used to transmit learning. A good example is the induction briefing offered by some organisations, which has been transformed from a set of briefing sessions spread over a few days, to a structured process extended over a much longer period, including the entire first field assignment.

121. Like UNHCR, other organisations which have decentralised the design, the organisation and the delivery of training, tend to place great value on this approach. In all cases, however, a strong central management authority for training has been maintained, without prejudice to the positive effects of decentralisation. This central body, usually the training department, is responsible for the allocation of training budgets, monitoring and quality control, evaluation of training results, and the overall implementation of the organisation's training strategy. As the examples from many other agencies amply demonstrate, the existence of such a central function can make a decentralised system more rather than less effective.

## **NOTES**

1. Memorandum "UNHCR Structure – Placement of Training Capability", by P. Sargisson, Head, Training Service, 12 March 1990.
2. IOM/62/90-FOM/54/90 of 1 June 1990. In the case of language training, only language ratings and official proficiency results were recorded.
3. CIDA Evaluation Study, September 1992. page 39, para 4.4.3.
4. Management training was discontinued in the instructions of DHRM in 1995 and not resumed until 1997-8.
5. A memorandum from the Officer-In-Charge of SDS of 1.12.94 called attention to the "continuing lack of any institutional process for choosing priorities when it comes to training".
6. A UNHCR Training Strategy; proposed by the Training Advisory Board, Geneva, June 1997. page 1, paragraph 1.1.
7. Ibid, page 4.
8. Update on Implementation of Training Strategy, SDS, January 1999.
9. Project Delphi: Plan of Action; Standing Committee 4th Meeting, EC/46/SC/CRP.48 of 4 September 1996.
10. "UNHCR Strategy Towards 2000", UNHCR's Global Strategy Paper, prepared by the Centre for Documentation and Research (CDR), April 1996.
11. Ibid, page 2, paragraph 1.5.

12. Staff Training in UNHCR: An Update on Recent Developments, Report for the 11th meeting of the Standing Committee, 2 April 1998, EC/48/SC/CRP.19
13. Memorandum ref. HRM10 of 29 October 1998 from DHC to Director, DHRM.
14. The Director, DHRM's reply of 25 January 1999 rather neatly side-stepped the 50/50 issue.
15. A UNHCR Training Strategy, proposed by the Training Advisory Board, June 1997, page 1.
16. Ibid.

EPAU/99/02

## Annex 1

### A REVIEW OF LANGUAGE AND INDUCTION TRAINING IN UNHCR

Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit  
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## INTRODUCTION

1. Language training is the oldest area of training in UNHCR. It is also one of the most costly of all training activities, and has been closely linked with human resources management policies. Likewise, induction briefing has been a constant element in UNHCR's staff development programme, familiarising newly recruited professional staff with the organisation, and with its most important principles, concepts and procedures. For these reasons, the evaluation reviewed these programmes in detail.

## LANGUAGE TRAINING

2. Over the past decade, UNHCR has endeavoured to develop a coherent language training policy. It was therefore considered important to examine the needs which the training programme addresses, or may be expected to address, with a focus on the key link between training and general human resources policies. It was also considered relevant to assess the extent to which the language training programme, and the various measures which have been taken to support it, merit the expectations placed upon them. Finally, recommendations are made to make language training more effective in dealing with identified needs and challenges.

3. The issue of language training must be seen in the light of the following general comments:

- a. Over the past decade, more financial resources have been allocated to language training than to any other area of training in UNHCR;
- b. Pending the full implementation of CMS, no other aspect of training has been so closely linked with human resources management policies (such as those regarding postings and promotions) as language training;
- c. More staff members come in contact with language training than with any other area of training in the organisation, and during a considerably longer period of time;
- d. The issue of language continues to generate a high level of interest among staff, and be a prime cause of emotion and frustration. Discussions tend to focus on access to and the quality of language courses;
- e. Despite all the above, the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of language training has hardly ever been put in question.

4. Ever since the creation of UNHCR in 1951, Headquarters-based staff have enjoyed the opportunity of following language courses at the Palais des Nations. The classes are organised by the Training and Examinations Section of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) for the benefit of Geneva based United Nations staff, including UNHCR personnel, and members of diplomatic missions. The courses offer training at various levels in any of the six official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and are held at the villa "Le Bocage" on the premises of the Palais des Nations. UNHCR staff are given the opportunity to attend daily classes during working hours and UNHCR is invoiced by UNOG for each language student. This arrangement remains in effect.

5. In 1985, UNHCR introduced a system intended to enable staff members serving in field offices to benefit also from language training. Under this arrangement, field offices receive funding to organise group courses. A more common form of support is the provision of a financial allowance to individual staff members to enable them to attend commercial courses available at their location, or receive individual tuition. These arrangements are still in force.

6. During most of the 1980s, the volume of language training and the number of language students increased significantly as a result of the growth in UNHCR's staffing levels in the early 1980s, and the introduction of language training in the field in 1985. In response to these developments, the then Training Service developed a set of criteria and procedures for the management of language training. These criteria concern primarily the eligibility of specific categories of staff for language training, the decision as to which languages may be learned with support from the Office and the duration thereof, as well as arrangements for leave of absence and the evaluation of learning results. Details of some of these criteria, and their role in the management of language training, will be found

below.

7. In 1988, the former Training Service conducted a language training needs assessment among staff, in response to which it took the initiative of organising in-house courses at the UNHCR premises for professional staff at headquarters, whose work did not allow them regular attendance at the Palais. After a short initial period during which Arabic, French and Spanish classes were offered, only French classes continued during subsequent years. The contents of these intensive courses were designed with a view to practical use in a UNHCR field work environment, focusing on the learning of a vocabulary specific to the refugee work situation. The courses initially attracted many staff, but were suspended in mid-1998 due to low attendance.

8. Finally, a special form of language training is the so-called total immersion training, from which staff may benefit under special conditions. In 1997, the then Staff Development Section (SDS) sponsored a Total Immersion Course in French, held in Annecy, France.

9. For many years, language training has had the largest number of beneficiaries in comparison with other fields of training. Average expenditures have represented some 10% of the overall UNHCR administrative training budget, and close to half of the portion of that budget administered by SDS.

#### **THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE TRAINING IN TERMS OF EXPENDITURE**

10. Language training represents one of the most costly areas of training in UNHCR, if not the most expensive, in terms of total annual expenditure. In terms of investment per staff member per year, language training arguably represents a more substantial amount than is usually assumed. As a first indication, the records of expenditure against UNHCR's administrative Training Budget were used. Unfortunately, records on expenditure which detail disbursements for language training separately from other areas of training are only available for the years since 1995. These show the following picture:

##### *Expenditure on Language Training Compared to Overall Expenditure on Training*

1995 : US\$217,000 out of US\$2,381,000  
1996 : US\$471,000 out of US\$4,311,900  
1997 : US\$519,200 out of US\$5,191,700

In each individual year there may have been another area of training which surpassed language training in levels of expenditure, such as Programme Management training, which had an incidental peak in 1995 (10%), CMS in 1996 (12%), or Protection Training in 1997 (suddenly increasing to 19%). But, over the years until 1998, language training showed, more than any other area of training, the most continuous high level of expenditure.

11. While this information on the level of investment in language training demonstrates that language training is overall the most costly area of training in UNHCR, it still provides an incomplete and, therefore, somewhat distorted picture. Expenditure would even be higher if one were to give proper consideration to the fact that the average number of working hours invested in language training is considerably higher than that required by other training programmes. The average duration of a UNHCR training event over the past ten years (not counting language training) varied between 3 and 4 days. In comparison, according to UNOG records, the hours invested in language training in Geneva add up to 25 working days per person per year, or 12% of the total

annual working time (198 course hours, not counting daily travel time between office and course venue). This is obviously not the complete picture, as comparable data on language training activities elsewhere are not available, but it nevertheless illustrates that language training constitutes a substantially greater time investment than other areas of training. At the same time, it supports the argument that language training consumes a relatively important, but usually under-estimated, proportion of UNHCR's training resources.

## **TOWARDS A LANGUAGE TRAINING POLICY; CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES**

12. For the management of language training activities, UNHCR needs to weigh the interests of the organisation and individual staff members with considerations of cost-effectiveness and the responsible use of resources. For this purpose, over the years, the Office has developed a series of instruments for language training, in particular criteria for eligibility and procedures for implementation.

### Criteria

13. Initially, UNHCR's approach to language training took its cue from the way the UNOG courses in Geneva were managed, in particular from UNOG's existing criteria for eligibility, duration of training and evaluation of training results. UNOG's objective for language training appears to have been defined as widely as "to encourage staff to improve their language skills", with the implicit assumption that improvement in competence in any of the six official UN languages of any staff member at any moment would be in the interest of the organisation. Subsequently, when UNHCR started to organise its own language training programme, it adapted some of the existing criteria for its own use, and developed additional ones as needed. Thus was added the "strong recommendation that staff learn languages which will respond to the needs of the organisation". It was no longer only the individual interest of a staff member to which the programme responded as staff were now encouraged to learn languages with the interest of the organisation in mind. In particular, the learning of French and English, UNHCR's two official working languages, was strongly recommended.

14. Thus there developed dual objectives for language training: to respond to the interests of the individual staff member, as well as the operational need of the organisation, by having certain categories of staff acquiring specific linguistic skills. However, the objectives were not linked to one another in the sense that, e.g., individual interest would be supported *provided* that it served the operational needs of the office and only if the particular linguistic competence was required for the staff member's job. Yet other objectives were added such as "to allow staff to obtain language indemnity or to become eligible for promotion". All the while, in most cases, each objective *per se* functioned as sufficient ground to qualify for language training. A notable exception was the criterion for eligibility of local field staff, which stipulated that local staff might obtain support only for learning the official working language applicable to their location, although, in practice, this criterion was not systematically applied. In general, the problem was that, without internal linkages, the list of eligibility criteria suffered from a lack of cohesion and focus. In practice, a staff member requesting support for language training had a good chance of seeing his/her request accepted, irrespective of any impact that the training might have on the person's job performance.

15. Thus, by defining a loose set of objectives, there was little scope for consistency in the application of the eligibility criteria. In addition, other criteria such as those specifying a maximum duration of support (three years) were not always applied. Coupled with the fact that, to our knowledge, a clearly stated



language training policy was never communicated to the staff prior to December 1998 (through FOM/87/98 of 17 December 1998), the haphazard application of the eligibility and other criteria has caused considerable confusion.

16. The result of this confusion can be seen today: in early 1998, some 41% of General Service and 28% of professional staff in the field have taken the trouble of submitting a request for language training, often with no obvious reference to any job-related criteria. In some cases, the entire General Service and professional staff of large offices in the field have submitted requests, many of which might not be accepted if job-related criteria were applied.

17. The conclusion must be that there is a need for criteria which derive logically from a set of mutually linked objectives. Considering the important financial and other resources which UNHCR invests in language training, the evaluation team recommends that objective-setting should be guided primarily by operational needs. In addition, it recommends that entitlements such as the "language allowance", should be considered as incentives and instruments in the promotion of a particular language training policy, rather than as operational objectives by themselves. In any case, all language training should be conditional on the usefulness of certain linguistic competencies for a person's current assignment, or in the case of staff subject to rotation, a prospective future assignment.

#### Procedures

18. Procedures apply mainly to the management of language training in the field: individual staff members who are considered eligible are entitled to an reimbursement of up to US\$500 per year, against certificates of attendance at a recognised language training institute, during a period not exceeding three years. From year to year, progress is supposed to be monitored. In practice, these procedures have not always been strictly followed, nor has an effective monitoring system been developed.

19. One can easily sympathise with the challenge SDS faced as it had to manage and administer these procedures: verifying correct implementation presents a formidable workload. Moreover, the volume of work steadily grew with the increase in the number of students during the past decade (from 140 staff following language training in 1985 to 1,300 in 1996), without any corresponding substantial reinforcement of the responsible staff complement. SDS responded by decentralising the larger part of the administrative workload to field training coordinators. This solution, however, had its limitations as the training coordinators are essentially part-time volunteers, so that a large part of the burden for monitoring and control was left in the hands of SDS, which was not equipped to bear it.

#### Preliminary Conclusion

20. The recently issued "Language Training Policy and Guidelines for Field Offices" (FOM/87/98 of 17 December 1998) certainly constitutes an improvement over the previous situation, as it clarifies many criteria and procedures. The fact that it highlights, more clearly than before, the logic and rationale behind criteria and procedures, linking these with operational needs, should provide guarantees for a more coherently implemented policy. That it was timely for this FOM to be issued is illustrated by the apparent results, during 1998, of a stricter application of the earlier criteria and a procedural requirement, which seems to have preceded the formulation of the FOM. In that year, expenditure on language training suddenly decreased to approximately half of its previous volume, i.e. to barely 5% of the overall Training Budget (US\$171,230 of US\$3,730,430 in projected expenditure). Such a considerable drop can be explained by a more

rigorous implementation of the existing criteria during this year. If this is true, it would suggest that a considerable part of the training budget in previous years was spent on activities which would not have passed the test of eligibility if a comprehensive language training policy had been in place.

The link with human resources policies

21. If we assume that the main reason why UNHCR supports language training is to serve the interests of its operations, i.e. in particular by having staff who can be more flexibly deployed, then we need to enquire into the extent to which language training has actually made staff more capable of deployment to new linguistic situations than before. Unfortunately, there are no data which would allow any such analysis. However, available anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact of language training has been modest.

22. In order to get a better and more precise idea of the organisation's needs, it is necessary to compare which linguistic competencies are actually required by UNHCR's operations, and how these have evolved over the past decade.

*Table 1*

*Number of field staff speaking principal languages as of:*

	<b>Jan-87</b>		<b>Jan-93</b>		<b>Jan-96</b>		<b>Oct-98</b>	
English	277	74%	453	76%	622	73%	659	75%
French	48	13%	77	13%	180	21%	180	20%
Spanish	51	14%	66	11%	51	6%	41	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>853</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>100%</b>

23. The above table illustrates where and why the issue of language competencies has become such a topical one in UNHCR during the past few years. While, over the past decade, the importance of English for field operations has remained constant, the volume of Spanish speaking operations has decreased and the need for French speakers has shown a significant growth.

24. As can be seen from the table, the percentage of staff assigned to francophone operations increased from 13% to 21%, between 1993 and 1996. This significant increase in relative terms can be ascribed primarily to the Great Lakes operation, which had its peak during the years 1994 to 1996, as well as smaller francophone programmes which were started during these years, such as the Mali repatriation and reintegration operation. But it was the Great Lakes situation in particular, which suddenly caused an increased demand for French speakers at a time when there appeared to be a lack of staff with at least a working knowledge of French.

25. In response to the sudden dramatic increase in the need for French speakers, between 1994 and 1996, UNHCR recruited a considerable number of new francophone staff, because its internal linguistic resources were constrained. At the same time, UNHCR increased its efforts to encourage existing staff to learn

French. The implementation of promotions or the granting of indefinite appointments was made subject, on several occasions, to the acquisition of proficiency in French or another official UN language.

26. Language proficiency is one of the criteria for the granting of indefinite appointments and promotion identified by the APPB regulations. The criteria for indefinite appointments had always been strict, and one of these, i.e. having "a second UN language", has always been considered a "*sine qua non*" condition. In the case of promotions, proficiency in a second UN language has been one of the criteria influencing a decision, but was not considered a "*sine qua non*" condition. In both cases, difficulties with the application of the criteria arose when it came to determine, within the context of an annual review session, whether a staff member had indeed obtained the level of proficiency claimed by him/her or his/her supervisor. Consequently, rather than relying on *ex-ante* claims or attempts to rate *all* staff, the APPB decided to adopt the criteria of language proficiency as a condition for the implementation of indefinite appointments in 1995, and for promotions from 1996 onwards. This has allowed more transparent procedures for decisions on promotions and indefinite appointments to be put in place. Proficiency in a second UN language could now effectively be made a *sine qua non* condition for promotions as well as for indefinite appointments.

27. It is too early to tell what the outcome will be of this new approach by the APPB. In retrospect, the incentives associated with the granting of indefinite appointments or promotions may have contributed to a number of staff members acquiring a working knowledge of French, more quickly than would otherwise have been the case. However, the impact of the increased emphasis on language skills on the staffing of francophone operations, such as the Great Lakes operation, is more difficult to assess. By the time it might have been felt, it is likely that the operations were already winding down, and the relative scarcity of French language skills amongst staff no longer constituted the most important reason for posts remaining vacant.

28. Measures to address an identified need for certain skills must necessarily respond to a situation which is in continuous change: in the 1990s operations need French speakers, in the 1980s there was a need for Spanish or Portuguese speakers. Tomorrow, UNHCR may be confronted with a sudden need for staff with a working knowledge of Russian or Arabic. One may ask if the current response to the need for language skills is not creating staff with the right profile for yesterday's operations and hence questions the expectations placed on language training to "re-develop" staff in response to evolving operational needs. Is this worth all the investment in language training and the commotion associated with it?

## Conclusions

29. The impact of language training on the organisation's operational capacity has been very modest, at best. For years, UNHCR has followed the example of UNOG and the UN Secretariat, which implement language training against a background of primarily "promoting a multi-linguistic and multi-cultural work environment". This has led to a UN training programme, which supports each staff member, irrespective of job category and career prospects, to learn any of the official UN languages. Basically, everybody can learn whichever official language they choose in working time, paid for by the UN. This has essentially been the state of affairs at UNHCR as well. The fact that UNHCR has continued, for many years, to apply the widely formulated objectives employed by UNOG and the Secretariat for the management of its own language training programme has precluded it from developing its own language training policy in accordance

with its own reality and in response to its own needs. UNHCR is a very different organisation from UNOG or the Secretariat, which are not operational, and do not have a rotation policy, to name just two of the more obvious key differences. Consequently, UNHCR developed a set of criteria and procedures which facilitated the management of language training, but which insufficiently addressed the overall objective of supporting operational needs.

30. A second issue relates to the expectations associated with language training, which have been generally unfulfilled. Language training was used in an attempt to address and rectify a situation on which it could only have a limited impact. As the expectations of the organisation became focused on language training to deal with the lack of adequate linguistic skills among the staff, attention was drawn from other, possibly more effective, solutions and approaches.

31. The conclusion is that an effective language training policy is not possible without a strong linkage with a coherent human resources management policy. The lack of linguistic skills should not and cannot be adequately addressed by training, but through the right recruitment policies, and a career development approach which targets language training in a more realistic way.

32. Remedial measures could include:

- a. Recruitment of staff proficient in, at least, two UN languages. The table on page 6 unambiguously supports the argument that these should be the two formal working languages of the organisation: English and French. This should not constitute a major problem, as existing recruitment criteria already stipulate this. This approach should replace efforts to rectify the lack of linguistic skills through training at times of sudden need, which does not effectively address the problem, and places a heavy burden on operations as well as on the staff themselves.
- b. UNHCR may also wish to apply these recruitment criteria to GS staff at Headquarters. There is no reason why UNHCR cannot expect GS staff at a French-speaking duty station, in an office which is mainly English speaking, and in an organisation with English and French as its official working languages, to be bi-lingual upon recruitment.
- c. If justified exceptions to these criteria are allowed, efforts should be made to ensure that staff achieve proficiency in the second working language within the shortest time possible. Staff should be encouraged to pursue intensive language training actively during the first years of employment. Post-recruitment career progress should be made subject to the achievement of an adequate level of proficiency in the second language.
- d. Support to the learning of other languages should be restricted to staff who are subject to rotation, when being assigned to duty stations where another language is required (Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, etc). UNHCR should invest in intensive submersion courses, prior to staff taking up their assignments.
- e. In the case of urgent linguistic needs for new operations, alternatives to normal recruitment, such as secondments from other UN agencies, governments, NGOs, short-term staff, should be considered. As a measure of preparedness, the necessary stand-by arrangements to facilitate these solutions, should be developed.
- f. For the rest, UNHCR should implement the criteria and procedures contained in FOM/87/98.

## INDUCTION TRAINING

33. An in-depth evaluation of induction training is difficult since participation was never systematically recorded in the Training Recording System (TRS), introduced in 1987. As this system was perceived primarily as a means of recording attendance at workshops on a staff member's Fact Sheet, rather than as a tool for the monitoring and management of training activities as such, participation in induction briefing was never systematically entered into the TRS. As all newly recruited staff, without exception, were supposed to undergo induction training at the start of their career with UNHCR, participation does not confer a distinguishing value, as a result of which the dominant opinion seems to have been not to record attendance at all. The resulting lack of reliable records makes a systematic assessment of the management and impact of induction briefing virtually impossible.

34. One of the main assumptions underlying the organisation of induction training is that, by definition, one hundred per cent of all newly recruited professional staff go through an induction programme. As we have seen, this was the main reason why participation was not systematically recorded. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that full participation has never occurred. This is partly the result of another assumption, i.e. that all newly recruited staff pass through Geneva for at least a week, *en-route* to their duty station. In fact, many do not pass through Geneva, and of those who do, many do not stop over long enough to attend a full week's briefing programme.

35. Since the introduction of the recruitment freeze, induction briefing for professional staff has been undertaken exclusively for Junior Professional Officers (JPOs), which is, with rare exceptions, the only category in which new professional staff members still arrive. This has led to a situation in which induction training is now sometimes referred to as "JPO training".

36. Induction training is essentially a schedule of briefing sessions, with the objective of welcoming new staff to UNHCR and the UN, and of facilitating their rapid assimilation into the organisation. The briefings are held at regular intervals throughout the year, with the exception of July and August. Each programme takes one full working week. The frequency with which these programmes are organised obviously depends on the number of newly recruited staff. In order to ensure effective coverage of content and participation, the number of participants in each programme is limited to ten.

37. The programme covers an introduction to UNHCR and the UN, and to the organisation's mandate as well as key aspects of refugee protection, programme management, and financial and administrative issues. The contents of the training, and the relative weight assigned to each functional work area, has largely remained unchanged over the years. As new recruits are grouped together for the duration of the training, irrespective of their future functions, it is usually not possible to design the training content with a specific trainee profile in mind. Briefings on each topic are given by staff working with the relevant departments in Headquarters. An important place in the programme is reserved for more detailed operational briefings by the Desk responsible for the area where new staff is being assigned. These briefings are also an important opportunity for newly assigned field-based staff and Headquarters staff to establish personal contacts.

38. Although a systematic evaluation of the induction training programme could not be undertaken, the programme was nonetheless discussed with a large number of staff who have been involved, either as organisers, as training providers or as trainees. The main finding from these discussions is a widely

shared perception that induction training needs to become much more effective and that its organisation needs to be revised.

39. Almost unanimously, trainees cast doubt on the usefulness of the current induction training programme. Most importantly, the timing of the programme is seen as problematic, for two reasons. First, receiving a comprehensive one-week briefing on UNHCR's mandate, systems and procedures, at a time when none of the trainees has yet had any practical exposure to its work, is considered too early. Second, during the induction week, there is a host of other, practical concerns competing for the trainee's attention. The result is that, however relevant the content of the briefings might be, the rate of absorption is generally considered low.

40. The problem of offering the relevant information at the appropriate moment, was recognised at an early stage. In the late 1980s, a new two-phased approach to induction was designed, comprising an initial short briefing programme upon recruitment, followed by a more extensive orientation workshop approximately one year later. Unfortunately, presumably for reasons of logistics and expense, this experiment was abandoned after only a few trials.

41. Another problem frequently mentioned by trainees is the perceived lack of commitment to their role as trainers on the part of many of the briefing providers. The Desks are the most frequent target of this criticism, with the trainee having higher expectations of a relevant and purposeful briefing on his or her future role than the desk officer is able or willing to fulfil. Whatever the expectations, they appear to be frequently disappointed because many training providers or briefers see their participation either as voluntary work or as, rather more negatively, a burden, requiring a disproportionate investment of time, without much, if any, return for their effort. For organisers of induction training, these perceptions indicate a lack of commitment to the fundamental training obligations in which all staff should share.

42. There is an urgent need to review the issue of induction training in detail, to draw lessons from the past and to design a more effective mode of introducing staff to the organisation and prepare them for their jobs. The current relatively quiet situation, characterised by a recruitment freeze apart from the mere trickle of new JPOs, should be seized upon as an opportunity to overhaul induction training and to introduce new approaches, drawing on the lessons learned. Since all concerned would appear to share, to a large extent, dissatisfaction with the way induction training is organised, the detailed review which we propose should be carried out in the form of a design workshop, linked to a lessons learned exercise, with participation by the main stakeholders. Obviously, such an exercise must look beyond the current situation of exclusive recruitment of JPOs, and should prepare UNHCR for a future lifting of the recruitment ban.

43. The following issues would require consideration in the overhaul of the induction training programme.

- . Induction training should modify the central concept of a one week event, with little reference either to the processes preceding it (such as recruitment), or to following events such as induction at the duty station, which from the initial training perspective is still virtually ignored. Rather, induction training should incorporate and support the entire process of learning from recruitment and selection for a post, to the moment at which a new staff member has achieved a degree of integration in the organisation, the working unit, and his/her post and function. The ICRC has developed a concept of induction as part of the recruitment process, to be extended over a period including the first field assignment. This

experience could prove a valuable example.

- b. The supervisor must play a key role in the induction of a new staff member. Guidelines should be formulated to list supervisory responsibilities and duties, provide practical support, and make clear that failure to perform the supervisory training role will reflect adversely on the career performance assessment of those concerned.
- c. Consideration should be given to the development of standard induction packages, linked to certain specific career paths: for protection officers, field officers, programme, administrative officers, and others. Similar packages could be developed for GS staff, both at Headquarters and in the Field, which would address a great outstanding need. In particular, if more emphasis is placed on self-study rather than on classroom-based training, which is the traditional method used in induction briefing, the contents might be made more relevant, and the desired impact better secured.
- d. Thought should be given to the feasibility of regular intakes of professional level recruits in particular occupational groups, such as protection, programme and administration, with a view to systematic joint induction training taking place. The experience of ICRC contradicts the conventional wisdom that the personnel needs of humanitarian organisations are too unpredictable to allow forward recruitment planning of this kind.
- e. In line with these proposals, responsibility for the design and delivery of induction training should be exercised in the closest possible cooperation between the Staff Development Service, the Recruitment, Vacancy Management and Postings Unit and the future supervisors of the individual trainees whether at Headquarters or in the Field.