



General Assembly

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Agenda item 127
Pattern of conferences

Reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/60/93) and on reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/60/112). During its consideration of the reports, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarifications.

2. The Advisory Committee notes the steady improvement in the utilization of conference servicing resources and facilities over the past few years. The overall utilization factor for 2004 was 83 per cent, exceeding the established benchmark of 80 per cent for the first time since 2000 (see A/60/93, para. 8). **The Committee continues to be concerned, however, that the methodology used for calculating the utilization factor has not changed significantly since 1993 and that, as the Committee has pointed out in the past, it does not take into account the specific nature of work of the various bodies subjected to study. The Committee reiterates that raw statistics on the utilization of conference resources are potentially misleading and could obscure the understanding of actual efficiency gains in the utilization of allocated conference resources. It is the Committee's continued belief, therefore, that a more qualitative analysis is required and that the methodology should be revisited, with a view to developing a more results-based approach, which would involve the measurement of results achieved with the use of available resources (see A/59/418, para. 5).**

3. The Advisory Committee notes the continuing problems cited in the reports of the Secretary-General concerning adherence to page limits and submission deadlines under the slotting system. The Committee was informed that of the 923 slotted documents in 2004, 236, or 25.6 per cent, were over the page limit and 424, or 45.9 per cent, were submitted late. **In the opinion of the Committee, such findings raise the question of the accountability of author departments.** In that

connection, the Committee recalls its recommendation in its report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007¹ that the responsibility for timely submission should rest with author departments and that this indicator of achievement should form part of the logical framework for those departments, rather than for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (see A/60/7, para. I.37). **The Committee welcomes the statistics provided by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management concerning compliance by author departments (A/60/112, annex). However, the Committee reiterates that, in order to function effectively, the slotting system must have some flexibility built into it (see A/59/418, para. 3).**

4. **The Advisory Committee notes the proactive approach that the Department is taking in dealing with the issue of compliance with deadlines and page limits and, in particular, the efforts by the Department to get involved in enhancing the drafting skills of staff members in the Secretariat responsible for preparing reports, with the aim of producing higher quality, more concise reports that would be easier for the Department to process in a timely manner. In undertaking this initiative, the Department has looked beyond itself to try to deal with one of the root causes of the problem. The Committee encourages it to continue to seek such creative solutions.**

5. **The Advisory Committee takes note of the information provided in the report on the findings of a departmental task force that was set up to review workload standards and performance measurement (A/60/93, paras. 60-62). In the view of the Committee, consideration should be given to placing this issue in the report on the reform of the Department, since performance measurement has been a key preoccupation in the reform process. Be that as it may, given the repeated attention by the General Assembly to the issue of workload standards and ways of measuring productivity and quality, the Committee believes the work done by the task force should be elaborated upon more fully.**

6. **As indicated in paragraph 62 of the above-mentioned report, the task force concluded that the existing workload standards should be supplemented by an array of management data along the lines of the “balanced scorecard” widely used in both public and private institutions so as to provide a broader picture of the Department’s performance from a full-system perspective. The Committee considers this statement vague, given the responsibility of the Secretary-General to respond to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 59/265 that he pursue the study of workload standards and performance measurement, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, with a view to submitting to the Assembly a proposal for a comprehensive methodology for performance measurement and management from a full-system perspective. The “balanced scorecard” approach, if it is to be used, should be expanded and elaborated upon and reported to the Assembly as soon as possible. The Committee commented on this issue in some detail in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (see A/60/7, paras. I.48-I.50).**

7. **The Advisory Committee notes the information provided in both reports concerning progress in the development and application of information technology tools. The Committee was informed that the introduction of such tools in some of the areas of work of the Department had not yet resulted in a marked increase in productivity; rather, it is expected by the Secretariat that they will primarily lead to**

enhanced quality and consistency. **The Committee reiterates that it considers measures to improve quality and accuracy important, particularly in an environment in which consideration is being given to outsourcing more and more of the work of the Department (see *ibid.*, para. I.46). It also expects that, with time, productivity will be increased. In this connection, it is important to develop tools to measure performance.**

8. The vacancy situation for translator and interpreter posts continues to be of great concern. In particular, the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences highlights the persistent problems encountered by the Department in recruiting interpreters for the United Nations Office at Nairobi (see A/60/93, paras. 65 and 66). The Committee was informed that the Department was currently working with the Office of Human Resources Management to arrange an Arabic language interpretation examination, with the specific aim of filling vacant posts in Nairobi. **The Committee welcomes this initiative and encourages the Department to further intensify efforts in this regard. In the light of the prolonged vacancy situation, the Committee urges the Department to consider all possible approaches.**

9. The Department is facing an unprecedented number of retirements over the next few years. In its report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, the Advisory Committee welcomed the emphasis placed by the Department on succession planning and recommended that the Department work out a special procedure with the Office of Human Resources Management whereby posts that are likely to become vacant, after taking into account possible promotions from within the Department, are advertised well ahead of time, with the proviso that they would be filled if and when they became vacant (A/60/7, para. I.53). **The Committee once again encourages the Department to make a concerted effort to identify qualified applicants and to develop rosters of qualified candidates in all the official languages (see A/59/418, para. 6).**

Notes

¹ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/60/7 and Corr.1).*