

Report on the Evaluation of UNITAR Service Functions (based on staff feedback for the period of 1 January – 30 June 2014)

25 August 2015

Executive Summary

An anonymous questionnaire was administered in the third quarter of 2014 to UNITAR staff to obtain feedback on key support service functions during the first six months of 2014. The exercise covered services funded through the Institute's cost recovery mechanism and included those related to budget and finance; procurement; clearance of agreements; human resources; communications; IT; planning, monitoring and evaluation; quality assurance; knowledge systems; and advocacy, fundraising and general trouble-shooting by the Executive Director. The questionnaire received a response rate of 53 per cent. Results confirmed that the majority of respondents requesting and/or using service functions frequently (i.e. several time per month) or occasionally (i.e. once or twice per month) expressed agreement or strong agreement that the services were timely, constructive and adequate. Satisfaction ratings varied, however, according to the particular service function, with those functions used more frequently generally receiving somewhat lower ratings than the services used less frequently. Satisfaction ratings also varied by staff category, with managers expressing somewhat more critical views than programme officers or fellows (with the exception of delays in payment in which fellows, consultants and individual contractors expressed disagreement). The questionnaire also invited respondents to provide observations and/or recommendations with a view to strengthening the provision of services, with the majority of comments relating to the need for services to increase help/guidance or periodic training (41 per cent), enhance response rates to programme requests (23 per cent) and strengthen communication channels (18 per cent) and flexibility (9 per cent).

The majority of respondents requesting/using services frequently or occasionally expressed agreement or strong agreement that services were timely, constructive and adequate. Recommendations were made for services to provide more help, coaching and training; to increase response rate to requests; to enhance communication with programmes; and to demonstrate increased flexibility wherever possible.

Introduction and purpose

At the request of the Executive Director, the Planning, Performance and Results Section administered an anonymous evaluation questionnaire during the third quarter of 2014 to UNITAR staff to obtain feedback on the Institute's service functions and identify areas that could be strengthened for improved service delivery.

Service functions are defined as those functions which provide support to UNITAR programmes and offices in project design and development, delivery and/or follow-up, such as budget and finance; procurement; clearance of agreements; human resources; communications; IT; planning, monitoring and evaluation; quality assurance; knowledge systems; and advocacy, fundraising and general trouble-shooting by the Executive Director. Many of these functions are performed by sections in the Operations Unit; others are performed by the Office of the Executive Director (OED); and still are performed through committee (e.g. quality assurance) or shared between a section and a committee (e.g. procurement). The functions are funded through the Institute's direct service cost and/or indirect support cost recovery scheme and account for approximately 16 per cent of the UNITAR budget. While some of the Institute's offices, sections and units provide service functions mostly if not entirely to programmes and other entities, some sections and units performing services may also undertake other functions (e.g. Knowledge Systems Integration is engaged 50 per cent in programming).

The evaluation covered the period from January to June 2014. For the purpose of the questionnaire, UNITAR staff are defined in the wide-sense of the term i.e. inclusive of regular staff members, as well as fellows (assistants, associates), advisors, in-house consultants, individual contractors, trainees, interns and collaborators. Unless otherwise specified, this report uses the term 'staff' in the broad sense.

To the best of knowledge, the evaluation represents the first time that staff were requested to provide feedback on service functions through an anonymous questionnaire. A number of staff reacted positively to the initiative and expressed satisfaction that such an evaluation was being undertaken and that there was a vehicle for providing anonymous feedback on service functions.¹

1. Methodology

A draft questionnaire was designed and circulated to managers with responsibilities overseeing support service functions. A number of comments were received and, following a period of testing, the questionnaire was adjusted accordingly.

The questionnaire comprised 24 questions over 11 service areas. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently a service function was requested and/or used. Respondents confirming frequent (i.e. several times per month) or occasional (i.e. once or twice per month) use were then asked to rate the function according to how timely, constructive and adequate the service was provided according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Respondents who expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with the statements were asked to elaborate and provide comments describing why. The questionnaire included a final question for respondents to

¹ It should be noted that this is not the only source of programme feedback. The Operations Unit, for instance, has organized since 2013 quarterly meetings to obtain feedback from programmes.

convey any general comments on the service functions, including way to improve service delivery at UNITAR. Feedback was coded in the following groups: communication; response rate; flexibility; help, coaching/training; and other.

The questionnaire was deployed online using Survey Monkey from 11 to 29 August (3 weeks) to staff included on the UNITAR staff email address list (unitarstaff@unitar.org). At the time of deployment, this list included 165 recipients. Among the recipients included 18 managers, 99 other salaried staff (professionals, general service staff, remunerated fellows, contractors and consultants), and 48 interns and collaborators. A wide a body of respondents was sought since all staff engage with the various support functions, albeit to different degrees. During the period in which the questionnaire was open for responses, three reminders were sent to staff.

Limitations

As with all evaluative undertakings, it is important to discuss several limitations. First, the questionnaire was not deployed to a restrictive population of UNITAR staff during the period of review. As such, the deployment of the questionnaire to all recipients on the email list in August 2014 could have enabled staff who recently joined the Institute (e.g. in July or August) to have responded. In such cases, while responses on frequency of use would have been compiled in the results, it is unlikely that these respondents would have provided ratings on the three key variables of service delivery. Second, while respondents were asked to rate the service function over time, it is possible that recent use (particularly for highly positive or negative experiences in service delivery) may have conditioned respondent feedback. Third, in order to keep the length of the questionnaire reasonable, most of the service functions were grouped (e.g. finance and budget functions covering allotments, financial reports, travel and salaries; or IT services covering computer/IT equipment trouble shooting, email, website, Moodle VLE and EMS). Thus, some functions receiving either positive or negative ratings overall may have been due to positive or negative experiences with sub-service areas as opposed to the service area as a whole. In most cases, however, the responses to the open-ended questions requesting elaboration on reasons why a service function may not have been rated favorably identified the specific reason(s). Fourth, while the questionnaire provides for an anonymous and structured approach to seeking feedback from internal UNITAR 'clients', the results are provided without 'triangulating' findings from other data collection sources, such as interviews and focus groups, or obtaining feedback from staff performing the service functions to obtain their views on the matter. **Finally, while the response rate of the questionnaire was satisfactory, it is important to emphasize that the service feedback ratings were only based on the number of respondents who confirmed using the service frequently or occasionally.** As shown in Annex 1, for all respondent categories, this number varied depending on the service from 57 (finance/budget) to 4 (quality assurance) respondents; for the manager respondent category, the number varied from 6 respondents to 1 respondent. The ratings should therefore be interpreted carefully.

2. Findings

Eighty-seven staff responded to the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 53 per cent. Of those respondents, 64 (or 74 per cent) indicated their functional title. Ninety-one per cent of respondents are remunerated staff. Consultants/individual contractors (38 per cent) and remunerated fellows (22 per cent) represent together 60 per cent of all respondents, followed by programme officers at 22 per cent. Managers and interns/trainees represent the smallest proportion of respondents at 9 per cent each.

Chart 1a: Respondents specifying functional title

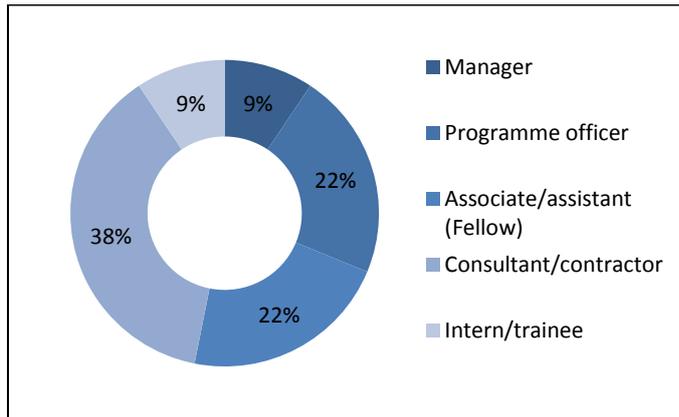


Chart 1b: Number of respondents

Manager	6
Programme officer	14
Associate/assistant (fellow)	14
Consultant/contractors	24
Intern/trainee	6
Not specified	23
Total	87

2.1. Frequency of use

Charts 2a and 2b below present the findings on frequency of use of the various service functions. In terms of respondents requesting/using services, the most frequently/occasionally used service was information technology (73 per cent), followed by budget and finance (65 per cent) and human resources (57 per cent). This compares sharply with some other service areas, such as quality assurance, knowledge systems and advocacy/trouble-shooting from the Office of the Executive Director, which were used much less regularly by all respondents. As shown in chart 2b, the functions mostly used by managers include budget/finance and human resources (at 100 per cent) followed by and clearance of agreements and information technology (at 83 per cent). Some functions, such as quality assurance and knowledge systems, were reportedly rarely or never used by manager respondents. It is worthy to underscore the different nature of many functions, with some, such as finance/budget and human resource services involving e.g. the issuance of contracts, budget allocations or financial reports, and other functions, such as quality assurance, related to providing independent peer reviews and issuing recommendations for improved learning services by programmes. The functions most used by manager respondents are those that required signature, clearance or some other required action by service entities.

Chart 2a: Frequency of Use (All staff categories: 87 respondents)

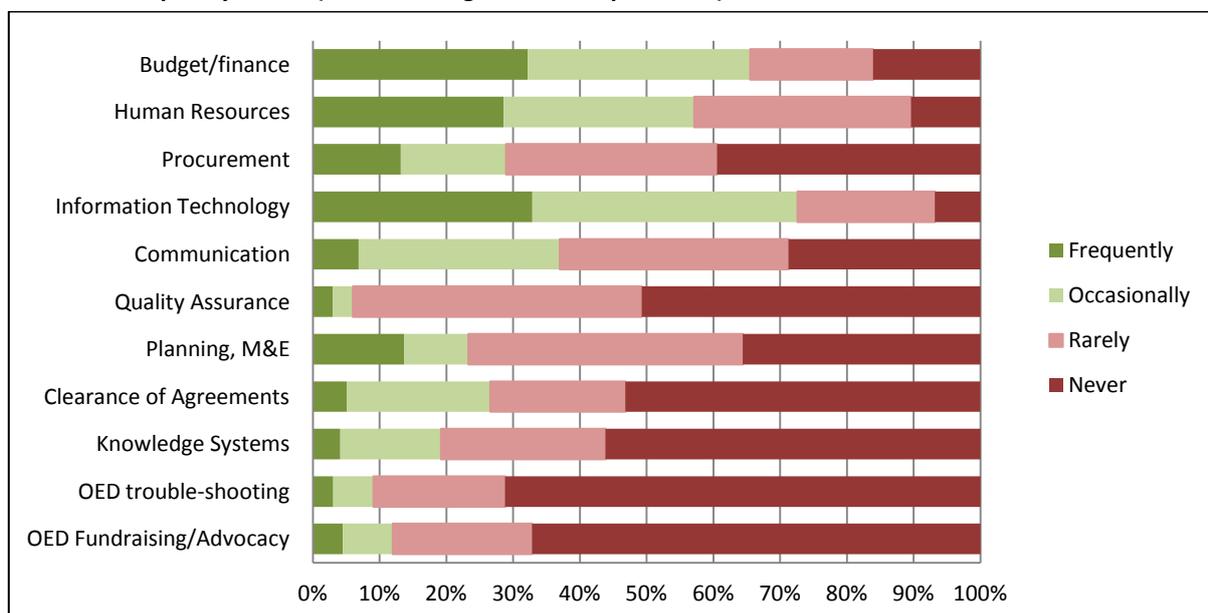
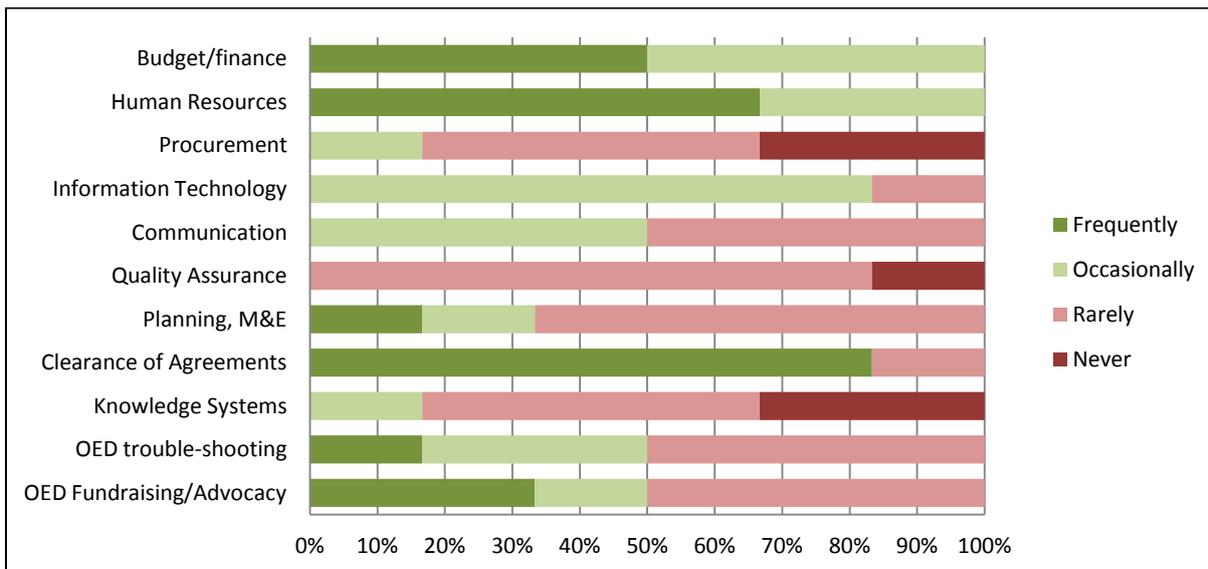


Chart 2b: Frequency of use (Managers: 6 respondents)



2.2. Timeliness of support

As illustrated in chart 3a, in terms of **timeliness of support**, staff generally expressed agreement or strong agreement for most of the service functions. Some respondents expressed no opinion. While these findings are globally positive, some expressed disagreement or strong disagreement on this feedback parameter, particularly in relation to budget and finance-related services. In most cases, respondents highlighted the slow response rate in issuing financial reports, processing travel claims and making salary payments (fellows/consultants/contractors). As shown in chart 3b, managers’ views were generally positive, with agreement or strong agreement that service functions were provided timely. As mentioned under the evaluation’s limitations, it is important to place manager respondents’ ratings in perspective since this staff category only represents 9 per cent of the total respondents. For example, the 100 per cent disagreement rating in reference to knowledge systems was based on the rating of only one manager respondent using/requesting the services frequently or occasionally, or the 100 per cent strongly agreeing rating for planning, monitoring and evaluation was only based on two manager respondents using the service frequently/occasionally.

Chart 3a: Services are timely. (All staff categories: services ratings ranging from 45 to 3 respondents)

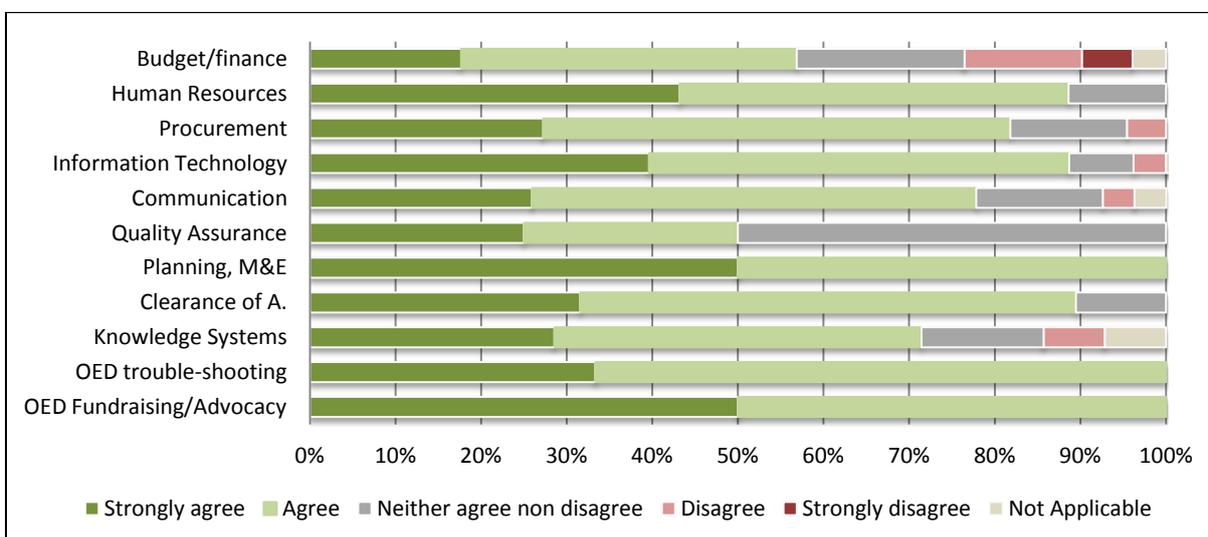
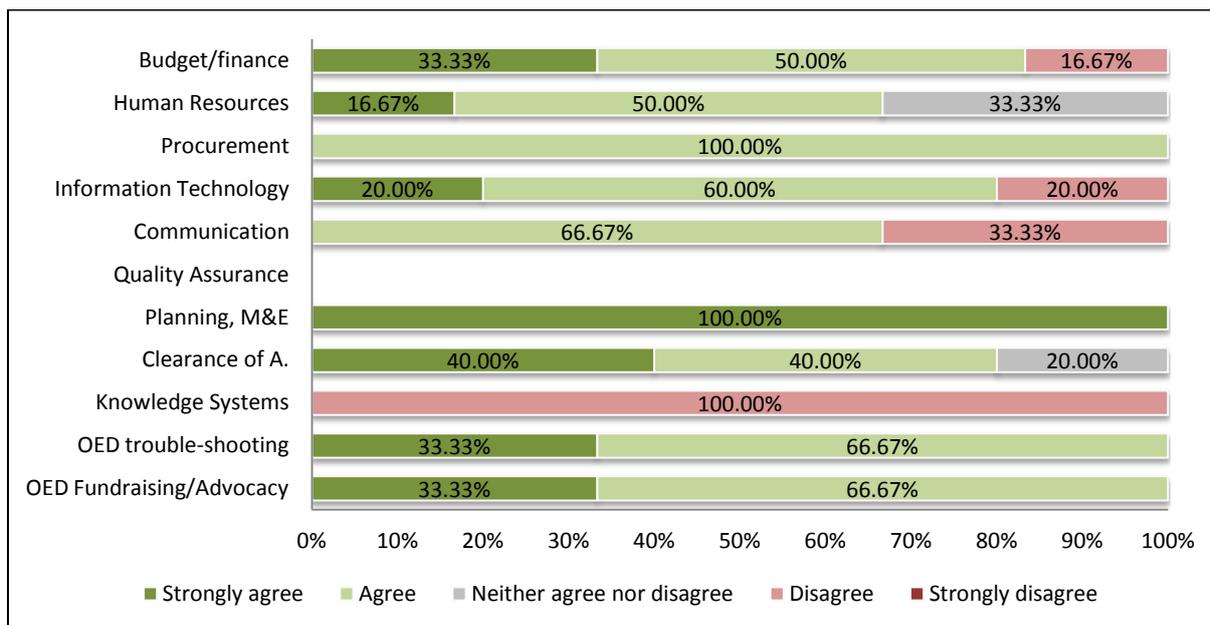


Chart 3b: Services are timely. (Managers only: service ratings ranging from 6 to 1 respondent)



2.3. Constructive support

As shown in chart 4a, respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement that **services are constructive**. There was, however, some disagreement or strong disagreement on budget/finance, human resources, procurement and, to a limited extent, IT service areas. As shown in chart 4b, these views were mostly expressed by managers, with only 33 per cent of manager respondents agreeing that services related to human resources are constructive (based on a total of six manager respondents), and no managers agreeing that procurement services are constructive (based on one manager respondent using the service frequently or occasionally). Reasons cited for disagreement include for the most part rigid rules and procedures, and the need to introduce more flexibility and solutions-oriented assistance to programmes, particularly for services that are internal to UNITAR.

Chart 4a: Services are constructive. (All staff categories: service ratings ranging from 45 to 3 respondents)

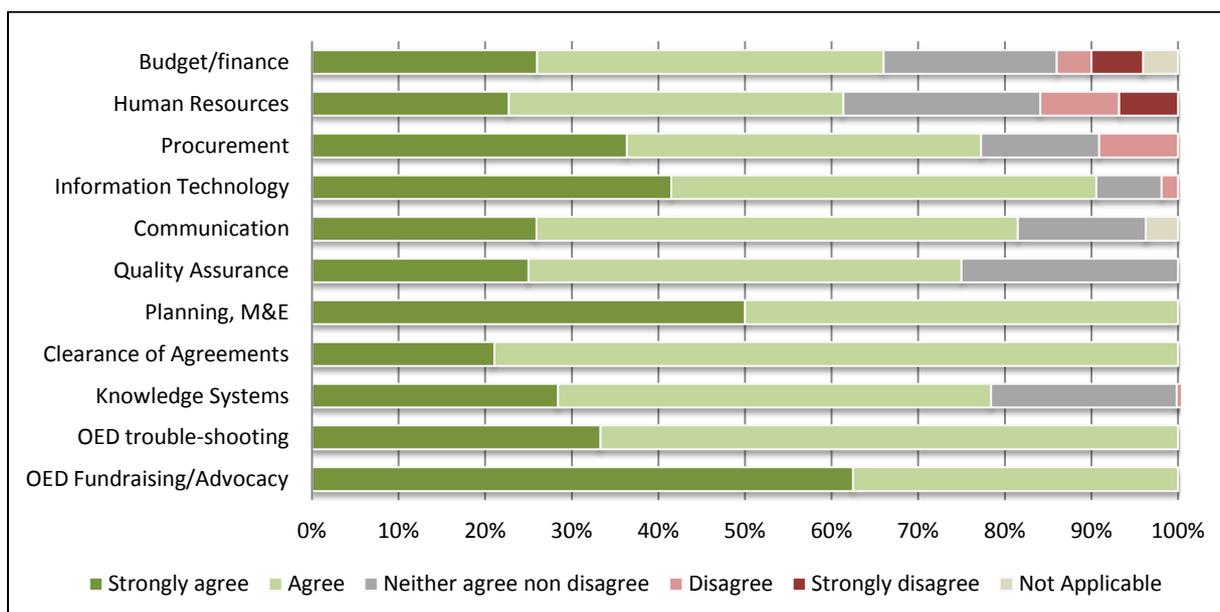
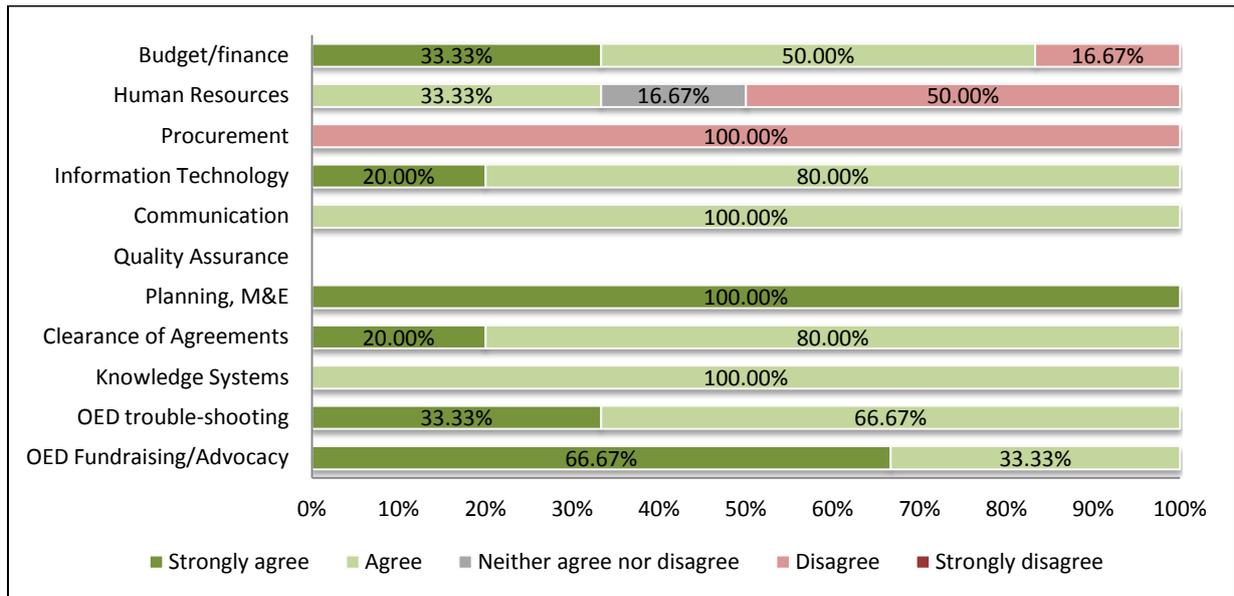


Chart 4b: Services are constructive. (Managers only: service ratings ranging from 6 to 1 respondent)



2.4. Adequacy of support

The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the **services provided were adequate**, although a number of respondents expressed no opinion and a few disagreed. Disagreement was most striking with responses from managers, with only 17 per cent agreeing that services related to human resources were adequate (based on six manager respondents), and one manager respondent disagreeing that procurement services are adequate. Reasons stated for respondent disagreement/strong disagreement include the lack of proactive advice, rules that appeared tedious and unexplained, and IT-related bugs or problems left unexplained (with specific reference to the Moodle virtual learning environment or the events management system).

Chart 5a: Services are adequate. (All staff categories: Service ratings ranging from 45 to 3 respondents)

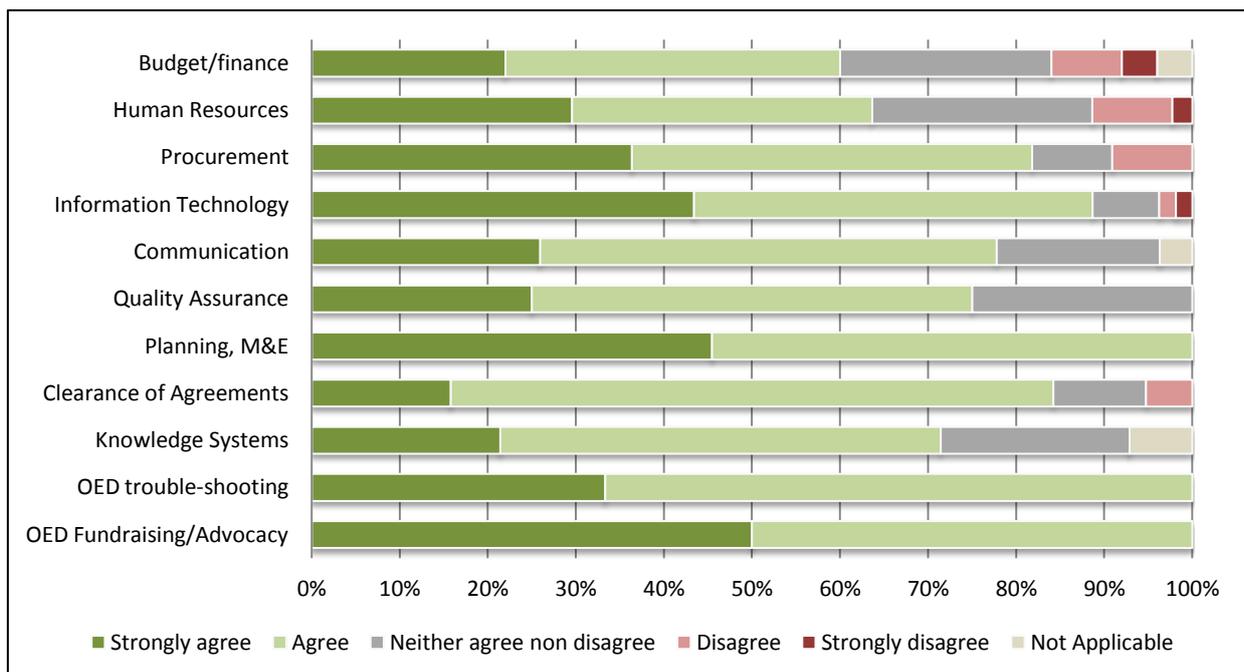
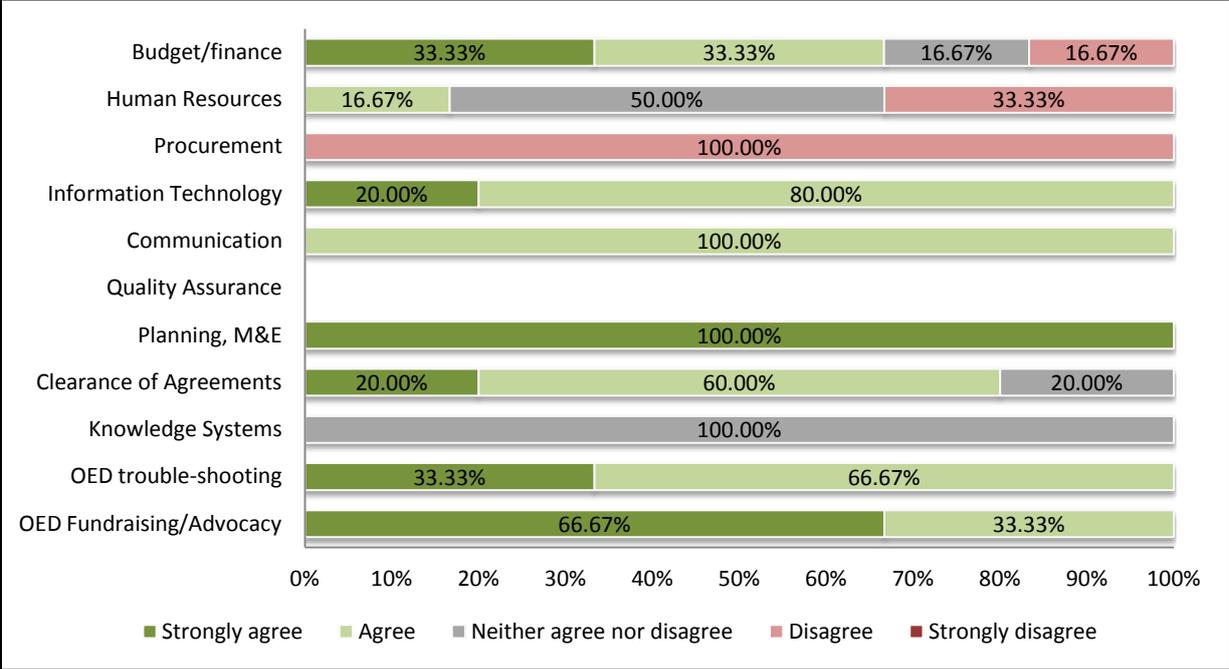
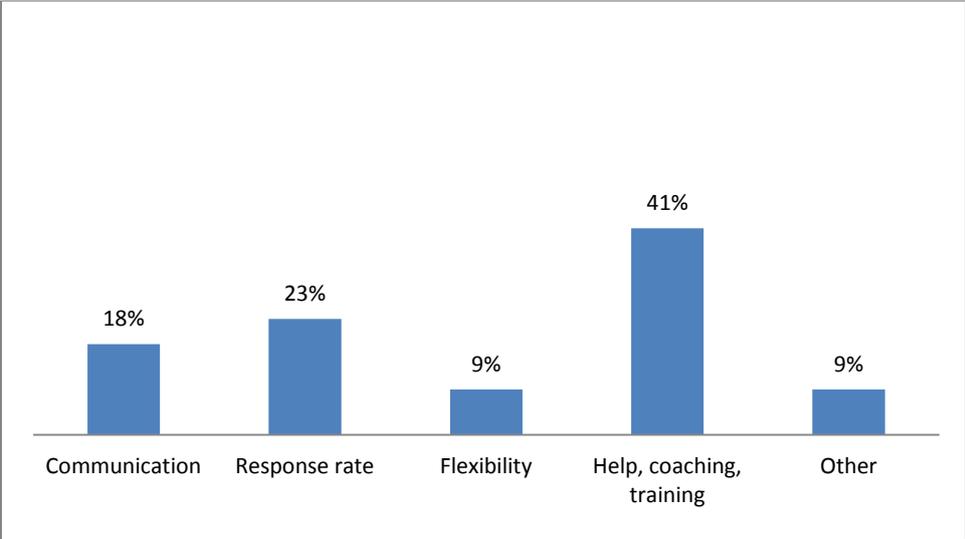


Chart 5b: Services are adequate. (Managers only: service ratings ranging from 6 to 1 respondent)



In addition to rating the various functions, the questionnaire invited respondents to provide observations and/or recommendations with a view to strengthening the provision of services. Eighteen respondents provided comments, observations, and/or recommendations, with the majority of comments/observations/recommendations on the need for services to provide additional help, coaching/training (41 per cent), followed by the need for services to enhance response rates to programmes (23 per cent), strengthen communication channels (18 per cent) and show more flexibility (9 per cent).

Chart 6: Comments/observations/recommendations by grouping



Comments and recommendations on the need to provide additional help, coaching and training apply to a number of services, from finance/budget and procurement to M&E and learning methodologies (two respondents recommended services to develop ‘one-stop shop’ such as an e-book, wiki and/or learning nuggets with quick access to UNITAR rules and policies). At least two

respondents observed that with the relatively high turnover rate of some categories of staff, coupled with the fact that in many cases not all staff interact with service functions on a day-to-day basis, a general lack of understanding on which rules and procedures need to be followed, or which exceptions may apply, can easily result. This lack of understanding, together with the back and forth communication that often occurs between service functions and programmes in processing requests, can quickly lead to frustration. One or two respondents observed that at times a solution could have been found or errors easily and quickly corrected directly by colleagues in the respective service areas rather than engaging in back and forth discussions with programmes.

Two observations were made on the importance that the Institute needs to attach to monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and learning methodologies, and expressed concern that while considerable tools, guidance and checklists exist to assist programmes in the delivery of quality and results-oriented programming, there appeared to be insufficient buy-in or attention paid within programmes on these functions.

With regard to instructional design and learning methodologies, two respondents observed the downsizing of KSI in relation to the support that the section used to provide to programmes in the areas of instructional design and learning methodologies, and one respondent suggested that it would be useful to consider relocating the Moodle e-Learning platform under KSI as feedback was more regular and timely several years ago. Two respondents also observed that a few key service functions are performed with few staff and noted that increasing personnel in areas would provide opportunities to reach out to programmes more proactively, particularly in areas critical to the work of UNITAR in order for the Institute to deliver effectively on its mandate. One respondent emphasized the need to hire a learning technologist to help programmes develop and apply critical knowledge and skills for programmes to enhance delivery of performance-based training.

Regarding response rates, the most sensitive matter raised is related to the delay in financial reporting, travel claims and salary payments for consultants and contractors, with recommendations on the need to improve timeliness and communication with programmes. One respondent made particular reference to the need to increase response rates for requests from the outposted offices.

3. Conclusions

The findings from the administration of the questionnaire point to a broad degree of staff satisfaction with the service functions during the period under review, with the majority of respondents who requested/used services frequently or occasionally expressing agreement or strong agreement that the services were timely, constructive and adequate. Ratings varied by service area and category of respondent, however. With one or two exceptions, those functions which were used more regularly by staff (e.g. services related to budget and finance, procurement, human resources, and IT) received more expressions of disagreement than the functions used less regularly.

In terms of overall appreciation, various views were expressed on the services, with several respondents observing that the functions are professional and prompt in responding, are working well, and that clear deadlines have proven useful. In contrast, several other respondents expressed more critical views, including the need for the services to introduce a culture of client orientation with increased flexibility, particularly for rules or processes that are internal to UNITAR. Several respondents emphasized the need for services and programmes to enhance their complementarities.

4. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations can be made with a view to enhancing the delivery of the Institute's service functions.

- **Management should issue a user-friendly, 'one-stop' guide/directory on management which provides all rules, procedures and processes in a single, easy-to-understand e-book.**

Rationale: Rules, procedures and processes have multiplied over the years as the Institute has developed, increased its autonomy, professionalized itself and responded to gaps identified by oversight bodies. Many of the service functions are responsible for ensuring that rules, procedures and processes are applied. Most of the rules and processes are issued in the form of administrative circulars, guidance documents and sometimes communicated through emails that have over time been by and large stored on the Global file sharing and as a consequence have become fragmented. As a result, they are at times difficult to locate for reference let alone recall. Given the relatively mobile workforce particularly among the non-remunerated and fellow categories of staff, many UNITAR staff may not know what is permitted or required, or to whom to turn to for guidance or advice. A one-stop-shop e-book would greatly facilitate this learning process. Resources permitting, sections of the e-book could be turned into short learning nuggets.

- **Services should strengthen their 'client orientation' by enhancing response rates and communication with programmes, as well as engaging in more proactive vetting and processing of documents submitted for review, clearance or approval.**

Rationale: Unnecessary frustration can and does occur when there is no communication, when requests go unanswered or when excessive back-and-forth communication occurs between services and programmes. The introduction of Atlas should help address delays in the timely payment of salaries. Regarding excessive back and forth communication, often times a number of small, insignificant/immaterial changes can be made directly by the service staff to a document under review for clearance or approval, who then can resubmit an edited version back to the programme for acceptance. While not all changes that may be required can or should be performed by service staff, some small changes that may be required can greatly reduce any frustration that may be experienced by programmes.

- **Management should review and update the UNITAR Welcome Guide to include a description of the service functions and the relationship between services and programmes.**

Rationale: The UNITAR Welcome Guide is an important entry point for any newcomer to the Institute and includes a range of useful and practical information. While the guide includes an updated organizational chart on UNITAR and a list of key contacts, there is no description what each of the service entities performs or to whom a newcomer (whether the newcomer is a manager or an intern) can turn for guidance or information. Filling this gap would provide newcomers with an understanding not only of the structure of the organization, but also with the basic functions that the various parts of the Institute perform and what capacity and

limitations the service functions may have. This would help inform newcomers of the importance of the service functions, and in particular those services related to budget and finance, human resources and clearance of agreements, in terms of ensuring that relevant regulations, rules and policies are respected.

- **Management should review the capacity of services that are designed to enhance the quality of the Institute's programming and in particular programming related to learning.**

Rationale: UNITAR is a learning organization, and facilitating the development of knowledge and skills of the Institute's beneficiaries is a critical function of programming. Over the years, the capacity of some mission critical services, such as knowledge systems, has decreased in comparison with other service functions which have remained constant or which have been developed to respond to organizational needs. Other service functions have also received expanded portfolios of work, yet resources within the services have remained by and large constant. Given the reliance that most programmes place on interns, trainees and other entry-level staff in the design, delivery and evaluation of learning related programming, it is recommended that management review existing capacity of these critical functions and consider ways of strengthening the Institute's capacity in this field.

Annex I:

Response rates for feedback rating on services (all staff respondents)

Service	Total number of respondents per service	Number of respondents requesting/using service frequently/occasionally	Percentage of staff respondents
Budget/finance	87	57	66%
Human Resources	77	44	57%
Procurement	76	22	29%
Information Technology	73	53	73%
Communication	73	25	34%
Quality Assurance	67	4	6%
Planning, M&E	73	17	23%
Clearance of Agreements	79	21	27%
Knowledge Systems	73	14	19%
OED trouble shooting	67	7	10%
OED Fundraising/Advocacy	66	6	9%

Response rates for feedback rating on services (manager respondents only)

Service	Total number of respondents per service	Number of respondents requesting/using service frequently/occasionally	Percentage of all manager respondents
Budget/finance	6	6	100%
Human Resources	6	6	100%
Procurement	6	1	17%
Information Technology	6	5	83%
Communication	6	3	50%
Quality Assurance	6	0	0%
Planning, M&E	6	2	33%
Clearance of Agreements	6	5	83%
Knowledge Systems	6	1	17%
OED trouble shooting	6	3	50%
OED Fundraising/Advocacy	6	3	50%