



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

United Kingdom  
National Commission for UNESCO

FACT SHEET

UNESCO: An Overview

April 2010 | FACT SHEET #1

This Fact Sheet provides an overview of UNESCO and its constitutional organs.

**Other Relevant Fact Sheets:**

- UNESCO Medium Term Strategy
- UNESCO Programme and Budget
- Regional Consultation with National Commissions for UNESCO

OVERVIEW OF UNESCO



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), founded in 1945, is one of 16 Specialized Agencies in the United Nations system.

The preamble to its Constitution sets out the ideals of the Organization:

***'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'***

Its current Medium Term Strategy (2008-13) is built around the following mission statement, focusing on themes and areas where UNESCO can make a difference through purposeful, strategic action:

***'As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO contributes to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information'.***

Website: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

**KEY FACTS**

- Headquartered in **Paris, France**
- **5** Programme Sectors: Education, Natural Sciences, Social & Human Sciences, Culture and Communication & Information
- 2010 - 2011 biennium regular budget of **US\$ 653 million**
- **193** Member States and six Associated Members (as of April 2010)
- **50** Field Offices
- **182** Permanent Delegations (which represent UNESCO Member State Governments) based in UNESCO Headquarters
- **196** National Commissions worldwide
- National Commissions are unique to UNESCO in the UN system, acting as a mechanism to involve civil society expertise in UNESCO's areas of competence.

**UK AND UNESCO: KEY MILESTONES**

- The UK was one of the 26 founding members of UNESCO, whose Constitution was signed in London on 16 November 1945.
- Two British scientists, Sir Julian Huxley (biologist, 1887-1975) and Dr Joseph Needham (scientist and sinologist, 1900-1995), put the "S" in UNESCO, ensuring science was included in the founding mandate of the Organization.
- Sir Julian Huxley was the first Director-General of UNESCO (1947-8) and Dr Joseph Needham the first head of UNESCO's Science Division.
- The Constitution of UNESCO was signed in the Great Hall of the Institute of Civil Engineers in London on 16 November 1945 by 37 countries and came into force on 4 November 1946 following its ratification by 20 signatories. ■



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## MAIN FUNCTIONS

The five “traditional” functions of UNESCO are:

- **Laboratory of Ideas:** serves as a think tank to facilitate understanding of the most important issues in its programme sectors, identifying strategies and policies to deal with these issues. This is done in light of the ethical principles UNESCO champions.
- **Standards Setter:** serves as a central forum for articulating the ethical, normative and intellectual issues of our time, fostering multidisciplinary exchange and mutual understanding.
- **Clearinghouse:** gathers, transfers, disseminates and shares available information, knowledge and best practice. Identifies innovative solutions and tests them through pilot projects.
- **Capacity Building:** provides technical expertise and facilitates international cooperation as a means of assisting countries in building human and institutional capacity.
- **Catalyst for International Cooperation:** as a multidisciplinary agency UNESCO assumes a catalytic role for cooperation in development, seeking to ensure that projects are implemented innovatively and effectively, particularly at the regional and national level.

UNESCO's role is better articulated as **operating in its areas of competence through global, regional and country-level action**. This is done by:

- **promoting global research, innovative thinking, and evidence-based policy debate;**
- **setting standards and norms;**
- **monitoring (to identify gaps) and benchmarking;**
- **helping countries to develop their own policies for building human and institutional capacities.**

## PRINCIPAL CONSTITUTIONAL ORGANS OF UNESCO

<b>The General Conference</b>	The paramount decision-making body for UNESCO's policies and major undertakings. All Member States have the right to be represented, each with one vote. From 1946 to 1952 the General Conference met every year. Since then it has normally met every 2 years.  Decisions of the General Conference are made by a simple majority vote, except for certain constitutionally-specified matters, such as amending the UNESCO Constitution or adopting an international convention, which require a two-thirds majority.
<b>The Executive Board</b>	Comprising 58 Members elected by the General Conference, each serving a four-year term, it meets at least twice a year. It supervises the execution of UNESCO's programme, reviews the budget estimate and work programme for the upcoming two-year period and submits its recommendations to the General Conference.
<b>The Secretariat</b>	Responsible for carrying out UNESCO's programmes. It is headed by the Director-General, operating with staff from some 170 countries. Currently, over 30% of the UNESCO staff works in field offices.

## UNESCO AND THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

In its capacity as a UN specialised agency, UNESCO actively contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. UNESCO's comparative advantage within the United Nations system lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bringing wide-ranging expertise and insight to global challenges. UNESCO applies this approach to the MDGs, especially contributing to the interconnected aims of:

- achieving universal primary education
- relieving extreme poverty
- eliminating gender disparity
- combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- helping countries implement national strategies for sustainable development
- helping reverse current trends in loss of biodiversity, natural resources and environmental security

In its approach to these goals UNESCO focuses on its core competencies in education, culture, sciences and communication. This helps ensure that the MDGs are seen and addressed as complex challenges which necessitate multidisciplinary solutions.

