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Audit of the Rapid Review Process
Summary audit results
March 2022

department of internal oversight services

Background

Since its inception, and consistent with UN practice in refugee situations globally, UNRWA uses the host country's curriculum. This ensures Palestine refugees can integrate into host secondary and tertiary educational systems and more broadly participate in the social and economic life of the host country. Though UNRWA has no mandate to alter any host government curriculum or textbooks, since 2016, UNRWA has conducted rapid reviews (RRP) on PA textbooks to identify issues of potential concern deemed not aligned with UN values against three key criteria: Neutrality/Bias, Gender, and Age-Appropriateness.

The Teacher Centred Approach (TCA), reflecting pedagogical principles of critical thinking and student empowerment, helps UNRWA teachers address identified issues in the classroom and teacher reference grid, guide and training material developed through the RRP, facilitate delivery of the curriculum in the classroom. In addition, UNRWA Education Department (ED) also prepares based on the RRP, statistical grids on the percentage of issues and pages with issues which serve as basis for external donor briefings (Briefing notes). Below is a summary of the coverage of the review with the issues identified.

Due to the COVID pandemic, during online learning, self-learning materials published on UNRWA's Digital Learning Platform (DLP) were used while review of PA textbooks by the HQ Curriculum team for the 2021/2022 academic year is currently in progress. Review for the host country curriculum for UNRWA schools in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon is conducted by the Field education staff.

The RRP is performed in five steps; identify, develop documents, address, implement, and monitor, evaluate, and reporting.

Objective and Purpose of Audit

The audit aimed to assess whether governance, risk management, and internal control processes over the RRP are adequate, effective, and in line with the relevant framework.
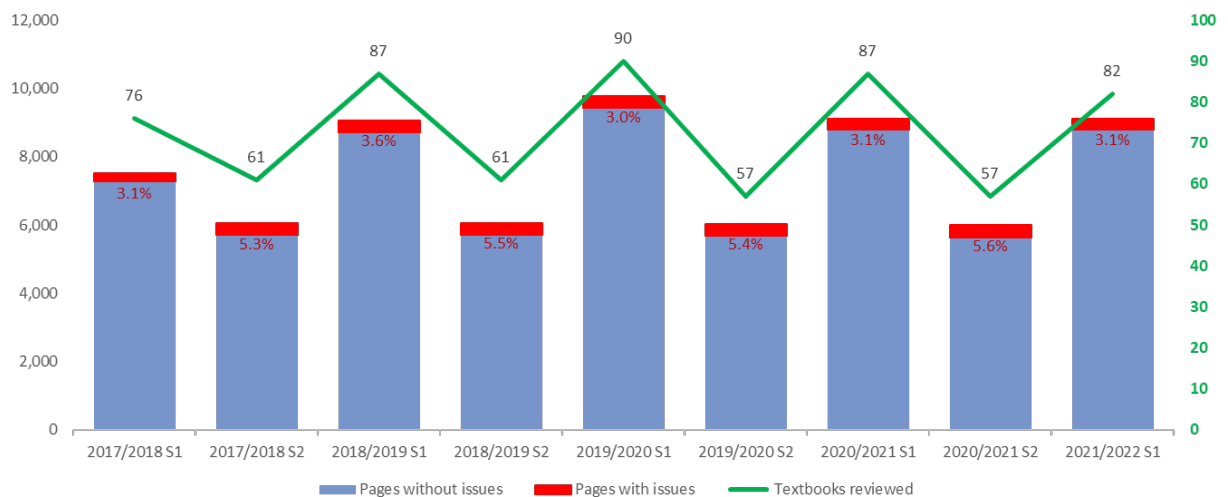
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What DIOS concluded

DIOS noted that extensive reviews have been conducted, covering over 600 textbooks with close to 65,000 pages to date, resulting in the development of 9 rounds of TCA documents (Grid, Guide, and Training material) addressing on average, over 300 issues of potential concern, including the provision of options and critical thinking questions as relevant, to be used in classrooms. Moreover, the ED Curriculum Team remained agile and responsive during remote learning, devoting resources to mitigate the risks of materials not aligned with UN values being posted to DLP.

However, DIOS assessed the RRP of new editions of PA textbooks as "Partially Satisfactory – Major Improvement Needed", which means that "The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were generally established and functioning but need major improvement to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of the audited entity/area should be achieved". In particular, the RRP framework required significant enhancement, and other necessary measures (including monitoring for implementation in all fields) were needed to ensure effective implementation of RRP and TCA in the classrooms.

What DIOS recommended

DIOS made 7 recommendations of which 3 (#1, #3 & #6) are high risk. To effectively implement the rapid review framework, Education Department should:

1. significantly enhance the rapid review framework by strengthening and incorporating the following key elements:

   ✓ defined roles and responsibilities;
   ✓ specified criteria to use when conducting the review;
   ✓ systematic quality assurance mechanism and;
   ✓ clarification of roles and responsibilities of specific stakeholders (such as Neutrality and Gender), for consistent interpretation of the identified matters related to key UN values.

2. immediately commence succession planning and accelerate recruitment for vacant posts in order to ensure that critical knowledge is retained and that the rapid reviews will continue to be conducted after staff transition;

3. establish clear timelines and monitoring mechanism to ensure timely completion and dissemination of the rapid review and related TCA documents respectively, in line with the start of the academic year;

4. take necessary measures to establish appropriate record-keeping system utilizing relevant existing IMTD suite, including OneDrive or SharePoint;

5. develop an effective training plan for HQ-led training, and ensure fields development of the cascade training plan, in due consideration of alternative delivery modality in accordance with the TCA Training Manual in line with the academic year given the potential constraints;

6. develop a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the TCA Grid and Guide are implemented, including ensuring the required monitoring, quality assurance, and classroom visits are conducted;

7. ensure monitoring mechanism is in place on the fields' implementation of the rapid review framework for the host country curriculum in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

What management is doing to address DIOS recommendations

Management has accepted the recommendations and is in the process of implementing them, including recruitment of additional professional support dedicated to the RRP. In particular, Education Department noted that the RRP is currently undergoing potential revision, including an alternative approach for the distribution of learning material which may mitigate the risks identified in the report.

Methodology, Approach and Disclosure

DIOS conducted an audit of the Rapid Review Process (RRP) to assess whether governance, risk management and internal control processes over the RRP are adequate, effective and in line with relevant framework. The audit focused on the rapid review of PA textbooks in use in Gaza and West Bank while also assessed ED HQA's role in the RRP as it relates to curriculum in use in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

The audit covered all five sub-processes of RRP focusing the roles of HQA ED: identify issues of potential concern, develop TCA documents, address issues identified, implementation, monitor and reporting. While the audit intended to focus on 2021/2022, where information was not available, earlier school years were assessed.

The audit approach included enquiries and discussions with relevant staff, review of control processes and documents, analysis and examination of selected samples and other procedures deemed necessary. The fieldwork was conducted from the beginning of October until the end of January 2022.

The audit was conducted in accordance with DIOS standards, which are designed to conform to the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. It was completed in conformity with the approved work plan and took into consideration the risk assessment exercise conducted prior to the audit.

Pursuant to OD14, this summary of findings and recommendations including management action taken to address recommendations is made publicly available on the DIOS internet page upon issuance of the report on 30 March 2022.