United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Board of Trustees

2026 Special Session

4 June 2026 UNITAR/BTSS/2026/2

12 June 2026 Geneva, Switzerland

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2026 SPECIAL SESSION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1. The Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) convened on 4 June 2026 in special session. A list of the session's main conclusions and recommendations, as adopted at the session, is attached as Annex I.

2. The following members of the Board were present or represented at the session:

Trustees:

His Excellency Mr. Ali Ben Fetais Al-Marri

His Excellency Mr. Arindam Bagchi

Ms. Dorothea Gieselmann

Mr. Nikolaj Gilbert

Mr. Petr Ilichev

Her Excellency Ms. Mathu Joyini

His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber, represented by His Excellency Mr. Thomas Gürber

Her Excellency Dr. Amina Mohamed (Vice Chair)

His Excellency Mr. Ib Petersen (Chair)

His Excellency Mr. Jian Shen

Professor Akiko Yuge

<u>Ex Officio</u>:

Ms. Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Executive Director, UNITAR

<u>Secretary of the Board</u>:

Mr. Brook Boyer, Secretary of the Board
Mr. Jonas Haertle, Deputy Secretary of the Board

<u>Observers</u>:

Mr. Firas Ahmed (attending with His Excellency Mr. Ali Ben Feitas Al-Marri)
Ms. Yiling Chen (attending with His Excellency Mr. Shen Jian)
Mr. Anton Minaev (attending with Mr. Petr Ilichev)
Mr. Moritz Seiler (attending with Ms. Dorothea Geiselmann)
Mr. Kshitij Tyagi (attending with His Excellency Mr. Arindam Bagchi)
Mr. Samir Yeddes (attending with His Excellency Mr. Thomas Gürber, representative of Ambassador Jürg Lauber)

3. Under <u>item 1</u>, Opening of the session, the Chair welcomed the Trustees to the special session and indicated that the session is convened pursuant to his proposal in his letter to the Board of 16 March 2026, as a follow-up to the discussions held during the Board's Sixty-Sixth Session, with a view to considering the two reports annexed under item 4 of the provisional agenda. He said that the purpose of the session was not to take a decision, but to provide the Board with an opportunity to review the findings, ask questions and offer guidance on the proposed way forward, and that the discussion would help inform the Board's deliberations at its Sixty-Seventh Session on 25 June 2026 at which the Board is expected to consider any recommendations it may wish to make regarding the merger proposal before it is transmitted to the Secretary-General. The Chair announced that a quorum was established with 12 Trustees present and declared the session open.

4. Under <u>item 2</u>, Introductory remarks from the Executive Director, the Executive Director expressed her appreciation to the Board for its continued engagement since the Sixty-Sixth Session, particularly regarding the UN80 Initiative and the proposed merger of the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) into UNITAR. She recalled that the Board acknowledged the importance of a rigorous, transparent and evidence-based analysis, and said that the special session was not a decision point on the merger but an opportunity to review two key documents—the Deloitte merger design proposal and the draft report of the Secretary-General—to assess whether the evidence supports advancing the proposal. She distinguished between the two documents, the first comprising an independent technical assessment based on consultation, benchmarking, functional analysis and financial modelling, and the second document drawing on that assessment to inform and frame a potential decision by Member States. She said that the purpose of the session was to assess whether the available evidence supports the strategic case for the proposed merger, as outlined in draft Report of the Secretary-General. The Executive Director emphasized that the merger is framed within the broader UN80 Initiative as a response to evolving global challenges, aiming not only at efficiency but at strengthening the UN's capacity, coherence and impact in learning and capability development. She said that the comprehensive, multi-phase analytical process involving extensive consultations, benchmarking and stakeholder engagement has demonstrated that both entities are performing effectively within their respective mandates, but that the analysis also identified opportunities to generate greater value by bringing together the entities' complementary strengths, particularly in response to the evolving multilateral and donor landscape. She indicated that the overall conclusion highlights a compelling opportunity to establish a more coherent and future-ready institution for the UN system and its Member States, and that the proposed merger would create a unified platform with a single-entry point, improve service integration, stronger digital and institutional capabilities, and more scalable impact, supported by a hub-and-spoke operating model. She said the Board was asked to provide observations and guidance on the robustness of the analysis, assumptions and risk mitigation, with its feedback

informing a revised proposal for the Board's consideration at its Sixty-Seventh Session on 25 June 2026, with a joint meeting organized on that occasion with the UNSSC Board of Governors, prior to the submission of the draft report to the Secretary-General for his consideration and decision to submit to the General Assembly at its present 80th session. **The Board took note of the introductory remarks of the Executive Director.**

5. Under item 3, Adoption of the agenda, the Chair introduced the provisional agenda as prepared by the Executive Director in accordance with the Board's Rules of Procedure. **The Board adopted the agenda as proposed.**

6. Under item 4, UN80 Initiative Action 68: Proposed merger of the United Nations System Staff College into the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Chair welcomed the representatives from Deloitte Consulting to the session. The Chair recalled that at its Sixty-Sixth Session, the Board took note of the update on the Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative, and in particular the Secretary-General's plan to merge UNSSC into UNITAR as contained in his UN80 Initiative Workstream 3 Report, *Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver*, took note of the Board's observations on the Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative and his proposal to merge the United Nations System Staff College into UNITAR, and requested the Executive Director to take the necessary actions to prepare UNITAR for any merger. The Chair also recalled that during the first months of 2026, the Executive Director had briefed the Board on these actions, as summarized in the item's annotation, and in his letter to the Board of 16 March 2026, proposed the convening of a special session on the UN80 Initiative, Action 68. He referred to the two documents before the Board for its consideration: UN80 Initiative Action 68 Merger Design Proposal: Turning Knowledge into Capability, Turning Capability into Results, produced by Deloitte, and the draft report of the Secretary-General on the Merger of UNSSC into UNITAR. He then invited the representatives of Deloitte Consulting to introduce its report.

7. Following the presentation of the Deloitte report, Trustees put forward numerous observations and requests for clarification, including on the calculations and analysis underpinning estimates of savings and one off transition costs, financial assumptions underpinning revenue projections given the constrained fiscal environment and high overheads, and related risks and strategic positioning, the origin and use of the operational reserves, and the practical challenges of restructuring staff. Clarification was also sought on the hub-and-spoke operating model and how this approach would function in practice, whether the location proposal would result in loss of proximity to key stakeholders and strategic engagement with key partners, and on institutional, financial and operational risks. Information was requested on whether comparison of alternative models, including their trade-offs, had been undertaken, given that the two entities are seen as functioning relatively well. There were also requests for clarification on who was consulted as part of the Deloitte analysis, the linkage to the SDGs and how the proposed model would strengthen system-wide leadership, Member State capacity and knowledge generation. It was also observed that the role of artificial intelligence was underdeveloped, given Geneva's growing prominence in this field. Observations also pointed to inconsistencies regarding location plans, including the future of existing offices, and suggested strengthening established hubs such as Bonn.

8. Trustees raised questions on whether certain administrative functions might be relocated to lower-cost settings and what the overall operating and financing model would look like. Questions on demand and competitiveness, were also raised, including whether countries—especially in the Global South—would be willing to pay for training and capacity development services, assumptions regarding mobilisation on non-earmarked resources, whether sufficient market research supports the assumptions of growing demand, and how the new entity would compete with private sector providers or free learning alternatives. Clarification was sought on the value proposition, and whether there's was a need to invest more heavily in new capabilities, and how the proposed merger would align with ongoing UN80 reforms. Questions about organizational culture and the feasibility of the proposed timeframe were also raised. Clarity was sought on the envisioned structure and functioning of the new entity, including its service model, treatment of research activities and the overall business model, risks and mitigation measures, and whether the merger would ultimately lead to greater efficiency and a more attractive offering for stakeholders.

9. Deloitte clarified that its mandate was limited to assessing how the two entities could be brought together, rather than exploring broader alternative models. Deloitte explained that within that scope, the exercise compared different merger approaches, including maintaining largely separate

operations versus full integration, and concluded that only a more integrated model would generate meaningful strategic value. Deloitte also explained that the hub-and-spoke concept was functional rather than geographic, and centred on a unified learning engine. Deloitte noted that the two entities already share similar cultures—particularly an entrepreneurial, cost-recovery mindset and a strong focus on quality—which should ease integration. Deloitte highlighted the potential demand for centralized learning services across the UN system and a shift in activities, which could be more focused on learning business partners who need to engage with agencies and Member States. Deloitte reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a strong presence in Geneva, while anticipating a marginal shift in the type of roles that sit in Geneva, with stability recommended in the short term, and possible future rationalization as the merged entity evolves.

10. On requests for clarification on matters related to finance and implementation, Deloitte stated that the cost-recovery model would remain the core funding approach, with services delivered on a fee-for-service basis and existing training activities continuing, enhanced by integration. The transition costs are expected to be covered from the existing operational reserve, subject to approval and clear governance arrangements. Deloitte acknowledged that the proposed timeline—aiming for operational launch within a few months after Member State approval—was ambitious but achievable if limited initially to essential functions, supported by sufficient resources and driven by strong delivery discipline. Deloitte emphasized that an incomplete or partial implementation would represent a major risk, as it could increase costs without eliminating duplication, whereas decisive and comprehensive execution would strengthen financial flexibility and help mitigate uncertainties related to future funding. Deloitte offered to provide written responses to requests for clarifications. The Chair thanked Deloitte for their responses and they subsequently left the meeting.

11. The Chair then invited the Executive Director to introduce the draft Report of the Secretary-General on the Merger of UNSSC into UNITAR. The Executive Director clarified that the draft report of the Secretary-General draws on Deloitte's analysis to prepare a concrete proposal for a decision by Member States, aimed at creating a single institution focused on learning, capability development and institutional transformation support. She reaffirmed that the hub-and-spoke model is not about physical location but about a functional "learning engine" that connects expertise across the UN system and beyond, enabling the new entity to act both as a system-wide hub and a delivery partner, responding to a challenge that both UNITAR and UNSSC both presently face. She said the proposal also seeks to address fragmentation by creating a single-entry point for Member States, offering clearer, more strategic and scalable services supported by shared platforms and structured learning pathways.

12. On location, the Executive Director explained that the proposal maintains all current locations at the outset to ensure business continuity, while recognizing that the geographic footprint of an entity with six presences in the North would need to be reassessed over time to improve effectiveness, cost-efficiency and alignment with client needs. Governance arrangements are designed to avoid any gaps, with UNITAR continuing as the legal basis throughout the transition and ensuring uninterrupted oversight. The implementation would follow a phased approach with dedicated workstreams covering key areas such as people, operations, finance, technology, legal matters and branding, supported by Board oversight and reporting throughout the process. The Executive Director concluded that the proposal reflects sound analysis, with the staff and leadership of both entities fully involved in helping shape the proposal.

13. The Board continued its reflections on both documents, raising observations and requests for clarification regarding the merger's rationale, feasibility and risks. Additional questions focused on whether the merged entity would be sufficiently competitive in a rapidly evolving and crowded learning and capacity development market, including its ability to anticipate and respond quickly to emerging needs. Clarification was requested on whether existing staff could effectively deliver higher-value advisory and transformation services, or whether new expertise would be required, potentially affecting competitiveness. Clarification was also sought on governance and operational design, including the relationship between the Board of Trustees and the Independent Programmatic Advisory Board. More broadly, clarification was sought on whether the merger would truly enhance efficiency, cost-effectiveness and financial sustainability, given that both entities are already performing well, and taking into consideration the existence of UN training institutions beyond UNITAR and UNSSC.

14. The absence of comparative options for the merger was reiterated, as well as insufficient detail on financial implications, envisaged budget and lack of clarity on staffing changes, cost savings and potential duplication of functions, including new leadership posts and overlapping structures. Clarification was also sought on the assumptions related to outsourcing, possible overlaps with other UN initiatives such as UN80 Work Package 8, the need for review by the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the rationale for rebranding. There were requests for more rigorous cost-benefit assessment, clearer articulation of the business model and critical resource requirements and transparency regarding the use of the operational reserve, including donor consent. Additional points included the need to ensure benefits for developing countries, strengthen links to key locations and stakeholders and enhance innovation and problem-solving capacity.

15. The Executive Director responded to the Board's numerous observations and requests for clarification. On the consultation process, the Executive Director replied that extensive consultations had taken place across all partner groups, including interviews with academic partners, engagement with host countries and programme countries, national authorities, where identified, and UN entities. On the hub-and-spoke model, the Executive Director explained that the concept is not about geographical location but about linking the UN's two dedicated learning entities into a unified system that connects with the broader UN and external expertise, emphasizing that the approach is demand-driven, non-duplicative and client-focused; she also clarified that the headquarters would remain in Geneva while strengthening the campus in Turin. In response to the comment related to funding and whether countries in the Global South would pay, the Executive Director indicated that the model largely continues the current self-financed cost-recovery approach. In response to the question on the views of the UNSSC's Board of Governors, she noted that this remains to be seen, pending its meeting scheduled for 9 June 2026, after which feedback from both boards would inform a revised proposal. On the operating model, the Executive Director explained that it is designed for flexibility and future needs, enabling multidisciplinary teams and agile responses through a learning solutions team. On branding, the Executive Director explained that a name change reflects the creation of a new institution with a broader, more strategic focus on capability development at scale, signalling a cultural and operational shift, driven by demand, better balanced between individual capability development, platform services, and advisory services to address specific skills gaps and strengthen institutions and learning systems. On the perceived ambition of the proposal, the Executive Director noted that it positions learning and capability development as a key pillar of the delivery architecture, treating capacity development as a strategic investment. On financing and whether developing countries would pay, the Executive Director stated that the model remains fundamentally based on cost recovery, as at present, but introduces additional mechanisms such as service and subscription fees for platform use, without seeking assessed contributions or regular budget funding. On the operating model, the Executive Director explained that it is designed to be agile, multidisciplinary and future-oriented, enabling tailored responses to complex challenges through flexible team structures rather than siloed approaches. On advisory structures, the Executive Director said the proposal builds on existing advisory mechanisms by creating a unified, multidisciplinary programme advisory board, complemented by a "learning business partner" function to ensure responsiveness to evolving needs. On the consideration of alternatives, the Executive Director indicated that multiple options had been analyzed, but the decision to propose a merger was taken at the highest level and follows years of discussion, with this being the first time a comprehensive and detailed proposal will be presented for Member State decision. On staffing, the Executive Director noted that contrary to the observation made, there was rationalisation rather than duplication of functions, and that detailed organisational structure would follow merger decision and be elaborated during detailed transition planning. On outsourcing and demand, the Executive Director conveyed that many entities informed they would prefer to rely on a strong internal learning function rather than external providers, while Member States are increasingly seeking support for systems support and institutional capacity development. On ACABQ review, the Executive Director clarified that formal review mechanisms would apply once a full proposal with budget implications is submitted to the General Assembly, noting the process is still at a preparatory stage. On implementation timing, the Executive Director explained that the merger would be rolled out over 16 to 24 months, a reasonable timeframe benchmarked against other similar mergers processes, ensuring disciplined execution. The initial focus would be on legal foundations, followed by phased implementation. Finally, on financing the transition, the Executive Director stated that costs would be covered from the existing operational reserve of both entities without falling below required thresholds,

emphasizing that the merger is expected to generate greater strategic value than maintaining the entities separately.

16. The Chair invited the Chair of the Finance Committee to introduce its report, UNITAR/BTSS/2026/FC/2. The Finance Committee Chair said the Executive Director recalled the rationale of the proposed merger, stating that the merger proposal is not primarily a financial exercise, but strategic, and that the objective was to create a stronger, more coherent institutional platform for learning capability development and institutional transformation serving both Member States and the United Nations system with the business case centred on strategic value creation. The Finance Committee Chair said the Executive Director stressed that the proposal would bring together UNITAR's strengths and the Staff College's expertise, and that objective is to create a single capability architecture that is greater than the sum of those two parts. The Executive Director said that any proposal of this magnitude must also demonstrate financial sustainability and responsible stewardship of resources. She said the Executive Director referred to Deloitte's estimates that once the merger is substantially implemented and the new operating model is fully operational, the merged entity could realize a sustained annual cost-based reduction in the range of $5.5 to $7.0 million. She emphasized that these savings would not be automatic and that they would depend on disciplined implementation of the future operating model and careful tracking of benefits throughout the transition process, and she distinguished different types of efficiencies, cashable savings, avoided future costs, and redeployed capacity. On transition costs, the Executive Director noted that Deloitte estimates one-time implementation costs to be in the range of $9.5 to $13 million. Consistent with the overall transition approach, the proposal foresees a phased implementation in two phases. The Executive Director reported that based on available information on the analysis conducted by Deloitte, the Staff College appears to be in a sound financial position, and its liability profile is predominantly staff related.

17. The Committee expressed support for the proposed merger, noting its strategic rationale and value, and that the exercise has advanced in a constructive and coordinated fashion with effective leadership, collaborative approach and open communication with staff of both entities. At the same time, while recognizing the usefulness of differentiating among various types of efficiencies, the Committee sought clarification about the financial assumptions underlying the merger proposal. It observed that the projected annual cost savings may be optimistic or overestimated, particularly in programmatic areas that the merged entity aims to enhance as a central component of its value proposition. The Committee advised that a more conservative estimate may be warranted until further detail is provided, especially given the relatively modest size of the combined workforce of the two entities. The Committee agreed on the importance of implementation discipline and sought clarification on the estimated transition cost, noting that severance, repatriation and relocation costs may be overestimated. Members requested greater granularity on staffing categories, where reduction was expected due to duplication, contract modalities and the methodology used to calculate the anticipated reduction of 30 full-time equivalents. The Committee enquired which functions may realistically yield efficiencies and which areas, particularly in the programmatic and learning functions, should be protected to ensure the merged entities' long-term relevance and competitiveness. The Committee enquired into staff perspectives on the merger and appreciated the identification of risk areas and mitigation measures. The Committee also requested further explanation of the proposed post-merger advisory support budget, noting that the purpose and scope of the $2 to $3 million allocation may require clearer justification. The Committee requested clarification on the specific amount of operational reserve required, the timeline for its use and the implications of UNITAR's operational reserve, including whether the proposed drawdown would maintain a 12-month minimum. Separate reporting on the one-off transition costs was also requested. The Executive Director informed the Committee that the largest component of projected merger-related costs is personnel-driven, including relocation, severance, training and other transition measures. She noted that underlying pro forma cost assumptions could be provided. She explained that staffing decisions would be guided by the future operating model and central management functions would be lean and designed to enable programme delivery. The Executive Director acknowledged concerns regarding potential overestimation of both costs and savings, emphasizing the current figures are high-level estimates derived from pro forma modelling and will require more granular bottom-up validation during detailed transition planning should a merger be approved. The Committee felt it important to reiterate that Deloitte's figures are indicative, require detailed verification, and should not be treated as commitments prior to transition phase analysis. The Committee underscored that the merger's success depends on sustained demand for Member States, UN entities and donors. If programme revenues decline or UN entities or Member States

shift to external providers, the financial model underpinning shared services and cost recovery would be weakened. The Committee and the Executive Director stressed that UN partners and Member States would need to commit to using the merged entity's learning and capability development services for the strategic rationale of the UN's learning delivery architecture to hold. Finally, the Committee raised a concern regarding the number of physical locations with a view that maintaining multiple sites may be excessive given the small size of the organisation and increasing shift towards virtual delivery, and requested Management to present a clear position on future geographic rationalization based on solid analysis. The Committee supported the proposed merger and recommended that the Board take note of the estimated sustained annual cost-based reduction of $5.5 to $7 million and one-time transition cost of $9.5 to $13 million with the understanding that these figures need to be validated. It requested Management to distinguish between cashable savings, avoided costs and redeployed capacity. The Committee endorsed as appropriate, the limited use of the operational reserve in 2026 for essential preparatory transition costs, including accounting advice related to dissolution and transfer of assets and liabilities and requested management to report back on actual transaction costs.

18. In response to the view expressed by a Trustee that the Advisory Committee should be formally involved before submission to the General Assembly, given its established mandate to advise on administrative and budgetary matters, the Executive Director clarified that procedurally, such consultation would normally occur once the Secretary-General submits a proposal or refers a matter to the General Assembly, and noted that the process remains at a preparatory stage and does not yet trigger that requirement, particularly noting the entities involved are self-financed, operating on a cost recovery basis. General support for the vision and potential benefits of the merger was also expressed, while underscoring concern about the risk of relying on optimistic assumptions. A more detailed analysis, including quantitative scenarios under varying assumptions of demand and funding, would be needed to better assess the robustness of the proposed model. Suggestions included reflecting more explicitly the role of different locations, as well as strengthening the analytical basis of the draft report before submission to Member States.

19. Regarding the proposed two-phased preach in the draft Secretary-General Report, one Board member suggested first seeking agreement in principle on the merger, and second, returning with a more detailed and comprehensive proposal covering governance, financing, operating model, location strategy and transition planning, supported by realistic cost estimates and scenario analysis. The Trustee felt that this approach would balance ambition with due diligence, ensuring that decisions are grounded in sufficient evidence while maintaining momentum toward reform. In response, the Executive Director emphasized the distinction between analysis required for decision-making and the further level of detail that can only be developed during implementation. She noted that while the current proposal is based on robust pro forma assumptions, more granular details—such as staffing configurations and precise cost breakdowns—depend on decisions about the operating model and cannot be fully determined in advance.

20. **The Board took note note of the Deloitte Report entitled *UN80 Action 68 Initiative Merger Design Proposal: Turning Knowledge into Capability. Turing Capability into Results* and the observations made; took note of the draft report of the Secretary-General on the merger of UNSSC into UNITAR and the observations and recommendations made; took note of the report of the Finance Committee and the estimated, sustained annual cost-based reduction of $5.5 million to $7.0 million and the one-time transition costs of $9.5 million to $13.0 million, with the understanding that these figures need to be validated; took note that the UNSSC Board of Governors will convene a special session on 9 June 2026; requested Management to provide clarification to the questions raised, consider the observations and recommendations made and submit a revised draft report of the Secretary-General for the Board's consideration at the Sixty-Seventh Session, by 12 June 2026; and agreed that the Sixty-Seventh Session will contain a joint session, as proposed by the Chair of the Board.**

21. Under <u>item 5</u>, Arrangements for the Sixty-Seventh Session and adoption of the 2026 Special Session's conclusions and recommendations, the Chair recalled the Board's decision at its Sixty-Sixth Session that the Board would convene on 25 June for its Sixty-Seventh Session, and that as proposed in his letter to the Board of 16 March 2026, the session would serve as a platform to convene a joint meeting between the UNITAR Board of Trustees and the UNSSC Board of Governors on the UN80 Initiative Action 68. It was therefore proposed that the Board of Trustees agree to suspend the Sixty-Seventh Session momentarily on 25 June 2026, from 14:30 to 17:00,

to allow this joint meeting to convene, after which the Board would result its Sixty-Seventh Session. **The Board agreed and requested Management to undertake the necessary arrangements for this joint meeting.**

22. The session was adjourned.

Annex I
Conclusions and Recommendations of the 2026 Special Session

Item 3: UN80 Initiative Action 68: Proposed merger of the United Nations System Staff College into the United Nations Institute for Training and Research

The Board took note note of the Deloitte Report entitled *UN80 Action 68 Initiative Merger Design Proposal: Turning Knowledge into Capability*. *Turing Capability into Results* and the observations made; took note of the draft report of the Secretary-General on the merger of UNSSC into UNITAR and the observations and recommendations made; took note of the report of the Finance Committee and the estimated, sustained annual cost-based reduction of $5.5 million to $7.0 million and the one-time transition costs of $9.5 million to $13.0 million, with the understanding that these figures need to be validated; took note that the UNSSC Board of Governors will convene a special session on 9 June 2026; requested Management to provide clarification to the questions raised, consider the observations and recommendations made and submit a revised draft report of the Secretary-General for the Board's consideration at the Sixty-Seventh Session, by 12 June 2026; and agreed that the Sixty-Seventh Session will contain a joint session, as proposed by the Chair of the Board.