

ISC membership: A discussion paper to accompany the revision of the ISC statutes

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1. Introduction

The revision of the ISC statutes and rules of procedure in 2023-2024 is an opportunity to tackle some long-standing and complex issues relating to membership, as well as related issues of voting rights and dues. This paper sets out the main issues and related questions as a basis for discussion with the membership. Consultation of the membership will be organized in September/October 2023, such that any consensus which emerges can feed into the ongoing revision of the ISC statutes.

Members are invited to send written comments on issues related to membership together with their comments on the zero draft of the revised statutes preferably by 30 September, through the online form provided.

2. The current situation

The [membership of the ISC](#) is currently organized into three broad categories, nominally representing (i) international disciplinary organizations, (ii) geographically defined, multidisciplinary organizations, and (iii) other organizations with cognate activities. However, there are numerous inconsistencies and anomalies in membership within and between the categories, largely resulting from the fusion of two predecessor organizations with complex membership histories.

To accommodate the diversity of members inherited from the merger of ICSU and the ISSC, the scope of membership of the Council was rather lightly defined in the ISC statutes (see extracts below). These definitions of membership categories were intended to be open and flexible; in practice, they are ambiguous and sometimes difficult to apply, and are not easily understood by prospective new members.

Membership issues are furthermore tangled up with voting and dues issues which cannot be resolved until the scope and categories of membership have been clarified.

Statute 1:

The International Science Council, hereinafter called 'the Council', is a global non-governmental and non-profit-making scientific organization of international, regional, and national science and research organizations and institutions.

Statute 8:

Members shall normally adhere to the Council in one of the following categories:

Full Members

- i. Category 1: Scientific unions, associations and similar bodies, being international scientific

organizations¹ devoted to the practice and promotion of specific scientific disciplines or areas.

- ii. Category 2: Academies of sciences, research councils or analogous not-for-profit scientific bodies representing a broad spectrum of scientific fields or disciplines in a country, region, territory or globally.

Affiliated Members

- iii. Category 3: Other bodies, being governmental and non-governmental organizations, whose activities are in a field cognate to those of the Council.

The critical issue for the ISC, which has as its mission to be the global voice for science, is that **there are large disciplinary gaps in its membership**. This partly reflects the establishment of ICSU and the ISSC before significant evolutions in science from the 1980s onwards, notably in the life and data sciences. Moreover, the way scientific organizations constitute themselves has changed and continues to change compared to the era when ICSU was formed over 90 years ago, or the ISSC over 70 years ago. Large umbrella bodies have in some cases not been the preferred model in either natural or social sciences, as subdisciplines have developed their own identity and new disciplines have emerged. This is particularly so in the clinical and life sciences, and in some areas of social sciences where quite narrowly defined and small disciplinary bodies may act globally.² The ISC needs to attract disciplinary bodies across the full spectrum of science. Notably, the ISC has not attracted any new Category 1 members in the five years of its existence (there have been a few shifts from Category 3 to 1).

The credibility of the ISC's mission to be the global voice for science requires a stronger and more comprehensive membership base, as well as definitions of membership that attract and are appropriate for relevant organizations. All current members must be retained, but the scope of membership must be clearer, more attractive and applied consistently in the future. This may entail recategorization of some members.

3. Questions for reflection and discussion

1. There is currently no place in the membership for disciplinary bodies that nominally might be geographically based but are functionally international (e.g. the American Neuroscience Association). Should such organizations be considered, and under what conditions?
2. Some ISC members are umbrella bodies which might suffer if their subsidiary members sought membership in the ISC. This excludes some very large science organizations from membership or direct engagement with the ISC. Could such bodies be offered observer status, on a case-by-case basis and with the umbrella body's consent?
3. Conversely, some members which are umbrella bodies have members which are also full members of the ISC (e.g. the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils and the

¹ For the purposes of these Statutes an international scientific organization is an institution that draws membership from several countries within a region or from countries across at least two regions, and whose members are held together by a formal agreement, constitution or similar instrument.

² For example, the International Society for Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, International Society for Evolutionary Medicine and Public Health – both of which might only have ~1000 members but are well established inter- or emerging-disciplinary bodies and are at the cutting edge of their sciences. While individual members of these organizations could be members of other science organizations, institutionally they would see no link to larger life science organizations.

Philippines Social Science Council, which are both Cat. 2 members). How should this be regularized?

4. National ISC members include some universities (in Fiji/South Pacific, Panama, Tunisia, Norway), funders (e.g. in Canada, Italy, Germany, South Africa, Indonesia) or their ministries (e.g. in Oman, Spain, Lesotho, Namibia), but not their academies. It is essential that the ISC attract all the national academies, including in those countries which have multiple academies (e.g. the UK has three academies as members). A derivative question is whether all funders could or should be members (noting the role of the Global Research Council). The ability to have multiple national members is complicated only because of voting issues (see below) and has largely been addressed by precedent.
5. The current Category 3 is a mix of very different bodies and allows for both governmental and non-governmental bodies. It is where membership growth is most likely. Within Category 3 there may be at least two clusters – organizations which are intimately linked to the ISC's business (e.g. IIASA, GYA, TWAS, OWSD) and others which are more casual associates.
6. There is a moral argument about the status of current Category 3 – is it fair to ask for a fee, but give no effective voice to a member? Many organizations would not join an organization as a non-voting member. Should some or all of Category 3 be integrated as voting members with lower weight compared to Category 1 and 2?
7. Is there a place for universities or collective university organizations?
8. Members should be in the right space – i.e. Category 3 should not be used for Category 1 members wanting to pay lower dues. Should such members be assigned to Category 1 or 2 but allowed a limited term as a provisional member with lower dues and no vote (see 'Provisional members' below).
9. Should the ISC accept private sector entities, given that private-sector funding of the global science effort is highly significant?
10. Could other types of body associated with the science system be considered, e.g. AAAS and other bodies that promote science–society relationships, associations of science publishers or science communication organizations (e.g. science journalists)?
11. Should foundations (e.g. the Nobel Foundation, the Kavli Foundation or Novo Foundation) be considered?
12. Should [Affiliated Bodies](#) (e.g. Future Earth, COSPAR, SCOR, CODATA) be a special class of member? Should they be mentioned in the statutes?
13. Are there other types of organization that would be desirable observer members?
14. The process of [membership application](#) can be slow and inhibitory. Could some types of membership be approved by the Governing Board only?

4. A possible conceptualization of membership

The ISC has a wide variety of actual or potential types of members, which could be clustered in different ways. The following is a list of the possible membership types which merit consideration:

- a. International disciplinary bodies.
- b. National members, being academies, ministries or funders.
- c. International and regional science bodies not covered by 'a'. There are a broad variety of entities (e.g. CLASCO, the Arab Council of Social Sciences, the Caribbean Academy of Sciences) and a growing number of regional umbrella bodies (e.g. ALLEA, IAAS, IANAS, NASAC, SEA, etc.). It is difficult except on a case-by-case basis to assign the best category for each potential member.
- d. Functionally international disciplinary bodies which are nationally constituted. Criteria would need to be drawn up (e.g. > 35% of their membership would not be from the country of legal domicile).
- e. Other bodies that are cognately related to the ISC mission.
- f. 'Young' academies and young disciplinary bodies.
- g. Members of umbrella organizations that fall under 'a', with the consent of the umbrella body – at least as observers.
- h. 'Science and society' organizations, e.g. AAAS, ASTC.
- i. Observer members: this could include foundations, private sector members, International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers (STM) etc. These would have no voting or nomination powers.
- j. Provisional members – organizations which are eligible for membership which might be allowed to be observers for up to three years before becoming a member.
- k. ISC Affiliated Bodies.

5. Bringing it together: voting

Below is a proposal for a voting system involving four categories of member.

- Voting on financial matters: weighted according to dues paid.
- Voting on scientific matters (e.g. approval of position papers or strategic plans): one member, one vote.
- Voting on elections and constitutional matters: the principle that the categories of 'disciplinary' and 'national' members have equal weighting appears to be non-negotiable. But an acceptable shift could be operated by giving a redefined Category 3 members a voice. In

this model, voting on financial and on ordinary matters remains unchanged. But for voting on constitutional matters and elections would be:

Category 1 (a in above list):	40%
Category 2 (b, some of c):	40%
Category 3 (d, e, f, g, h, some of c, g):	20%
Category 4 (i, j, k, some of g):	zero vote

6. Next steps

The Members are asked to reflect on the discussion questions and the proposal for clustering types of members and associated voting rights, and to participate in the consultations, in written form though the online form (see 'Introduction') or in the virtual meetings that will be organized.