



**International
Science Council**

The global voice for science

Uniting the world through science

The International Science Council **harnesses the universal language of science** to catalyse and convene scientific expertise, advice and influence on issues of major concern to both science and society, through a unique global membership of natural and social sciences and humanities.

Preamble to draft Strategic Plan

This document presents a draft Strategic Plan for the ISC for the period 2025–2028. The draft Plan outlines at a high level the proposed strategic priorities of the Council that will inform and guide its actions, choice of activities and ways of working.

The draft Plan takes into account the responses of ISC Members to earlier consultations on ISC priorities, and has been prepared with guidance from the ISC Governing Board and input from the ISC Secretariat.

Feedback on the draft Plan is welcome until **10 November 2024** via:

<https://council.science/news/feedback-isc-draft-strategic-plan-2025-2028/>

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ISC STRATEGIC PLAN 2025–2028

I. Introduction

The International Science Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2025–2028 builds upon the second Action Plan (2022–2024), which was entitled '[Science and Society in Transition](#)'. As we approach 2025, the world continues to be in transition. However the International Science Council (ISC) is now more mature and better equipped to address the continuing and emerging challenges and opportunities for science and humanity.

Given the rapid changes that confront us, the Governing Board has recommended that the Council be guided not by a detailed Action Plan, but by a Strategic Plan that translates the ISC's vision, mission and core values, as set out in the Council's [High-level Strategy](#) (2018), into a set of strategic priorities and organizational objectives for the period 2025–2028. The Plan is not specific about the actions and projects that will be undertaken, which are the object of the annual work plans of the Secretariat, as reviewed by the Governing Board. The Governing Board and Secretariat need the flexibility to be able to respond to and drive change within the boundaries of agreed strategic priorities and principles and the resources of the organization. A stock-taking exercise will be undertaken after two years.

The Plan briefly recalls the context in which science is operating today. It reminds us of the founding [vision and mission](#) that orient everything the ISC does. It then outlines and justifies five strategic priorities for the ISC in the period 2025–2028, identifying the main challenges and opportunities for science and society in those areas and where the ISC can make a unique contribution, and suggesting also where future avenues of work may lead. Finally, the Plan enumerates the key organizational objectives, which are critical to enabling success.

II. The evolving context for science

The scientific endeavour has transformed humanity, providing deep insights into a vast array of subjects – from the structure of atoms to the organization of societies. Medical practices have advanced from bloodletting for fevers to vaccines and precision medicine. Energy sources have evolved from wood and coal to nuclear, solar and wind power. All these advances stem from humanity's curiosity and desire to understand the universe. At times, these advances have been accompanied by unwanted and, in many cases, unanticipated and undesirable side-effects, including climate change, inequalities, and environmental degradation.

Society is undergoing rapid transformation, and at this moment in the 21st century there is a growing awareness of its complexity, uncertainty and vulnerability. Thinking about the future and making sound and evidence-informed decisions is crucial for the sustainability and wellbeing of not only humanity, but also the planet and beyond. As the impact of cutting-edge science on society becomes more direct, it is the responsibility of the scientific community to engage with the public, act responsibly, and identify both the opportunities and threats in the use of science. This proactive approach is essential to restore trust in science and to enable it to contribute effectively to society's expectations, concerns, and needs.

Major societal challenges today and in the coming years are the multiple environmental crises, deepening social inequalities, international conflicts, and the health and wellbeing of all generations. These

challenges often intersect with each other, with emerging technologies and changing values, potentially amplifying the challenges and accelerating their impacts.

They also interact with developments within science systems that are more internal in nature. These include inequities in science, pressures on scientific freedom, responsibility and integrity, tensions between value and knowledge systems, politicization of science, and declining trust in science as an institution—all of which make it difficult for science to make its best contribution to society.

This Strategic Plan of the ISC for the period 2025–2028 recognizes the pivotal role that science has had in shaping the world, and the integral role of science in reaching our shared goal of a fair, peaceful and equitable society and of inclusive, resilient and sustainable development for all.

III. Working towards the vision of science as a global public good

The vision of the International Science Council is of science as a global public good, meaning that scientific knowledge and practice should be universally considered a shared resource of which everyone should be able to benefit regardless of their location, gender, economic status, cultural background or other characteristics. This principle is rooted in the conviction that scientific discoveries and advancements should contribute to the welfare of humanity, other life forms, ecosystems, the planet and beyond.

To realize its vision, the mission of the Council is to provide a powerful and credible global voice that is listened to. It must not only be respected within the scientific community but also valued in the public and policy domains. It uses that voice to:

- i. Speak for the value of all science and the need for evidence-informed understanding and decision-making at all levels, from local to global;
- ii. Stimulate and support international, interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly among Members of the Council, on scientific research and scholarship on issues of global concern;
- iii. Articulate scientific knowledge on issues of global concern in the public and policy domains;
- iv. Promote and assist science diplomacy, particularly where it advances the common good and addresses global challenges;
- v. Promote the continued and equal advancement of scientific rigour, creativity and relevance in all parts of the world;
- vi. Assist the scientific community and relevant stakeholders in their respective roles in the conduct of science and in the face of the evolution of science systems;
- vii. Defend and promote the free and responsible practice of science.

These seven core areas of action are what the ISC *does* to achieve its ultimate goal of enabling science to be used effectively to advance the global public good; they all cut across and contribute to the strategic priorities underlined below.

IV. Principles of ISC action

The ISC is not the only knowledge-based organization working towards the goal mentioned above. Additionally, it may not always be in the best position to take action in a given area. It must make choices within the bounds of its limited resources and its particular strengths and capacities.

The principles that underpin the ISC's priorities and that will guide the whole portfolio of ISC's activities are as follows:

- i. ISC activities should address complex issues of global significance that require international, interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary collaboration.
- ii. All work led by the ISC should aim to contribute to the public understanding of science, and inform practice and policy, especially at the global level.
- iii. The Principles of [freedom and responsibility in science](#) are a core normative foundation of the Council's work.
- iv. All ISC work should seek to redress global knowledge divides.
- v. An ethos of inclusivity and of embracing diversity with regard to geography, gender, age, language and culture should permeate the Council's work.
- vi. The ISC should respect and be sensitive to differing regional, national and local histories, cultures and values that can lead to differing scientific perspectives, priorities and approaches.
- vii. The principles of open science should be adopted in all its work, to promote access to and participation in science of all relevant stakeholders and encourage their effective engagement.

The ISC should engage with other organizations and stakeholders where this offers efficiencies or enhances the potential for impact. The global voice of science must be heard by all those who engage with and shape the broader science ecosystem – not only active scientists but also research funders, scientific infrastructures, publishers, policymakers, foundations, the private sector, journalists and wider publics.

The key criteria that will inform the development of specific activities under each strategic priority are the following:

- i. The issue is timely and relevant to the Council's mission and strategic objectives.
- ii. The issue offers a clear and, ideally, unique role for the Council.
- iii. There is a well-defined target audience and pathway to influence.
- iv. Adequate resources are available.

V. The unique ISC role

The ISC's major strength is its ability to bridge disciplines and offer nuanced and integrated perspectives on complex, multidimensional issues. Its reputation as a thought leader on cross-cutting issues such as scientific integrity, open science, and the responsibilities of scientists is well-established.

The ISC has a rich history of producing high-level and high-impact outcomes in science coordination. As a non-governmental organization with an international mandate and a pluralistic membership, it represents the scientific community across countries and disciplines. Without specific geostrategic interests and with partnerships across academia and the multilateral system, the ISC serves as an impartial platform to set and support global scientific agendas for the benefit of society. In a time of polycrisis, the ISC continues to provide a platform for the coordination of relevant science agendas at the regional and global levels, leveraging the expertise of the [ISC Affiliated Bodies](#).

Additionally, the ISC has a long legacy of practice in science diplomacy, facilitating international collaboration in areas like environmental change, space research, data sharing, and global negotiations. This experience positions the ISC to play a pivotal role in advancing science diplomacy, particularly in “Track 2” efforts that foster informal international dialogue.

In recent years, the ISC has strengthened its work at the science-policy-society interface through its engagement in the multilateral system. This strategic approach, adopted by ISC members at the 2021 General Assembly through the [Marton-Lefèvre report](#), translates into action-oriented partnerships with UN organizations. These partnerships deliver horizon scanning, technical guidance, and policy briefings on issues that span from rethinking human development and planetary health to sea-level rise, plastic pollution, hazards and systemic risks, biological weapons, and the governance of digital technologies.

The ISC can provide a neutral and authoritative platform to support stronger governance on issues arising largely due to the impact of new technologies – such as AI, geoengineering, and synthetic biology – and in relation to ungoverned spaces like outer space and ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction. Additionally, the ISC can help build consensus for collective action where science plays a crucial role.

VI. The Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities defined below build on and consolidate the ISC's work since its establishment, sometimes drawing on decades of experience and impact of the ISC's predecessors, ICSU and the ISSC. They exploit the strengths and the capacities that have been cultivated in more recent times, notably in science advice, global science policy, the evolution of science systems, membership engagement and capacity building.

They also build on new and long-standing partnerships with key players in the science and policy arenas cultivated over the past three years.

The strategic priorities are:

- Strategic Priority 1: Nurturing the conditions that allow science to thrive and contribute to peaceful and sustainable development
- Strategic Priority 2: Setting and coordinating science agendas on issues of global importance
- Strategic priority 3: Monitoring and shaping the evolution of science systems and the practice of science
- Strategic Priority 4: Promoting and assisting science diplomacy, particularly where it advances the common good and addresses global challenges.
- Strategic Priority 5: Synthesizing and translating scientific knowledge to inform decision-making

Strategic Priority 1: Nurturing the conditions that allow science to thrive and contribute to peaceful and sustainable development

Rationale

Science is a universal and collective endeavour, conducted by a global scientific community working together to address the challenges of today and tomorrow. Pursuing the vision of science as a global public good means ensuring that the scientific process is trustworthy, that the practice of science is free, responsible, equitable and inclusive, and that scientific knowledge is accessible to all.

Major challenges and opportunities include:

- a. While the importance of science is widely acknowledged, growing scepticism, misinformation and distrust are threatening its credibility.
- b. There are evolving and emerging threats to the free and responsible practice of science. Political, economic and ethical pressures restrict scientific freedom. Protecting the independence of scientific inquiry is crucial for fostering knowledge and innovation and for maintaining public trust.
- c. Accelerating technological, social and environmental change is putting pressure on science. Scientific and technological advances can be used for both beneficial purposes, like medical breakthroughs, and harmful ones, such as biological weapon development – a concept known as 'dual-use' – which requires science to evolve responsibly to meet these ethical demands.
- d. Structural and systemic inequalities still hamper access to the production and use of scientific knowledge. Through both unconscious and institutionalized biases, some individuals and groups have much higher barriers to entry into the production of knowledge and to the recognition of their contributions.

The ISC is well placed to work in this area. It has longstanding, extensive and visible work in upholding and advancing the principles of freedom and responsibility of science and a long history of advocating for the safety of displaced scientists and for support and resources for displaced scientists. The ISC has played a coordinating role in the promotion and advocacy of women and minority groups within science.

Priority areas of work

- i. Continued scholarly work aimed at understanding and advocating for the right to participate in and benefit from science, irrespective of gender, race, ability, socioeconomic status and community.
- ii. Protecting, upholding and promoting freedom and responsibility in science through statements by the ISC Governing Board and ISC Members based on informed evidence.
- iii. A renewed programme on strengthening scientific integrity in an era of digital developments and AI and biotechnologies. Actively promoting trustworthy science and trust in evidence through science through dedicated campaigns.

Areas for development

- i. Exploration of normative concepts in, and guidelines for, the framing of the right to science, and the influence of funding or donors on the scientific agenda.
- ii. Scoping a renewed programme on strengthening scientific integrity related to digital developments and new technologies, such as AI and biotechnologies.

Strategic Priority 2: Setting and coordinating science agendas on issues of global importance

Rationale

Challenges related to pandemics, biodiversity, food security and climate change are often interconnected, cross-disciplinary and cross-border. Science is central to monitoring, understanding and addressing these challenges. It is essential to be proactive about putting such issues on the policy agenda. Moreover, emerging research questions that have the potential to result in practical applications at multiple scales can be effectively nurtured within a coordinated science agenda.

Major challenges and opportunities

- a. Planetary stewardship extends beyond national borders. The atmosphere, ocean, polar regions and space are shared. They provide unparalleled natural resources, as well as insights into understanding and preserving life on earth. Without a shared scientific agenda and advocacy in the policy space, they are extremely vulnerable.
- b. With complex and interconnected challenges, a solution in one area has the potential to create unintended consequences in another. A globally coordinated and efficiently networked science agenda is capable of responding to consequences through both policy and scientific channels to curtail negative outcomes.
- c. Technological advances and global shifts create both opportunities and challenges. A responsive science agenda around the preservation and governance of the global commons can pre-empt and help adapt to these advances and shifts.

The ISC's history of convening, coordinating and integrating science on issues of global concern makes it a trusted partner in framing and leading these initiatives. This work can also build on the ISC's strong ethical positioning around freedom and responsibility within science.

Priority areas of work

- i. Convening and coordinating the scientific community to design the science agenda needed generate knowledge on emerging and unresolved issues of common concern.
- ii. Implementing a critical mass of science missions for sustainability leading to transformative change in support of the SDGs at multiple scales.

Areas for development

- i. Foresight and horizon scanning for emerging issues using the collective intelligence of the ISC membership.
- ii. To develop and frame emerging areas of common global concern, for example artificial intelligence, neuroscience and human augmentation or human contamination of outer space

Strategic priority 3: Monitoring and shaping the evolution of science systems and the practice of science

1. Rationale

While science itself is a tested and reliable way to understand our world, the means of knowledge production is in flux. Global centres of scientific production are shifting, and so is the balance of knowledge production between the public and private sector. An increasingly digitalized and interconnected world means that large, international, multi-funder projects account for a significant fraction of research output. Rapid technological advancement, new actors driven by different motives, and new modes of engagement have all contributed to these changes. The 'science system' is already vastly different from what it was two decades ago, and more change is inevitable. Yet, parts of the science systems are still rooted in tradition and poor practices. Driving change requires the participation of diverse scientists as well as multiple stakeholders beyond scientists themselves: funders, publishers, policy-makers, technology firms, research infrastructure providers, networks and research platforms.

Major challenges and opportunities include:

- a. Science systems are evolving, with more transdisciplinary research and increased contributions from the Global South. However, misaligned incentives still hinder science's ability to meet societal needs, and new frameworks are required to support open and responsible research.
- b. Research dissemination is at the core of the global scientific enterprise itself. It could, and should, be a medium for rapid communication of ideas that is available to all authors and readers irrespective of ability to pay. The current system is largely dominated by commercial interests. In addition, it is supported by inappropriate proxy metrics that incentivize behaviours which create excessive profit levels, discriminate against scientists in low-and-middle income countries in particular and unbalance the scientific effort by encouraging overproduction of papers of little value. It is a major priority for the health of the scientific enterprise to work to stimulate and deliver reform.
- c. Emerging technologies, such as the widespread availability of artificial intelligence, offer both an opportunity to increase the efficiency of scientific production, innovation, dissemination and assessment, but are also challenging in terms of predicting and mitigating for unintended consequences, including scientific integrity, ethics and the creative process of research.
- d. The existing structures of most science systems do not incentivize and facilitate the rapid uptake and application of knowledge in wider societal and decision-making contexts. Only significant changes in incentives, funding and research design will narrow this gap between knowledge generation and application, while recognizing and supporting fundamental science and research projects with uncertain outcomes.
- e. Unequal access to funding and biases due to historical legacies combine to raise the barriers to entry into scientific knowledge production in the Global South.

The ISC's work on scientific publishing and research assessment provides a solid foundation on which to convene and unite actors and communities across the scientific landscape and address how the performance and dissemination of science must evolve.

The work of the ISC Centre for Science Futures in engaging the global community on the impact of AI on science systems will continue to be fundamental, engaging the scientific community on the impacts of emerging technologies and appropriate ethics within science systems.

The ISC's role as a valued interlocutor of the funding community through relevant consortia of funders , to assist funders in mainstreaming transdisciplinary and sustainability science into their efforts.

Priority areas of work

- i. Providing value to ISC members by contributing to the dissemination of scientific results, through evolution of scientific publishing and open science.
- ii. The evolution of research assessment for impact and evolution of career pathways in science and for the evaluation of research proposals and attribution of funding for research.
- iii. Assessing dimensions of impact of emerging technologies on science and science systems. This includes establishing mechanisms for interfacing with the private sector while maintaining the underlying principle of 'science as a global public good'.
- iv. Bringing the contribution of social sciences to bear on addressing knowledge and policy needs on issues of common concern.

Areas for development

- i. Exploring relationships and interfacing between publicly funded and private sector science, focusing on technology and innovation.
- ii. Developing capacity for transdisciplinary science through education- and training-based intervention.

Strategic Priority 4: Promoting and assisting science diplomacy, particularly where it advances the common good and addresses global challenges.

1. Rationale

Rapid socio-technological developments, deteriorating planetary health, new multipolarity and geopolitical tensions and competing interests are putting science at the forefront of international relations. From global pandemics requiring scientific collaboration and exchange, to pressures to explore and exploit space or the deep sea, global risks and the protection of global commons requires a stronger engagement of science in international policy and diplomatic debates. The knowledge, capacity and resource divides across countries are also undermining the ability for nations to contribute individually and collectively to solutions; they also are undermining trust in institutional ability to deliver fair and global outcomes. Conversely, diplomatic tensions between countries are also affecting science, including what science is prioritized, how science is produced and shared, and what collaborations are encouraged or discouraged.

Science diplomacy broadly refers to the use of science in promoting bilateral or multilateral collaboration between countries to advance diplomatic goals. Science diplomacy sits at the nexus of science, policy and international relations and can provide a universal language and a common tool to bridge divides and enhance collaboration on shared global challenges.

Major challenges and opportunities include:

- a. Leveraging science to inform international negotiations and decision-making given the rapid pace of scientific and technological change, and the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the challenges that need to be addressed.
- b. Facilitating and enhancing international scientific collaboration and exchange in the context of the recent trend in securitization of STI policies and protectionist measures that hinder the mobility of scientists and free exchange of ideas and information.
- c. New risks posed by STI developments, for instance in areas such as synthetic biology or artificial intelligence, require robust, independent and pluralistic scientific inputs to support the emergence or strengthening of international governance regimes.

The ISC has solid experience in this area through engaging in and informing intergovernmental discussions and negotiations related to the global commons [e.g. plastic pollution, the UN Ocean Conference, the IPY-5]. The ISC has engaged with coalitions of member states to raise awareness of the needs for evidence-informed decision-making [e.g. sea-level rise, non-communicable diseases, the UN Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development, the UN Decade for the Cryosphere, the UN Decade for the Ocean].

Priority areas of work

- i. The protection and global governance of the global commons including the ocean, atmosphere, biodiversity, outer space, polar regions, and the maintenance of the benefits they provide for wellbeing and peace and security.
- ii. The facilitation of engagement and meaningful partnership between the scientific, policy and diplomatic communities to inform global debates and make progress on addressing global challenges.
- iii. Fostering debates on controversial scientific issues that present major political, economic and security implications.

- iv. Facilitating international dialogue and support for at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists and for science systems, institutions and infrastructure in times of crisis (conflicts, natural, technological and other disasters and humanitarian emergencies).

Areas for development

- i. Using ISC's convening power as a global non-governmental scientific organization to stimulate debates on controversial issues bringing together relevant stakeholders (e.g. solar radiation modification, synthetic biology, open science).
- ii. Working with ISC Members to strengthen scientific inputs into foreign ministries, diplomatic missions.
- iii. Delivering comprehensive horizon scanning of emerging issues that require multilateral deliberations on a routine membership-wide process.

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Strategic Priority 5: Synthesizing and translating scientific knowledge to inform decision-making

1. Rationale

Most if not all global challenges are urgent, complex, and interconnected: preventing and responding to a global pandemic, tackling deepening inequalities, reversing the loss of nature, addressing the climate emergency, governing technological change for the public good and more, require ambitious global cooperation and robust scientific information. Meaningfully addressing these issues requires mobilizing the full breadth and depth of all sciences, and other forms of knowledge. It also requires a much stronger integration of social, political, cultural, cognitive and behavioural factors to understand the root causes of such global challenges, and their implications.

While science is recognized as an important part of the solutions to many global issues, the gap between available knowledge and action is widening and trends of mis-information and dis-information, inequalities and conflicts threaten cooperation at a time when it is most needed. New forms of public engagement and changing approaches to accessing and using information requires more agile and contextualized approaches at the science-policy-society interface.

Major challenges and opportunities include:

- a. Closing the scientific knowledge to action gap: while there is a wealth of knowledge produced at an ever-increasing pace, its impact on policy and society at large remains insufficient. Experience of working at the science-policy interface demonstrates time and again the need to strengthen our collective capabilities in synthesizing, and translating scientific information, and making explicit the limitations and implications of the science to effectively inform deliberation and decision-making.
- b. Enabling a holistic understanding of shared challenges: many global challenges require a depth and breadth of expertise to be addressed holistically, be they planetary and One Health approaches to better address environmental and human health together, social and ecological determinants of mental health, or the wider implications of sea level rise not only on infrastructure and livelihoods but also on culture and sovereignty.
- c. Creating and enhancing the enabling conditions needed for science advice and brokerage (i.e. bringing pluralistic inputs from across relevant scientific domains and elucidating the implications of what is known, what is not known and what is uncertain) to be valued, heard, and acted upon in decision-making spaces.
- d. Aligning communication, work cultures, and timelines between scientific and policy-making communities through brokerage at the science-policy nexus, to ensure the supply of evidence and science advice from the scientific community can meet the demands of decision-makers in a realistic, useful, and actionable manner.

The ISC has engaged actively in the development and implementation of science-policy interfaces ('SPIs') to strengthen scientific advice to the UN leadership level in recent years [SAB, UNGA, OPGA]. We have showcased examples of science informing decision-making and actions across different contexts and scales [HLPF, etc.].

Priority areas of work

- i. Promoting and advising on the development of new and/or enhanced interface mechanisms in the multilateral system to better mobilize scientific knowledge for evidence-based policy-making within and across different contexts and levels.
- ii. Delivering scientific advice through bringing pluralistic scientific inputs to bear on global issues.
- iii. Collaborating closely with the ISC membership to strengthen science-policy-society interfaces at national, regional and global levels.
- iv. Harnessing the collective expertise of the ISC membership to identify emerging issues and put them on the multilateral agenda.

Areas for development

- i. Provide comparative analysis of models of science-policy interface and support the development of new SPIs (for chemicals and plastic pollution, AI, biological weapons) where gaps have been identified.
- ii. Build capacities on science advice to governments among the ISC membership.
- iii. Develop frameworks and guidance of policy interventions that can support transformative change.

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VII. Mobilizing the ISC community

The achievement of the strategic priorities described above depends on having a strong, empowered and inclusive membership, including a close network of affiliated bodies, as well as an engaged Fellowship and effective partnerships. In 2025–2028 the ISC should continue the transformational work begun in 2019 to increase the engagement of the membership in its activities, to promote interaction between Members, to support and promote the Members' own work, and to expand the membership base. This will be supported by a clear and compelling value proposition for existing and prospective members and partners, based on the Strategic Plan.

1. Sustaining membership engagement efforts

As reflected in [ISC annual reports](#), Members contribute in important ways to the Council's activities via consultative processes, calls for input, representation on ISC project steering groups, as well as calls for international expert committees, and participation in project events. In the next period covered by the Strategic Plan, Members will be called upon to engage with each other and the ISC in the delivery of the Strategic Priorities. A mechanism should be developed for ISC Members to engage with, lead or co-lead ISC projects, and contribute funding, if desired, where those Members or consortia of Members have expertise. The ISC Secretariat will continue to work closely with Members for opportunities to engage at sessions of the General Assembly, or other key events and forums, including knowledge sharing sessions, potentially differentiating between Members within ISC categories to ensure distinct value and issues within the categories.

A mid-term meeting of Members between the four-yearly regular sessions of the General Assembly is foreseen in the Statutes. Other, less formal opportunities for meetings between Members will be facilitated by the Secretariat to help increase interaction and collaboration, such as continuing the online forums organized by the ISC's membership team and at international fora where ISC Members convene.

The Secretariat will continue its regular, tailored communication with Members and stakeholder mailing lists and other platforms to keep them apprised of opportunities and news at the ISC and among the ISC family.

2. Representing the full spectrum of science and career stages

It is vital that the ISC membership reflect the spectrum of sciences as broadly as possible, including natural, social, mathematical, medical and engineering sciences and science-related humanities, as outlined in the Statutes. Efforts to add to its membership base in areas not well represented are bearing fruit and should be pursued with transparency towards existing Members and relevant partner organizations.

The ISC is listening to the voices of early- and mid-career scientists and researchers (EMCR) and intends to engage them even more systematically in its membership, bodies, activities and meetings.

3. Ensuring worldwide representation and a regional presence

The membership of the ISC should, as far as possible, be globally representative. The Secretariat has had great success in the 2022–2024 period in terms of re-engaging 'lapsed' or peripheral Members, in establishing Regional Focal Points in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia and the Pacific, and in

facilitating the establishment of the Pacific Academy of Sciences. It remains a priority to extend the membership into those countries where the ISC does not currently have a national Member, and to consolidate the ISC's presence and networks in the regions, particularly in Africa.

4. Capacity development for ISC Members

The ISC will continue to use its convening power to build capacity for its Members focusing on knowledge exchange and collaboration through workshops and webinars that address pressing needs such as digital transformation, science communication and leadership in science-policy engagement. The ISC will also continue to work with Members to ensure the international scientific ecosystem remains viable and robust – declining membership in scientific associations and financial stability must be seen as an existential threat not just to individual disciplinary bodies, but to the broader scientific community. By fostering networks and partnerships between Members, the ISC can create an enabling environment, particularly through its Regional Focal Points, for shared learning and resource development that are globally relevant yet adaptable to local contexts. Additionally, the ISC can promote mentorship programmes, convene and offer expertise that empowers Members to strengthen their institutional capabilities, and drive impact at national, regional and international levels.

5. Developing partnerships

The ISC cultivates partnerships with key actors in the global science and policy ecosystem, including at regional and global level, to advance its vision and mission. The ISC wants to work with networks and organizations from across the science-policy system, including intergovernmental organizations, funders, and scientific networks, to advance science as a global good.

Coordination with other relevant science and scholarly bodies (IAP, CIPSH, WFEO, etc.) will be systematic.

The new [Category 4](#) membership category allows for actors in the science ecosystem to become observer Members of the ISC.

6. Increasing the ISC's reach through the ISC Fellowship and ISC Patrons

By 2028 the Fellowship should have reached its intended capacity of 600–700 Fellows, which will give the ISC a hugely significant cadre of scientists and other professionals in the science ecosystem to draw on for expertise, counsel and influence. This potentially very powerful body of experts will help to identify opportunities for the Council, deliver the Council's programmes of work and promote that work among key communities.

The ISC Patron will continue to be an eminent individual who helps to open doors for the ISC and to raise support for its activities. More than one ISC Patron will be appointed if appropriate.

VIII. Organizational objectives

The achievement of the strategic priorities described above depends on having a strong and empowered membership, a network of Affiliated Bodies and efficient partnerships, as well as appropriate resources, capacity and ways of working among the Governing Board, ad-hoc committees and the Secretariat. A set of organizational objectives aimed at strengthening the operational base of the ISC are presented below.

1. Implementing the revised governance arrangements

The [ISC Statutes and Rules of Procedure](#) were fundamentally revised in 2023–2024 to address governance and membership category issues. The revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure will be tested in this planning cycle, and possibilities for further refinement may be identified.

Among the major changes to the Statutes was the introduction of a new advisory body model. The Council now operates with only two core Standing Committees – for Freedom and Responsibility in Science, and for Finance, Compliance and Risk – allowing greater flexibility to establish new committees and advisory bodies tailored to emerging strategic priorities, such as science programmes, membership and strategic planning.

The revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure also foresee the establishment of a Host-Country Liaison Committee to promote mutually beneficial relationships between the Council and the host government and national scientific institutions. This committee should be operational in 2025.

2. Securing resources for delivery

To maintain the current high level of activity and achievement going forward, income will have to increase. As income from membership dues is, however, not expected to rise substantially in the coming years, new sources of income will be required to sustain the ISC's increased ambitions. In the coming period the CEO will devote energy to raising funds for core expenditure and for projects.

i. Membership dues

It is vitally important for the stability of the ISC that the overall income from membership dues does not decline in the near term. The ISC is having success in raising external funds for specific projects, which also help to cover some of its core costs, but membership dues are foundational.

Following the adoption of revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure in March 2024, the Governing Board mandated the Committee for Finance, Compliance and Risk to establish a Working Group to revise the ISC dues structure, with the aim of presenting a proposal for the approval of the membership before the end of 2025 and application as of 2026. The aim of the revision of the dues structure is to unify the parallel dues systems of former ICSU and ISSC Members and to develop a fairer, more acceptable and more sustainable dues structure. This is a very important, complex and urgent task.

ii. External funding

Regarding projects, the ISC will target funders whose interests align with those of the ISC and who will agree to cover the real costs of projects, including indirect costs.

Regarding core costs, the key avenue to increasing the Secretariat's capacity is to develop its philanthropic giving. The ISC Foundation, a charitable trust based in the UK, is now operational and able to receive funds. The ISC needs to develop and sustain relationships with philanthropic organizations and donors, which will require investment in fundraising and marketing.

3. Secretariat structure and capacity

The ISC Secretariat is highly professional, productive and adaptable. As of September 2024, it constituted 25 staff members in Paris, four staff members provided by the Regional Focal Point in Asia Pacific and one staff member at the Regional Focal Point in Latin America and the Caribbean. A Regional Focal Point for Africa and for the Middle East and Northern Africa Region will be established in 2025 subject to the availability of resources.

The Secretariat furthermore intends to increase its capacity through a secondment scheme, whereby ISC Members can 'donate' expertise to the ISC in the form of a staff member who works at the ISC for 12–18 months, in the framework of an 'Expertise-based Philanthropy Agreement'.

A priority for the Secretariat is to maintain and enhance the Council's communications and outreach capability, ensuring that it is able to provide a responsive resource for Members, as well as an effective source of information for wider publics.

In the coming planning period, the Secretariat will continue to exercise adaptability to evolving priorities and ways of working, especially in the digital space.

4. Policies and procedures

The Secretariat has in place the appropriate policies and procedures to ensure that the Council works in ways that reflect its core values: excellence; inclusivity and diversity; integrity, transparency and respect; collaborativeness; sustainability.

Notably, in the next planning period, the ISC will operate with a code of conduct, a due diligence policy, and a sponsorship and endorsement policy. It will develop a policy for the use of Artificial Intelligence by the Secretariat and the Governing Board.

5. Digital journey

The Council will continue to embrace the digital era by prioritizing agility, sustainability and inclusivity in its digital journey, both internally and with its membership. The Secretariat should leverage digital tools, and the partnership led by the Centre for Science Futures in order to foster deeper connections, enhance collaboration, and create new value across its global network by sharing best practices and case studies on how the scientific community responds to the rapidly evolving digital space.

6. Inclusivity and diversity

Inclusivity and diversity are among the ISC's core values. This value will be upheld in the pursuit of inclusive and diverse membership of the ISC, equitable access to the opportunities it offers, and pro-active work with Members in low-income countries to ensure their participation in ISC activities and structures and to build their capacity in various domains. Similarly, the Council will work to promote inclusivity of gender,

domain of science and geography, aided by its Standing Committee on Gender Equality in Science, and will aim to be sensitive, responsive and transformative to issues of linguistic and cultural diversity.

7. Sustainability

The ISC takes responsibility for its impact on the environment and integrates sustainability principles into its ways of working. Measures already implemented to this end include optimization of attendance at international meetings and the increase of remote participation; the limitation of procurement arrangements to companies that have a demonstrated record of environmental and social sustainability; and promotion of a culture of sustainability among the Members and the ISC Secretariat.

IX. Monitoring and evaluation

It is important that a membership organization such as the ISC be subject to review by its members. Now that the trajectory of development of the ISC is clearer, its direction of travel, priorities and operations can be scrutinized to gauge the extent to which they serve the purposes for which the Council was created by its membership, and the extent to which they do so in efficient and effective ways.

A stocktake of work under this Strategic Plan will be undertaken after two years.

The optimal time for an independent review of the ISC would be during the second year of the Council's third planning period, i.e. 2026.

Feedback on the draft Plan is welcome until **10 November 2024** via:
<https://council.science/news/feedback-isc-draft-strategic-plan-2025-2028/>