

THIRD ISC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Muscat, Oman 2025

Discussion note on ISC membership

Document 11

For discussion



**International
Science Council**

وزارة التعليم العالي
و البحث العلمي والابتكار
Ministry of Higher Education
Research & Innovation



Discussion note on ISC membership

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The ISC was formed in 2018 from the merger of the ISSC and ICSU, both long standing organizations. The current membership is primarily shaped by that which existed at the time of the merger, which in turn represents decisions made over many years in different contexts and which as a result has accumulated some degree of confusion. But over the nearly 100 years since ICSU was formed and the 70 years since ISSC was formed, the organization of science and its disciplines, nationally, regionally and internationally, has evolved substantially, as have the roles and expectations of various types of scientific organizations. The ISC was established with a vision to be the global voice for science, and its goals were confirmed in the 2023–2024 revision of the statutes.

During the revision of the ISC Statutes and Rules of Procedure over the course of 2023–2024 the issues of vision and goals were points of focus, but it was felt premature to have a comprehensive and rigorous discussion on membership issues until there was a consensus on the former and what being the global voice for science meant in both strategic and operational terms.

Some changes were introduced in the revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure. These were the introduction of voting rights for Category 3 Members and the creation of a new Category 4 for observers and Affiliated Bodies. Concerns around the fragmentation of scientific communities (national and disciplinary) were allayed by according greater input to existing Members in the approval process for new Members. See an overview of the current membership categories in Appendix.¹

However, the ISC Secretariat and Governing Board regularly struggle with the technical eligibility of aspiring Members, which is an indication that the deeper questions have not been resolved. These deeper issues relate to the relationship between the purpose of the organization and its membership structure and eligibility. The current structure means that many relevant disciplines, including those of current and growing relevance in the life, digital, engineering and economic science are not well represented by an organization which claims to be the global voice for science; the organization's legitimacy, relevance and impact can therefore be challenged. The Governing Board proposes that a discussion on membership be launched at the ISC General Assembly in Muscat.

At its heart is the question of what the ISC needs in order to be a most effective global voice for science in the evolving global context. Does the ISC prefer to remain a rather constrained organization, with a membership gathering representatives of scientific organizations reflecting the historical constituency of the ISC predecessors; or does it wish to represent and engage directly with a wider and more diverse global community of actors in the science system, including the members of our Members? This could mean a significant expansion and more heterogeneity in the membership and possibly more overlap in membership among the ISC Members. It could raise existential questions for an organization that is fundamentally membership-based. All of these possibilities have both positive and negative implications which need to be discussed and debated.

The Members are invited to participate in a discussion about the purpose and ambition of the ISC and what that means for the shape of its membership.

¹ The full definitions of the membership categories are contained in Statute 9 and the procedure for admission of new Members are outlined in Rule of Procedure 8. See the [ISC Statutes and Rules of Procedure](#).

The guiding question that the Members are asked to reflect on for the discussion at the General Assembly and beyond is:

- *What does an ideal ISC membership look like, in light of its mission to be the ‘global voice for science’ and in the evolving global context?*

It is intended that, following the opening exchange at the General Assembly, the incoming Vice-President for Membership will coordinate the strategic reflection with Members over the next year.

Appendix 1

At the time of the merger of ICSU and the ISSC in 2018, all Members of the merging organizations were carried over into the membership of the International Science Council in one of three categories. The revision of the [Statutes and Rules of Procedure](#) in 2024 introduced a fourth category. A summary of the four membership categories and their characteristics is found below:

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Characteristics	<u>International scientific unions and associations in a specific discipline or area of science</u>	Scientific bodies representing a <u>broad spectrum of scientific fields or disciplines in a country, region or territory</u>	Diverse organizations representing <u>active scientists; young scientist organizations</u>	ISC Affiliated Bodies and observers
Members in good standing	42	121	50	16
Voting rights	Collectively 40%	Collectively 40%	Collectively 20%	None
Dues*	Based on membership dues income	Based on GDP (with some exceptions)	Flat rate of ca. 570 EUR (in 2025)	None

*The question of an integrated approach to dues, which is a residual matter from the merger of ICSU and the ISSC, is the focus of a separate note to Members.