

Review of ICOM membership criteria

Proposal AGM 22 May 2023 (version 1 May 2023)

Purpose: memorandum to present to members at the AGM on 22 May 2023, after which new membership criteria can be formulated and introduced

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1. Reasons for revising membership criteria

ICOM NL policy - emphasise ICOM's international network function

In recent years, ICOM Netherlands' policy has been focused on strengthening the participation of Dutch members in the international ICOM network of museum professionals. Our motto is: 'More than just a map'. In practice, however, we see that the majority of new applications are because membership entitles them to free admission to museums,¹ which is why encouraging participation in international networks and the cross-border exchange of expertise remains an important action point.

International working group

Within ICOM, the NCWG (Working Group on National Committees) has been working since 2020 to streamline membership criteria. The aim is to bring uniformity to the membership criteria the various national committees use.

Since the first 'recommendations' of March 2022, we at ICOM NL have been in contact with chairman Hugh Maguire (ICOM Ireland), because it was immediately apparent that these have had a major impact on the way ICOM NL operates. Our input was partly incorporated in the updated recommendations to the Executive Board of August 2022, but ICOM NL is currently deviating markedly from the proposed strategy, especially when it comes to student membership.

Feedback from the secretariat in Paris

The secretariat in Paris has long been critical of ICOM NL and thinks we accept far too many student members. This generates a lot of work for them. Their criticism has increased in recent months and recently they have stopped making passes for every new member we propose.

¹ The reciprocal granting of free admission between colleagues is a tradition within ICOM. This is a favour; museums do not have to do this. It is therefore not a 'right' of the cardholder. Museums do not receive any compensation for it (unlike with the Museum Card).

<i>Figures from 2022 or 2023</i>	BE	DE	UK	IR	NO	NL
Institutional members - total	133	302	79	10	83	110
Individual members - total	1678 (100%)	6350 (100%)	2064 (100%)	63 (100%)	766 (100%)	7810 (100%)
- Regular (individual) members	1303 (78%)	4950 (78%)	1166 (56%)	46 (73%)	596 (78%)	3938 (50%)
- Senior members	289 (17%)	946 (15%)	547 (27%)	9 (14%)	152 (20%)	850 (11%)
- Student members	83 (5%)	417 (7%)	348 (17%)	8 (13%)	18 (2%)	3019 (39%)
- Supporting members (indiv.)	3 (0%)	37 (0,01%)	3 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Sounding out other National Committees

Discussions with the national committees of Belgium, Germany, UK, Ireland and Norway confirm that there is a great disparity when it comes to student members: ICOM NL currently has over 3,000 student members compared to a handful in other countries. ICOM UK also has a relatively high number of student members and is currently in discussions with the secretariat in Paris about certain applicants.

Other colleagues do not understand our approach and this this had led to criticism about diluting the membership base with even more people who are members just because of the card. This undermines support for museums giving free admission to colleagues. After all, museums receive nothing in return and they are obliged to give all those Dutch student members free admission. Another concern is the influence of non-museum people on ICOM policy. After all, ICOM is an association of museum professionals, so they should have the greatest input into its direction (NB. this does not apply to student members, who have no voting rights).

Logistics within ICOM NL itself

Several courses encourage their students to apply *en masse* for ICOM cards to visit museums for free on field trips. ICOM's student membership is considerably cheaper than a Museum Card: currently €47.50 compared to €64.90. Because of the relatively high turnover rate among student members, this generates a continuous stream of new applications, amounting to many hundreds every year. Each application requires a series of actions and, not infrequently, personal e-mail contact to complete the data. This is not only a major burden for the secretariat in Paris, but certainly also for the administration at ICOM NL.

2. Principles of new criteria

According to its statutes, ICOM is an international organisation of museums and museum professionals.

Museum professionals include all employees of museums and institutions that can be regarded as museums according to the definition, as well as those whose main professional activity is the provision of services, knowledge and expertise on behalf of museums and the museum world (ICOM Statutes 2022, see also Appendix 1).

ICOM Netherlands is of course bound by these statutes. It has already been mentioned above that major differences have arisen between the various countries in the implementation of the criteria, and that ICOM NL occupies an exceptional position in this respect.

Our emphasis has long been on giving as many potential future museum colleagues as possible the opportunity to become acquainted with the museum world. This is why we have been admitting students from a wide range of studies, because museum professionals can, after all, have attended a variety of courses. In practice, however, obtaining free admission to museums is the main motive for wanting to become an ICOM member.

ICOM’s focus, however, is on being an international network of museum professionals: people who together advance the field by exchanging knowledge and experience, across borders, thereby strengthening the museum sector around the world.

We have now also put this focus at the heart of the review of the new criteria within ICOM Netherlands: what does the new member contribute to this international network? Does it enrich their experience and does their joining benefit the ICOM network?

For student members, we concur with the NCWG’s advice to only admit students who will almost certainly join the museum profession. We interpret this slightly more broadly than some neighbouring countries because of the nature of curricula in the Netherlands and the testability of the criteria.

This evaluation is a practical starting point for the new criteria, as we aim to be able to determine as objectively as possible whether someone meets them.

3. Proposed new ICOM NL membership criteria

Below are the proposed new criteria for new applicants, with the current criteria in the right-hand column. In the grey areas we describe the way we test the criteria. The next section elaborates on some of the categories.

New criteria	Current criteria
In the grey areas: criteria testing methods	
Individual members / museum professionals:	
Professionally connected to a museum.	Professionally connected to a museum.
Check if the applicant is using an official museum e-mail address, via Google, or in case of doubt, by confirming with the museum in question.	Check if the applicant is using an official museum e-mail address, via Google, or in case of doubt, by confirming with the museum in question.
Individual members/self-employed: primarily provides services or knowledge to the museum sector	
Provides mainly services or knowledge to the museum sector and works very closely with museums.	Provides mainly services or knowledge to the museum sector and works very closely with museums.

We ask for a personal substantiation as well as a recommendation from a museum confirming that, in their opinion, the applicant contributes substantially to the development of the museum sector, spends a considerable amount of time on museum-related work and upon becoming a member will contribute to the quality of the ICOM network.	We ask for a personal substantiation or a recommendation from a museum confirming that their work is directly linked to the museum field. This should verify that the applicant spends the majority of their time working with museums.
Individual members/non-museum employees: who do not work for museums, but whose work is mainly museum-related	
Works very closely with museums and contributes directly to the museum sector through work or knowledge.	Works very closely with museums and contributes directly to the museum sector through work or knowledge.
We ask for a personal substantiation and a recommendation from a museum confirming that, in their opinion, the applicant contributes significantly to the development of the museum sector, spends a considerable amount of time on museum-related work and upon becoming a member will contribute to the quality of the ICOM network.	We ask for a personal substantiation or a recommendation from a museum confirming that their work is directly linked to the museum field. This should verify that the applicant spends the majority of their time working with museums.
Senior members: retiree who was professionally connected to a museum or museum-supporting institution	
Someone who has reached retirement age, has worked in a museum function for at least the previous five years and has also been a member of ICOM.	Someone who has reached retirement age, has worked in a museum function for at least the previous five years and has also been a member of ICOM.
We ask applicants to upload a copy of their ID to check their age. If someone was not an individual member but worked at a member institution, we check via the Internet or network whether this person worked in a museum function at this institution in the previous five years. If necessary, we ask the institution to confirm this.	We ask applicants to upload a copy of their ID to verify their age.
Student members: students pursuing studies for a museum position.	

<p>Students in the final stage of their education who are pursuing studies at a higher vocational institution or university directly related to attaining positions in the museum field. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - master's students in museum studies/heritage studies/conservation and restoration - master's student from another discipline who is graduating in a demonstrable museum subject, to be assessed by the ICOM NL board - 3rd- and 4th-year bachelor heritage studies at the Reinwardt Academy. <p>They can remain members for a maximum of two years. In case of relevant subsequent studies, they can reapply for membership.</p>	<p>Students studying at a higher vocational institution or university that offers courses that may lead to a museum function. Currently, this includes all students in (art) history, cultural studies, museum/heritage studies and those attending art academy (museum-related studies only).</p>
<p>We require proof of registration, including the applicant's name, the course name and the current year of study. It is also mandatory to specify the course e-mail address as the primary e-mail address. This enables us to confirm if someone is still studying.</p> <p>In the case of Reinwardt Academy bachelor students, we check directly with the programme whether the student in question is indeed a 3rd- or 4th-year student. Once a month, we send a list that is checked by the academy.</p>	<p>We ask for proof of enrolment, including the applicant's name, the course name and the current year of study. It is also mandatory to specify the course e-mail address as the primary e-mail address. This enables us to confirm if someone is still studying.</p>
<p>Other category: board member or member of the Supervisory Board of a (registered) museum</p>	
<p>Can become a supporting member for the period they hold office.</p>	<p>Can become an individual member, but only for the period they hold office.</p>
<p>Can only be applied for by the museum concerned, and the invoice is sent to the museum. In this way, we prevent board members from automatically remaining members after their board term ends.</p>	<p>Is usually requested by the museum concerned, but not always. We check with the museum if necessary.</p>
<p>Other category: employed at organisation that supports museums in terms of policy or funding, such as policy officials or fund officers</p>	
<p>Can become a supporting member for the period that their work directly relates to the museum sector. They have no voting rights within ICOM.</p>	<p>Can now become individual members. At present, whether or not the position is museum-related is not strictly considered.</p>
<p>We ask for a personal substantiation or a recommendation from a museum confirming that their work is directly linked to the museum field.</p>	<p>We ask for a personal substantiation or a recommendation by a museum confirming that the organisation collaborates with or is (partly) focused on the museum sector.</p>
<p>Institutional members:</p>	

<p>For registered museums and for cultural institutions whose mission is to represent and promote the interests of ICOM.</p> <p>Organisations that are not themselves museums, but are key members of the ICOM network, can become supporting institutional members.</p>	<p>For museums and for cultural institutions whose aim is the representation and promotion of the interests of ICOM.</p>
<p>We ask for a substantiation from cultural institutions whose mission is to represent and promote the interests of ICOM, but are not museums, as well as a recommendation from two museums.</p> <p>The ICOM NL board decides whether a non-museum institution can become an institutional member or a supporting institution member.</p>	<p>We ask for a substantiation from cultural institutions whose mission is to represent and promote the interests of ICOM but are not museums, as well as a recommendation from a museum.</p>

Excluded from membership:

- Volunteers (except board members and members of the Supervisory Board of Museums, see above)
- Commercial institutions and people employed by an institution commercially trading in cultural goods

Registered museums run exclusively by volunteers can, however, become institutional members if they fall within the criteria for institutional members. This entitles them to receive a number of ICOM cards proportionate to the size of their museum's budget and to participate in the ICOM network.

4. Explanation of new criteria

An explanation of the categories in which the biggest changes will occur with the introduction of these new criteria.

Supporting members

This is a relatively new category of members within ICOM, intended for people (or institutions) who significantly assist ICOM both financially and otherwise out of an interest in museums and international cooperation between museums. The rationale behind this category is that these people substantially enrich the ICOM network, but are not, strictly speaking, museum professionals themselves and therefore should not be able to co-manage ICOM. This stems from concerns about too much influence from parties that do not represent the museum sector. They have no voting rights within ICOM.

In the Dutch context, this translates to museum experts at, e.g., funds and (state) officials whose portfolios include museum policy, as well as to museum board members and Supervisory Board members. These are often not museum professionals themselves and therefore fit well into this new category.

Student members

For ICOM NL, admitting students from studies that might lead to future employment in a museum has resulted in huge numbers of student members from a wide range of courses. A small proportion are directly museum-related, such as museum and heritage studies and the conservator training programme. Most student members are derived from studies linked to the content side of art and historical museums in particular, such as art history (more than 50% of student members), history, archaeology and broad cultural studies. We even accept students attending art academies now, as occasionally artists go to work in museums (not as exhibitors, but as museum professionals). However, we do not accept students attending general studies in other fields in the museum sector such as PR, marketing, fundraising, management, education, security, etc.

In discussions with the chair of the NCWG international working group and with fellow national committees, our relatively liberal student admission policy is the major point of contention. The vast majority of our student members are junior members and apply mainly because of the free admission to museums. Only a very small proportion of them will later actually go on to work as museum professionals and remain members of the ICOM network.

In other countries, student memberships are limited to university students in the final phase of their master's studies, sometimes only to those who also do internships in museums as an integral part of their studies, and even then only on the recommendation of a museum.

ICOM NL is going to align its student membership policy according to the advice of the NCWG to only admit students aiming for a career in the museum field. In the proposed revision, the primary consideration is therefore that students in their final years of a museum-related study, take a first step into their own future network in the museum world through their ICOM student membership, and therefore also remain involved in ICOM later on.

We then translated this into criteria that are testable in the Dutch context. For example, we can check whether someone is a master student in a particular study. But in the case of bachelor students, we cannot see which year the student is in.

Because the Reinwardt Academy is pre-eminently a training institute for the museum profession and has a long-standing relationship with ICOM, we were able to make an arrangement for bachelor students in their final years of this programme: the student administration of the Reinwardt Academy will check whether registered student members are in their 3rd or 4th year. We can thus retain those

students for the network and encourage them to remain members of ICOM later on as long as they work in the museum sector.

Lecturers studies/scientists

Many lecturers and scientists teaching at courses that are eligible for student memberships assume that they can also become members. We are already critical of this and only admit lecturers and scientists who work directly with museums (i.e., not just visit many museums with their students). In the future, they must conform to the criteria for individual members/non-museum staff and may or may not be accepted on those grounds.

5. Implementation process

Upon approval at the AGM on 22 May, the many changes to the admission policy will have to be clearly and accurately shared with members.

- Once adopted, the new regulations will be translated into English.
- Proposed implementation date: shortly after the AGM, e.g., by 1 July 2023.
- The updated regulations will be published on our website in a press release as soon as possible.
- Once ratified, they will be published on the Dutch and English membership pages; in other words, the new regulations will take effect from that moment for new applicants.
- We will also communicate the changes to the membership office in Paris, to the NCWG, and to our interlocutors at other national committees.

- We will apply the new criteria differently for current members.

Proposal:

- With the exception of student members and the 'supporting members' category, current members retain their membership.

- Student members will be asked to reapply for membership before 2024. If they want to remain members and comply with the new criteria, they must renew their membership by a certain date (e.g., 1 November 2023).

This requires a smart administrative solution (via the usual application procedure or via a separate form, including the option to upload current proof of registration?).

We will inform all student members personally about this before the summer via e-mail and generally via our other media. We will also try to contact the courses that many of our student members are attending (a database of these is still needed).

Student members who do NOT renew their membership will have their membership revoked from 1 January 2024.

- The 'supporting members' category is new, so we still need to determine whether we only implement this for new members.

Appendix 1 - membership criteria ICOM

Categories of Membership

According to Article 4, Section 3 of the 2022 ICOM Statutes, these are the Categories of Membership:

- i. **Individual Members:** Museum professionals, as defined in Article 3 Section 3, still working or retired, or other persons as defined in Article 4 Section 1, shall be eligible to become individual members.
- ii. **Institutional Members:** Museums or other institutions that comply with the definition of a Museum as defined in Article 3.
- iii. **Student Members:** National Committees may propose students enrolled in museum-related academic courses for admission into this category.
- iv. **Honorary Members:** Individuals who have rendered exceptional services to the international museum community or to ICOM. All former elected ICOM Presidents are deemed Honorary Members.
- v. **Supporting Members:** Individuals or institutions providing substantial assistance to ICOM both financially and otherwise, due to an interest in museums and the international co-operation between them.

No categories of ICOM membership other than those described in the Statutes shall be deemed valid or applicable by ICOM at any level.

Membership privileges

According to Article 6, not every category has the same privileges. All members in 'good standing' receive a membership card. But only individual members and designated persons among institutional members have voting rights and can be elected to international ICOM functions or as chairpersons of national committees.

Students, honorary and supporting members do not have voting rights and cannot hold positions in ICOM.

Appendix 2 - summary 'recommendations' of the NCWG

ICOM NL has received the recommendations of the NCWG (Working Group on National Committees) to the ICOM Executive Board of August 2022 from chairman Hugh Maguire. The Executive Board's responses to these recommendations are not yet known, but it is noteworthy that they are already trickling through in the application of criteria.

These recommendations are therefore NOT formally valid yet. Each country will also have to adapt them to its own circumstances.

Herewith a summary of the recommendations per category, adapted to the situation in the Netherlands.

Students

Only students in the final year of officially recognised study programmes in museology and/or restoration/conservation, or post-graduates of these studies can apply. The year of graduation must be clearly indicated.

Students in their final years of broader heritage/museum studies must be able to clearly demonstrate their direct involvement in the museum sector. They must also specify the end date of their studies. Their membership expires after that date.²

Prospective professionals

Students can work in a museum alongside their studies as interns, employees or volunteers. If the student works there for long enough and the museum is accredited to supervise these students, the museum could nominate this student as a member. This will strengthen their involvement in the museum sector and allow the museum to benefit from fresh ideas. The museum in question must provide substantiated evidence of the student's long-term professional involvement and the extent and regularity of his/her work for the museum.³

Volunteers

The NCWG advises ICOM to consider adding a cheaper institutional membership category for (registered) museums that are run and managed by volunteers, limiting participation in ICOM activities to two core team members.

Career change

The proposal is that someone who has been an ICOM member for a longer period can remain a member for a certain number of years after a career change and then no more. If this person remains involved in the museum sector through, e.g., teaching, consulting or as a director, then membership

² In practice, it is not easy for Dutch students to provide a graduation date. Moreover, on Dutch registrations of study enrolment we cannot see whether a student is in the final year of a bachelor study (you can only see that someone is studying that year + their field of study).

³ ICOM NL has decided not to adopt this recommendation, because it leaves a lot of room for interpretation and is already partly covered in the categories we use (student membership and individual membership for people working in a museum). For internships, the application process at ICOM often takes longer than the internship.

can continue. The national committee should determine whether these are indeed sector-related activities.⁴

Retirees

The NCWG recognises the importance of retirees' contribution in providing insight and perspective and bringing a wealth of experience that is of value to ICOM. Retirees are always welcome, providing they were members for at least five years during their professional career. This applies within museums and within the other permissible categories, such as museum board members, university lecturers of museology programmes and exhibition makers.

Friends of museums

'Friends of' organisations cannot become members of ICOM: we are an organisation for professionals.

Institutional membership

The NCWG recommends putting the subject of institutional membership within ICOM back on the agenda, as there are several issues surrounding this type of membership. For instance, it is not always clear to institutions what the added value of institutional membership is, only a few of their employees use the cards, and in practice it does not always lead to committed participation in ICOM by the museum professionals working there. The institution is already a member, so why should they become members themselves?

The NCGW itself makes no specific recommendations on this at present, but does suggest that institutional membership should be accompanied by (significantly) reduced rates of individual membership for employees at this institution. This would have the advantage that staff in large multidisciplinary institutions could be involved not only at national committee level, but also in international committees.⁵

⁴ At ICOM NL, we remain flexible in the case of a career change if the member indicates that they wish to continue seeking employment in the sector. We usually consider the aforementioned activities that count as involvement in the museum sector as a reason for allowing someone to remain a member for the current year. In September we check if they are working in museum field again, if not we deregister them. We are therefore already applying this recommendation. Regarding applicants from education, the rules apply to individual applicants who do not work in a museum.

⁵ ICOM Belgium already applies this reduction because it gives institutional membership a demonstrable extra value.