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How to have impact in science politics in Switzerland

Working at the interface of two very special systems!

Dr. Dr. h.c. Barbara Haering

02.09.2025

Politics for science – science for politics : Three main questions

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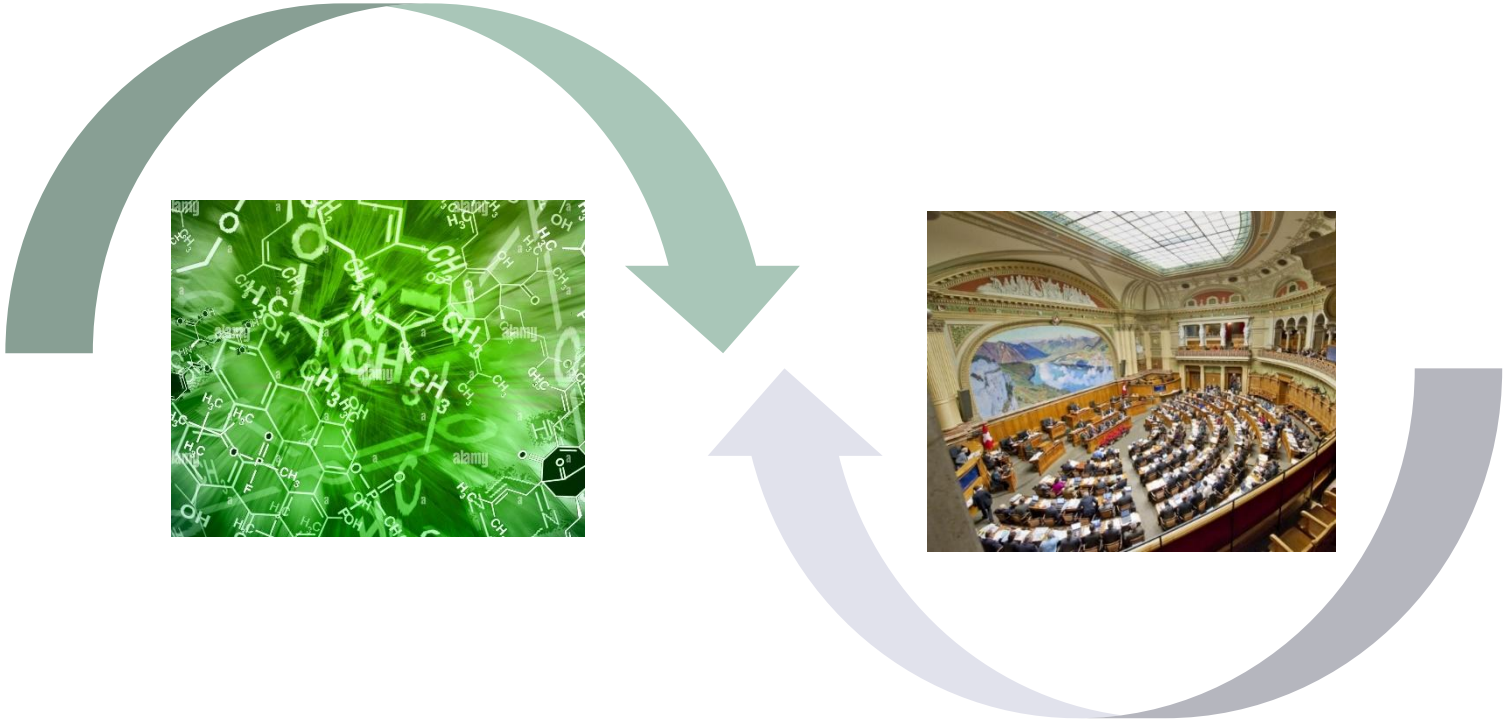
- How to work at the inter-face of science and politics?
- How to have impact in science politics?
- How to have impact in politics with our science?



I've looked at life from both sides now!

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Strategic Governance

Boards of TU Dresden, TU Graz

Accreditation Commission for academic post-grad schools, Baden-Württemberg

President CoF GICHD

Board of ICMP, The Hague

Former responsibilities

Chair of the COSt UNIGE

VP Board of the ETH-Domain

Board of UZH

Consulting and Evaluation

Assessing PHD Programmes, ongoing

HE&R-Strategy for a Swiss Canton, ongoing

Evaluation of NGO-funding, ongoing

Strategy for a university institute, ongoing

Coaching for university leaders, *ongoing*

Impact of EU-Programmes for CH, 2025

Evaluation of the CoE, 2025

Spillover effects of Switzerland, 2025

Sustainability in Swiss universities, 2024

Precariousness of young academics, 2023

Economic impact of an UAS, 2023

Evaluation space policies CH, 2022

Start-up training Innosuisse, 2022

Research and Teaching

Innovation in public administrations

Impact oriented subsidies in environmental policies

Participatory processes

Politics

Member of the Cantonal Parliament of Zurich 1979-1983 and of the National Parliament of Switzerland 1991-2007, Chair of the Committee on science, education and culture as well as of the Committee on Security Politics

Exchange: What are your hats?

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- Imagine the potential in this room!
- Imagine its' impact in science politics!
- Imagine its' impact for society!

How to work at the interface of science and politics

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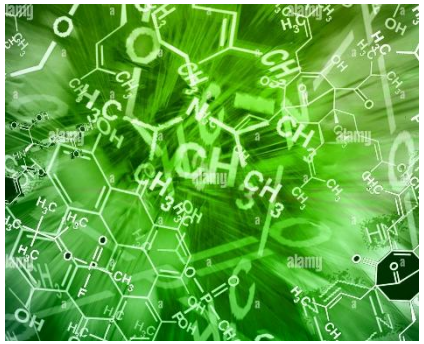
- **How to work at the interface?**
- What do we have to take into consideration when working at the interface of science and politics?



The logic of science – searching for INSIGHT

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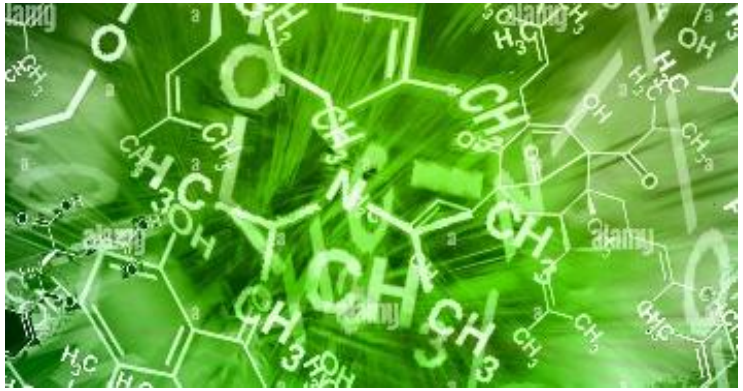
Universities and research institutes have a complex mission:

- **Seeking for insight** with an intrinsic motivation (fundamental, blue-sky research, applied research);
- **Passing on knowledge** to students and thus forming our future leaders;
- **Contributing to solutions** for real world problems and acting in favor of society, economy and the environment (applied science and development, third mission);
- **Reflecting** on societal developments from some distance and with a critical eye.



By transforming the inherent contradictions of these missions into synergies universities add their specific value to the world.

The logic of politics – looking for SOLUTIONS

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Politics is not about insight but about solutions.

- **Solutions:** Politics is looking for solutions for societal, economic and environmental challenges. It’s the art of optimisation.
- **Acceptance:** Policies must be acceptable for majorities – be it in parliament or in a referendum.
- **Boundaries:** Political decisions are bound to legal framework conditions. Moreover, they must respect budget targets and use taxpayers' money responsibly, effectivly and efficiently.

Accentuated change and global crises urge politics to deliver solutions just in time!

Different tasks, logics, interests and incentives

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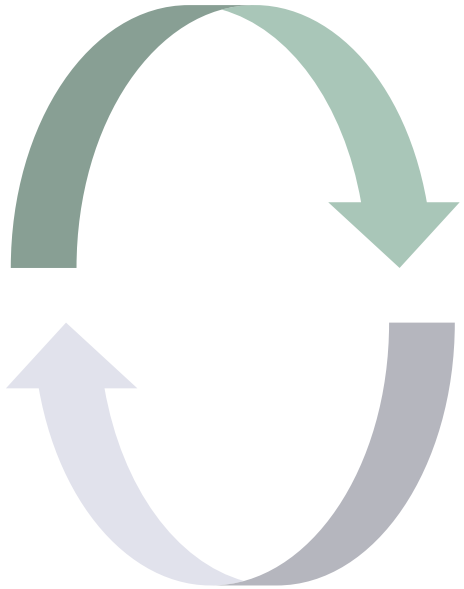
Aspects	Science	Politics
Tasks and logic	• Search for **insight** • **Competition** of ideas • Transfer of knowledge	• Search for **solutions** • **Competition** of ideologies • Societal optimisation
Reference systems	• **Long** term • **Global**	• **Short-**, mid-, long-term • Local, regional, **national**
Interests and incentives	• Intrinsic motivation • **Scientific competition** • Academic career • Economic interests	• Intrinsic motivation • **Competitive elections** • Responsibility regarding the electorate
Specific aspects	• Male dominated in many disciplines • Benchmarks reflecting old traditions	• Strongly depending on visibility of individual politicians via media



Two very different animals with a lot of misunderstanding!

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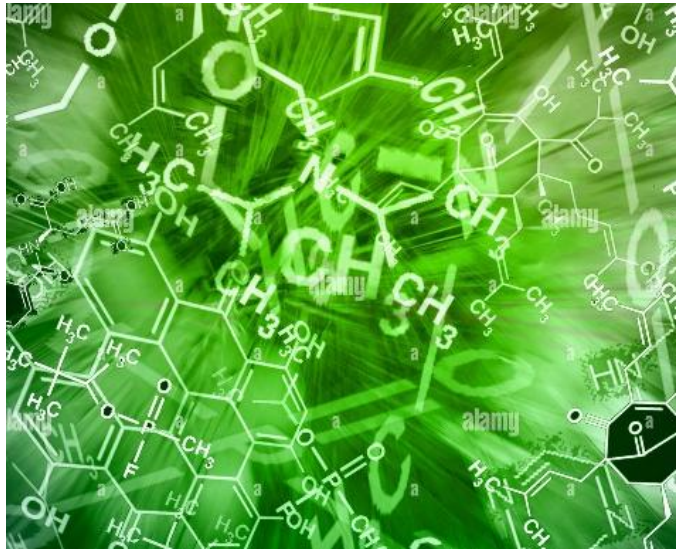
Insights



Solutions

- Academia and politics have different tasks, interests, incentives and timelines.
- The actors don’t know each other and about each other.
- There is a lot of misunder-standing at the interface of the two systems!

Acknowledging differences, translating and building bridges

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- Never forget: Both, scientists and politicians, are experts – in their specific system!
- Different approaches must be mutually recognized, if we want to be successful in working across the interface of science and politics.
- Working at the interface of science and politics means constantly translating and building bridges – with two- way systems!

Exchange: What is your experience so far at the interface of science/ politics?

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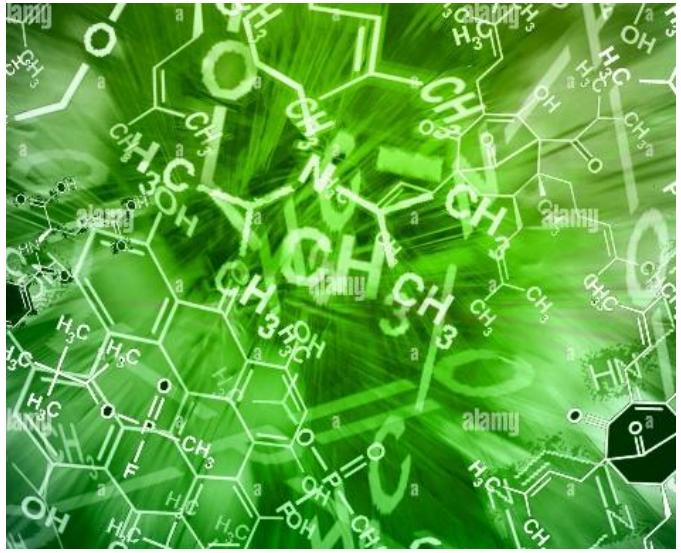

- Engaging for your institution?
- To what extend do you know institutions, actors?
- Did you participate in public/ policy debates?
- Writing articles?

POLITICS for science: Our questions

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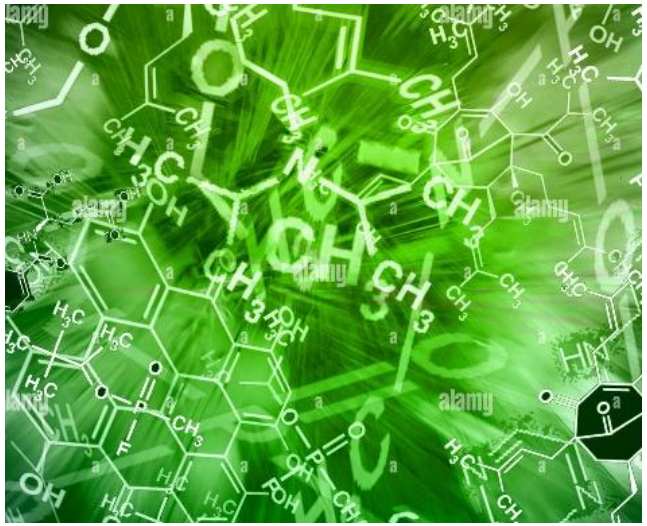
- How does politics govern academia in Switzerland?
- Structures, processes, actors.
- **How to have impact in science politics?**



Politics for science in a federalist system

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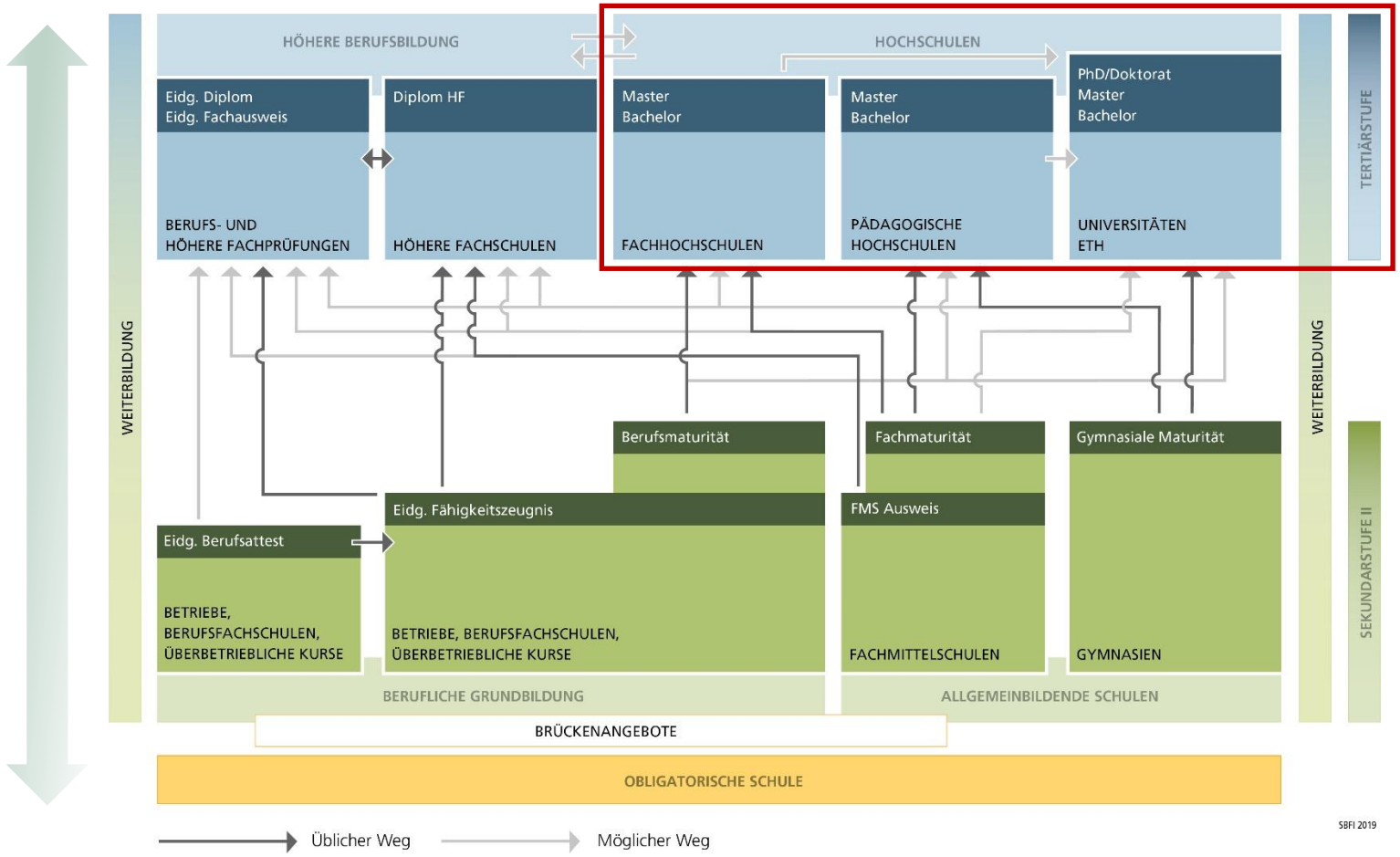
International, national and cantonal responsibilities

National, cantonal and private responsibilities;

Cantonal and local responsibilities.



National responsibilities – organized in complex structures

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Article 61a FC: Within the limits of their respective competencies, the Confederation and the cantons work together to ensure the quality and permeability of the Swiss education space. They coordinate their efforts and ensure their cooperation through joint bodies and by taking other measures.

HEdA: Coordination, accreditation, and funding of universities by the Confederation.

RIPA: Competitive funding for research and innovation by the Confederation.

Contract UE : Access to EU-programmes (research, innovation, education).

Parliament and Federal Council: Federal funding for the ETH-Domain, cantonal universities and universities of applied science

Swiss Swiss Council: Advising the Federal Council regarding politics for science

Swiss University Conference: Confederation & Cantons, Accreditation Board and Accreditation Agency

swissuniversities: Organisation of universities; with three chambers: Universities/ETH, UAS, PU

SNSF: Competitive federal funding for research

Innosuisse: Competitive federal funding for innovation (funds only for universities)

Swiss Academies of Science: SAGW, SCNat, SAMW, SATW, (TA Swiss, science et cite) and a+ as umbrella organisation

Navigating complexity!

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Swiss University Conference

Swiss Research Council → Federal Council

Cantons

Parliament

Institutional strategies

Swissuniversities

- ETH-Domain
- Cantonal Universities
- Universities of Applied Science
- Pedagogical Universities

CHF

ERI-Dispatch

CHF

- **Swiss National Science Foundation**
- **Innosuisse**
- **Swiss Academies Arts and Science**
- **ETH-Domain** *(via Board of ETH-D)*
- **Cantonal Universities**
- **Universities of Applied Science**

Political processes take time – preparing the ERI-Dispatch takes four years!

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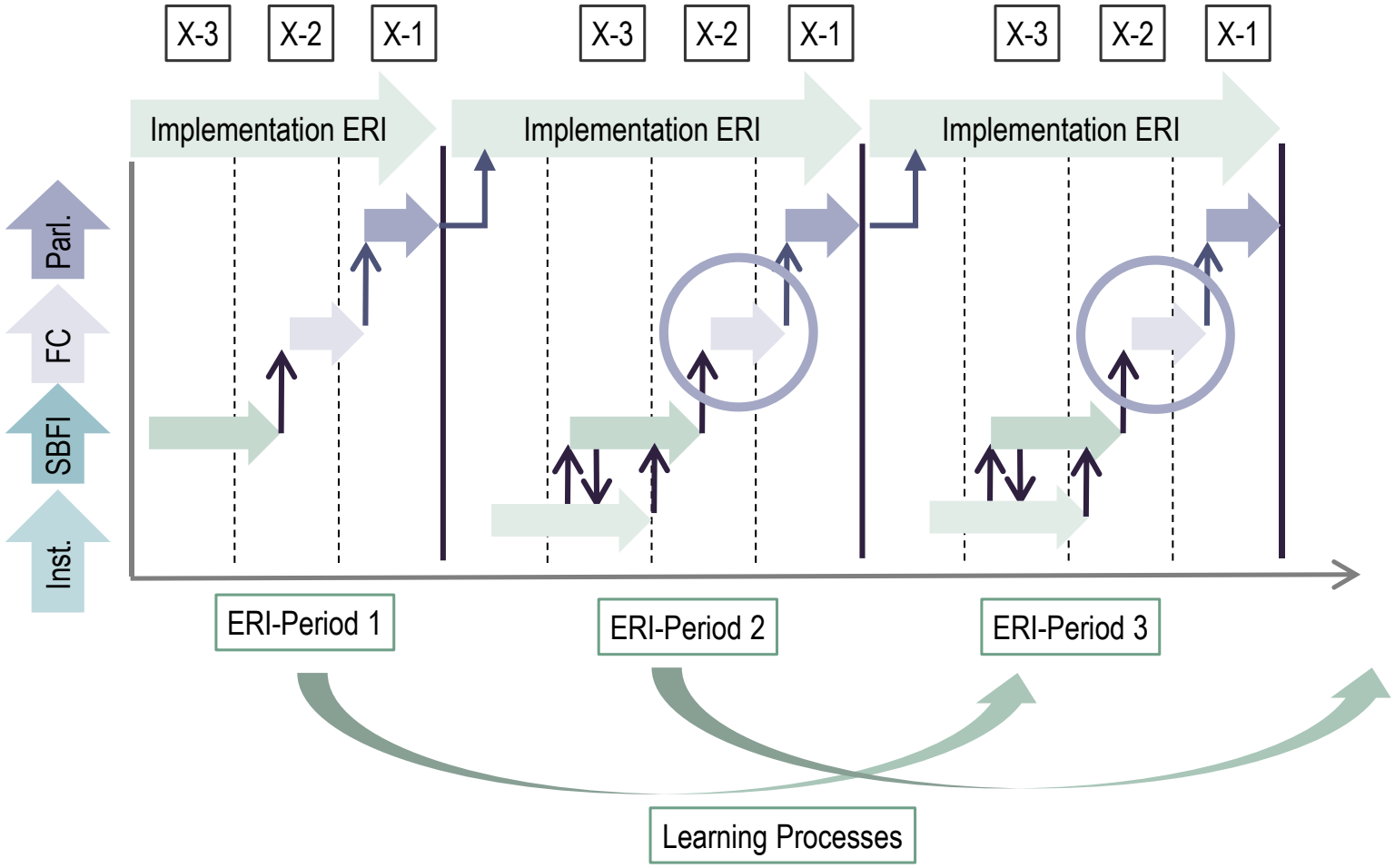

- Preparing the ERI-dispatch starts bottom up in the academic institutions.
- The Confederation adds national objectives and growth rates.
- Funding is decided by the Parliament.
- You will find similar processes in your canton – some more bottom-up, others more top-down.

By the way: Added value of EU-Programmes for Switzerland

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strategos

- **Besonders behindert** waren junge Forscher:innen, Studierende sowie KMU in Hightech-Branchen. Gerade diese Zielgruppen der EU-Programme sind für die Zukunft der Schweiz matchentscheidend.
- **Unsicherheiten bleiben.** Es bestehen für Forscher:innen sowie für Unternehmen weiterhin Planungs- und Rechtsunsicherheiten bzgl. der Optionen einer Beteiligung an EU-Programmen, was sich insbesondere bzgl. der Engagements von Unternehmen an Projekteingaben negativ auswirkt.
- **Win-win-Situationen schaffen.** Eine Vollassoziierung der Schweiz an den EU-Programmen ist für ganz Europa relevant – insbesondere in Zeiten verschärfter Konkurrenz zwischen Europa und anderen Regionen. Der Ausschluss der Schweiz von Hightech-Bereichen wie Quantum, Halbleiter, Space oder Cyber behindert die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit und die Sicherheit Europas.
- **Wissenschaft und Innovation sind auf stabile Rahmenbedingungen und öffentliche Investitionen angewiesen.** Grundlegende Innovationen basieren auf langfristigen Forschungen, die öffentlich gefördert wurden. Forschung und Innovation sind dabei auf stabile Rahmenbedingungen angewiesen.

Study by Barbara Haering and Sandra Wirth for scienceindustries

Strategic level as important intermediary partner

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Aspects	Science	Intermediary actors: Strategy	Politics
Bodies	• Individual scientists • Scientific community • Universities	• Strategic boards • Funding agencies • Academies • Science administrations	• Political parties • Government • Parliament and parliamentary committees
Interests and tasks	• Scientific progress • Education of you people • Scientific careers • Societal commitments • Economic interests	• Scientific progress • Advocacy for science • Return on investment • Strategic guidance • Delegated responsibilities • Accountability regarding politics	• Scientific progress • Solving societal, economic, environmental challenges • Responsibility regarding taxpayers: Return on invest-ments • Responsibility for the overall education and science landscape • Electoral interests

Exchange: How could you help the rabbit!

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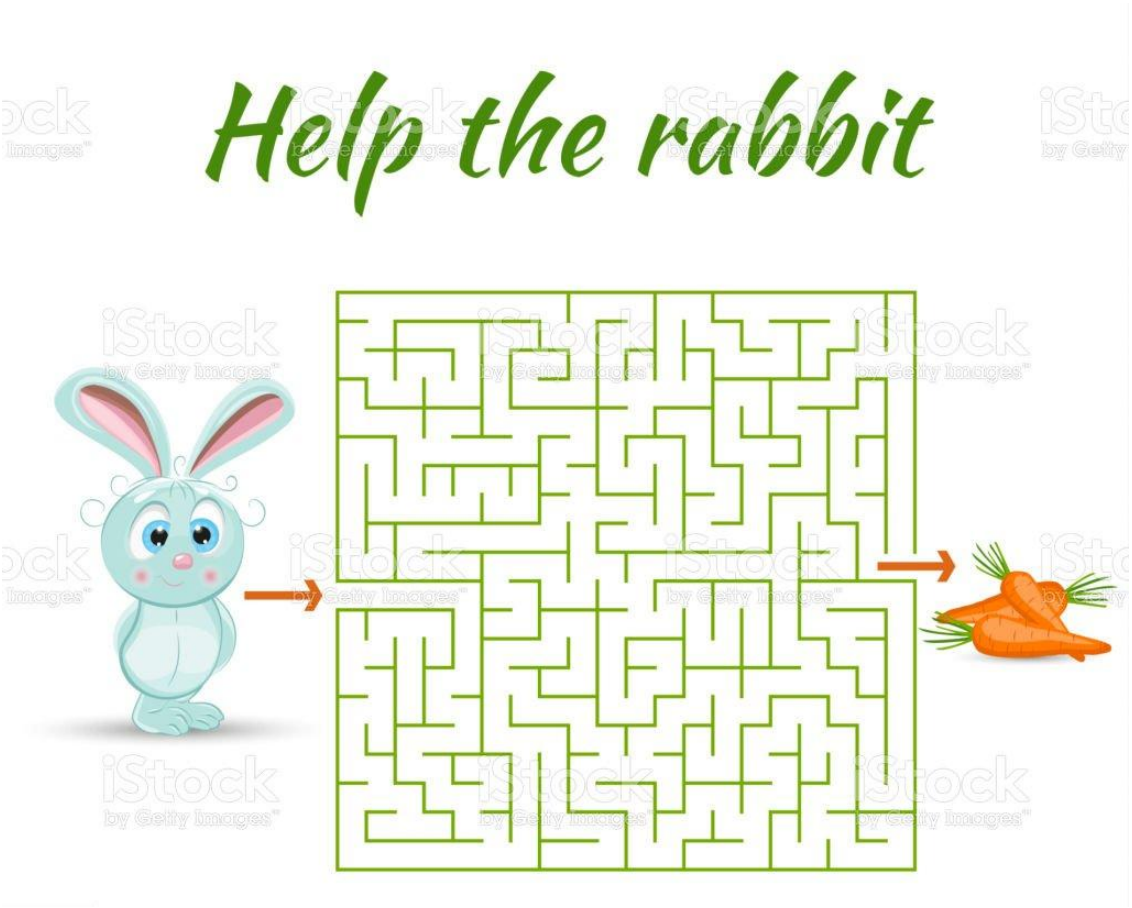
- How to get involved?
- In your university…
- In the SNF…
- In an academy…
- In politics….
- ……



SCIENCE for politics : Our question

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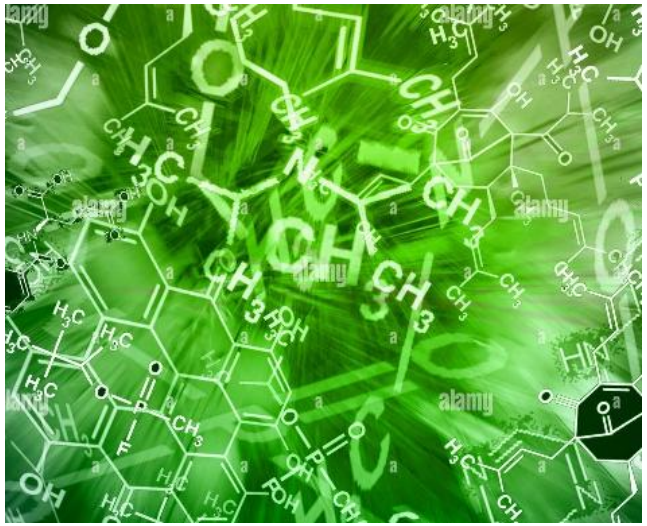
- **How to have impact in politics with our science?**
- How can we assure that politics benefits from our expertise?



Science and politics – same discussions and misunderstandings in all countries

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Renommierter Experte und Bundesrats-Kritiker tritt aus Corona-Taskforce zurück

Der Schweizer Epidemiologe Christian Althaus war Mitautor einer der ersten Studien zum Coronavirus aus China. Jetzt verlässt er die Covid-Taskforce des Bundes. Auch aus Protest.

As India's Lethal Covid Wave Neared, Politics Overrode Science

The country's top science agency tailored its findings to fit Prime Minister Narendra Modi's optimistic narrative despite a looming crisis, researchers say.

Science

India needs barrier between science & politics, says chemistry Nobel co-winner V Ramakrishnan

The scientist pointed out that wealth of a country depended on innovation and knowledge, and noted that over the years, the share of GDP India spent on science had been declining.

MOHANA BASU 5 February, 2023 02:22 pm IST

"Ich habe ihm zugehört, aber nicht getan, was er sagte, denn ehrlich gesagt sind seine Belege keine guten Belege", sagte Trump in dem Podcast "The Truth with Lisa Boothe". Die langjährige Erfahrung von Fauci kommentierte Trump mit den Worten: "Ich habe ihn nicht wirklich befördert. Er ist schon seit 40 Jahren dort – er ist schon Ewigkeiten dort."

Drosten spricht über Rücktritt

Bund fordert von Corona-Rat "Herkules-Aufgabe"

03.05.2022, 16:12 Uhr

Science for politics: The example of Covid in Switzerland

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What went well?

On the scientific side

- Science provided expertise – and got organized immediately.

On the political side

- Politics learned to take decisions «just in time» and to work across sectoral silos like health, education, economics, culture, security policies.
- Compared to other countries Switzerland went for balanced solutions, supported by scientific evidence.
- External Evaluations were launched by the government to learn from experience made. This opened doors to innovation.

Where did we have to learn?

On the scientific side

- Most scientists involved didn't understand political processes. Science had also to get used to political trade-offs: Looking for solutions acceptable by a majority rather than strictly following scientific expertise.
- Researchers didn't unveil their uncertainties; some preferred their own show.

On the side of politics and media

- Politics and media could not really assess the relevance of scientific findings.
- Politics lacked established contacts within the scientific community.
- The digital handling of health data was insufficient.

On the public side

- Swiss citizens didn't trust digital tracking; the app developed to inform about risks of infections did not reach the critical mass.
- A small but loud group was against vaccination – and joined the right-wing political movements.

Needs for the future at the interface of science and politics

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Bridging the gap between science and politics

- **Sustainable organisational set-up:** Switzerland needs a «Scientific Advice Mechanism» assuring a constant dialogue of science and politics and ready to provide expertise «just in time» whenever needed. Following the UK/India experience looks promising. Civil society must be integrated as well.
- **Multi-level approach:** Cooperation of science and politics must take place on three levels at the same time: With public administration to find reasonable solutions, with the authorities to build up political acceptance and with media regarding a clear and simple communication.

Politics

- **Digital Health** to improve public health; a digital patient record must be integrated in a general policy regarding private/public health.
- **Compass:** Politics must assure sustainable solutions, societal cohesion and transparency to (re-) gain trust of citizens.

Science

- **Legitimation:** Scientists providing expertise to politics must be anchored in their academic community (no one-man shows). Moreover, they must declare their uncertainties.
- **Engagements** must be valorised by their peers. Academic incentives set today are wrong.

Not just «bureaucracy»: Public administrations are important partners!

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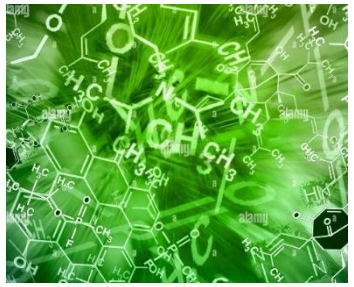

Science

Public Administration

Politics

- Public administrations have scientific knowledge as well as procedural and political knowhow.
- Particularly the middle-management integrates thematic and political competences.
- They serve as institutional memories for politics and as partners for stakeholder.

Exchange: Go for it!

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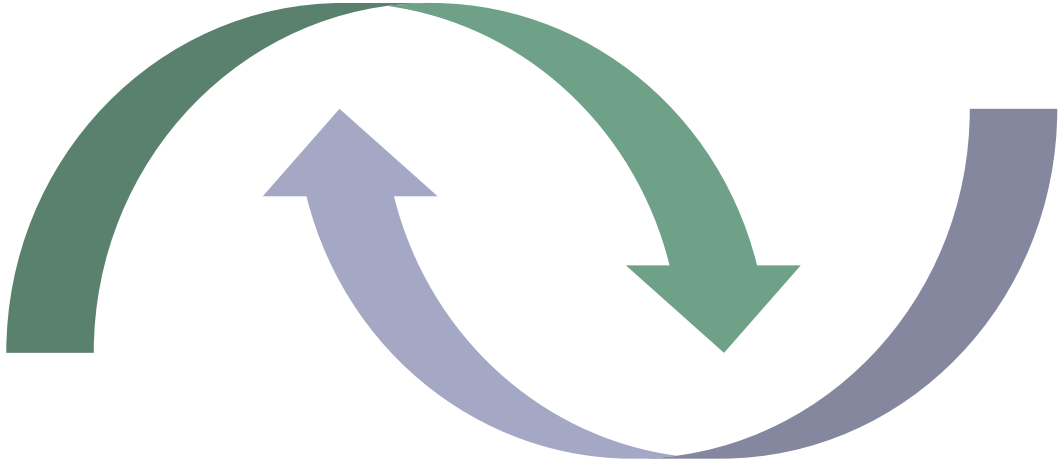
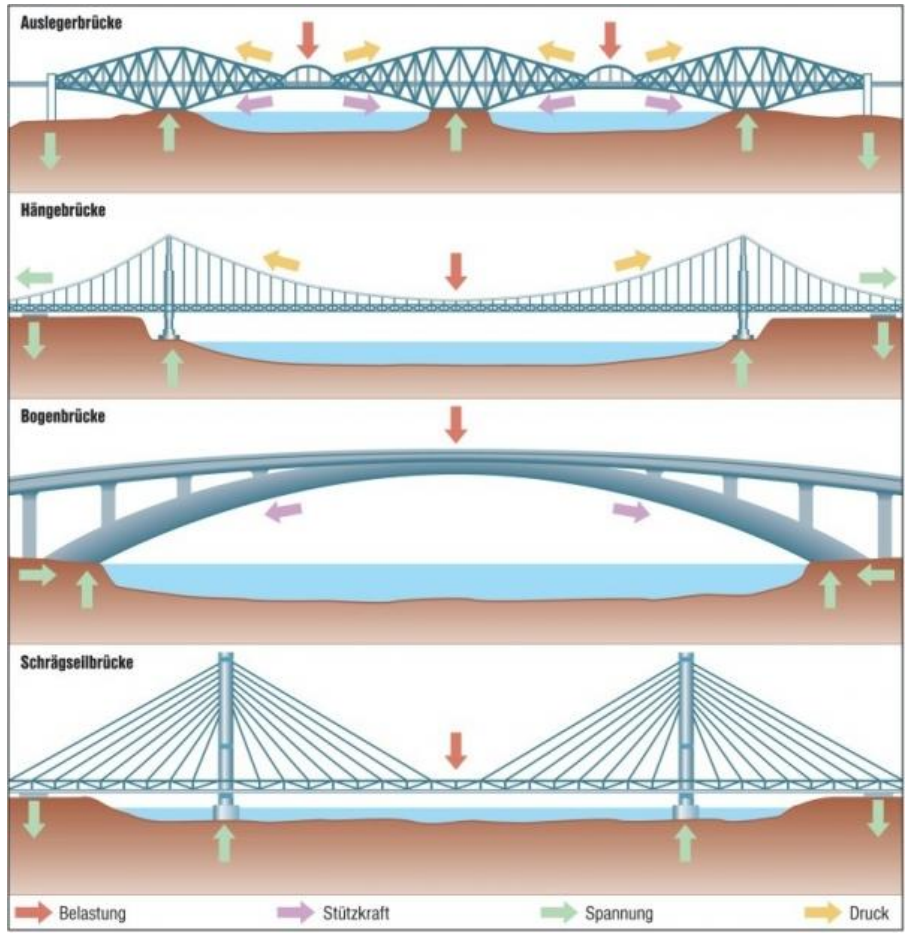
- The best way to get something from politics is to support politics with your science – even if constructing the bridge may be challenging!





Logic of management – dealing with organisations and their processes

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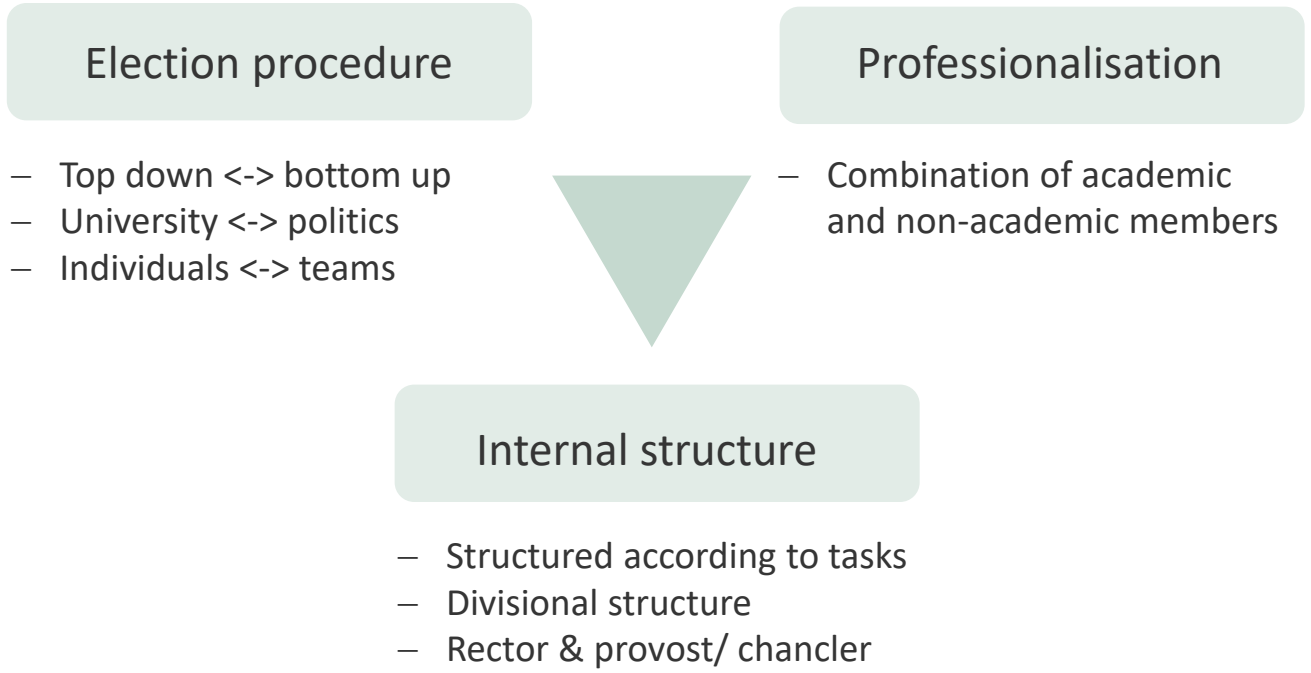
The governance of a university strongly depends on the following elements:

- The election procedure of a rector impacts his legitimation.
- Internal structures of a rectorate reflect its priorities.
- The professionalisation of rectorates is increasing.
- Governance structures impact the culture as well as the power sharing within a university.



Know the biases – and who they serve!

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Institutions are shaped by objectives, structures and processes but also by their culture – including biases:

- **Conscious** / explicit biases – used to maintain power
- **Unconscious** and implicit – securing power
- **Structural** – as a result of traditional power sharing

At the end it is also about power and power sharing!

- It is important to identify prevailing biases – and to find ways to mitigate their impact on behaviour and decisions if we want to achieve sustainable change in an institution.

How about your own institution?

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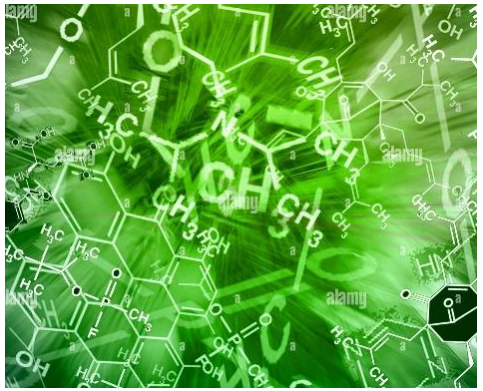

Election procedure

Professionalisation

Internal structure

- What could be a next step to get involved in your organisation and beyond?

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Impressum

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