

## Annual Report 2019/20 of the Board to the Assembly of Delegates

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### Board activities

Carmen Faso, Isabel Bolliger, Rashmi Rai-Rawat, Alexey Evstratov, and the extended board of actionuni-der Schweizer Mittelbau.

Reporting period: 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### 1. Overview of all activities May 2019 – August 2020

Event	Start Date	End Date
ESKAS	08-05-20	08-05-20
swu Netzwerktreffen Lehre	16-05-19	16-05-19
SHK	20-05-19	20-05-19
swu Delegation Lehre	29-05-19	29-05-19
meeting with VSS	07-06-19	07-06-19
FH-CH GA 2019 in Olten	21-06-19	21-06-19
Actionuni new board meeting in Bern	11-07-19	11-07-19
WG Motion 2 kick-off meeting	07-08-19	07-08-19
swu Delegation Lehre	28-08-19	28-08-19
Interview with Sophie Gaitzsch @Heidinews	05-09-19	05-09-19
Grand Tour 1-MVUB	10-09-19	10-09-19
actionuni Board Meeting	12-09-19	12-09-19
Grand Tour 2-MIFHO	25-09-19	25-09-19
Austauschtreffen mit swissuniversities und VSS/UNES	17-10-19	17-10-19
Mvub "Forum Berufseinstieg"	24-10-19	24-10-19
swu Delegation Lehre	06-11-19	06-11-19
actionuni board meeting	12-11-19	12-11-19
Motion 2 WG	13-11-19	13-11-19
actionuni-SNSF exchange meeting	28-11-19	28-11-19
SHK	29-11-19	29-11-19

Grand Tour 3-AVUBA	02-12-19	02-12-19
University.Now in Lausanne	05-12-19	06-12-19
Board meeting	14-01-20	14-01-20
Motion 2 WG meeting	29-01-20	29-01-20
SHK HSR	27-02-20	27-02-20
Board meeting	17-03-20	17-03-20
ESKAS	19-03-20	20-03-20
Swiss Accreditation Council	27-03-20	28-03-20
actionuni board meeting	21-04-20	21-04-20
Eurodoc	29-04-20	29-04-20
actionuni covid19 minisummit	27-04-20	27-04-20
Eurodoc	03-05-20	03-05-20
Eurodoc	17-05-20	17-05-20
OECD panel	26-05-20	26-05-20
swissuniversities Del Lehre	27-05-20	27-05-20
Eurodoc	31-05-20	31-05-20
actionuni online board meeting	02-06-20	02-06-20
actionuni meets SNSF	03-06-20	03-06-20
Eurodoc	11-06-20	11-06-20
Eurodoc	14-06-20	04-06-20
Biannual online exchange with swissuniversities	11-06-20	11-06-20
actionuni online meeting with MOL	06-07-20	06-07-20
Participation in OECD eurodoc panel	07-07-20	07-07-20
Online actionuni board meeting	08-07-20	08-07-20
actionuni online meeting with ACIDE	11-07-20	11-07-20
Eurodoc annual conference & AGM	22-07-20	23-07-20
actionuni online meeting with MOL delegates	06-08-20	06-08-20
swissuniversities Del Lehre	27-08-20	27-08-20

## 2. Motion II working group

By the actionuni co-president, Carmen Faso

On the 7. August 2019, following the acceptance of Motion II by the delegates of the 2019 general assembly, we formed a working group dedicated to the development of funding strategies for actionuni and possible future goals for our association. We've had several meetings that have progressively narrowed down options to two possible sources of structural funding, namely SERI and/or swissuniversities. We explored the possibility of leveraging funding from each university represented by its members in actionuni and came to the conclusions that this was unlikely to succeed, given that universities already support their MB associations and that we do not (yet) provide any specific service to our members as an added value to their membership. We had just started exploring this topic with a substantial intellectual contribution from C Wittlin (VAUZ) when our activities were cut short by the covid19 pandemic. In the meantime, the issue of structural funding for actionuni, VSS and swissfaculty was brought to the forefront (see "Swissuniversities-Delegation Lehre and yearly exchange") and will be prioritized by swissuniversities in the coming months. I would like to personally thank all members of this working-group for their engagement, support and willingness to address the difficult problem of how to make our action sustainable. Contributors in alphabetical order: Patricia Eiche (avuba), Stefan Emmenegger (MVUB), Daniela Feller (MVUB), Muriel Nann, (MVUB), Alejandra Parreno (VAUZ), Rashmi Rai-Rawat (AVETH-actionuni), Chris Wittlin (VAUZ).

## 3. Media Coverage

actionuni was officially interviewed twice:

- 1) by Heidi.news: <https://www.heidi.news/sciences/dans-les-universites-suissees-huit-chercheurs-sur-dix-n-ont-pas-de-contrat-fixe>
- 2) by the NZZ: <https://nzzas.nzz.ch/schweiz/problematische-arbeitsbedingungen-uni-forschende-fuehlen-sich-ausgebeutet-ld.1540787?reduced=true>

## 4. Actionuni Member Associations

By the actionuni co-president, Rashmi Rai-Rawat

### Grand Tour (GT)

In the year 2019, Grand Tour was an initiative pursued by the new board members Carmen Faso and Rashmi Rai-Rawat. Its main objectives are, (1) to establish and increase actionuni presence as an umbrella association among our members, (2) to build a close connection with the member associations, (3) to meet the delegates and other members of the association in person, (4) to increase our understanding about the association's structure, working, board composition, and issues properly, (5) to increase knowledge sharing practices, info flow and active communication between the umbrella association and its members (6) to actively support the associations in diverse ways.

Pilot Phase 1 - During 2019 - 2020, we visited three associations either during their Board meeting or General assembly MVUB, MIFHO and AVUBA. During these Grand tours an overview of actionuni was presented. These visits enabled us to interact with the member associations closely. We realised the working and composition of each association is complex. Therefore, regular meetings with delegates are indeed essential to build a proper platform to work together.

Pilot Phase 2 - Because of the extraordinary circumstances (corona) our planned grand tours were cancelled. Therefore, we started organising regular online meetings. We have been regularly interacting with the delegates of MOL, ACIDE, & AVETH. We will continue to organise these meetings with all our members.

Planning for the year 2020-2021

- Organise regular meetings with delegates.
- Grand Tour will be continued (excluding extraordinary circumstances).
- More activities / trainings / networking events will be organised for the members (if we will have enough resources).
- With the support of the delegates, a report will be developed which will give an overview of each association. Additionally, some guidelines will also be developed, e.g. best practices.

### **University.Now event**

Please see the [following pdf document](#).

On 5 - 6 December 2019, a forum of Swiss mid-level academic staff was organised by ACIDUL, at the University of Lausanne. Actionuni fully supported the initiatives of our member association. Board members Rashmi Rai-Rawat and Alexey Evstratov represented actionuni at uninow. During this forum, several topics related to the situation of the postdoc and doctoral candidates were discussed. Some topics were highly sensitive too. On behalf of actionuni we presented the idea of a postdoc graduate school.

Additionally, we highlighted some topics related to the overall development and wellbeing of a doctoral candidates. Topic related to supervision was also addressed. We actively contributed to all the discussions. During this event, we also got the opportunity to meet with several researchers mainly in the french part. Some of them were actively involved in the associations while some were looking for advise on how to get involved or how to even activate the working of associations. In future, we will support them as per their requirement.

## 5. Consultations

### 1. Federal Act on International Cooperation and Mobility in the Field of Education (SR 414.51)

The new law is in effect a legal formalization of policies on cooperation and mobility which are already in place. This topic is clearly central to academic and professional training.

Our main feedback points were the following:

- we recognize the need for the Confederation to be able to manage its programmes more autonomously
- we support the establishment of a national agency with a specific executive mandate concerning the instruments of implementation of the policies presented by the law
- we welcome the opening to non-European educational realities
- we stress the need for the Confederation not to distance itself too much from the cooperation and mobility programmes linked to the European Union.

Read the [full letter here \(in Italian\)](#).

### 2. The SHK ordinance on the coordination of higher education teaching

The ordinance focuses on higher education at all three types of universities, defining which types of academic diplomas and certificates can be issued, how many ECTS are associated with each kind of study program and which sort of institutions are allowed to offer third-cycle programs such as doctorates.

Our main feedback point as actionuni is that UAS and PH should, similarly to cantonal universities and federal polytechnics, be also allowed to develop and offer their own third-cycle study programs, provided a rigorous quality control procedure be put in place to ensure quality standards comparable to those of existing third-cycle programs.

Read our full response [here](#) (in Italian).

### 3. Changes to the federal law on research promotion and innovation

For the full dossier on changes proposed, please click [here](#)

For actionuni's response to the consultation, please click [here](#)

## Swiss National Science Foundation

By the actionuni representative, Katharina Prautsch

1. actionuni-SNSF annual meeting took place on the 28th of November 2019

During the meeting topics raised by actionuni members and the SNSF representatives Angelika Kalt and Marcel Kullin were discussed. Main points of discussion were following:

Broadened definition of the mobility criteria

Definition of excellence

Implementation of DORA

Strengthening of the status of PRIMA grantees

Funding instrument on post doc level: actionuni was asked to evaluate the existing funding instruments, and we came to the conclusion that no career funding instrument on postdoc levels exists, but would be urgently needed.

Adaptation of doctoral and postdoctoral wages

The complete report can be found here in German. For any questions Katharina Prautsch can be contacted.

## 2. SNSF- Stiftungsrats meeting on the 29th of March

The SNSF ensures that actionuni will continue being part of the Stiftungsrat. It acknowledges actionuni as official representative of the Schweizer Mittelbau and ensures its support in case actionuni is moving to a more professional organization. However, it would wish an improved contribution and representation of the French part of Switzerland.

## **Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE (Hochschulkonferenz und Hochschulrat)**

By the actionuni representative and co-president, Isabel Bolliger

The SHK ([www.shk.ch](http://www.shk.ch)) represents the uppermost political organization of higher education in Switzerland. In accordance with the Swiss federal constitution, the federal councillor Guy Parmelin and the cantonal governing councillors for education and research develop and determine federal and cantonal mutual decisions on higher education policies. Since the first SHK meeting in 2015, actionuni has one seat in the SHK with advisory vote. Attendance of the SHK offers direct personal contact with decision-makers.

During the reporting period, the SHK has held two meetings and executed one votation via mail (14 May 2019 to 10 August 2020). Important discussion points were the Referenzkosten/Coûts de référence for 2021-2024 and the proposal by SAR for a new Akkreditierungsverordnung/Ordonnance d'accréditation. An important topic is support for young researchers. Swissuniversities drafted a report on support of young researchers at universities and universities of applied sciences. Further topics were: continuing education, the ordinance for coordination in teaching at the swiss higher education institutions.

## **swissuniversities**

By the actionuni co-presidents, Isabel Bolliger and Carmen Faso

### 1. Delegation Lehre

During the reporting period xy meetings took place. During the meetings in 2019 actionuni was represented by Antoine Chollet. Cosima Locher has now officially taken over from August 2020 on.

## 2. Biannual exchange

*November 2019:*

actionuni sent in the following discussion points:

- Lack of funding for actionuni
  - Actionuni has formed a dedicated working group to come up with a viable plan to professionalize its organization and activities. Nonetheless, other than VSS and swissfaculty, actionuni doesn't receive any third-party funding and therefore lacks the resources to establish a professional secretariat (Geschäftsstelle). The representation of the interests of mid-level staff at the national level is therefore entirely self-financed and self-driven. This weakens mid-level staff representation and participation, and heavily impacts the sustainability of the entire operation.
  - For this reason, we welcome any intervention on swissuniversities' behalf that can consolidate our position as credible partners.
- Digitalization
  - How do the swissuniversities members plan to prepare their students and mid-level staff for the changing requirements needed in the evolving research practice?
  - Compared internationally, students and mid-level staff of Swiss institutions have limited open access options online for scientific publications, particularly in the case of academic books. We understand that subscriptions to publishers are costly. Is this being discussed at the level of swissuniversities.
- Open Science
  - With regards to the elaboration of future policies for open science we would like to urge swissuniversities and the member institutions to also consider needs and challenges students and mid-level staff face.
- University Now
  - On 5-6 December 2019, a forum of Swiss mid-level academic staff is taking place at the University of Lausanne. Actionuni will present the idea of a post-graduate school, offering a more structured training period for post-docs equally to the increasingly popular graduate schools and programmes. What is the perspective of swissuniversities on the potential and feasibility of this proposal for the long-term future?
- Association of Switzerland to European Programmes
  - The association of Switzerland to the next generation of European programmes, incl. Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ is very important for students and mid-level staff in Switzerland. We therefore support the political statements made so far by swissuniversities in the relevant context and would like to urge the member institutions to get more involved in the public discussion as well.



*June 2020:*

actionuni sent in the following discussion points:

- 1) covid-19: concrete measures to manage the negative impact of this crisis on mid-level staff. Specifically:

- a) how to ensure that PhD candidates and postdocs employed have a fair chance to obtain prolongation to finish their work correctly?

- b) how to account and correct for the aftermath of the disproportionate share of caretaking duties for female applicants to open positions?

Answer a: no coordinated action appears to be possible at the moment. Every university has a right to deal with the issue of compensation in their way and according to their own means.

Answer b: this is a high-priority topic which will be developed, still unclear how.

- 2) position of swissuniversities on the new ERI dispatch

Answer: no answer, did not make it on the agenda

- 3) funds of the cancelled summer schools cannot be used at a later date

Answer: no answer, did not make it on the agenda

- 4) doc.mobility: status of the transition, development and reaching of target audience

Answer: Doc.mobility was moved entirely to universities, with a smaller budget and the need for universities to co-finance.

The issue of structural funding for actionuni, VSS and swissfaculty was promptly raised. Swissuniversities agreed to prioritize this for their agenda.

As a follow-up to this meeting, given the absence of any progress on the issues we raised, a joint letter was sent to swissuniversities to demand answers to the main open questions. Please find it [here](#).

### **Swiss Accreditation Council**

By the actionuni representatives, Carla Duss and Florian Lippke

In 2019, the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC) started its second mandate period. actionuni is represented by Florian Lippke, who is in his second term, and Carla Duss, who has been chosen by the federal council from a shared list of candidates presented by actionuni and VSS. The SAC decided the institutional accreditation of six public Institutions of Higher Education and the programme accreditation of seven study programs for medicinal professions. (The list of accredited Higher Education Institutions (UHEI) is published on the website of the SAC: <https://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/accredited-institutionsprogrammes/>).

The work on the rules regarding the re-accreditation of HEI in Switzerland is ongoing. This is necessary as section 5 of the Ordinance of the Higher Education Council on Accreditation within the Higher Education Sector is only concerned with the procedure for the first institutional accreditation.



## ESKAS- Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars

By the actionuni representative, Sophie Girardin

ESKAS (Eidgenössische Stipendienkommission für ausländische Studierende/Federal Commission for Scholarships for Foreign Students) is a program from the Swiss government that attributes excellence research scholarships for foreign scholars at the pre-doctoral (research assistant), doctoral and post-doctoral level; as well as art scholarships at the master level. It usually gives out around 400 scholarships per year, out of a total of 1'500 applications (26% success rate).

The goal of ESKAS is not to take in the typical “mainstream” high-achiever research candidates (who usually anyway get more prestigious grants), but to encourage more diversity in research and establish good relationships between Switzerland and other countries. Many scholarships are attributed to candidates from developing countries who plan to go back to their home countries after their stay in Switzerland. It is not meant as a “brain drain” programme.

The Commission is formed by a professor from each Swiss university and Polytechnical School, as well as by one member of the International Relation Office from each school. Based on their field of expertise, the professors are in charge of reviewing and rating 30-60 scholarship applications. They then send to the Commission a recommendation on which application should get accepted. Borderline cases are discussed by the Commission.

A student representative from VSS/UNES is also seating in this Commission. Since 2020, this representative is chosen by actionuni, so as to have relevant expertise on research and on being a mid-level staff member. The representative is elected for four years (2020-2024).

The ESKAS Commission meets three times a year. The meeting of December 6 was an end-of-the-year/end of mandate meeting, so it was a rather light meeting. I will officially come into function in January 2020 and thus did not have a right of vote at this meeting.

Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 6, 2019: Accepting the call for tenders 2021/22

- The “call for tenders” for the scholarship 2021-22 was accepted. This document defines the “priority countries” for the scholarships, as well as an outline of the number and type of scholarships by “group of countries”. The proposition was identical to that for the year 2020-21 and will be disseminated among the embassies of all 184 countries of the programme by the EDA/DFAE/FDFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs).
- Digitalisation of the application process. So far, everything is on paper but for the 2020-21 scholarship, a pilot project of digital application will be run with Italy and India
- Short discussion on the supplementary gains additional to the scholarship, as the scholarship is not meant as a full salary and barely covers the living costs in Switzerland
- Short discussion on how to check the English level of applicants (C1 level required), as there was a case of a student that did not speak any English and likely did not write their application themselves.
- Integration of the scholarship recipients into the local culture is often an issue.

Summary ESKAS meeting of March 26-27, 2020: Selection of candidates for the 2020/21 scholarships (Part 1)

*Note: due to the COVID-19 crisis, the physical meeting was cancelled. Technical issues prevented the meeting from taking place online, so discussions were held by email and votes took place online.*

- University/Polytechnical school representatives reviewed about 2/3 of the applications and shared their propositions for attributing the scholarships. The proposal is split by country to match the call for tenders. The proposals by country were put up to vote and all got accepted  
Summary ESKAS meeting of May 8, 2020: Selection of candidates for the 2020/21 scholarships (Part 2)

*Note: due to the COVID-19 crisis, the physical meeting was replaced by an online meeting.*

- University/Polytechnical school representatives reviewed the remaining 1/3 of the applications and shared their propositions for attributing the scholarships. The proposals by country were put up to vote and all got accepted

In total, 178 scholarships were attributed, with a success rate of 21%.

## **Eurodoc**

By actionuni co-president, Rashmi Rai-Rawat

We are closely collaborating with Eurodoc.

Throughout the year,

- We support Eurodoc by circulating the information and announcements to our members. Either through mails or through the social media platform.
- We regularly contribute to the consultation, surveys and their ongoing projects.
- We participate regularly in the Eurodoc members meetings.
- We also share information focussed on the situation of Switzerland mittelbau.
- We represent actionuni annually in their General Assembly.

Additionally in the year 2020 we have also

- Participated in the OECD Eurodoc panel.
- Contributed in the consultation, survey collection and report writing focussed on the country-specific conditions of ECRs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **6. Covid-19 emergency**

The early months of 2020 were marked by the explosion of the covid19 pandemic, with fall-outs unimaginable just a few months prior. In mid-March 2020, Switzerland went on lock-down. This meant an abrupt halting of all research activities, since universities and their infrastructure became inaccessible. Homeoffice became the norm and so did home-based teaching. Aside from a couple of exceptions, the system was almost completely unprepared for this major shift in operations and this left many mid-level staff members stranded with projects they couldn't continue/finish and online teaching duties, along with care duties due to the shut down of schools and other institutions across the country.

actionuni took a number of actions early on, including email correspondence, acting as a coordination platform for our members, website communication (the Covid19 tweets), sustained twitter activity and direct contact of important partners such as the SNSF and swissuniversities. Furthermore, we met with a restricted number of members for input across the country to address needs, concerns and solutions that could shape our official communication to the SNSF and swissuniversities. Our activities are listed below:

Letter 1: [From actionuni message from the Presidency](#)

Letter 2: [From actionuni keeping channels open](#)

Letter 3: [From actionuni Covid-19 we need your input here](#)

Letter 4: [Letter to swissuniversities](#)

Letter 5: [Letter to the SNSF](#)

Document 1: [Minutes covid19 online mini summit \(Muriel Nann, MVUB\)](#)

The points addressed in letter 4 were discussed only in June 2020, during the biannual exchange (see section Swissuniversities-Delegation Lehre and yearly exchange). The points addressed in letter 5 were addressed at an online meeting with SNSF Director Dr. Angelika Kalt. The outcome of that meeting can be found [here](#).

Ongoing activities include a) pursuing swissuniversities' solutions to some of the problems listed in our letter; and b) developing an online survey to be distributed across the country in October, to evaluate quantitatively the true impact of covid19 on our research and teaching activities, and career prospects.

## 7. Acknowledgements and thanks

We wish to thank Alexey Evstratov who, as core board member, has been deeply engaged in so many of our activities this year and has lent his time to both ACIDUL and actionuni.

We'd also like to thank Lauriane Nallet-Khosroffian for her service, in collaboration with Salome' Adam, as social media coordinator and actionuni main tweeter! She did a wonderful job and we were lucky to work together, albeit for a short time. Salome' Adam will also hand over her social media activity for which we thank her greatly!