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Mittelbau**

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Annual Report 2021/22 of the Board to the Assembly of Delegates

Reporting period: October 2021 to September 2022

Table of Contents

1	Board of actionuni.....	3
2	Overview of activities.....	4
3	Statutory Changes from mini-GA 2022.....	5
4	Actionuni priorities.....	5
4.1	BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28.....	6
4.2	Position Papers.....	6
4.3	Petition Academia.....	6
5	Actionuni representation in national bodies.....	7
5.1	Swiss Accreditation Council (SAR).....	7
5.2	Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE.....	8
5.3	Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).....	8
5.3.1	SNSF Evaluation.....	8
5.3.2	AARE.....	9
5.3.3	Working conditions of SNSF-employed research staff.....	9
5.4	Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities.....	9
5.5	Application for a structured position for actionuni-VSS-swissfaculty – Update.....	10
5.6	Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars (ESKAS).....	11
5.6.1	Summary of ESKAS meeting of October 29, 2021: Discussion about the FRI/BFI message 2025-28.....	12
5.6.2	Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 3, 2022: Accepting the call for tenders 2023-24	12
5.6.3	Summary of ESKAS meeting of March 17-18, 2022: Selection of candidates for the 2022-23 scholarships (Part 1).....	12
5.6.4	Summary of ESKAS meeting of May 6, 2022: Selection of candidates for the 2022-23 scholarships (Part 2).....	13
6	Actionuni representation in international bodies.....	14
6.1	Eurodoc.....	14
7	Actionuni member associations.....	14
8	Media Coverage.....	15

1 Board of actionuni

Who is who?	Role	Period
Carla Duss	Delegate to the SAR	October 2021 to present (second 4-year mandate starting in 2023)
Carmen Faso	Treasurer and Admin Manager	October 2021 to October 2022
Florian Lippke	Delegate to the SAR	Second mandate ending in 2023; not replaced for the moment
Hannah Schoch	Co-President and Delegate to Eurodoc	June 2022 to present (board member since October 2021)
Laia Guardiola	Co-President	October 2021 to December 2021
Lisa Rieble	Delegate to the Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities	April 2022 to present
Magali Bertrand	Board member	June 2022 to present
Marco Prost	Co-President	October 2021 to August 2022
Martina von Arx	Co-President and Delegate to the SHK/CSHE	October 2021 to present
Melanie Röthlisberger	Open Science Delegate	October 2021 to present
Neele Heiser	Board member	June 2022 to present
Prabitha Urwyler	Delegate to the SNSF and Social Media Manager	October 2021 to October 2022
Rachel Demolis	Board member	June 2022 to present
Sophie Girardin	Delegate to ESKAS, Treasurer and Admin Manager	October 2021 to present (taking over treasury from Carmen Faso)
Timon Elmer	Board member	June 2022 to present

2 Overview of activities

Event	Date	Hours
Meeting of the 3 Stände and swissuniversities	12-10-2021	2
General Assembly 2021	25-10-2021	3
ESKAS	29-10-2021	2
Meeting of the 3 Stände and swissuniversities	16-11-2021	1.5
Board meeting	24-11-2021	2
SHK/CSHE Plenary	25-11-2021	1.5
SHK/CSHE	25-11-2021	2.5
ESKAS	03-12-2021	2
Board meeting (and Christmas dinner)	08-12-2021	1.5
Board meeting	12-01-2022	1
Participation in the evaluation of the SNSF	13-01-2022	2.5
Board meeting	09-02-2022	2
SHK/CSHE	24-02-2022	2
Board meeting	16-03-2022	1.5
ESKAS	17-03-2022	2
Board meeting	13-04-2022	1.5
ESKAS	06-05-2022	2
Board meeting	11-05-2022	1.5
SHK/CSHE	19-05-2022	2
Eurodoc AGM	10-06-2022 + 11-06-2022	14
National sensibilization day on sexual harassment at higher education institutions, Lucerne	14-06-2022	8
Board meeting	15-06-2022	1.5
Mini General Assembly (and dinner)	24-06-2022	2.5
Board meeting	17-08-2022	1
Meeting SBFI/SEFRI	09-09-2022	1
Board meeting	14-09-2022	1
Total presence hours of at least 1 board member (without preparatory work)		65

Regular tasks

- Elaboration of position papers
- Media interviews
- Informal discussions and meetings with partners like VSS/UNES
- Informal discussions and meetings with delegates
- Eurodoc meetings and representation
- Outreach activities
- Mail correspondence
- Contribution to national and international surveys, reports, etc.

3 Statutory Changes from mini-GA 2022

By the actionuni co-President, Hannah Schoch

Since Actionuni's statutes had been outdated as well as since new paragraphs that had previously been voted on still had to be incorporated, we proposed an overhaul of the statutes at the mini-GA 2022, which were accepted with some additional changes suggested and voted on during the meeting. The primary goal was to simplify and streamline the statutes where possible, to add the additions, and to have the statutes conform to our working reality. The statutes were passed by the assembly and came into effect on June 24, 2022. The statutes are in German. Translations into English and French are currently being prepared.

4 Actionuni priorities

By actionuni co-president Martina von Arx

Actionuni has no structural funding meaning that all work is done voluntarily. Consequently, the board sets priorities for topics to be addressed. Details on this years' priorities are described in the following sections.

The co-presidency would like to warmly thank all board members for their reliable and continuous investment within actionuni.

4.1 Strategy paper BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28

Together with the VSS/UNES, actionuni did a close follow-up on the mandate given to swissuniversities by the SHK/CSHE to write the strategy paper which will define the BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28.

For the first time, actionuni could give feedback on the strategy paper at **three occasions**. In November 2021, a meeting with the three “Stände” was organized during which we could elaborate our priorities for the strategy paper. Following this, actionuni has written two position papers referring to the development of the strategy paper. A first position paper commented the first draft circulated in March 2022. Then, the presentation of this draft was approved by the SHK/CSHE in May 2022. A second position paper was written in August 2022 regarding the finalized version of the strategy paper. This final version will be voted on by the SHK/CSHE in November 2022 building the basis for the BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28.

Overall, actionuni underlined the need for a sustainable management of human resources, especially regarding midlevel staff. We criticized the argument of a high personal fluctuation for the sake of excellence and argued in favor of stable working conditions favoring creativity and continuity in research and teaching.

4.2 Position Papers

- Änderung des Ausländer- und Integrationsgesetzes: Zulassungserleichterung für Ausländerinnen und Ausländer mit Schweizer Hochschulabschluss /
Modification de la loi fédérale sur les étrangers et l'intégration : admission facilitée pour les étrangers titulaires d'un diplôme d'une haute école suisse
- Totalrevision der Beitragsverordnung Innosuisse /
Révision totale de l'ordonnance sur les contributions d'Innosuisse
The board of actionuni warmly thanks Daniel Bolliger for his contribution as an insider of the topic.
- Actionuni Statement on Russia's Invasion of the Ukraine
<http://eurodoc.net/ukraine/statements-and-responses>

4.3 Petition Academia

By the actionuni Co-president Hannah Schoch

Within a bit more than a year the Petition Academia gathered more than 8'000 signatures. The aim also gained momentum through the work of the committee, as well as the Twitter-

movement under the Hashtag #IchbinHanna that emerged in Germany. This was reflected by Swiss Media in the Swiss-German part as well as in the Romandie. The Petition was handed in on October 8, 2021.

On June 9, 2022, the National Council voted in support of the Petition Academia in the form of the Postulat 22.3390 “Für Chancengleichheit und die Förderung des akademischen Nachwuchses / Pour l'égalité des chances et le soutien de la relève scientifique”.

With this postulate, the Federal Council (Bundesrat / Conseil fédéral) now:

- needs to conduct a detailed investigation and issue a report on questions of precariousness and equal opportunity for the mid-level staff at Swiss higher education institutions.
- needs to examine whether a significant number of stable positions for postdoctoral researchers can be created.

For more information, please check their homepage: <https://campaign.petition-academia.ch/>

5 Actionuni representation in national bodies

Actionuni is represented in several national bodies and commissions. Except for the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAR) actionuni has no right to vote. Actionuni is mostly represented as a consultative voice.

5.1 Swiss Accreditation Council (SAR)

By actionuni co-president Martina von Arx

The period 2021/2022 marked the last year of the second mandate period (2019-2022) of the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC). Up to now, actionuni held one and half a seat within the SAR. Florian Lippke will finish his second term (2 times 4 years) by the end of 2022 and cannot be reelected. Carla Duss had up to now a shared board position of actionuni and VSS/UNES.

In spring 2022 the SBF/SEFRI contacted actionuni regarding the end of term of the mandate of Florian Lippke. Within the short delay of two months, actionuni managed to recruit two candidates who could take over the mandate of Florian Lippke. The final decision and election of one of the two candidates was left to the SHK/CSHE. Only one week before the SKK/CSHE meeting in May, actionuni knew that the constitution of the SAR will be scaled down.

For the next mandate period, actionuni will only be represented by one delegate, namely Carla Duss. The VSS/UNES will also be represented by one person (Francesco Bee). Consequently, Martina did a clear statement during the SHK/CSHE meeting in which she stated actionuni's disappointment of the way communication and collaboration between the SBFI/SEFRI and actionuni has been handled. Some weeks later, actionuni received a short letter from the SBFI/SEFRI in which they excused themselves. Nevertheless, actionuni deeply regrets how the re-election was handled, cutting the voices of those who should have a say in the accreditation of higher education institutions.

5.2 Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE

By actionuni SHK/CSHE delegate Martina von Arx

Actionuni has participated in one plenary session and three SHK sessions during the period of 2021-2022. A recurring discussion point is the non-affiliation of Switzerland to Horizon Europe. Politicians start putting pressure on the SBFI/SEFRI to find a solution.

There is a stable and close collaboration with the VSS/CSHE regarding the plethora of agenda items of each meeting which is mutually appreciated.

Through personal exchanges actionuni could establish a collaborative relation with the person responsible for higher education politics in Switzerland at the SBFI/SEFRI. This type of collaboration is important, especially as actionuni still does not have structural funding.

5.3 Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

By the actionuni SNSF delegate Prabitha Urwyler

The whole board warmly thanks Prabitha Urwyler for her reliable engagement within actionuni over the last two years. We wish her all the best for her future.

5.3.1 SNSF Evaluation

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) mandated the Swiss Science Council (SSC) to evaluate the SNSF. Actionuni board members (Martina von Arx, Prabitha Urwyler and Sophie Girardin) and Young Academy representatives (Lucas Müller and Karin Spycher) participated in the site visit (Thursday, 13 January 2022, online) with an international panel of experts, conducted as part of the evaluation of the SNSF. The evaluation focused on the key funding instruments of the SNSF, and the impact of the SNSF funding policy

on the Swiss research and innovation system at all career levels. The final report on the SNSF evaluation published by SSC can be found here:

<https://wissenschaftrrat.ch/en/publications-ssc>

5.3.2 AARE

The SNSF is modernizing its grant management system (mySNF) as a part of its digitization program AARE. Actionuni board members (experienced and novice users of mySNF) participated in the design phase (14.06.2022 Interview) to provide user functionality requirements. The new solution is now in a BETA test phase and some of the actionuni board members have agreed to participate in the assessment (Oct 2022) of the BETA version (unofficial version, does not yet offer the full range of functionalities).

5.3.3 Working conditions of SNSF-employed research staff

SNSF commissioned the Swiss Competence Center for Social Sciences FORS to conduct a survey on the working conditions of SNF project staff. The report has been published in September 2022 and can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.snf.ch/en/slWEhKbS95Jnrciy/news/early-career-researchers-value-their-jobs-but-theres-room-for-improvement>

The report confirms the need to improve midlevel staff working conditions. Especially the harmonization of salaries and work percentages across the cantons should be addressed. Moreover, it reveals alarming numbers regarding harassment (gender, race, etc.) and non-scientific behavior at higher education institutions in Switzerland. On November 1, actionuni is invited to attend the meetings of the Research Council Executive Committee to discuss the findings of the report and its results.

5.4 Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities

By the Delegate to the Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities Lisa Rieble

I took over the position as delegate for the “swissuniversities Delegation Lehre” in April 2022 and have since participated in the two meetings that since have been held (25.05.2022 and 24.08.2022). The discussed topics from the two meetings are elucidated in the following.

a) The next funding round of the PgB Open Education 2025-28 and the project sketch and allocation of funds to the topics Open Science and Open Education were discussed.

b) The planning for the next network meeting (Oct-28) was finalized and the workshops and speakers were presented.

c) The Gymnasium level teaching and learning and the necessary skills for a transition to university were discussed in the context of the documents on the “further development of the gymnasium (high school diploma)” that has been send back for commentary.

d) We broadly discussed the questions the teaching delegation could amend to the questionnaire of the BFS/OFSP on the “social situation of students”. It was decided that the questions will stay the same for the next questionnaire and the BFS/OFSP was asked to evaluate whether it is possible to analyze the results on the basis of further criteria like the field of study to get a better insight. In general, it was seen that many students would like to have more education in the field of programming and would be interested in gaining competencies in data safety, data- and information processing. Many students hadn't made experiences with blended learning but those who did, reported them as positive. Contrary was the finding on online exams, which about 56% of students did not want to see increase. As Covid most likely had a big influence on how students see their education, the delegation is looking forward to the next evaluation which will shed light on how the above-mentioned points might have changed.

In general, the challenges of Covid were raised again. The delegation is sensitized for the increased challenges students and midlevel staff experienced and especially the need for further digital skills was mentioned several times. However, this topic has not been discussed extensively.

5.5 Application for a structured position for actionuni-VSS-swissfaculty – Update

By the actionuni co-president, Martina von Arx

Following discussions with VSS and swissfaculty in the aftermath of our joint meeting with swissuniversities held in November 2020, the three tiers decided to collaborate on a proposal to swissuniversities for a 60% secretarial and coordinatorial position shared by the three tiers. Martina von Arx took the lead on this proposal, in close collaboration with colleagues from VSS and swissfaculty.

The proposal for a for a shared 60% secretarial and coordination position of actionuni-VSS/UNES-swissfaculty was submitted on January 4, 2021, to swissuniversities. On February 25, 2021, the proposal was dismissed with the rationale that the three “Stände” had enough possibilities of participation. A request for reconsideration and for an open discussion submitted on April 25, 2021, has been postponed.

On December 3, almost one year after the initial proposal submission, swissuniversities offered a one-hour meeting to discuss the issue. Swissuniversities showed some understanding. Nevertheless, a solution could not be found. Swissuniversities agreed to make the rectors of the universities of the issue, with the idea to install a system similar to the one of the students (in which all midlevel staff would contribute a small amount of money per semester to local and national midlevel staff organizations).

In March 2022, a feedback from swissuniversities completely dismissed our claim for a shared secretarial and coordination position. After a debriefing within the three “Stände”, we realized that there has been a motion by the VSS/UNES for more participation in the parliament which has been rejected in 2020 also including actionuni and swissfaculty. Hence, the parliamentary way of finding a solution for structural funding is blocked for about 5 years at least.

5.6 Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars (ESKAS)

By the actionuni delegate to the ESKAS Sophie Girardin

ESKAS (Eidgenössische Stipendienkommission für ausländische Studierende /FederalCommission 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 on average). The goal of ESKAS is not to take in the typical “mainstream” high-achiever research candidates, but to encourage more diversity in research and to establish good relationships between Switzerland and other countries. 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 reviewing and rating 30-60 scholarship applications each. They then send to the Commission a recommendation on which applications 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, in March, May and December. Its work is supported by a Secretariat, which is part of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation ([SERI/SEFRI/SBFI](#)).

5.6.1 Summary of ESKAS meeting of October 29, 2021: Discussion about the [FRI/BFI](#) message 2025-28

This was the first physical meeting since March 2020, which was used to discuss all the topics that were pushed back because they were non-essential and ill-suited for discussions at an online meeting. The main discussion topics were:

- Requesting a budget increase from SERI/SEFRI/SBFI to increase the amount of the scholarships. The possibilities discussed were: increasing the monthly amount of the Master/PhD/research scholarships; increasing the PhD scholarship duration (from 3 to 4 years); and/or streamlining the scholarship amount (same salary for PhD students and postdoc)
- The postdoc scholarships: they last only for a year and for many fields, this is too short for a proper postdoc. The salary is low. For expectation management, these scholarships should maybe have a name change, for example one-year research stay for early-career scientists (but this complicates the administrative status across different universities and for e.g. visa applications). “Double dipping”: some postdocs are getting doubly paid, by both an ESKAS scholarship and by a grant from a university of their home country
- How to handle the scientific assessment of the increasing number of applications

5.6.2 Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 3, 2022: Accepting the call for tenders 2023-24

- The “call for tenders” for the scholarship 2023-24 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 2022-23 and will be disseminated among the embassies of all 184 countries of the program by the EDA/DFAE/FDFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs).
- When communicating the acceptance of the call for tenders, the ESKAS Secretariat will inform the SEFRI/SBFI that the current amount of the scholarships are not high enough and that the ESKAS budget should be increased.

5.6.3 Summary of ESKAS meeting of March 17-18, 2022: Selection of candidates for the 2022-23 scholarships (Part 1)

- 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. Overall, there was about 20% fewer applications than the average of previous years. This is likely due to Corona.

- Several measures regarding the war in Ukraine were decided:
 - Send a demand to Martina Hirayama (Secretary of state for education, research and innovation) to give funds for an extraordinary call for Ukrainian students and early career researchers. With a credit of 1.5 mio CHF, about 20 researchers (PhD students and postdocs) could be hosted in Switzerland.
 - Follow-up: the demand was refused by the SBF/SEFRI with the argument that this will be tasked to the SNSF, partially through the “Scholars at risk” program
 - Current Ukrainian, Bielorussian and Russian scholars whose scholarship is expiring can prolong it for 6 months
 - Ukrainian scholars whose applications are accepted may come to Switzerland as soon as they are accepted (in April 2022 instead of September 2022), granted that they are allowed to leave Ukraine
 - All Ukrainian scholarship applications were accepted. The quality of these applications was good to excellent. Good scholarships that would not have made the cut under normal circumstances were still accepted.
 - Scholarship applications from Russian and Bielorussian citizens were not given any special treatment
- Discussions on raising the amount of the ESKAS scholarships were continued

5.6.4 Summary of ESKAS meeting of May 6, 2022: Selection of candidates for the 2022-23 scholarships (Part 2)

- University 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. Overall, 737 applications were received and 232 were accepted (acceptance rate of 32 %, which is higher than usual)
- The ESKAS Secretariat could organise a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education, Research and Innovation, which is to take place in July 2022. During that meeting, they will ask for a budget increase, motivated by the need to raise ESKAS grants for PhD students, Master students and research scholars by 20 % (from 1920 to 2300 CHF/month). How to handle scholarships from people living in conflict areas will also be a topic of the meeting.

6 Actionuni representation in international bodies

6.1 Eurodoc

By the delegate to Eurodoc Hannah Schoch

Eurodoc, the European council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, is a grassroots federation of national associations of early career researchers (ECRs) from European countries. Currently, 26 national associations across Europe are its members. Its mission is to advocate for positive change in the policies, culture, and environment that affect the quality training, well-being and employment conditions of early career researchers.

Important topics tackled by Eurodoc the last twelve months included Russia's war in Ukraine and [the support of ECRs](#) affected by it – with a special task force formed within Eurodoc. Eurodoc's primary strength lies in cooperating with other partners and with EU policy makers, and key statements and participation include [reforming research assessment](#) or on [Open Science](#). Currently, Eurodoc is working on statements on mental health and on academic freedom (amongst others).

This year's AGM took place in hybrid form on June 10+11 2022 and tackled the following topics: annual reports and updated on Eurodoc activities, finances and budget, changes of the statutes and internal regulations, election of new board and secretariat, and the setting of Eurodoc's annual goals.

7 Actionuni member associations

By the actionuni Co-president, Martina von Arx

Actionuni has been consistently making efforts to support scientific staff in Switzerland. Since, last two years we have made additional efforts to connect and strengthen the relationships with all our member associations. Actionuni has continued to promote and support the initiatives of our member associations. Members were regularly informed about the activities of our other partners through mails, via Slack, our website, or social media. We have replied to individual queries of individuals. For next year, actionuni will try to facilitate the communication and networking actions across Switzerland. The introduction of Slack as a communication tool was a first step in this direction.

8 Media Coverage

- CH Media, 04.11.2021, Lucien Flurri: *Problemfall Doktorarbeit: Jeder Fünfte gibt auf*
<https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/schweiz/schweizer-universitaeten-problemfall-doktorarbeit-je-nach-uni-bricht-jeder-fuenfte-ab-was-dies-kostet-weiss-niemand-ld.2209494?reduced=true>
- RSI, SEIDISERA, 30.05.2022: *Come si diventa professori universitari in Svizzera*
<https://www.rsi.ch/rete-uno/programmi/informazione/seidiser/SEIDISERA-del-30.05.2022-Come-si-diventa-professori-universitari-in-Svizzera-15373393.html?f=podcast-shows>
- Alpha. Der Kadermarkt der Schweiz, 24.07.2022: *Prekäre Arbeitsverhältnisse an Schweizer Hochschulen*
<https://campaign.petition-academia.ch/prekare-arbeitsverhaeltnisse-an-schweizer-hochschulen-stellenmarkt-tamedia-23-7-2022/>
- Republik, 17.10.2022: *Erfolgsquote 1 Prozent*
<https://www.republik.ch/2022/10/17/erfolgsquote-1-prozent>