

**actionuni der Schweizer
Mittelbau**

Rämistrasse 62
CH-8001 Zürich
Telefon +4144 635 22 17
www.actionuni.ch
@Actionuni1
info@actionuni.ch



Annual Report 2022/23 of the Board and Delegates to the member associations

Reporting period: October 2022 to September 2023

Contents

1	Board of actionuni	3
2	Overview of activities	4
3	Actionuni priorities.....	5
3.1	Strategy paper: BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28	5
3.2	Position Papers.....	6
3.3	Actionuni Mental Health Survey	6
4	Actionuni representation in national bodies	7
4.1	Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC)	7
4.2	Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE	8
4.3	Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)	8
4.3.1	Participation in the SNSF Foundation Council meetings.	8
4.3.2	Actionuni-SNSF meeting.....	9
4.4	Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities.....	9
4.5	Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars (ESKAS).....	9
4.5.1	Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 9, 2022: Accepting the call for tenders 2023-24	10
4.5.2	Summary of ESKAS meeting of March 16-17, 2023: Selection of candidates for the 2023-24 scholarships (Part 1)	10
4.6	Summary of ESKAS meeting of May 5, 2023: Selection of candidates for the 2023-24 scholarships (Part 2).....	10
4.6.1	New ESKAS delegate 2024-2027	11
5	Actionuni representation in international bodies	12
5.1	Eurodoc	12
6	Actionuni member associations.....	12
7	Media Coverage.....	12

1 Board of actionuni

ABC of who is who?	Role	Period
Antonio di Maio	Board member	January 2023 to present
Anupamaa Rampur	Board member	January 2023 to present
Carla Duss	Delegate to the SAC	October 2021 to present (second 4-year mandate starting in 2023)
Hannah Schoch	Co-President	June 2022 to present
Lisa Rieble	Delegate to the Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities	April 2022 to present
Magali Bertrand	Delegate to Eurodoc	June 2022 to present
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 and in charge of Social Media presence	June 2022 to present
Rachel Demolis	SNSF Delegate	November 2022 to present
Sophie Girardin	Delegate to ESKAS, Treasurer and IT Manager	January 2020 to present (ESKAS); October 2023 to present (Treasurer)
Timon Elmer	Board member	June 2022 to present

2 Overview of activities

Type	Total hours (all board members)
11 Board meetings	48
Delegation work (preparation, meetings, etc.)	85
Position papers (especially regarding the ERI dispatch 2025-28)	43
External meetings with other stakeholders	26
Media (including Social Media presence)	40
General administrative tasks	18
Treasury	14
IT	15
actionuni Mental Health Survey	12
GA preparations	20
Total hours worked by all board members confounded	321

3 Actionuni priorities

By actionuni co-president Martina von Arx and Hannah Schoch

Actionuni continues its activities with the relentless voluntary work by board members and delegates. We are happy to count on several good people who are willing to dedicate some or even a lot of their spare time to the cause of actionuni. The co-presidency warmly thanks all of them for their continuous efforts, their reliability, and the team-spirit that we developed together over the past months.

It was a particularly busy year with the on-going development of the ERI dispatch 2025-28 and actionuni's involvement. In particular, the co-presidency would like to thank Sophie Girardin, who volunteered to take the lead for our position paper on this important strategy paper.

We also ensured our delegate positions in the bodies in which we have a consultative voice and in the SAC in which our delegate is allowed to vote. It is essential that we keep the voice of the midlevel staff heard in these consortiums. It allows actionuni to work as a bridge between local midlevel staff associations and national higher education politics. The co-presidency would like to thank all the delegates who continuously do their job in following up and attending the meetings of the respective stakeholders.

Further details on this years' activities are described in the following sections.

3.1 Strategy paper: BFI Botschaft / Message FRI 2025-28

By Sophie Girardin and Martina von Arx

The education-research-innovation dispatch 2025-2028 (ERI dispatch / "BFI Botschaft" in German / "Message FRI" in French / "Messaggio ERI 25-28" in Italian) is the central document of the federal ERI policy, which the Federal Council submits to Parliament for approval every four years. The 2025-28 ERI dispatch ([French version](#)/[German version](#)/[Italian version](#)) contains an assessment of the current funding period (2021-24), defines the priorities, objectives and measures for the new period, and requests the necessary funding ("guarantee credits") for their implementation. For the first time, the Federal Council has decided to publish an early draft and to put it out for consultation for relevant stakeholders to give feedback on it. The consultation procedure was open from June 2nd to September 24th, 2023.

Because the midlevel staff of Swiss higher education institutions is highly impacted by the ERI dispatch, actionuni wrote a position statement to the consultation, taking position on the issues most relevant to doctoral students, post-docs and non-professorial scientific employees:

- the **budgetary cuts** of the ERI dispatch, which actionuni opposes;
- the **objectives for higher education institutions**, which actionuni salutes, but would like to see completed with more attention to representation, to scientific integrity, and to improve research culture;
- **international cooperation**, which is essential for to quality research – in particular, a quick association to Horizon Europe;
- **academic career and next generation scientists**, who need support and career prospects;
- the **Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)**;
- **Equity: diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity**, which is rightly identified as a priority, but should be accompanied by concrete measures from all HEIs ;
- **open science**, which strategy should go hand in hand with guidance and resources for its practical implementation ;
- **ESKAS grants for international students**, which urgently need to be increased.

Actionuni's full response was elaborated by consulting its members and can be found on our website, in [French](#) and in [English](#).

3.2 Position Papers

By actionuni co-president Martina von Arx

Apart from the work that actionuni has put in the position paper regarding the ERI dispatch 2025-28 (see 3.1), actionuni responded to the consultation on the measures to ensure Switzerland's full association with the Horizon Europe research program. Detailed documentation on this issue is available in [German](#) and in [French](#).

3.3 Actionuni Mental Health Survey

By actionuni board members Timon Elmer, Neele Heiser, & Rachel Démolis

To better understand the mental health and well-being of mid-level academic staff in Switzerland, actionuni is launching a Swiss-wide mental health survey. The survey will be targeted at mid-level academic staff at all higher education institutions in Switzerland.

The survey will cover a range of topics, including mental health burden, stressors, work-life balance, working conditions, and the availability of support resources. The overarching objective is to obtain a general assessment of the mental health situation of mid-level staff in Switzerland and to identify any areas where mental health support and resources can be improved.

We formed a small working group of six members, consisting of board members of actionuni and mid-level staff representatives of two member associations. The content of the survey is currently being discussed. The aim is to launch the survey via the member associations in early 2024. We aim to publish a report on this survey in autumn 2024.

We hope that the results of this survey will help to improve the working and research conditions of mid-level academic staff in Switzerland, and ultimately their mental health and well-being.

4 Actionuni representation in national bodies

Actionuni is represented in several national bodies and commissions. Except for the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC), actionuni has no voting rights in any of them. Actionuni is mostly represented as a consultative voice.

4.1 Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC)

By actionuni SAR delegate Carla Duss

In December 2022, the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC) November concluded its second mandate term and the first cycle of institutional accreditations of the public higher education institutions with a review on the first 8 years of institutional accreditation according to the Higher Education Act (HedA). With the conclusion of this second term, Dr. Florian Lippke who represented actionuni in the first two mandate periods reached his term limit and had to step down. We thank Florian Lippke for his tireless efforts for non-professorial academic staff in the SAC. Unfortunately, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) decided to down-size the SAC and did not replace Florian Lippke. Carla Duss started the third mandate period of the SAC as sole representative of actionuni.

In the three meetings of the SAC from January to October 2023, the SAC started to work on the task it was given by the Swiss Higher Education Conference to propose a simplification of the renewal of accreditation. Most of the accreditation related decisions the new SAC has taken until October 2023 concern private higher education institutions, as the first institutional accreditations of public higher education institutions expire in 2024.

The SAC publishes its positive [decisions](#) and its [activity reports](#) on its website.

4.2 Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE

By actionuni SHK/CSHE delegate Martina von Arx

Our presence at the SHK/CSHE is relevant to make the voice of the mid level staff in Switzerland heard in a body constituted of the cantonal politicians responsible for the education department. Actionuni has participated in one plenary session and three SHK/CSHE sessions during the period of 2022-2023. Main topics concerned the evaluation of the HFKG, the finalization of the ERI dispatch (see also 3.1) and Switzerland's position in the European and international research landscape and network, also in the context of the war in Ukraine.

With the change of the presidency at VSS/UNES and their delegate to the SHK/CSHE, collaboration is no longer as close as it was before. Actionuni wishes to take up regular exchanges again, as it has proven to serve both parties in tackling political issues.

Moreover, collaboration and regular exchanges stabilized between actionuni and the division of higher education politics in Switzerland at the SBF/SEFRI. This allows actionuni to intervene and discuss upcoming issues early on by being invited to the respective meetings or by writing an opinion piece addressed to the responsible politicians or stakeholders.

4.3 Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

By the actionuni SNSF delegate Rachel Demolis

4.3.1 Participation in the SNSF Foundation Council meetings.

As actionuni delegate, I have attended 7 meetings in 2023. In this function, actionuni participated in the later stages of the discussions concerning the writing of the [new SNSF statutes for GO2024](#), a forward-looking structure for the further development of the SNSF.

An extraordinary meeting also took place during which the members of the Foundation Council and the members of the Research Council met. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss previous miscommunications and strategies for finding common grounds on issues related to the writing of statutes and conditions for the Research Council, to be implemented starting in 2025.

4.3.2 Actionuni-SNSF meeting

A meeting with Angelika Kalt will be held at the end of the year. During this meeting, three elements will be discussed: the new SNSF statutes, how to improve the conditions of SNSF PhD candidates, and strategies to support the improvement of the conditions of the midlevel staff and how the SNSF can contribute to incentivize the institutions which benefit from its founding to provide better working conditions for the employees funded by the SNSF.

4.4 Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities

By the delegate to the Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities Lisa Rieble

An update on the activities of the past year will be delivered during the General Assembly on November 3, 2023.

4.5 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 (25%-30 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 Technical Institute (EPFL and ETH), 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 midlevel 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).

4.5.1 Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 9, 2022: Accepting the call for tenders 2023-24

- The “call for tenders” for the scholarship 2024-25 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 had a few changes compared to the one for 2023-25. It 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. It will also inform that although the scholarships are awarded on criteria of scientific excellence, HEIs hosting scholarship recipients must sometimes deal with humanitarian problems (recipients having gone through very distressing situations in their own country, recipients not wanting to return to a country in war/under a totalitarian regime/where individual freedom is greatly restricted, etc).
- ESKAS PhD students generally seem satisfied by the quality of the supervision they receive. A survey of finishing ESKAS PhD students (N = 125) showed the following ratings for their academic supervision: very good (79%), fairly good (15%), good (3%), insufficient (1%), not good (2%)

4.5.2 Summary of ESKAS meeting of March 16-17, 2023: Selection of candidates for the 2023-24 scholarships (Part 1)

Unfortunately, due to professional obligations, Sophie was not able to attend this meeting.

- University/ETH 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 2022. This might be due to the Covid-19 crisis and to the poor economic situation.
- Discussions on raising the amount of the ESKAS scholarships were continued

4.6 Summary of ESKAS meeting of May 5, 2023: Selection of candidates for the 2023-24 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, 612 applications were received and 203 were accepted (success rate of 33%, higher than in previous years, due to the lower number

of candidacies received). 45 were attributed to research stays, 18 to Art Master students, 69 to PhD students and 71 to Postdocs. The successful applicants came from 69 different countries. In addition to the 203 newly granted scholarships, about 180 PhD students grant were reconducted for a year

- Swissuniversities wrote a letter to ESKAS to state that they support the work of ESKAS, but suggest an increase in the scholarship amount (too low to cover living expenses in some cities) and an increase of the duration of the PhD scholarships (currently 3 years, but a PhD thesis often requires 4 years).

ESKAS members agree with swissuniversities's suggestions, but unfortunately cannot decide to increase their budget themselves. They ask for a budget increase in the ERI dispatch 2025-28 for precisely these two points. These were communicated to State Secretary Martina Hirayama. Unfortunately, the situation is not promising: the ERI dispatch 2025-28 will be financially conservative and it is unlikely that the ESKAS budget will be increased enough (currently: about 10 mio/4 years).

- Solutions to increase PhD scholarship amounts in case the 2025-28 ESKAS budget is not increased were discussed. It was proposed to stop awarding scholarships for postdocs from "industrialized" countries, as these usually have access to other scholarships. This would allow reallocating money for PhD student scholarships.

4.6.1 New ESKAS delegate 2024-2027

At the actionuni General Assembly 2022, the actionuni members delegated to the Board the task of finding and electing the ESKAS delegate for the period 2024-2027, as that person would need to be appointed around spring 2023, when no GA was taking place.

The application was open during the month of March and we received one application. During its Board meeting of March 22, 2023, the actionuni Board elected Annelise da Silva Canavarro to the position of actionuni representative in the ESKAS for the period 2024-2027. Annelise has just finished her PhD at the University of Lausanne in the topic of international student and academic mobility and migration.

In November 2023, the Federal Council will officially appoint Annelise as the ESKAS delegate.

5 Actionuni representation in international bodies

5.1 Eurodoc

By the delegate to Eurodoc Magali Bertrand and 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, 25 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. It works for example on projects like CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment).

An update on the activities of the past year will be delivered during the General Assembly on November 3, 2023.

6 Actionuni member associations

By the actionuni co-presidents Martina von Arx und Hannah Schoch

Actionuni has been consistently making efforts to support scientific staff in Switzerland. The last few years, we have made additional efforts to connect and strengthen the relationships with all our member associations by promoting and supporting their initiatives to the best of our capacities. We respond to individual queries and members are regularly updated on our activities, as well as on the activities of partners and stakeholders through e-mail, or via Slack, our website, or social media. In particular, we will fuse the two separate Slack channels we use among the board and for the communication and support between actionuni and its members.

7 Media Coverage

By actionuni co-presidents Martina von Arx and Hannah Schoch

Hannah Schoch wrote two opinion pieces for the “Horizonte Magazin”. The “Horizonte Magazin” illustrates discourses around scientific research and research policy issues in Switzerland and abroad. The “Horizonte Magazin” is published by the Swiss National Science Foundation in collaboration with the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. The two opinion pieces can be read via the following links:

- [“Wir brauchen eine neue Kultur der Zusammenarbeit”](#) – March 2, 2023
- [“Diejenigen mit sicheren Arbeitsplätzen müssen das Ihre tun”](#) – September 7, 2023