



Dachorganisation des akademischen Mittelbaus in der Schweiz  
Organisation faîtière du corps intermédiaire académique en Suisse  
Federazione delle organizzazioni del corpo intermedio in Svizzera  
Umbrella organisation of academic mid-level staff in Switzerland

# **Annual Report 2024/25 of the Board to the Assembly of Delegates**

**October 2024 to November 2025**

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# 1 Board and delegates of actionuni

Who is who?	Role	Period
Laura Bitterli	Treasurer, board member	January 2025 to present
Rachel Demolis	Board member, SNF delegate	June 2022 to present
Antonio di Maio	Board member	January 2023 to present
Carla Duss	Delegate to the SAR	October 2021 to present (end of mandate 2026)
Timon Elmer	Board member, SWiMS-team	June 2022 to present
Anne-Lise Erismann	Delegate to the ESKAS	March 2023s to present
Isabelle Ferrer	Board member, future delegate to swissuniversities teaching delegation	January 2025 to present
Joanna Haupt	Co-president	October 2023 to present
Chantal Hinni	Eurodoc delegate	September 2025 to present
Neele Heiser	Board member, Delegate to SHK, SWiMS team	June 2022 to present
Laure Piguet	Co-President	October 2023 to present
Melanie Röthlisberger	Open Science Delegate	Not active anymore
Joanna Rutkowska	IT and social media manager, Eurodoc delegate, board member	October 2023 to present (delegate) August 2024 to present (board member) January 2025 to present (IT and social media manager)
Simon Scherrer	Delegate to swissuniversities teaching delegation	January 2025 to present
Philipp Walch	Board member and SNF delegate	August 2024 to present
Myra Muzaffar	Board member	January 2025 to present

## 2 Overview of activities

Category	Number of hours
Survey	73
Presidency	80
GA (preparation-etc.)	32
Tresory	23
Admin (Mails-Slack-Minutes)	41
Position Paper (medias, allies, stakeholders..)	39
Delegate	321
BM	134
External Meetings	33
IT and social medias	9
Total of hours	780

### 3 Actionuni priorities

*By actionuni co-presidents Laure Piguet and Joanna Haupt*

The primary objective of actionuni is and remains to improve the working and living conditions of mid-level staff. 2025 was an extremely productive year in this regard. First, existing problems became particularly visible thanks to new data obtained by the SWiMS Team (Swiss-wide mental health survey). Secondly, budget cuts at the federal and cantonal levels announce serious deterioration in working conditions.

As anticipated in our last annual report, our priority during 2025 was to mobilize against the budget cuts planned by the Confederation. After responding to the consultation on the cuts, we co-organized a national mobilization on October 1, 2025. On this occasion, we were able to strengthen our relations with our members, with the Swiss students' associations (VSS-UNES-USU), and the public service union (SSP-VPOD). These mobilizations gave actionuni a boost in visibility. This is shown by the increase in the number of emails from journalists, members of the mid-level staff asking for our help, and professors requesting to subscribe to our (non existing) newsletter. We are happy with this development, as it shows that we are doing a good job at all levels. However, as always, this good news is potentially threatened by our lack of resources.

At the same time, we have continued the policy of political entryism pursued by our predecessors. Actionuni remains a key contact for all national institutions involved in university policy as the association representing academic mid-level staff in Switzerland . We currently have three representatives at the SNSF Delegates' Assembly, one representative at the SHK, and we have had meetings with both SEFRI and swissuniversities, giving us the opportunity to make our demands heard. The difficulty of finding the right balance between participating in power structures and maintaining our critical capacity has been greatly alleviated by the fact that the main stakeholders in the academic landscape are positioning themselves as our allies in the context of budget cuts. We have therefore faced some changes in the way we approach these institutions.

Another priority for actionuni was the analysis and publication of the Swiss-wide mental health survey. After collecting the data in 2024, the SWiMS team transformed it into an extremely detailed report in 2025. Thank you to the team for their tireless efforts (Patricia Eiche, Timon Elmer, Neele Heiser, and Zoran Kovacevic). The co-presidents then drafted a policy statement to put the data into context and make policy recommendations based on it. On the strategic level, in June 2025, the board decided to notify the higher education institutions with which we work closely before publishing the survey. The survey was therefore sent on November 15 to the following institutions, informing them that we were seeking dialogue and would be delighted to present the survey to them soon: SNSF, Swiss Academy of Sciences, SERI/SBFI, swissuniversities, Swiss Science Council (SWR), ETH Board, Swiss Young Academy. The survey will be published on December 1.

We have also carried out several internal reforms. On the one hand, we have modernized our image through a graphic redesign and a complete makeover of our website. We have also reorganized the workspace on Slack in order to communicate better with our members. A working group has been reviewing the statutes, which will be discussed by the general assembly. We also recruited a second delegate for eurodoc and created a working group on open science.

After a year of growth and transformation, 2026 should be a year of stabilization. The aim will be not to start new projects, but rather to continue and complete those already underway. One of the co-presidents is leaving us at the end of the year, and we will need to manage the transition. Actionuni is doing well; we have grown stronger in the face of budget cuts and feel capable of continuing our commitment. Joanna H. is leaving with regret, but with a sense of satisfaction at having been part of changing actionuni internally and in its external perception. The co-presidents would like to thank all their colleagues for this year of collective struggle. It was a busy and intense year, but the atmosphere was always pleasant and very constructive.

### **3.1 Situation on the federal level**

*By Joanna Haupt, co-president of actionuni*

On September 20, 2024, the Federal Council presented a program aimed at cutting public spending. A few months earlier, the Federal Department of Economic Affairs had commissioned Serge Gaillard, former director of the Swiss Trade Union Federation (USS-SGB), to submit a report identifying areas where cuts could be made in order to comply with the debt brake (Schuldenbremse, frein à l'endettement). With the help of neoliberal economists from the University of Lucerne, the "Gaillard report" proposed cuts of several billion between 2027 and 2030. The education and research sector is one of the areas most affected, alongside culture and environment protection. The PgB "support for young scientists" (Nachwuchsförderung/Promotion de la relève scientifique) being on the Gaillard's list, most work in progress is put on hold.

In their initial public statements, universities, through the Netzwerk future, take a stand against budget cuts. A broad coalition is formed, ranging from swissuniversities to student organizations and the SNSF. In February 2025, the Federal Council announced that budget estimates were better than expected and that certain programs could be maintained until the end of 2026. This was the case for the Projektgebunde Beiträge. After the consultation ended in May 2025, the Federal Council published its message on budget cuts in September 2025. In its current version, the budget cuts plans to save CHF 200 million per year by increasing tuition fees and withdrawing CHF 130 million per year from the SNSF's budget. The SNSF estimates that this cut will prevent 500 projects and 1,500 research contracts from being created.

The budget relief package will be discussed in the Council of States during the winter session, which begins on December 1. The aim is for the package to come into force in January 2027. The various thematic commissions must give their opinion on the parts of the program, and the

WBK/CSEC-S decided by 7 votes to 2, with 1 abstention, to request that the savings be achieved without legislative changes and without transferring costs to the cantons (press release). Some of the budget cuts require legislative changes and may therefore be subject to a referendum.

## 3.2 Anti-austerity campaign

*By Laure Piguet, co-president of actionuni*

At the 2024 general assembly, it was decided that we should prepare to fight the budget cuts, particularly by informing colleagues and holding information meetings at universities. Actionuni was already discussing potential collaborative actions with VPOD and the SNSF via the Delegates Assembly (see section 4.3).

Actionuni convened a first anti-austerity meeting with member associations on 29 January 2024. The following was decided:

- a) To write a joint statement from the academic mid-level staff associations explaining why we are mobilising and what we want.
- b) To raise awareness and speak out, using following arguments:
  - i) The financial incentives (budget cuts will reduce future profits) and Switzerland's image as a world leader in research and teaching.
  - ii) The precarious position of academic mid-level staff and the fact that they would be the first to be affected by the cuts.
  - iii) The cuts would prevent the implementation of measures recently decided upon in response to the demands of the Academia Petition, which was signed by over 8,600 colleagues.
- c) To organize anti-austerity general assemblies on campuses in collaboration with unions and student associations, with the aim of combining our efforts so as to minimise the time commitment required.
- d) A special 'anti-austerity' committee was elected, comprising members of actionuni and the associations. The following people volunteered and were elected: Patricia Eiche (AVUBA), Kelly Harrison (ACIDUL), Neele Heiser (actionuni), Arturo Winters (AVETH) and Laure Piguet (actionuni).

With regard to written work, the anti-austerity committee produced a press release (in French, English, Italian and German), a leaflet (same languages) and a response to the consultation (Vernehmlassungsantwort). As expected, the **press release** sent at the end of February did not receive any press coverage but now they know who to contact if they want to write about the problems in the academic system. On the other hand, it circulated well on LinkedIn. Some universities, including those in Lausanne and Fribourg, circulated it on internal lists. Designing the **flyer** was somewhat complicated (many thanks to Kelly Harrison!), as we attempted to publish it with UNES, but were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, our flyer was distributed at multiple

events between April and October 2025, either in its original form or modified by the associations.

In our response to Federal Council's open consultation on austerity measures ([German](#), [French](#)), we decided to avoid the usual arguments, such as 'endangering Switzerland's future', and so on (not that these are necessarily bad arguments, just classic ones). The anti-austerity committee tried to highlight that these measures are dangerous and that academic mid-level staff and students will bear their full burden. It was argued that there is a danger not only to science, but also to ethics. We also opposed the idea of charging students higher tuition fees based on the principle that consumers should pay. Nine associations, including actionuni, submitted our response.

During the same period, member associations organised demonstrations and assemblies on campuses in collaboration with student and trade unions (UNIFR, UNIL, UNIGE and UNIBAS). In Lausanne, a general assembly on 10 April adopted a joint resolution signed by around thirty associations from across Switzerland. On 5 May, students organised a mobilisation with speeches from members of the academic mid-level staff, which drew around 100 participants. The CSWM organised a meeting to gauge staff concerns, which was attended by around 60 people. Another mobilisation was organised by VPOD. There has been some contact with students, but professors currently appear to be relatively unconcerned. In Basel, a mobilisation took place at the end of April with around 50 participants, including the student association and the SSP/VPOD union. The committee believes that researchers feel powerless in the face of the cuts. In Geneva, the SSP/VPOD organised a mobilisation. In Neuchâtel, a mobilisation organised by the SSP/VPOD union took place on 7 April.

The anti-austerity working group convened a second meeting with member associations on 9 May 2024 to discuss the national mobilisation on 1 October. The plan was to hold several mobilisations on different campuses, as well as a mobilisation in Bern at 5 pm. Coordinating with UNES was not easy. The student association wanted to retain control over the organisation of the mobilisation in Bern. For reasons of time and strategy, we decided not to insist. The association's idea for this mobilisation was to try to attract the attention of parliamentarians who did not necessarily support our cause, and, for that reason, to avoid collaborating with trade unions. UNES initially banned flags, but then backed down. We tried to ease the tension between UNES and SSP/VPOD by arguing that they needed to work together and try to move in the same direction, albeit with different strategies. To encourage people to mobilise on 1 October and to inform colleagues about what to expect, we distributed leaflets and used LinkedIn. The LinkedIn campaign was successful, gaining us a large number of followers — people we could contact again at other stages of the mobilisation if necessary.

Demonstrations against federal budget cuts took place on 1 October at the University of Geneva (SSP/VPOD, ACCORDER, CUAE), the University of Lausanne (ACIDUL), the University of Fribourg (SSP/VPOD – strike), the University of Neuchâtel (ACINE, SSP/VPOD), the Università della Svizzera italiana (SSP), the University of Zurich (VAUZ-AVETH-SSP/VPOD) and the University of Basel (AVUBA + student association/SSP/VPOD). The mobilisation attracted the attention of the press, particularly in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. For articles and



radio interviews in French, see ACIDUL [website](#). Philipp Walch was interviewed by Radio Télévision Suisse Romande, and Mosé Commetta was interviewed by Swiss Italian Radio and Television, both as representatives of the academic mid-level staff of USI. The demonstration in Bern, organised entirely by UNES, focused primarily on opposition to tuition fees. However, UNES also campaigned against cuts to research funding. Actionunini's two co-presidents, Laure Piguet and Joanna Haupt, gave a speech in Federal Square. This was an important moment in establishing actionuni's role as the 'spokesperson' for the academic mid-level staff in Switzerland and as a defender of research interests, given the silence of the professorial body on this issue.

In addition to organising the event on 1 October, we were contacted by the Green Party, as well as numerous other cultural and educational organisations, including UNES, Suisseculture, Cinésuisse and Schweiz Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendverbände. On 28 August, we participated in a discussion with these associations and agreed to present a united front against the cuts, joining forces to reject them and prevent anyone from trying to pull the wool over our eyes. The Greens drafted a joint letter, which the member associations decided to sign after a vote by email.

## 3.2 Mental Health Survey

*By Neele Heiser and Timon Elmer, SWiMS-Team*

Switzerland still lacks comprehensive national data on the mental health of academic mid-level staff. While some universities, such as ETH Zurich, have run internal surveys, no coordinated nationwide effort has existed since the last report by actionuni in 2009. To close this gap, actionuni and 13 mid-level staff associations launched SWiMS 2024 as a bottom-up initiative.

The Swiss-Wide Mental Health Survey (SWiMS) 2024 examines the mental health and well-being of Switzerland's academic mid-level staff, including doctoral candidates, postdocs, and other academic employees without professorships. Its goal is to identify key stressors and resources, providing a data-driven foundation for improved support structures and higher education policies. Data was collected between May 2024 and October 2024, featuring responses from 2,518 individuals across 13 Swiss higher education institutions.

In 2025, the SWiMS team prepared institution-specific reports, as well as an overview national report, each spanning more than 200 pages. The institutional reports were sent out to the contact persons at each partaking mid-level staff organization in early October 2025. The national report will be published on December 1st, 2025.

Detailed item formulations, variables, etc. can be found in the codebook and survey-PDF on the Open Science Framework repository of this project: <https://osf.io/kqdnm>. The analysis code can be found on <https://github.com/timonelmer/SWiMS>.

The SWiMS team consists of Zoran Kovacevic (ETH Zürich), Patricia Eiche (avuba, University of Basel), Neele Heiser (University of Geneva), and Timon Elmer (University of Zurich).

## **3.4 Makeover**

*By Joanna Haupt, co-president of actionuni*

Since becoming co-presidents, we have regretted the outdated look of the actionuni logo. Last year, we contacted a graphic designer and an IT company. This year, we proceeded as planned at the 2024 AGM. We have been using our new visual identity on LinkedIn, in our document headers and email signatures since August with great satisfaction.

The website is under construction and we hope to be able to present it at the general assembly in December. One of the goals of this new site is to host the valuable and extensive documentation of the petition academia and then close the site. Joanna H. will be in charge of moving the documentation from one website to the other.

During the year, Joanna Rutkowska, our IT manager, also restructured our Slack workspace. We removed inactive members and defined three external channels and two main internal channels for communication within the board and with our members.

Joanna R. also regained access to our LinkedIn page. This social network gives us excellent visibility. Since the beginning of the year, our content has been viewed more than 40,000 times and has generated more than 800 reactions. We are very pleased with this result, which is encouraging for the future.

Laure and Joanna R. have also been working on revising the statutes. These lacked clarity and had not reflected actionuni's practice for years. They will be submitted for approval at the general assembly in December.

Finally, actionuni will celebrate its 25th anniversary on the day of the general assembly with a panel discussion of members and former members of actionuni. This panel will be an opportunity to discuss the past and future of actionuni and to reflect collectively on the working conditions of mid-level faculty through a presentation and discussion of the SWiMS survey.

## **4 Actionuni representation in national bodies**

Actionuni is represented in several national bodies and commissions. Except for the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAR), 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 SAC delegate Carla Duss*

The SAC is the accreditation body for decisions under the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA). The SAC meets on a quarterly basis. The HEdA distinguishes institutional accreditations and program accreditations.

The website of the SAC lists all accredited institutions and programs: <https://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/decisions/>

#### **4.1.1 Institutional Accreditations**

The year 2024 marked the start of the first re-accreditation cycles of higher education institutions: The Berner Fachhochschule, the Pädagogische Hochschule Bern and the Pädagogische Hochschule Luzern gained their institutional re-accreditation. In the year 2024, the SAC decided on four institutional accreditations and confirmed eleven institutional accreditations after fulfillment of conditions.

The federal administrative court and the federal court decided to confirm two decisions the SAC had taken previously, BG 2C\_548/2023 confirmed a decision of non-admission and and BVG B-5968/2023 confirmed a non-accreditation.

In the three meetings in the year 2025, the SAC had to take decisions on seven admissions to the procedure of institutional accreditation, five longlists of experts for institutional accreditations, three institutional accreditations and twelve decisions on fulfillment of conditions.

#### **4.1.2 Program Accreditations**

Program accreditations are compulsory for study programs for medical professions and health care degree programs. In 2024, no programs were accredited based on the Federal Act on Medical Professions in Higher Education. The SAC on the other hand decided to accredit nine programs for health professions in accordance with the HEdA and the Federal Act on Healthcare Professions.

In the three meetings of the SAC in the year 2025, two programs gained accreditation under the Federal Act on Medical Professions in Higher Education and two programs gained accreditation under the Federal Act on Healthcare Professions.

#### **4.1.3 Recognition of Accreditation Agencies**

The SAR also has the authority to grant Swiss and international accreditation agencies the right to carry out procedures in accordance with the HFKG. The agencies can apply to carry out institutional accreditation, programme accreditation or both types of procedure. In the reporting year, the SAR renewed the recognition of the accreditation, certification and quality assurance institute ACQUIN and the agency for quality assurance and accreditation AQ Austria.

### 4.1.3 Projects

At the start of the current mandate period, the SAC launched two major projects:

1. The project to further develop the SAC office, taking into account governance requirements, was successfully completed in 2024.
2. Ten years after the introduction of the quality standards, the SAR concluded that their revision was necessary. Some of the standards are vaguely formulated, some of them too complex in their structure. This makes the work of the expert panels in the institutional accreditations more difficult and has a negative impact on their reporting and the SAC's decision-making process. The SAC sought to simplify the standards, taking into account the existing mandate of the Higher Education Conference. A revised set of quality standards was developed in 2024. By unbundling and clarifying the language, it should be possible to make faster and clearer decisions in future and reduce the workload for universities. At its December meeting, the SAC approved the revised standards for consultation by the Higher Education Conference. The question of whether a distinction should be made between the period of validity between initial and renewed accreditation remains open. In addition, with its new guidelines for accreditation agencies, the SAC aims to improve the basis for decision-making by declaring what information and statistics it expects as part of the assessment criteria for the standards.

The Higher Education Conference started the consultation process regarding the revised set of quality standards in September 2025. The consultation will be concluded on 15 December 2025. The actionuni representative in the SAC was involved in the detailed work of this project.

## 4.2 Swiss Conference of Higher Education SHK/CSHE

*By actionuni SHK delegate Neele Heiser*

### 4.2.1 Summary of Fachkonferenz meeting of January 24th

I requested that the University Council and the Swiss National Science Foundation review international best practices. The aim was to examine which of these practices can be adopted in our system.

### 4.2.1 Summary of SHK meeting of February 28th

Official announcement of the budget cuts. Vote on how to use the small amount of budgets, unfortunately the SHK did not vote to prioritize the PgB relève académique/mid-level staff conditions.

Together with the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, we presented our position on the urgent changes needed in higher education. We shared some best practices from abroad and emphasized the need to consult mid-level staff

about their working conditions, needs, and well-being. On various topics, I emphasized the need to include mid-level staff in working groups.

#### **4.2.2 Summary of follow-up meeting November 5th**

We have discussed the further implementation of the PgB with SERI, swissuniversities, and académies suisses. The main focus was on how to implement lasting solutions with limited resources and how these action plans could be integrated into a national plan to improve higher education in Switzerland. This discussion is still ongoing, and we will continue to exchange ideas online and offline in the coming months.

### **4.3 Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)**

*By the actionuni SNSF delegate Philipp Walch, amended by Laure Piguet and Rachel Demolis*

The Delegates Assembly of the SNSF, where actionuni is represented by three board members: Rachel Demolis, Laure Piguet, and Philipp Walch, discusses important strategic matters and advises the SNSF on decisions that affect the research environment at the represented institutions. This academic year was coined by the looming budgetary restrictions that will heavily affect the SNSF's ability to continue all funding schemes and programs as initially planned. Much of the work of the Delegates Assembly was therefore dedicated to advising on contingency planning and deciding on priorities for essential funding schemes. Finally, the situation of early career researchers, as well as the role the SNSF play in fostering their development has been at the center of these deliberations. Since it is one of the core missions and values of the SNSF to advance young talents, we gave the recommendation to limit the impact of budget cuts on the academic mid-level staff as much as possible, by prioritizing Career funding and by maintaining and further developing measures targeted towards the enabling of non-linear career paths.

#### **4.3.1 Summary of SNSF meeting of 13.12.2024**

We discussed the interplay between the different bodies of the SNSF (Research Council, Academic Board and Delegates Assembly) and how this developing environment can be further improved. Furthermore, the projected budget cuts were discussed with Thorsten Schwede. We furthermore addressed the coordination of the next roadmap research infrastructures, as well as the ORD Strategy Council.

#### **4.3.2 Summary of SNSF meeting of 20.03.2025**

Again, the budget cuts, and the planned contingency strategies were discussed and evaluated. The scenario planning included a worst-case, intermediate and best case scenario. Furthermore, we elaborated on strategies to improve lobbying on behalf of the academic research community, including which other stakeholders to bring on board and how to coordinate messaging between the different entities that were involved. We furthermore

received an update from the Research Council by the Academic Board, detailing how the transition to the new structure of the council should proceed.

#### **4.3.3 Summary of SNSF retreat of 03.07.2025**

The in-person only meeting in Murten / Morat was dedicated to the scenario planning for the budget cuts, as well as the refining of the communication strategy during the ongoing mobilization and political lobbying. We furthermore conducted group work on the role that the SNSF can play in sustainable research (focusing on the ecological aspects). This included recommendations on travel policies, as well as other measures the SNSF can take.

#### **4.3.4 Summary of SNSF meeting of 28.08.2025**

We revised the final statement of the Delegates Assembly about the budget cuts. This followed a survey among all members, as well as the previous discussions. From actionuni's side, we emphasized the importance of the preservation of funding for early-career researchers as well as the protection of academic mid-level staff from increasing precarity. Additionally, we organized the attendance of members of the Delegates Assembly in three workshops dedicated to the development of the Multi-Year Program 2029-2032. Philipp Walch was elected to join the second and third workshop (in October and December respectively). We furthermore discussed the expansion of the Delegates Assembly to non-commercial research institutes and mandated the Bureau to develop a proposition, based on the requirements of admission that we defined. Lastly, we validated the statement on sustainability that was developed in the aftermath of the Retreat.

#### **4.3.5 Summary of SNSF workshop of 15.10.2025**

This workshop was the second in a set of three: The first one (in September) was dedicated to the core values of the SNSF, as well as its core missions. All workshops were attended by different stakeholders of the SNSF: Administrative Staff, Members of the Policy Committee, the Academic Board, the Research Council and the Delegates Assembly. In the second workshop we focused on three aspects of the Multi-Year Program: International Relations, Diversity and Transversal Themes (research valuation, AI and resilience). Philipp Walch worked on the Diversity stream, where we discussed measures the SNSF can take to promote increased research diversity, as well as diversity among researchers. Possible target points were identified: The pool of applicants, the pool of reviewers, and the method of evaluation. Several scenarios were discussed, such as including a double-blind review stage to reduce biases, measures to increase the potential of interdisciplinary projects and the instatement of ambassadors to increase awareness in underrepresented and underserved research communities. In a second session, workplace conditions, precarity and harassment were discussed and clear goals and measures were incentivized: Mandatory training for group leaders, increased recognition of non-linear career paths, incentives for the university to promote stabilization in the academic mid-level, as well as the requirement for institutions to combat harassment. The last of these workshops will be held in December, bridging and

combining the previous working groups to make recommendations for the Multi-Year Programme 2029-2032.

## **4.4 Teaching Delegation of swissuniversities**

*By the actionuni delegate to the Teaching delegation Simon Scherrer*

The swissuniversities Teaching Delegation is scheduled to meet four times in 2025, with three of the meetings having taken place before October. The general focus of the meetings was placed on advancing major regulatory projects and managing financial opportunities.

The DeIL successfully launched the Verifiable Credentials (VC) pre-project, securing the necessary participation of SWITCH, and commencing a survey among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In regulatory matters, the delegation confirmed the revision of the nqf.ch-HS qualification framework to reintroduce “Continuing Education”. Furthermore, the DeIL allocated an unexpected additional CHF 2.4 million federal funding for 2026 to support the ongoing PgB Open Education & Digital Competencies projects. Finally, regarding the Concordance List (regulating transitions between Master’s programs across different HEIs), the delegation reinforced the practice to keep the list concise, choosing to reject numerous overly specific and unrelated proposals for the annual update.

### **4.4.1 Summary of TD meeting of Feb 5, 2025**

The delegation defined its priorities, which include Inter- & Transdisciplinarity (the theme of the Netzwerk Lehre meeting on Nov 7, 2025), Personalization & Flexibilization (potential theme for the Netzwerk Lehre meeting in 2026) and Future of Continuing Education. Regarding Verifiable Credentials (VC), the proposal to expand VCs nationwide was confirmed, with no confirmed financial plan yet. The adaptation to nqf.ch-HS was also discussed, approving a proposal from the ad-hoc working group to reintroduce descriptors for Continuing Education, with references to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels 6-8. Regarding the Concordance List, the delegation agreed to promote a short, concise list and instructed the General Secretariat (GS) to suspend this year’s applications and prepare clear criteria for future updates.

### **4.4.2 Summary of TD meeting of May 22, 2025**

The DeIL continued working on the Verifiable Credentials (VC) pre-project, which had been approved by the swissuniversities Board for a duration of 6 months. Switch did not commit to participating at its own expenses, therefore the GS was asked to prepare a formal letter from the swissuniversities president to the Switch Foundation Board to press their involvement. Concerning the nqf.ch-HS changes, due to reservations from the DeIL regarding potential overregulation, Microcredentials were not explicitly mentioned in the proposal. Furthermore, the delegation approved the allocation of an unexpected additional CHF 2.4 million in funding to the existing ten projects under the PgB Open Education & Digital Competencies program, using the existing distribution key.

#### **4.4.3 Summary of TD meeting of August 20, 2025**

In a significant step to move the Verifiable Credentials pre-project forward, Switch confirmed its participation, allocating 10-12 working days. A survey was launched among HEIs (until end of September 2025) to assess the current state. The delegation decided on the PgB Open Education & Digital Competencies financing for 2026, officially distributing the CHF 2.4 million budget to the ten ongoing projects. The adjusted nqf.ch-HS version was formally adopted by the DeIL for submission to the CSHE, having addressed all concerns. A preliminary discussion took place on the upcoming Revision of the Coordination Ordinance, addressing potential elements like regulating microcertifications, rules for refusing admission based on knowledge security, etc. The final program for the Netzwerk Lehre 2025 meeting was presented, confirming the format, keynote speakers, and podium discussion participants. The issue of Disadvantage Compensation (Nachteilsausgleich) advanced with the discussion of a draft for an internal Good Practice paper.

### **4.5 Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars (ESKAS)**

By the actionuni delegate to the ESKAS Annelise da Silva Canavarro (former, now-Erismann)

#### **4.5.1 Summary of ESKAS meeting of December 6, 2024**

Back in December, members of the ESKAS commission were still discussing whether the ESKAS budget for the upcoming term would be cut in half. In the end, the decision resulted in a reduction of one million francs for 2025.

At that time, the prevailing sentiment within the presidency and the secretariat - and consequently, among commission members - was that it was essential to lobby political figures in the Federal Parliament, particularly those sitting on the Finance Commission and late the Ständerat members. An additional letter, hand-signed by all ESKAS members, was written during this meeting and sent to members of parliament.

Commission members were provided with a set of the most viable arguments to support their lobbying efforts. These included, among others, the potential harm to the reciprocity clause that benefits Swiss students. Less persuasive in the current political climate was the argument that ESKAS functions similarly to foreign research investment, often perceived as a form of development aid that might foster unwanted highly skilled migration to Switzerland.

Some commission members expressed frustration about what they perceived as inaction by various decisive categories in university management, such as deans. Discussions followed regarding possible scenarios and pragmatic solutions in the event of a drastic budget reduction - such as how to reduce the effects on current scholarship holders and how to adapt selection practices for new cohorts.



#### **4.5.2 Summary of ESKAS meeting of March 20 and 21, 2025**

The first-day meeting opened with the presentation and validation of the Federal Office for Culture's scholarship decisions according to the country pools, followed by initial discussions on the attribution of new stipends for 2026-2027. The selection criteria were recalled: excellence, originality, feasibility, the host institution's/professor's interest, and the expected multiplication effect. ESKAS commission members with the right to select candidates discussed in detail their choices for main and reserve candidates. This year, there were no favorites on the waiting list.

Discussions began with cases from countries eligible under ESKAS' so-called reciprocity agreements, followed by applications from so-called priority countries (in essence: BRICS). As usual, the commission reviewed a demographic and disciplinary breakdown of the selected applicants - an exercise considered particularly important given that ESKAS is understood as an investment in individual careers, in contrast to the SNSF. Some members highlighted ESKAS's mission of fostering foreign nationals to act as ambassadors of Switzerland abroad/in their home countries, and the unequal value an ESKAS scholarship may have to researchers from the Global South compared to their European or American counterparts. Others argued the opposite, hoping the program will further evolve beyond a development-aid logic and instead serve to internationalize Swiss higher education by exposing Swiss research to excellent foreign scholars. For several professorial members, this rationale also reinforced their view that discussions about academic precarity apply less to ESKAS, given its nature as a temporary resource.

Considering the austerity measures currently imposed on ESKAS, the commission reflected on the overall scholarship amounts and the opportunity costs associated with different categories of investment - for example, the comparative cost of funding an ESKAS postdoc versus a research stay; whether a new category, such as 'visiting fellows', might eventually replace the current postdoc and research-stay framework. Members also questioned to what extent ESKAS can meaningfully compensate for structural inequalities, especially as the program aims to grow more diverse as it in reality remains subject to recurring budget cuts.

One case resembling a co-tutelle was highlighted as a positive example of ESKAS funding: the support of a Ph.D. project already successfully underway in the home country, with ESKAS financing only the international research stay.

As in the meeting of December 6, the commission revisited scenarios expected under the next FRI message (2028 onwards), including the possibility of increasing scholarship amounts within the boundaries of university autonomy. The program is also expected to change its official name soon, no longer referring to "foreign students" but to "international researchers." Finally, the planned Swiss-wide meeting of all ESKAS scholarship holders was postponed to late 2026.

### **4.5.3 Summary of ESKAS meeting of May 9, 2025**

I could not attend this meeting because I had just started a new position that same week and did not feel it was appropriate to request time off. When I contacted the secretariat to ask for the minutes (the week of November 13), I was informed that they are currently overloaded with work and that the preparation of the minutes is still on hold. The next meeting is scheduled for December 5, which I will attempt to attend. No further details are available at this stage.

## **5 Other actionuni delegates**

### **5.1 Eurodoc**

*By Eurodoc delegates, Joanna Rutkowska (JR) and Chantal Hinni*

actionuni is one of the National Associations (NA) that are members of Eurodoc, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, whose main aim is to represent doctoral candidates and junior researchers (postdoctoral level) at European level in matters of education, research and professional development of their careers. Joanna Rutkowska (JR) represented actionuni as a delegate to Eurodoc throughout the term, and Chantal Hinni joined as a delegate in September 2025. In addition, since August 2025, Joanna Rutkowska served on the advisory board of Eurodoc. The delegates received and responded to correspondence from Eurodoc, reviewed documents from Eurodoc and provided feedback on draft documents. The delegates attended NA meetings and the General Assembly as representatives of actionuni, and regularly informed actionuni members of the content of the meetings and any other Eurodoc activities via slack channel #Eurodoc.

#### **5.1.1 Summary of Eurodoc NA meeting: 25.02.25**

As actionuni's delegate to Eurodoc, JR represented Swiss Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at the Eurodoc National Associations (quarterly meeting). The first half of the meeting was spent on a workshop organised by Eurodoc's Mental Health Working Group, where we brainstormed about positive examples of practises aimed at improving ECRs' mental health. This work builds on the Eurodoc statement "Towards Healthy Working Environments for Early Career Researchers". Eurodoc asked us to share their padlet where they organise the ideas with our members and their boards and asked for input. Importantly, they ask for best practises, so please do not enter any problematic practises in the padlet. The aim was for the Mental Health WG to be able to highlight the best practises example to showcase that change is possible. JR communicated to actionuni members how they could add their input.

The second half of the meeting was spent on the brainstorm about Eurodoc's planned statement on the Salzburg recommendations. The Salzburg recommendations turn 20 years this year, and

are the main framework for doctoral education at a European level. They also created a padlet where they encourage us to give our input by Friday, March 7th. JR included the link to the padlet, so that actionuni members could add to it if needed. The board also presented the proposed changes to the selection procedures for the organisers of the annual Eurodoc conference and the Annual General Meeting.

### **5.1.2 Summary of Eurodoc NA meeting: 28.04.25**

As actionuni's delegate to Eurodoc, JR represented Swiss Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at the Eurodoc National Associations (quarterly) meeting on April 28th.

Before the meeting, JR reviewed and gave feedback on 4 documents from our actionuni point of view:

- A statement on supervision (This statement has been prepared by the members of the WG doctoral training during 2023/2024 and 2024/2025.)
- A statement on representation (This statement argues for the importance of ensuring ECRs' self-representation and participation in academic governance)
- A statement on Salzburg Recommendations (This statement responds to the 20 year anniversary of the Salzburg Declaration; it points out the important achievements and discusses areas of improvement); I am listed as contributor to this statement as the actionuni delegate that helped to brainstorm it
- A statement on financial conditions of research and researchers (This statement addresses that at the core of the policies of EHEA and ERA is the mobility of the academic community, this statement argues that across Europe ECRs should have a salary and employment conditions that match their academic qualifications.)

The items discussed during the meeting:

1. More information about Eurodoc Conference (August 6th-7th) and Annual General Meeting (August 8th-9th) organised in Denmark this year by the Danish national association, PAND. The theme for the Eurodoc Conference is: Breaking Barriers: Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). JR extended the invitation to participate to actionuni members.
2. A short discussion on academic governance and representational rights (in relation to the statement on representation)
3. A presentation about the European Research Act and the public hearing about the Multi Financial Framework (in the EU).
4. A discussion on the topic of the minimum salary with the aim of:
  - recognising the professional status of doctoral candidates as researchers by employing them.
  - acknowledging that doctoral candidates have a similar level of training and length of professional experiences as upper secondary teachers in their first years of employment.
  - ensuring that doctoral candidates receive comparable salaries and social rights as upper secondary teachers in their first years of employment

- ensuring that postdoctoral and other early career researchers are employed and not on stipends or similar ensuring that postdoctoral and other early career researchers receive salaries comparable to their qualifications
- 5. An invitation to joint the second edition of "Mental Health in Academia: The Hot Potato 2", taking place on May 16–17, 2025, at the University of Zadar, Croatia (hybrid).

### **5.1.3 Summary of Eurodoc NA meeting: 24.06.25**

As actionuni's delegate to Eurodoc, JR represented Switzerland-based Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at the Eurodoc National Associations (quarterly) meeting on June 24th.

The items covered during the meeting:

1. Initiative for Science in Europe's Open Letter regarding the next European Multiannual Financial Framework plans and against potential directionality in the MSCA funding scheme. JR linked the letter to be signed to actionuni members.
2. Overview of Eurodoc's structural funding: To apply for additional funding, Eurodoc needs information from its member National Associations (actionuni) that it asked to supply us
3. Conference and AGM 2025
4. Suggested Statute Changes altering Article 33 covering Eurodoc as an Employer
5. Discussion about the working group structure 2025/26. Proposed structure: Doctoral Training, Mental Health, Equitable Opportunities and Sustainable Research Cultures, Financial Compensation and Cost of Living, International Mobility, Open Science, AI, Research Security & Research Assessment
6. Statement on Equitable Opportunities that will be sent out to national association's members for consultation

### **5.1.3 Summary of Eurodoc Annual General Meeting: 08-09.08.25**

Eurodoc's Annual General Meeting took place on August 8th and 9th in Copenhagen, JR participated online and served on the voting committee to ensure the votes were counted and announced correctly. Below is the main summary of the main points covered during the AGM on each day.

Day 1:

- a. Membership removals: ADS (Slovakia), CJC (France)
- b. Membership admissions: Doktorantide Selts/Doctoral Society (DOK; Estonia), Fédération de l'Éducation, de la Recherche et de la Culture (FERC-CGT; France), Association Nationale des Docteurs (ANDès; France), Netzwerk Unterbau Wissenschaft (NuWiss; Austria)
- c. Annual report (can be viewed [here](#)) approval
- d. Financial Report and proposed budget approval
- e. Membership fees and membership fee reductions
- f. Statue changes about Eurodoc as an employer

- g. Approval of CoARA Action Plan, Gender Equality and Equitable Opportunities Plan
- h. Annual Goals for 2025/26

Day 2:

- a. Approval of Eurodoc statement on Equitable Opportunities
- b. Election of the board, secretariat, and advisory board members.
- c. Approval of Eurodoc statement in support of the European Commission's Suggestion to Suspend Israel from Parts of Horizon Europe
- d. Approval of the AGM 2026 proposal by DOSZ to be hosted in Budapest, Hungary

JR got elected for the advisory board of Eurodoc.

#### **5.1.4 Summary of Eurodoc NA meeting: 28.10.25**

As actionuni's delegates to Eurodoc, JR and CH represented Swiss Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at the Eurodoc National Associations (quarterly) meeting on October 28th.

The meeting started with news from Eurodoc. Eurodoc asked for support in collecting evidence regarding issues related to researchers' mobility for the ERA Act. (The ERA Act is a legislative proposal being developed by the EU commission to strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).) They shared a questionnaire, which JR and CH have forwarded to actionuni's members. JR and CH collated all the evidence provided and submitted it to Eurodoc through their questionnaire. Eurodoc also presented their working groups (WGs) and explained how to participate.

This was followed by a "Forum on Mental Health", where good practices were shared and running projects presented. This included the Mental Health WG, and three National Agencies: KRD - Poland, Penkala - Croatia, and Tieteentekijät - Finland.

## **5.2 Open science delegate**

No open science delegate was active in 2025. Fortunately, from 2026 onwards, actionuni will benefit from a working group that will represent the interests of the mid-level staff in matters related to open source on the national level.

## **5.3 Projektgebundene Beiträge**

Since January 2024, Actionuni had been part of a steering committee for the PgB Nachwuchsförderung. This PgB, worth CHF 20 million, was intended to enable universities to implement measures over a three-year period to address the issues raised in the *Petition academia*. To date, it has been the only concrete implementation of postulate 22.3390 "Pour l'égalité des chances et le soutien de la relève scientifique/Für Chancengleichheit und

Förderung des akademischen Nachwuchses.” In October 2024, action wrote a letter to SEFRI/SBFI alongside VPOD/SSP asking them to maintain the PgBs.

In March 2025, the steering committee met in Bern. At that point, it was not yet clear whether funding would be maintained for 2026. During the meeting, Joanna Haupt and Neele Heiser argued that the money should be used to reflect about the structure of universities, on how the money is used, and supported all initiatives that decided to look at what can be realized in concrete terms without the need for additional money (harmonization of statutes, protected research time, analysis of job structure). As some universities planned to use this short-term money to finance post-doctoral contracts, we tried to make it clear that it is absurd to combat precariousness by creating more precariousness. During the meeting, our delegates also made sure that all stakeholders were reminded of the importance of consulting the organizations representing mid-level staff in their respective institutions. New contacts were made.

In October 2025, the PgBs were discussed at a preparation meeting for the coming 2026 SHK (see above). Swissuniversities presented the initial measures taken by the universities, revealing that measures relating to working conditions are marginal compared to other measures that we consider cosmetic.

Even if the PgBs had not been partially cut, they would probably have been a weak response to our demands. At present, one of the main responses of universities to the crisis in the mid-level staff is the creation of more opportunities, better pathways out of academic life, coaching, and work fairs. For actionuni, it is clear that the priority must be to improve working conditions in higher education institutions and not to facilitate our way out of academia. We do not have a problem of mass unemployment because we do not know how to write a resume or because we need additional skills; we have a problem of precariousness and lack of prospects that puts our health and the quality of research at risk.

## 6 Actionuni member associations

By actionuni co-presidents Laure Piguet and Joanna Haupt

By Laure Piguet, Co-President in charge of relations with member associations.

Actionuni is an umbrella organization made up of "local" associations linked to Higher Education Institutions. The member associations of actionuni are the "ordinary members" of the association (art. 4, statutes). They can belong to one of the following three categories: university (cantonal universities and federal institutes of technology), university of applied sciences or university of teacher education. There are 15 ordinary members of actionuni: on the university side we have ELISA (EPFL), AVETH (EPFZ), ACIDUL (UNIL), ACINE (UNINE), ACCORDER (UNIGE), AVUBA (UNIBA), CSWM (UNIFR), MOL (UNILU), MVUB (UNIBE), VAUZ (UZH). In last year's report, we announced that only two more associations were needed to complete our list: the University of St Gallen and the University of Italian Switzerland. Although we have not heard anything from St Gallen, we have received positive news from Italian Switzerland. ACISi

was established in July 2025. Unfortunately, we have not heard from ADA, the association of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

We still need to do some recruitment work in the Fachhochschulen, and this should go hand in hand with a better understanding of the situation in these institutions. At the moment we only have the following members: vmph FHNW and VMPH (Mittelbauvereinigung der PH Bern). AMb ceased to exist.

Following very fruitful discussions with some of our member associations, we agreed last year to put in place a more efficient and routine system for circulating information. In order to keep members informed of the points discussed at the various Board meetings, it was decided that we will systematically send the minutes of meetings to members@actionuni. Due to the anti-austerity protests, we had a lot of contact and discussions with members of associations, both via visioconference and in person. The flow of information regarding the protests organised at universities was good. It would be good to maintain this and expand it to other topics beyond cuts in research.

To raise awareness of actionuni and local associations on campuses, we decided to try to hold conferences at a different campus at the start of the academic year. In September 2025, we organised a first conference at the University of Lausanne with ACIDUL. We invited Thomas Porcher, a French economist who has just published a book entitled *Le vacataire. Expérience vécue de la précarité à l'université* (The temporary worker: a real-life experience of precariousness at university).

## 7 Actionuni and friends

*By actionuni co-president Laure Piguet*

During 2025, we kept on working to develop our relationships with associations and trade unions whose actions, interests and demands are close to our own. The links we have forged are crucial to strengthening our presence at the federal level. In 2026, it will be important to maintain these links and build new ones. In the context of budgetary austerity, we have also built relationships with a political party: the Greens. We intend to maintain and expand these contacts to include parties from a variety of backgrounds, with the aim of building majorities in committees and parliament.

### **Swissfaculty**

We collaborated with Swissfaculty on the SHK meetings and the PgB support group. At the end of 2023, Hannah Schoch and Joanna Haupt had a meeting with Swissfaculty where it was decided to collaborate more closely. The idea of being invited to their meetings as external members was even raised. Stephan Morgenthaler has repeatedly shown his support for our activities and is a valuable ally. We did not have further contact in 2025.

## **VSS-UNES**

In 2024, we collaborated closely with UNES/VSS, both at SHK and with the PgBs. We developed a very good relationship with Nadège Widmer, one of the co-presidents, whose term ended at the end of that year. Consequently, we had to re-establish contact with the new co-presidents, Sophie Wang and Julia Bogdan. We had very fruitful discussions on the Swiss academic system, the difficulties faced by researchers and the importance of improving working conditions for mid-level staff, which would at the end benefit the students themselves. The fact that UNES asked us to talk about the situation of research as part of their event on the Federal Square on October 1 alongside student associations is an illustration of this awareness of the links between education and research.

## **VPOD-SSP**

The cooperation with the public service union, which began with the Petition Academia, is continuing and has become increasingly important in the face of the budget cuts. We worked closely with the VPOD/SSP, exchanging information, discussing our respective responses to the federal consultation on budget cuts, and drafting a joint press release for local associations that mobilised with the VPOD/SSP at their respective universities.

## **Ständiger Ausschuss der Arbeitswelt - SGB**

We also worked with the AOA, and more specifically with Nicole Cornu (SGB). Although we don't always see eye to eye - which is natural, since she represents the Ständiger Ausschuss der Arbeitswelt with economiesuisse, Travail Suisse and SGV - she has been an ally on certain issues and will be a key figure in the near future.