

better science

Cooperation Project
Better Science Initiative
Final Report 2021-2024

Introduction

The Better Science Initiative was a coordination project funded by the P-7 program of swissuniversities 2021-2024. This final report discusses achievements and work done and reflects on the learnings of the project group. It thus serves as a basis for future work in the area of research culture for an equitable and sustainable research system in Switzerland and beyond.

A note on the quotes

The quotes interspersed with the report are taken from interviews with researchers, academic leaders and other professionals in the research system or in policy. The snippets reflect on the issues brought up by Better Science. The quotes are anonymized.

Critical discourse on excellence

The Better Science Initiative was created by the working group "Critical Discourse on Excellence" at the University of Bern. The group includes equal opportunities coordinators of various faculties, researchers and administrative staff. The working group is coordinated by the Equal Opportunities Office. It discusses the issues of academic excellence and research culture and has realized multiple projects, such as a portrait series showing the diversity of career paths of academic staff.

With ten calls to action which all members of academia should be able to adhere to, the group aimed to show how bottom-up approaches can be successful for implementing a diverse, sustainable, and "care-ful" research culture. Inspired by the slow science movement, the working group designed ten principles as both a manifesto and a code of conduct to be implemented into everyday work practice at universities, applied universities and universities of teacher education. The project aimed to create a movement to which all university members can commit. With events and a website, Better Science offered a platform for the discussion and presentation of solutions towards diversity, sustainability and fairness in research.

Better Science was a successor of the "Slow Science" project, supervised and developed by the working group and was based on research done by Dr. Patricia Felber at the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern, which describes the situation surrounding the concept of excellence at universities as precarious.¹

Problem statement

In academia, an increasing acceleration in research can be observed; researchers are under intense pressure to produce numerous publications with a high impact factor. In teaching, it is also expected that lecturers always provide high-quality teaching material. In addition to constant availability, researchers are expected to acquire external funding in a competitive environment. The pressure that the constant evaluation and quantification in research, the high demands in teaching and the acquisition of external funding exerts on researchers, contrasts with a discourse of excellence that allows a healthy workload, allows for creativity and makes it possible to work on a research topic that might not lead to

An einer Universität verbinden sich auf eine spannende Art und Weise die Kräfte von Tradition und Innovation ... An einer alten Hochschule ist Tradition sehr wichtig ... Und gleichzeitig steht Forschung und zum Teil auch die Lehre für Innovation in unserer Gesellschaft.

¹ Felber 2018. *Einschätzung der Karrieresituation von Nachwuchswissenschaftlerinnen in der Schweiz*. Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz.

publishable results.² In the following, the drivers of the current research culture as addressed by Better Science are laid out.

The expectations of research systems and the values of academics have a significant impact on research culture. These values are often characterized by contradictions which influence different perceptions of research culture. They determine how research is conducted, which research is funded, and they affect the careers of researchers.

Firstly, in the current scientific context, the maxim of **excellence** is applied everywhere, but clear criteria for it are often lacking.³ Excellence is used as a placeholder term whose meaning varies depending on the context. A high publication output is often seen as a mark of excellence, but it has little positive impact on research culture. Also, the construct of excellence is strongly influenced by existing structures and power relations and acts as an exclusion mechanism.

Der Begriff von Exzellenz ist extrem einseitig definiert. [...] Er ist extrem männerdominiert, Ego-dominiert. 'Ich bin derjenige, der das publiziert hat, ich bin derjenige, der eingeladen wird an Kongresse, weil ich so gut bin, weil ich smarter bin'

Secondly, the image of the “ideal scientist” remains crucial for the assessment of academic achievements. Individualized performance assessment focuses on the idea of brilliant scientists, although research is usually a collective effort. Oftentimes, research funds and positions are awarded to individuals due to the “excellence” of PIs. This tendency is also evident in the structures of the mid-level

faculty. The image of the “ideal academic” is also aligned with hegemonic masculinity, and a narrow understanding of excellence promotes social selectivity.⁴

Thirdly, the individualized career **competition** and impermeable subject boundaries can lead to a singularization of university members. A “collective of academics” does not exist as such, which hides inequalities and hinders collective change. The degree of individualization varies depending on fields and institutions.

Fourthly, most researchers have a **passion** for their work. However, requiring such passion as a preliminary for excellence can reinforce the blurring of boundaries between work and private life. The idea that “science is a vocation” for example, is often associated with the expectation that researchers will make themselves available for their work for an unlimited period of time. This narrative also contributes to the assumption of a gatekeeping function in the (self-)selection of young researchers. However, constant availability is at odds with private care work and extra-university activities, which sometimes get deprioritized and receive little recognition. On the other hand, work as a scientist is perceived as a privilege, for which disadvantages are accepted.⁵

Lastly, there exist multiple dichotomies and paradoxes concerning **academic leadership**. Professors and PIs are in their positions primarily due to their scientific achievements - leadership skills are valued less highly. Professors and Postdocs combine supervisory and leadership tasks, whereby these two tasks can

² Mountz et al. 2015. „For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University. ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies.

³ Cf. Moore et al. 2017. “‘Excellence R Us’: university research and the fetishisation of excellence.”

⁴ Cf. Nentwich, Julia Nentwich. Ursula Offenberger: „Meritokratie – Fakt oder Fiktion? Spannungsverhältnisse zwischen Exzellenz und Chancengleichheit.“ Tagungsdokumentation.

⁵ Cf. Andrea Zimmermann 2023. *Gender Equality Measures in Academia*. Swiss National Science Foundation.

be mixed. Management positions at institutes and faculties, for example, are often assigned on a rotational basis for a certain period of time. This can mean that professors who return to the ranks of their colleagues after their term of office tend to make less controversial decisions as managers. Additionally, flat hierarchies often mean that managers do not adequately fulfill their duty of care towards their employees. Thus, the relevance of leadership is seen as low: there is “no need to lead experts”.

What is more, academic leaders have to manage various external factors: Publication pressure, competition, and precarity. However, inadequate protection and promotion of team members leads to mental health issues, bullying, exploitation, integrity violations and lack of equal opportunities.

These are the key factors that contribute to the current research culture which leads to the exclusion of academics – especially of members of minorities. The Better Science Initiative highlighted these aspects and suggested solutions to problems arising from harmful research culture.

Man spricht gerne von dieser Passion für das Fach. Sie soll der Grund sein, dass man mitmacht bei dieser Selbstausbeutung. Und wenn man diese Passion nicht hat, dann ist man vielleicht halt nicht die richtige Person für das. Das ist der Vorwurf, der dann häufig kommt.

Purpose and scope

The project was aimed at discussing the notion of academic excellence and challenging assumptions about research culture to disrupt current trends detrimental to equal opportunities and the health of researchers. What is more, it aimed to establish a different research culture. As a cooperation project of six Swiss higher education institutions, it was aimed at researchers, lecturers and students in academia. The decision to discuss the interrelations and overlaps of diversity, equity, inclusion, sustainable research culture and academic excellence resulted in a varied and multi-faceted discussion which included a broad range of stakeholders and university members. During the project phase, researchers throughout Switzerland and abroad were reached.

Project objectives (overarching goals)

The project followed four distinct lines of action. These simultaneously formed the vision for a better research culture:

- 1) The initiative is supported and implemented by the various staff groups at as many universities as possible throughout Switzerland.
- 2) In Swiss higher education policy and at the universities, a more in-depth discussion is taking place about the concept of excellence, about equal opportunities and about gender equality.
- 3) A different evaluation practice of scientific research, as required by the DORA declaration, is becoming established in the appointment procedures and in the assessment of scientific research: quality instead of quantity.
- 4) A new culture of diversity and equal opportunities has emerged at Swiss universities.

The project objectives were translated into actionable and assessable measures. Of these, most were fulfilled during the project phase.

Project organisation

Project structure

Working group “Critical discourse on excellence”

- Representatives of the faculties of the University of Bern

Responsibilities

- Expert Advisory Board
- Ambassadors for the dissemination of the project contents at the University of Bern and beyond

Project group at Equal Opportunities Office, University of Bern

- Lilian Fankhauser, co-director, Equal Opportunities Office (2020-2023)
- Sabine Höfler, scientific officer, Equal Opportunities Office (2021-2023)
- Karin Beyeler, deputy director, Equal Opportunities Office (2023-2024)
- Joel Schaad, scientific officer, Equal Opportunities Office

Responsibilities

- Project assignment and coordination
- Responsible for the fulfilment of the project goals
- Reporting
- Administration and finances
- Coordination between partners and stakeholders

Steering group of cooperation partners

- Dr. Susanne Burren, director, department for equality and diversity, PH FHNW
- Verena Witzig, scientific officer, department for diversity, Equality & Inclusion, University of St. Gallen
- Dr. Patricia Felber, director, department for equality & diversity, ZHdK
- Dr. Klea Faniko, scientific officer, department for equal opportunities, University of Geneva
- Lilian Fankhauser, University of Bern; Karin Beyeler, University of Bern

Responsibilities

- Adaption of project goals and measures
- Distribution of project results within partner institutions
- Scientific advice
- Stakeholder management

Networks and stakeholders

The Better Science Initiative and its exponents took part in various networks and vice versa. Of note as valuable networks, stakeholders and partners to the Better Science project are especially the following:

- Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF
- Schweizerische Akademie der Geisteswissenschaften SAGW
- Schweizerischer Verband des Personals öffentlicher Dienste VPOD
- Forum of the Think Tank Gender & Diversity
- Better Science network at the University of Bern
- Leaders for Equality research project
- Swiss Young Academy SYA

Achievements & work done

The project achieved to be a successful long-term campaign and discussion platform. In this regard, it developed the issue of research culture at Swiss higher education institutions and established a knowledge base for further work at the institutional level on the issues of research culture.

The project highlighted the conditions under which researchers work at Swiss universities today and the barriers they face. Combining a focus on assessment practices, team culture and leadership, the project showed how research culture can become more diverse and sustainable for members of universities, applied universities and universities of teacher education. Measures in these areas are central to a diverse and equitable university environment that enables everyone to achieve academic excellence.

Over the course of 4.5 years, the initiative helped shape the opinions and situations of researchers and teachers at higher education institutions. In 2020, the project was launched with an elaborate website and a proposal for financial support through swissuniversities was written, which was successfully granted for 2021-2024.

In 2021, the project launched a workshop for research groups and highlighted best practices on its website. The years 2022 and 2023 were marked by the consolidation of what had been achieved and the expansion of the network. The vision of a sustainable and diverse research culture was further discussed at a number of events at Swiss universities and conferences in Switzerland and abroad.

In 2024, more events helped to grow the network and lay the groundwork for future projects. The project supported research groups that have reflected and worked on their culture of collaboration. Some institutes have adapted their employment guidelines and evaluation regulations and faculties and centers which have set an example by signing the Better Science calls to action.

Goals and measures

From the vision for a better academic culture the project laid out in the proposal to swissuniversities, the project group formulated three lines of action into which the proposed measures were grouped.

Research culture development

Together with the working group „Critical Discourse on Excellence“, a survey on research culture at the universities participating in the project was developed and carried out as a baseline for the project.

An analysis of reports and studies on research culture at Swiss universities was conducted. The analysis highlighted the situation of university members and the effects of the current research culture.

From 2020-2024, the working group “Critical Discourse on Excellence” at the University of Bern functioned as a sounding board and expert group for the sub-projects carried out, such as the collection of best practices and the discussions in the faculties of the University of Bern.

After initial publication, an in-depth analysis and with the aid of experts, the “calls to action” were adapted to better represent teaching culture.

Man arbeitet mehr, als man angestellt ist.
 [...] Ich traue mich nicht, meinen Chef oder vielen anderen älteren Akademikern zu sagen, dass ich das ganze Wochenende frei gemacht habe.

A workshop was developed based on the workshop „We Scientists 2030“ of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT). The workshop shows participants what opportunities they have to advocate for a diverse research culture. The workshop was held several times.

Discussions have taken place at four faculties of the University of Bern regarding signing the initiative as a faculty. The Vetsuisse Faculty has signed the initiative.

With the achievements in this line of action, Better Science highlighted the problems of current research culture and presented practical solutions.

Website and communication activities

In cooperation with Studio Way, a website was designed (www.betterscience.ch) to publish the ten calls to action. In combination with various social media channels, the website served to make the initiative and the associated events and discussions visible.

In meiner Erfahrung passieren die wichtigen Gespräche und die wichtigen Sachen inoffiziell. Es sind versteckte Regeln, Werte, Handlungsstrategien, die unausgesprochen bleiben.

For the duration of the project, the website was used to collect signatures to the calls to action and to communicate project outcomes.

A collection of best practice examples from research, teaching and administration was curated and published on the website. Support for the project and the network was

made visible by updating the testimonials on the website: A total of 150 testimonials have been gathered on the website. The website was used to advertise events.

A social media campaign in 2022 highlighted different researchers as role models for good research culture on Twitter and Instagram, featuring ten achieved academics from all cooperation partner universities as well as the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It generated a total of 60'000 impressions on Twitter and Instagram reaching hundreds of researchers and lecturers.

In 2024, a short video showing how research assessment and research culture are linked was produced for use at events and on websites.

Network building

A public event has taken place at some of the participating institutions in order to advertise and discuss Better Science:

- Universität St. Gallen: Lecture series “Hinter den Kulissen der Forschung,” autumn semesters 2022 and 2023.
- Universität Luzern: “Infolunch Spezial: Wissenschaftskultur als Schlüssel für bessere Wissenschaft,” spring semester 2022.
- Zürcher Hochschule der Künste: Lecture and Panel Discussion “Sense of belonging in the working environment: How diversity research can be transferred into good practice at UZH,” spring semester 2024.
- Université de Genève: “Quelques pistes pour renforcer la conciliation vie professionnelle - vie privée à l’Université,” spring semester 2024.
- Universität Bern: Lecture and panel discussion “Good Research Culture as the Basis for Excellence”, summer 2022, lecture and panel discussion “Fixing Academia? Towards a Culture

of Collaboration,” spring 2024, lecture and workshop “Raising Our Expectations: How to Survive Academia and make it better for others”, autumn 2024.

In the four years of existence, Better Science was discussed at or has initiated a total of 60 events at 20 universities and other institutions: Most of them took place at Swiss higher education institutions. However, Better Science has garnered support internationally, notably in Germany and Austria.

Members of the rectorate of the University of Bern and others formed a support group for the project was formed at the University of Bern to accompany the implementation of the calls for action at the University of Bern.

In order to promote the campaign nationally, a pool of experienced and motivated researchers was assembled as ambassadors for Better Science. They presented and discussed the project at various events.

A network of the various actors involved in research culture and scientific excellence was created. These include the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Swiss Academies, the Swiss Young Academy and various university groups. A loose network of university members and institutions was sustained for the transfer of knowledge and to foster exchange on the issues of research culture.

Overall, the majority of measures was successfully implemented on time. However, some measures were adapted or abandoned by the project group.

Target group reached?

Better Science was aimed at all members of academia, namely students, doctoral candidates, intermediate staff and, in particular, people with leadership responsibilities. Administrative staff and the public were also planned to be taken into account. The goal was that in the long term, the initiative would reach national institutions, universities, funding agencies and political decision-makers through the actions of individual institutions.

After the start of the project, it has become evident that the calls to action were geared towards academics with a research focus. This was corrected in 2021 by broadening the calls to include teaching. This focus was incorporated into the alignment of the project contents with the project goals.

Although members of more than 28 universities in 9 countries have been reached, not all university types are represented equally among the signatories. Researchers from universities have been reached more easily by the project than members of other higher education institutions such as applied universities and universities of teacher education.

Also, although there have been contacts with SNSF, there was never a sustained effort to network with funding agencies and political actors.

In this regard, the initiative remained true to its origins and followed a bottom-up approach.

Nonetheless, with a broad range of activities spanning from workshops, lectures, panels, poster sessions and discussions as well as the use of various communication channels and different collaborators, over 1500 academics could be reached.

Die Schweiz ist ein interessantes Land. Wir haben renommierte Hochschulen. Aber wir hassen eigentlich Forscherinnen und Forscher. Wir sind gerne wichtig. Wir haben gerne das CERN bei uns. Aber den Leuten, die in diesem Bereich arbeiten, bringen wir Misstrauen entgegen.

Further achievements

In collaboration with the working group „Critical Discourse on Excellence,“ a survey on research culture at the universities participating in the project was developed and carried out as a baseline for the project.

An analysis of studies on research culture at Swiss universities was conducted. The analysis provided an overview of the current research culture at Swiss higher education institutions and its effect on academics.

The working group “Critical Discourse on Excellence” at the University of Bern acted as a sounding board and expert group for the sub-projects, such as the collection of best practices and the discussions in the faculties of the University of Bern.

Challenges

Existing hierarchies, processes and strategies make it difficult for any bottom-up initiatives to implement widespread change. As values-driven project, Better Science faced criticism especially due to perceived threats to existing power structures, or skepticism about the benefits of adopting new practices.

The varying sizes, structures, and cultures of Swiss higher education institutions presented a challenge for standardized approaches. The diversity in organization among the cooperation partners required tailored strategies to address the specific needs and dynamics of each institution while maintaining consistency in the overarching goals. This was not sufficiently factored in from the outset of the project. Due to the scope of the project and the resources of the project group, not all partner universities received equal attention.

Die Kultur, die an den Hochschulen herrscht, hat viel mit der Struktur zu tun.

Die Uni ist eine gewollt leitungsschwache Organisation.

occasionally diluted the overall message and goals.

Lastly, the scope of Better Science covered an expansive range of topics, from research assessment practices to diversity and inclusion. Addressing such a wide spectrum made it challenging to prioritize issues effectively. Additionally, stakeholders often focused on specific aspects of the initiative, which

Sustainability

As a bottom-up approach, the sustainability of the Better Science Initiative heavily relied on the ongoing engagement of university members and supporters. The initiative's long-term impact depends on several factors: Firstly, continued support and advocacy are required for sustained momentum. This can include regular events and discussions to keep the initiative visible. Thus, a certain number of supporters would be ideal to retain momentum for the initiative to stay in the discourse. During the project phase, a low volume of 2-4 requests for workshops or other events was generated yearly that stemmed from members of the wider network and came from people and offices not directly involved in the project, showing that continued longer-term support is achievable.

Secondly, Embedding the Better Science calls to action into official university policies and practices ensures sustainable implementation. While the project team does not hold direct responsibility for such changes, the initiative has provided a foundation for institutional reforms along the lines of Better Science. Although the ability to incorporate the calls of Better Science at the partner universities was not within the competences of the project group, the calls contributed to and have formed part of

arguments for the implementation of measures aligning with the Better Science Initiative. Some of these include the following:

- At the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, the Better Science calls to action were taken into consideration for the discussions for a new code of conduct for all employees.
- At the Universität St. Gallen, two short lecture series were held titled “Hinter den Kulissen von Forschung und Lehre”. The lectures discussed the issue of academic excellence and criticized the idea of research as a calling.
- At the Université de Genève, the calls to action were interpreted to suit the universities’ push to strengthen work-life-integration.
- At the Universität Bern, a *tour d’horizon* was conducted by members of the working group “Critical discourse on excellence” at several faculty meetings, in order to gain support for the pledge to the calls to action.
- At the Hochschule Luzern, the calls to action were discussed with the equal opportunities delegates from all departments as a basis for a letter to the incoming rector.

Measures not implemented

In agreement with the steering group, the project management decided not to realize a small number of measures. As such, the development of political demands was abandoned due to a lack of resources as well as a changed focus of the project. Also, the plan to organize a meeting with interested members of parliament, aiming to exchange ideas and raise awareness among politicians was abandoned. Also, the planned round table as part of the Forum by the “Think Tank Gender & Diversity” with regular meetings was never initiated, as this format proved to be too rigid. Nonetheless, Better Science was discussed and presented during one of the Forum exchange meetings in 2022.

The development of a concept for the exchange with participating offices (HR departments, research commissions, etc.) was not completed in favor of other subprojects.

Es müsste vor allem zunehmend auf eine wirklich wohlwollende Wissenschaftskultur hingearbeitet werden, einerseits dass einzelne Personen nicht immer unter Verdacht gestellt werden, zu wenig zu leisten, was eigentlich völlig absurd ist, denn es gibt nirgends so viele intrinsisch motivierte Personen wie in den Hochschulen. Gleichzeitig gibt es aber implizit oder explizit den Generalverdacht, dass die Personen zu wenig leisten und eine Angst davor. Das fördert definitiv nicht eine chancengleiche Kultur.

Financial summary

The project was budgeted at CHF 400'000.-. Thereof, CHF200'000.- was financed by swissuniversities and another CHF200'000.- was financed as matching funds by the University of Bern.

Each partner university received a sum of CHF1'000.- to finance an event related to Better Science.

Expenses

The numbers (in CHF) in the table are rounded.

	Project money (swu)	Matching funds	Other expenses
Personnel cost	178'000	160'000	
Events	10'000	0	
Communication (Website, Social Media, Print media)	10'000.-	15'000	
Other	2'000.-	25'000	6'500
Total	200'000	200'000	6'500

Revenue

The project generated a small sum of revenue through workshop and lecture fees to a total of approx. CHF 6'500.-. The revenue helped fund other events.

Ich wünsche mir ein Team, das Respekt lebt gegenüber anderen, wo es darum geht, dass, auch wenn alle an ihrem eigenen Projekt forschen, man trotzdem regelmässigen Austausch hat, also ein Gefühl von Zusammenarbeit. Eine Kultur, in der Interesse an gegenseitigem Lernen da ist und eine Fehlerkultur, wo es drum geht, dass man lernen kann; eine Kultur, [...] die respektiert, dass es noch andere Lebensbereiche gibt ausser der Forschung.

Reflection

Target groups, settings

The wide range of target groups proved challenging to manage, but the involvement of stakeholders from various institutions and hierarchical levels was very productive, facilitating a more in-depth discussion of issues and solutions.

In terms of the setting, not all levels of action were focused on equally. Individuals and groups were addressed directly (e.g., with calls to action), whereas organizations were addressed directly only in part (e.g., with the toolbox). The levels of politics and society were not addressed directly. This approach was chosen as it seemed appropriate and proved effective in reaching a broad audience, thus favoring the bottom-up aspect of the project over top-down approaches. However, in the dynamic academic environment, this strategy may yield greater long-term success.

Project goals

The goals formulated at the outset of the Better Science Initiative primarily served as a vision for fostering equitable and sustainable research cultures. While these goals provided valuable direction, some of them lacked concrete implementation plans. Namely, these overarching goals effectively highlighted the need for systemic change in research culture but required further refinement into actionable steps, which was taken in 2021 in collaboration with the cooperation partners. Over time, the project group adapted the objectives to reflect evolving priorities and challenges. This adaptability was crucial in addressing institutional diversity and stakeholder feedback.

Strategies

In 2021, the establishment of a temporary advisory committee consisting of members of the rectorate at the University of Bern marked a shift in the strategic procedure by the project group. Whereas before, the project had been marketed in a more political tone accusing current institutions, the communication was adapted to incorporate both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Subsequent communication efforts have not suffered in effectiveness from the change in tonality.

When discussing the implementation of project measures at the cooperation partner institutions (as well as others), flexible approaches have proved useful.

Measures

The measures adopted by the project group proved successful in terms of implementing the project as a discussion platform and awareness campaign.

The Better Science Initiative implemented a variety of measures to promote a sustainable research culture, including workshops, evaluations, a best practice repository and events and social media campaigns. As a campaign, the initiative was able to attract and retain attention over an extended period of time, reaching hundreds of university members, and the measures proved expedient.

However, as the project progressed, it became evident that the measures were not adequately focused on institutional change to support long-term and sustainable cultural transformation. This is a crucial consideration for the design of any subsequent project.

Concluding thoughts: Lessons learned and the way forward

The project has demonstrated that transforming research culture requires patience, persistence, and sustained effort over many years. Continuous engagement, long-term commitment, and the integration of new practices into daily routines are essential, as applied universities and universities operate as complex organizations situated in very different contexts and encompassing highly varied academic cultures. Future cooperation projects need to factor this in for successful implementation.

Ich glaube, was man tun kann, ist immer wieder daran erinnern, dass es anders sein könnte. Also einfach, dass man immer wieder anspricht, hey, macht das wirklich so viel Sinn, wie wir es hier organisiert haben?

inclusivity, rather than solely relying on quantity or prestige.

Better Science has highlighted various paradoxes that researchers and teachers at higher education institutions navigate in their work, such as perceived and real conflicts between collaboration and competition, or between the idea of research as a vocation versus a job. These contradictions underscore the nuanced challenges faced by academic institutions. Acknowledging and addressing these paradoxes openly can foster a more supportive environment.

The wide range of issues addressed by the project was both its aim and a major challenge. Future projects should focus on certain aspects that have been highlighted by the Better Science Initiative (although without disconnecting them from their broader implications). For example, a follow-up project could focus specifically on diversity-conscious team culture in research groups. Nevertheless, the success of Better Science was partly due to its flexibility in adapting to feedback and evolving priorities.

The Better Science Initiative has demonstrated that to foster a culture of diversity, equal opportunities and inclusion within Swiss higher education institutions, it is essential to provide concrete support offers for research groups and academic leaders. This support should aim to create an environment that fosters belonging, authenticity, diversity of perspectives and equal opportunities. In order to cultivate inclusive team cultures within rigid and hierarchical organizations, it is crucial to showcase role models and facilitate the exchange of good practices. To promote diversity-conscious and inclusive leadership, transparent career structures and hiring processes, as well as the provision of tools and training materials, are imperative.

The project has highlighted the interconnected nature of the issues of equal opportunities and academic excellence, often perceived as conflicting. The project sought to demonstrate their interdependence, emphasizing the need for metrics that emphasize quality, collaboration, and