

# Webinar N°7 - Rethinking excellence

within the SCNAT webinar series Achieving Gender Equality and Diversity in the Natural Sciences, held in 2021



## Summary of inputs and conclusions

by Romaine Jean

In this webinar, three representatives of the University of Bern explore the concept of excellence, which is used frequently in the academic world to justify research decisions and funding or in recruitment policy.

The concept of excellence is gendered, explains Sabine Höfler, Scientific officer at the Gender Equality Office. It corresponds to the values of the "classic male scientist", based on criteria such as the number of publications in renowned peer-reviewed journals. It reproduces stereotypes and excludes many women and men who cannot or will not follow the current criteria. Excellence is jeopardized by a lack of equal opportunities. Excellence needs good framework conditions: sufficient freedom of thought and time to think, and sufficiently secure career perspectives.

There is a strong need to rethink these criteria for excellence, says Joël Schaad from the Gender Equality Office, who is involved in the Better Science Initiative. Since 1901, only 12% of Nobel Prize winners have been women. This initiative calls for a rethink of the University in terms of sustainability, diversity and equal opportunities. Criteria such as work-life balance should be taken into account for academic excellence. Joël Schaad gives some statistics: In today's academic world, only 29% of researchers feel secure pursuing a research career. 78% of researchers think that high levels of competition have created unkind and aggressive conditions. 80% of researchers who manage people say they have the knowledge and skills to manage a diverse team, but only 48% have received training. Other criteria and values should be highlighted: take time to think, put quality before quantity, prioritize thoughtfully, careful communication, appreciate the team, be a role model.

However, the situation of women in academia has improved in recent years. The Institute of Geography at the University of Bern for instance is applying a new approach to academic excellence, with more inclusive group cultures. Natascha Flückiger, a young member of the Board of Students' Union, is responsible for equality and personnel issues. Like other speakers in this webinar series, she points out the shortcomings of family policy in Switzerland and childcare, which handicap women's careers. In her view, it needs above all a lot of patience as the academic system seems to evolve very slowly. She experiences some progress in the promotion of women, but changing the definition of excellence seems to cut deep.

### Watch the video on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Tl5KkS2Njk>

### Website of webinar series

[https://biol.scnat.ch/de/activities/uuid/i/d87a53d7-bac7-522f-957c-12f0d9ebc843-Achieving\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_and\\_Diversity\\_in\\_the\\_Natural\\_Sciences](https://biol.scnat.ch/de/activities/uuid/i/d87a53d7-bac7-522f-957c-12f0d9ebc843-Achieving_Gender_Equality_and_Diversity_in_the_Natural_Sciences)