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Chemistry

Platform of the Swiss Academy of Sciences

## Platform Chemistry – Giving Chemistry a Voice

Barbara Winter-Werner\*

\*Correspondence: Dr. B. Winter-Werner, Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT), Platform Chemistry, Schwarztorstrasse 9, CH-3007 Bern, E-mail: winter@scnat.ch

**Keywords:** Chemistry · SCNAT

Several of you may have come across announcements relating to the «SCNAT Platform Chemistry»; and with this short article we would like to introduce our institution in a more detailed way. The «Platform Chemistry» (PFC) is one of the six platforms of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT), which itself is part of the alliance of the Swiss academies (Fig. 1). The Swiss Academy of Sciences has been committed to the establishment and development of the sciences since 1815. Today, this network brings together over 35'000 scientists from all over Switzerland. SCNAT makes use of expert knowledge and promotes the dialogue between science and society. In order to meet these goals the academy clearly defines local, thematic, disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains. To target available knowledge and expertise, SCNAT has created platforms, which group one or several disciplines. The «Platform Chemistry» – as well as the other platforms – is directed by a board, which is appointed by the Executive Board of SCNAT. The office of the PFC is headed by a Chief Science Officer, who is responsible for project management and for all administrative matters (Fig. 2).

The PFC represents, *via* its member associations (Swiss Chemical Society (SCS), Swiss Society for Food and Environmental Chemistry (SSFEC)) some 3,000 scientists and experts. With their active support, the platform aims to further the dialog with society, the media, business and politics. The PFC focuses mainly on the promotion of chemistry at all educational levels.

The «Platform Chemistry» also lends financial support to its member associations for specific projects such as:

- The Spring and the Fall Meetings of the Swiss Chemical Society
- CHIMIA, the international scientific journal and official bulletin of the SCS
- The annual meeting of the Swiss Society for Food and Environmental Chemistry.

The PFC also provided financial support in 2008 to the following events:

- The 3rd Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin Symposium (Zurich, May 9, 2008)
- The Zurich School of Crystallography 2008 (Zurich, June 22 to July 5, 2008).

In mid 2008, the «Platform Chemistry» began setting up its own projects in its priority areas and a flyer and website ([www.chemistry.scnat.ch](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch)) were realized.

## Promotion of Chemistry, its Students and Researchers

Besides making science – and especially chemistry – more attractive to students at all educational levels, it is crucial to increase the number of first-year students in this domain.

The PFC sees its role in coordinating efforts in this area. It has set up a database of the various public relation activities of the institutes and departments of chemistry at all universities, Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology and Universities of Applied Sciences. It provides a ready overview of PR activities for future students, students and teachers at the different pre-university levels as well as the public; and contributes the efforts to coordinate these activities. The compilations (with web links and contacts) are available at [www.chemistry.scnat.ch/PR\\_activities](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch/PR_activities).

The PFC participates in the SCNAT program that provides mentors for 'Matura' projects of high school students ([www.maturitywork.ch](http://www.maturitywork.ch))

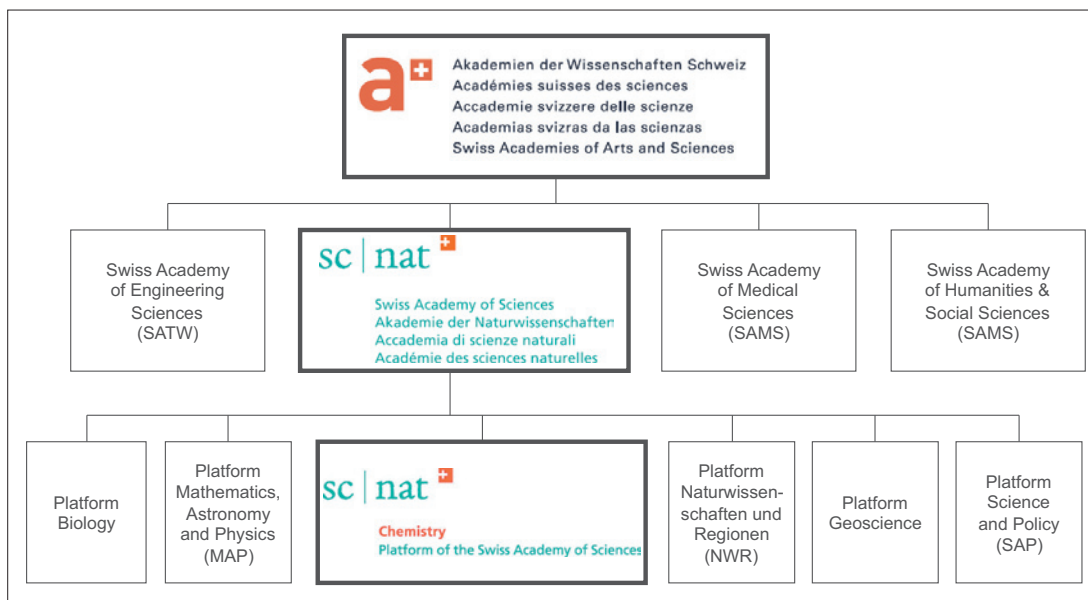


Fig 1. Organization chart of SCNAT



Fig 2. Board of the «Platform Chemistry» (PFC) of SCNAT

Active participation of Ph.D. students at international congresses is an important part of the educational program since it allows students to measure, compare, and discuss their scientific results at an international level. In 2008, the PFC made financial contributions to 19 PhD students to participate at the 2nd EUCHEMS conference (Torino, Sept 2008). For 2009, rather than focus on a single event, the PFC has set up the 'SCNAT Chemistry Travel Award' which is advertised in CHIMIA,<sup>[1]</sup> and on the PFC website ([www.chemistry.scnat.ch/travel\\_award](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch/travel_award)).

Researchers at a more advanced level were involved in other PFC events:

The first 'Young Faculty Meeting' was organized at the University of Bern on 28 November 2008 by Karl Gademann (EPFL), Michele Cascella (University of Bern) and the author of this article. The event brought together over twenty professors and group leaders aged under 40 from all Swiss chemistry departments. The morning session focused on short presentations of research projects and in the afternoon session the topics 'funding opportunities', 'work/life balance', 'the cultural heritage of chemistry' as well as 'group organization and recruiting' were discussed.<sup>[2]</sup> Given the success of this event, it will be repeated this year, albeit in a different format. The organizers in 2009 are Andreas Zumbühl (University of Geneva) and Hermann Wegner (University of Basel) together with PFC. The date is 17 June 2009, again in Bern (see ref. [3] or [www.chemistry.scnat.ch/YFM](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch/YFM)).

Last but not least, the Rigi-Workshop 'Frontiers in Chemical Biology' was co-organized by the PFC (Karl Gademann) together with the «Platform Biology» of SCNAT. This successful interdisciplinary workshop for PhD students took place at the end of January 2009 at Rigi-Kaltbad. Top-class speakers included Charlie Boone (University of Toronto), Ben Cravatt (The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla), Jing Huang (UCLA), Tarun Kapoor (The Rockefeller University, New York), Chaitan Khosla (Stanford University), and Herbert Waldmann (Max Planck Institute of Molecular

Physiology, Dortmund). For details see [www.chemistry.scnat.ch/rigi-workshop](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch/rigi-workshop).

### Dialogue with Society

In 2009, the «Platform Chemistry» starts its program 'Chemical Landmarks' ('Historische Stätten der Chemie', 'Monuments historiques de la Chimie'). Key scientific and technological discoveries in chemistry have enriched our culture and have strongly contributed to prosperity in Switzerland. The PFC has launched a call for identification of the sites of these discoveries. A commemorative plate and a ceremony with press conference will recall these events and the inventors in order to preserve their memory and share the essence and consequence of these discoveries with the wider public. Details on this program can be found on our webpage ([www.chemistry.scnat.ch/chemical\\_landmarks](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch/chemical_landmarks)) or in CHIMIA.<sup>[4]</sup>

The General Assembly of the United Nations has proclaimed 2011 as the *International Year of Chemistry (IYC)* and 2009 is the year when preparations for this event start. The «Platform Chemistry» and the Swiss Chemical Society will coordinate the Swiss activities for the IYC 2011. It will be an excellent occasion to bring into the public the benefit our science brings to society.

More detailed information about the activities of the PFC may be found at [www.chemistry.scnat.ch](http://www.chemistry.scnat.ch). Questions, comments and offers of active participation are welcome. Please contact the President or the Chief Science Officer of the Platform directly.

Received: March 9, 2009

[1] *Chimia* 2009, 63, 78.

[2] B. Winter-Werner, K. Gademann, *Chimia* 2009, 63, 82.

[3] *Chimia* 2009, 63, 233.

[4] *Chimia* 2009, 63, 170.