

# Conference Report

## The International Chemistry Olympiad – 2023 for the first time in Switzerland

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55<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
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In summer 2023, the International Chemistry Olympiad (ICHO) will take place in Switzerland for the very first time. Since 1987, Switzerland has sent delegations to the ICHO more than 30 times but has never been a host country itself. In 2023, the time for this has finally come. From 16 to 25 July 2023, Switzerland will welcome over 900 enthusiastic chemistry talents, supervisors, and guests from all over the world.

### What is an ICHO and how does one qualify for it?

The ICHO is an annual international competition for talented young students in secondary schools and colleges and takes place in a different country every year. Besides providing a framework where the world's best chemistry talents can measure their skills, it promotes international exchange and cultural familiarisation with the host country over a period of 10 days.



The Swiss team at the ICHO 2019 in Paris, © Science Olympiad Switzerland.

In order to qualify for an ICHO, participants must go through their respective national competition. Every year, hundreds of thousands of students worldwide attempt to enter the ICHO, motivated to learn more about chemistry. In Switzerland and Liechtenstein, the national Olympiad is organized by the SwissChO and is divided into 4 phases. Interested high school or vocational training students complete an entrance test (1) in autumn before starting a specialized training (2) for the national final (3) in spring. The winners – representing some of the brightest minds – then enter a special preparation phase (4). At the latter, students from Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein compete against each other, fighting for the popular tickets to the ICHO in July.

At this international competition, participants take both a practical and a theoretical examination, each lasting 5 hours. The exams are accompanied by the opening ceremony, the reunion event and the closing ceremony, where students have the opportunity to meet one another and network.

### Swiss victories at previous ICHOs

It all began in 1968, when the very first ICHO was held only between Czechoslovakia (as it was in 1968), Poland and Hungary. A couple of years later, in 1974, when Romania was the host of the ICHO, the competition was opened to western countries - including Switzerland. After that, an invitation letter was sent each year to the Swiss Ministry of Education in Federal Bern – only to be discovered in 1986. Thanks to the intervention of the federal official Ernst Flammer, the invitation reached the Association of Swiss Science Teachers where Maurice Cosandey was the representative for the French-speaking part of Switzerland. After travelling to the Netherlands as an observing country, he returned enthusiastically and was determined to send a Swiss delegation to the next ICHO. It turned out to be rather complicated to put together a team from all over Switzerland, so Cosandey simply selected his best students from the Gymnase de Chamblandes in Pully and registered them as the Swiss participants for the ICHO 1987 held in Veszprém, Hungary. That such an involvement can lead to the most interesting careers shows Pierre-Alain Ruffieux, current CEO of Lonza, having been a member of that very first Swiss ICHO team.



First Swiss ICHO team in 1987, © Maurice Cosandey.

As was often the case for many first-time participants, the Swiss delegation ended up in last place in 1987. But not for long. The first Swiss victories were achieved only a couple of years later, in 1991 when Marco Ziegler and Marc-Etienne Schwenter won the first medals (bronze) for Switzerland. A year later, the first gold medal followed, won by Lukas Hintermann. Up until today, Switzerland has won 37 bronze, 6 silver and 2 gold medals as well as 9 honourable mentions, the last medal being won by the young talent Sandro Pfammatter at the online ICHO Japan 2021.

### The ICHO 2023 in Switzerland – a unique opportunity

But how is all of this connected to the ICHO 2023? That the participation at an ICHO inspires and fills one with joy for a lifetime shows the engagement of ETH professor Wendelin J. Stark

for the IChO 2023 as Head of Scientific Committee. Stark participated three times at an IChO (1993–1995) and states:

“The participation in an IChO leaves a positive mark and leads to completely different high performance in one’s later academic and professional career”.

This statement is emphasised by Patrik Willi, President of the Swiss Chemistry Olympiad and member of the steering committee of the IChO 2023. Patrik Willi participated twice in an IChO, once in 2013 and in 2014. Knowing that these experiences influence everyone for a lifetime he became a strong advocate for the cultural exchange happenings at the IChOs. At the IChO 2023 in Switzerland students from more than 90 nations will come together, celebrating their enthusiasm for chemistry while simultaneously learning about each other’s cultural backgrounds while also experiencing Switzerland with all its facets.

Apart from the two exam days, the students will be offered a diverse programme ranging from visiting important Swiss institutions such as the federal parliament (Bundeshaus) in Bern, innovative Swiss companies in the field of chemistry, pharmaceutical and life sciences as well as outstanding research institutions. In addition, they will experience Switzerland’s breath-taking nature, have an introduction to Swiss delicacies and many other Swiss traditions. Participation in the IChO 2023 will result in lifetime memories.



Lab apprentices at ETH Zurich, © IChO 2023.

### Supporting the youth

Winning the International Chemistry Olympiad can have a significant impact on a participant’s academic and professional career, as they are often given the opportunity to study at one of the most renowned universities in the world. What if we told you that you can be part of such a promising career?

The IChO 2023 is keen on providing an unforgettable experience while discovering the most brilliant young minds of this world and showing them their exceptional career options here in Switzerland. For this to happen, the IChO 2023 is continuously in search of interested supporters. All types of support measures, whether this be a financial contribution, the sponsoring of a cultural event for the programme or an in-kind donation, are all very welcome and highly appreciated.

Let’s create an unforgettable experience together for these talented young people, and let’s show them the very best of Switzerland.

### Become a partner of the IChO 2023

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Interested in playing an active part of the IChO 2023? Take the opportunity and become a volunteer for the event from 16 to 25 July 2023. Accompany the young talents during the 10 days and support us in the successful organisation and realisation of this unforgettable event.

### Goals



- Promoting young talents in STEM subjects – especially chemistry – with an attractive extracurricular educational programme
- Motivating young people from all over the world to study chemistry in Switzerland
- Media presence both nationally and internationally
- Public relations work on the topic of chemistry using an image campaign
- Positioning Switzerland as a leading location for education, industry and research

### Project Overview



- Up to 91 delegations, each with a maximum of four competitors, two mentors and some observers
- Two days of chemistry exams
- An inspiring and unforgettable programme with excursions throughout Switzerland
- More than 900 participants with over 200 volunteers on duty
- Opening and closing ceremonies to frame an unforgettable Swiss experience
- Promoting international exchange and diplomatic relations

### Organisers



The National Steering Committee consists of one representative each from:

- ETH Zurich Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich
- D-CHAB Department of Chemistry and Applied Biosciences of ETH Zurich
- SwissChO Swiss Chemistry Olympiad Association
- SO Association of Swiss Science Olympiads
- SCS Swiss Chemical Society