

5 QUESTIONS

Werner Wegscheider treasures academic freedom and feels that the current proliferation of publications is a good thing: *“Electronic publications make our work more efficient.”*



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1 *Who have been your most influential teachers?*

I was lucky to receive an excellent scientific education in school, particularly from my physics and mathematics teachers. Later in the transition to university, what inspired me most was the great freedom and flexibility in the study programme at the time.

2 *Why is internationality important for a university?*

At good universities, teaching and research thrive on cross-pollination of ideas from people with different cultural and educational backgrounds. This is what drives a university's continuous development. Cutting off the international aspect would severely limit further development. It's also worth noting that excellence in research is the result of international competition. This spirit of competition must be present at all levels – from applying for research grants and recruiting doctoral students, postdocs, senior scientists and professors to publishing results at conferences and in international journals.

Werner Wegscheider, Professor of Solid State Physics, has also served as the University Assembly President at ETH Zurich since June 2016.

The University Assembly is composed of the university members' elected representatives.

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3 *What's the best way of helping talented people to flourish?*

Talented scientists can grow and develop particularly well if they are given academic freedom with sufficient funding, no set goals, and minimal bureaucracy.

4 *Does the current system of publishing harm academic research?*

In my opinion, the recent proliferation of publications in a variety of different media is actually extremely positive. All the various search options,

and the excellent electronic access that ETH Zurich researchers enjoy, have made laborious document requests from libraries a thing of the past. This makes scientific work more efficient. I also don't believe it leads to increased pressure on young scientists to publish as much as possible. It has now become standard practice for grant applications, evaluation boards and appointment committees to submit only a certain number of the best publications, or to consider the prestige of the journal.

5 *Are there any areas in which your work hasn't been a success?*

I'm an experimenter at heart, and I like nothing better than working in the lab. In my former role as a university professor in Germany, the size of my working group and the related administrative burden meant I almost completely lost contact with the lab environment. I hope that won't happen again, despite my various and interesting role as University Assembly President at ETH Zurich. — Recorded by Martina Märki