

Changing the environment in which scientists evolve requires considerable cultural changes. In this exclusive interview, EuroScientist talks to Hans Wigzell, one of the most influential scientists in Europe and former president of the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden. Although he recognises the necessity of bureaucrats in research institutions, he denounces their intervention as micromanagers of research. He also shares his views on what is required to, literally, let scientists free from bureaucrats. The solution he advocates involves strong leadership in research to remove the need for bureaucratic rules.



Published in [EuroScientist](#) via [SciencePOD](#).

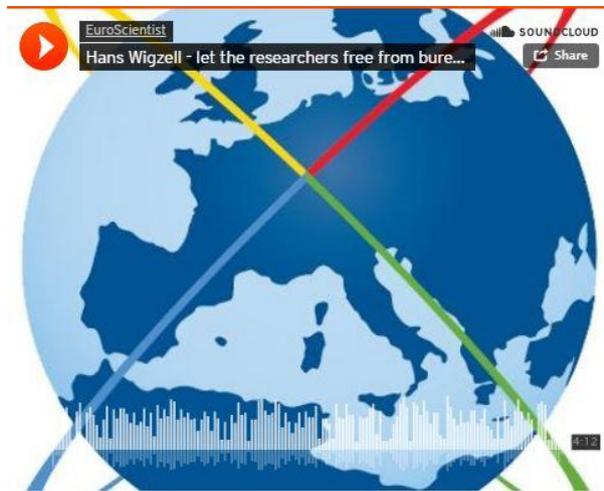
Hans Wigzell interview: let the researchers free from bureaucrats



The conflict between science and bureaucracy has reached unprecedented levels

Hans Wigzell is former president of the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden, adviser to the Swedish government and the European Commission as well as chairman of the Nobel Assembly. He is also [professor emeritus of immunology](#) at the Karolinska Institute. For decades, he has been one of the most influential scientists in Europe. In this exclusive interview to *EuroScientist*, reporter Jen Degett asked him whether research and bureaucracy are compatible.

Wigzell believes that "there is a conflict between science and bureaucracy" even though "there is a need for good bureaucrats." He adds: "Although scientist often refer to bureaucracy as being 'bad' or unnecessary this is not true." He argues that [universities could not function without bureaucrats](#). However, "the bad thing is when bureaucrats go into details and start micromanaging things following bureaucratic rules."



A good example of how things can go wrong, in his view, is the [Bologna Process](#), which aims for greater harmonisation in higher education. He denounces the process as a clear case of conflict where bureaucrats are trying to harmonise the educational systems in Europe.

The process aims to ensure that everybody who leaves the university with a PhD degree has the same skills. "This is completely nonsense" declares Wigzell, "There is a need for people with very different educational training and skills. If you want good scientists, you must let them grow and let them free." He argues that too many regulations and mandatory courses are devastating for creative initiatives.

Too much framing of research goes against the nature of the scientific endeavour. "In my mind science is like a rain forest where you walk around, you hear funny noises and there are good fruits," Wigzell notes. However, "there must be some control on economy, ethics, etc. but ... we should be able to let the researchers free."

A strong research leader can make a difference by maximising freedom for the researchers within the legal structure. Hans Wigzell gives an example of a Cambridge Vice-Chancellor who define their job as to protect researchers from chaos.

He recognises that "right now, it is much more tough for young scientists to get a university job than a few decades ago." He notes that there is much more competition and stress. "To get funding is very challenging and it may pressure weak personalities not to behave in a 100% honest way," he adds.

Part of the solution, in his opinion, is the "need to control the ethical environment when there is a lot of competition." However, the strongest control is not about creation of bureaucratic rules or finding [manipulated articles](#). "The strongest control is to set up a creative collaborative environment in the lab with high ethical standards," Wigzell argues and he concludes: "The solution is leadership which can reduce the need for bureaucratic rules."

Jens Degett

Photo credit: Hans Wigzell.