

EGU2020-22689

<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu2020-22689>

EGU General Assembly 2020

© Author(s) 2022. This work is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.



Scientific freedom and integrity in the 21st century: roles and power of scientists

Claudia Jesus-Rydin

Science is rooted in basic values. Freedom is one of them. History is rich in examples of struggles by scientists for freedom. They often had to struggle to find patrons and avoid persecution. Religious authority, often associated with political power, was a permanent challenge to freedom of thought and freedom of movement, which is a major requirement for scientific cooperation and dissemination.

We live in worrying times, where some politicians are tempted to deglobalise economies and trade by closing borders and even building walls. Letting scientific collaboration be affected and reshaped by these vision is concerning. Especially when we know that the challenges we face are global. Nationalism conditions the impact research and science can have.

The power of hierarchical structures can also lead to limitations to freedom. Scientists themselves are part of a system that makes decisions about people. There is the peer review system, making decisions on who, what and when is published. Another example of power in the hands of the scientific communities is promotion, nomination and awards. However, this power is also a remarkable opportunity for scientists to stand above political flows. Remaining loyal to principles of integrity is the only way for scientists to safeguard freedom for their own sake.

Scientific freedom from funders is crucial but impactful only if supported by independent and forward-looking decisions by scientific communities. Reviewers, promotion and award committees need a wide and integral understanding of scientific development and the vital conditions that favour this.

Freedom and integrity lies at the heart of the scientific endeavour and its ability to develop new knowledge and challenge beliefs. Scientific communities have great responsibilities and roles to play.