

Evidence – Excellence – Relevance? Current Perspectives on the Contested Relations between Research, Practice, and Politics

International Conference

18-19 February 2027

Zurich (Switzerland), Zurich University of Teacher Education

Organized by the BiB Network (www.bib-programm.net)

Call for Papers

Submission deadline: 30 June 2026

Inspired by ongoing dynamics in the field of education, this conference explores novel perspectives on doing and reflecting on research that engages with "matters of concern", to borrow from Bruno Latour. Scholars are increasingly confronted with the challenge of providing knowledge for the (re-)design of professional practice and political decision-making. Following persistent requests for "improvement" anchored in "evidence", various fields of social research are themselves under increasing pressure to change: the demand that policy and practice should be evidence-based finds its increasingly emphatic counterpart in the demand that research should be practice-relevant.

Dominant notions of "evidence", "relevance", and "excellence" thus become interrelated in tension-ridden and powerful ways. Researchers are expected to meet requirements deemed "relevant" while adhering to the highest scientific criteria and standards (themselves the topic of persistent epistemological developments and debates). The challenge of accommodating methodological concerns with practical and political expectations is intensified by the fact that lasting scholarly engagement is hardly conceivable without relations of care (about and for) and/or of critique – yielding fundamental questions such as how to balance trust and autonomy in collaborative settings.

Important questions follow regarding fundamental epistemological, methodological, research-strategic, political, ethical, and academic-cultural issues. These questions concern the social role and responsibility of research as well as divergent and contested understandings of scientific quality and practical value. Engagement with these questions can benefit from the variety of fields of research for which they have become relevant, including education, health and medicine, social work, or management studies.

The aim of this conference is to bring diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives into dialogue, crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries. The described tensions can be approached from different angles, ranging from ontological and epistemological reflections of research-practice-politics nexuses to "second-order" considerations of the social (institutional, organizational, cultural, historical, political) conditions under which research operates and under which certain knowledge claims come to count as important, noteworthy, or legitimate in the first place. The productive dialogue between contributions on these different dimensions is precisely what the conference aims to foster.

Different traditions, modes of research, and strategies of engagement shall serve both as sources of inspiration and reflection and as contrasting cases that help to carve out the specifics of research in different fields of practice and different disciplinary contexts. Particular attention will be paid to current approaches to practice-based research (such as participatory action research, Design-Based Research, or Research-Practice Partnerships) and to emergent conceptual and theoretical perspectives (for example from Science-and-Technology Studies or feminist epistemology). The promises and possibilities, but also the limits and risks, of engaging in practice-oriented research while retaining methodological orientations, critical stances, or scholarly reflexivity will be central themes throughout the conference.

Topics that can be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- Methodological challenges of practice-oriented research
- Epistemological and philosophical reflections
- Current perspectives and models of practice-based research
- Knowledge transfer, knowledge utilization, and co-production
- Organizational forms of transformation-oriented research
- Coordination and communication in science-practice relationships
- Reflexivity, relevance, and critique between moralisation and instrumentalisation
- Ethics of scientific research between policy and practice
- Historical and critical perspectives on knowledge cultures and epistemic orders

To enable the inclusion of diverse experiences and perspectives, the conference language will be English.

The conference will feature a mix of formats, ranging from traditional paper sessions to more discussion-oriented formats and workshops. Dedicated session formats are planned for researchers in qualification phases (doctoral students, postdocs), providing space for reflection and exchange on how the challenges discussed in this conference play out during academic qualification processes.

The conference aims to generate lasting outcomes and will provide the basis for joint publication projects. Details on publication plans will be shared several months before the conference; proposals for additional publication projects (special issues, edited volumes) related to the conference theme are welcome.

Submission of proposals

Scholars interested in joining this conference are invited to submit an abstract of around 300 words to bib@phzh.ch by 30 June 2026. Papers can be empirical, conceptual, or methodological, but in any case need to clarify the research contexts that inform them. To be considered, abstracts need to clearly state the intended contribution to debates on the issues outlined in this call. Notifications on the outcome of the review process can be expected by 31 July 2026.

Please note: This conference has a workshop character. Accordingly, there is a limited number of places. Submissions will be evaluated with a focus on their relevance for the conference theme and their contribution to the diversity of disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical perspectives represented. We particularly encourage submissions that cross disciplinary boundaries. Any questions regarding the submission process, the fit of possible contributions etc. can be sent to bib@phzh.ch or to kenneth.horvath@phzh.ch.