

PRESS RELEASE 04/2025

Public conference: Knowledge and Power – Science in Politics and Society

Berlin, 6 October 2025

Be it pandemics, climate change or technological innovations: Political decisions rely on scientific findings. At the same time, science and research are under increasing pressure. What role could and should science play in a democracy? This will be the topic of discussion at the German Ethics Council's autumn conference on 15 October in Heidelberg.

“We live in an increasingly complex world. Challenges are pressing and scientific expertise is urgently needed,” explains Helmut Frister, Chairman of the German Ethics Council. “At the same time, however, research is being massively questioned, partly discredited or even restricted, as current developments show. How can we get out of this dilemma?”

“Science provides knowledge – politics must weigh up the options and make decisions. Together with our experts and the audience, we want to explore what science and politics stand for and how to achieve constructive dialogue with society,” adds Eva Winkler, Vice-Chair of the Council and spokesperson for the conference's preparatory working group. “However, the political and scientific elites cannot do this alone; it must be supported by the population,” emphasises Uta Eser, deputy spokesperson for the preparatory working group. “That is why we have chosen a public format for this topic. We look forward to the input of all participants.”

The following questions are at the heart of this debate:

- What claim to validity can scientific findings make, and how can they be distinguished from opinions? How should uncertainty, dissent and contradictions within science be communicated appropriately?
- What role do traditional and digital media play in the perception of science – and in building or losing trust?
- How do scientists understand their role in politics and society, and how are scientific findings perceived?
- What significance does scientific knowledge have for the legitimacy of political decisions, and what other factors need to be taken into account?
- How can the different logic and interests of science, politics and society be brought into a constructive exchange?

The conference is open to the public and free of charge. To participate on site, we kindly ask members of the press to **register at presse@ethikrat.org**. The event is held in German, interpretation into English is not provided. The livestream on the internet can be followed without registration. For the hearing impaired, simultaneous transcription is available on site and online; sign language interpretation will be available online.

Members

Prof. Dr. iur. Helmut Frister (Chair)
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Susanne Schreiber (Vice-Chair)
Prof. Dr. phil. Judith Simon (Vice-Chair)
Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. Eva Winkler (Vice-Chair)

Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Jutta Allmendinger
Prof. Dr. phil. Cornelia Betsch
Prof. Dr. iur. Hans-Georg Dederer
Dr. rer. nat. Uta Eser
Prof. Dr. Aldo Faisal
Prof. Dr. rer. pol. Nils Goldschmidt
Prof. Dr. theol. Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt
Prof. Dr. med. Winfried Hardinghaus
Dr. phil. Ute Kalender
Hedy Kerek-Bodden
Prof. Dr. phil. Armin Nassehi
Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Annette Riedel
Prof. Dr. iur. Dr. phil. Frauke Rostalski
Prof. Dr. rer. soc. Dr. theol. Jochen Sautermeister
Prof. Dr. theol. Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl
Dr. med. Dr. h. c. Josef Schuster
Prof. Dr. phil. Mark Schweda
Prof. Dr. iur. Gregor Thüsing
Prof. Dr. Achim Wambach

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Autumn conference of the German Ethics Council
“Knowledge and Power – Science in Politics and Society”
Wednesday, 15 October 2025, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Alte Universität, Aula, Grabengasse 1, 69117 Heidelberg
Livestream: www.ethikrat.org/live

The programme and conference folder providing information about the speakers can be found at www.ethikrat.org/veranstaltungen/tagungen/wissen-und-macht.