



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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The Federal Council
The portal of the Swiss government

A collegiate group since 1848

Since 1848, the Federal Council has always been made up of seven federal councillors, who together govern Switzerland. Each of the seven federal councillors heads a department. The members of the Federal Council decide who is to be allocated which department.

[Composition of the Federal Council since 1848](https://www.gov.ch/en/start/federal-council/history-of-the-federal-council/composition-of-the-swiss-government-since-1848/departementsvorsteher-liste.html) (/gov/en/start/federal-council/history-of-the-federal-council/composition-of-the-swiss-government-since-1848/departementsvorsteher-liste.html)



Composition of the first Federal Council: (back row, from left to right) Ulrich Ochsenbein - military department, Jonas Furrer - political department, Daniel-Henri Druey - department of justice and police, (front row, from left to right) Friedrich Frei-Herosé - commerce and customs department, Wilhelm Matthias Naeff - department of post and construction, Stefano Franscini - department of home affairs und Martin J. Munzinger - department of finance . (KEYSTONE/Photopress-Archiv/Str),

A collegiate group of seven government members and heads of department

The Swiss system of government has hardly changed since 1848. The principles of collegiality and of primus inter pares apply to this day. Federal councillors have a dual function. They are members of the government and therefore jointly responsible for governing. But they also head a department and represent its interests in the governing college, the Federal Council.

Dual role since 1848

Balancing this dual role (government member and head of department) has regularly given rise to debate over the years. Since the early days of the federal state, the tasks of government have expanded considerably. The workload of heads of department has also grown. This has led to regular calls for the system to be changed, and for there to be more federal councillors. So far, the Federal Chancellery has been given more powers, the Parliamentary Services have become an independent entity, and State Secretaries have been appointed.

Forever and always seven departments

The number of federal councillors and departments has always remained the same. What has changed over the years are the significance and responsibilities of the departments. For example, the importance of the FDHA changed with the introduction of social insurance, as did that of DETEC with the advent of modern means of communication and transport and new energy issues. The names of the departments are a good indication of how things have changed. The department now known as DETEC (Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications) was first called the Post Department, then the Post and Railways Department and later the Transport and Energy Department.

Allocation of departments

The federal councillors are elected to the Federal Council and not as the heads of specific departments. The federal councillors decide among themselves who is to be allocated which department after they have been elected.

Last modification 27.12.2022

