



Career funding 1: Eccellenza

Better prospects for young talents

To successfully pursue an academic career, researchers generally need to work with their own team. But many academics do not have the necessary resources. For many years, the SNSF awarded SNSF professorships. In 2017, in consultation with the higher education institutions, it created the “Eccellenza” funding scheme to replace the SNSF professorships. With the SNSF Eccellenza Professorial Fellowships, it is continuing its support for talented young researchers who are bringing themselves into position for a professorship. And with the new SNSF Eccellenza Grants it now also supports researchers who already have a tenure track assistant professorship.

“Eccellenza enables us to expand our support for researchers pursuing an academic career,” says Marcel Kullin, head of the Careers division of the SNSF. “This increases the chances of keeping outstanding young researchers in academia and thereby strengthening Swiss research.” Scientists with an Eccellenza award will receive up to 1.5 million francs for a project spanning several years, which they can conduct together with their team. The SNSF plans to award approximately 45 grants in 2018.

Career funding 3: PRIMA

The stepping stone to a professorship

In autumn 2017, the SNSF launched the first call for PRIMA grants. The PRIMA funding scheme is open to excellent women scientists who have a doctorate or three years’ research experience and who aspire to become professors.

PRIMA grantees can set up their own team and conduct a research project lasting several years at a Swiss higher education institution. In so doing, they can enhance their scientific profile and attain the independence they need to pursue their careers successfully. The funding they receive from the SNSF finances their own salaries as well as the salaries of their team and covers additional project costs. If they are appointed as professors at a higher education institution, they can take the funding with them. The SNSF plans to award up to 12 grants worth a total of 15 million francs each year.



Career funding 2: Flexibility Grant

More flexibility for researchers with children

Looking after small children and doing postdoctoral research at the same time is a difficult balancing act. To take some of the pressure off such postdocs, the SNSF has been offering them a 120% Support Grant since 2013. The grant covers external child care costs and pays for a support person to help with the research work.

At the beginning of 2018, the SNSF expanded this funding option, renaming it the Flexibility Grant. Now doctoral students can also benefit from such grants. So can parents whose children are at primary school. The maximum total amount per person per year has been increased to CHF 30,000. “The grant makes it much easier to combine job and family,” says Simona Isler, Gender Equality Representative of the SNSF. “It gives researchers with children a fair chance of holding their own in academic competition.”

Customised funding

A set of measures for UASs and UTEs

The SNSF aims to offer the universities of applied sciences (UASs) and the universities of teacher education (UTEs) more funding opportunities. For this reason, it now approves positions for doctoral students matriculated at a university abroad if there are no suitable partners in Switzerland for the relevant research field of the UAS or UTE. Under the Eccellenza funding scheme for assistant professors, grantees are able to use their grant to finance part of their salary. By doing so, they gain more research time.

Further measures under discussion include a time-limited funding scheme exclusively for researchers from UASs and UTEs. Moreover, the SNSF is intensifying its communication with these institutions: it is including them in its regular tour of Swiss academic institutions (known as the "Tour de Suisse") and will launch a dedicated web page for them in 2018.



Swiss science award Marcel Benoist

SNSF as evaluator

For almost 100 years now, the Swiss science prize "Marcel Benoist" has symbolised the extent to which the Swiss economy and Swiss society rely on knowledge gained through research. In accordance with the wishes of the donator, the prize is awarded to established researchers whose work is of significance for humankind. In 2017, the climate researcher Thomas Stocker was presented with the prize by Federal Councillor Johann Schneider-Ammann.

As of 2018, the SNSF will be evaluating candidates on behalf of the Marcel Benoist Foundation and the federal government. Thanks to an open nomination process, proposals from the research community can be accepted. An evaluation committee assesses the proposals according to excellence criteria and selects a winner. The committee includes two people from public life who are non-scientists. In addition to its evaluation duties, the SNSF will also carry out the relevant communication activities and organise the award ceremony in Bern.

Great honour for Lausanne scientist

Nobel Prize for a revolutionary method

Jacques Dubochet, professor emeritus of Lausanne University, was awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 2017, together with Joachim Frank and Richard Henderson. The three researchers played a key role in the development of biological cryo-electron microscopy, which is used to study samples that have been cooled down to below -150 degrees Celsius. The SNSF Research Councillor Kaspar Locher from ETH Zurich describes it as a revolutionary method thanks to which "we can now display cell structures and macromolecules with unbelievable precision".

Between 1989 and 2007, Jacques Dubochet received financial support from the SNSF for ten projects in total. By that time, he had already developed cryo-electron-microscopy while working at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg.

