

Basic research campaign

Video campaign for basic science

The SNSF invested approximately 80 per cent of its budget in basic research in 2019. Such research seeks to gain insights into human beings and nature. Insights that provide a basis for the technical and social innovation to which we owe our prosperity. To make the public more aware of the value of basic research, the SNSF launched a digital campaign in June 2019. In a series of videos, scientists talk about their reasons for conducting basic research. Four explanatory videos present knowledge which – when applied in practice – benefits society. For instance, how a gaming computer became a “super physician”. Or how to prevent truancy. The videos from the campaign had been viewed around 24,000 times by the end of 2019. “Basic research is an investment,” says Matthias Egger, President of the National Research Council. “But sometimes, it only pays dividends years or even decades later.”

Pilot scheme for original ideas

Lighting a spark

The Spark pilot scheme launched by the SNSF finances unconventional projects that run for a maximum of twelve months. It is the originality of the idea that counts. How experienced the researchers are or how often they have published is of secondary importance.

757 applications were submitted in response to the first call in summer 2019. Most of the 950 researchers involved in the projects were under 40. Roughly three out of four had never applied for an SNSF grant before. “With Spark, we are primarily reaching out to young researchers and new applicants,” says Director Angelika Kalt. “This is in line with our goal to promote diversity in research.” In November 2019, the SNSF awarded 27 million francs for 284 projects, 17 million more than originally planned.

PRIMA leadership programme

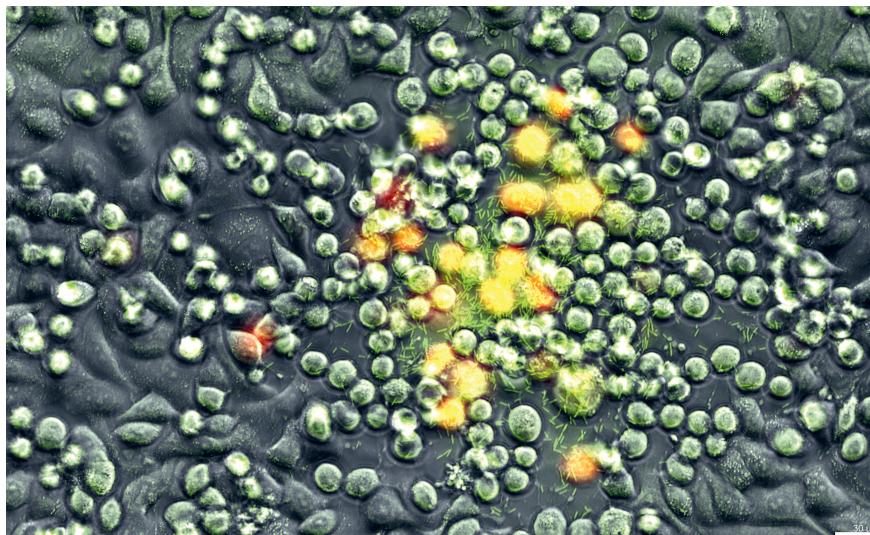
Women in leadership positions

Pursuing a career in academia is more difficult for women. With the new PRIMA leadership programme, the SNSF is promoting gender equality and innovative approaches to leadership. The programme is open to all women researchers funded under the PRIMA scheme. The programme includes workshops as well as counselling and networking opportunities.

Women in leadership positions could play an important role in problem-solving, stressed the leadership expert Margaret J. Wheatley at the programme launch in April 2019. “Without considering a wide range of different perspectives on the scientific and social issues of today, we will not make any progress.” How can we achieve adequate representation of women researchers? The participants in the panel discussion were unanimous: it was the institutions and the academic culture that had to change. It wasn’t the fault of the women if they couldn’t manage to reach the top.



Before the kick-off event of the PRIMA leadership programme, the grantees of the PRIMA scheme came together for a workshop.



5th series of NCCRs

Boosting top-flight research

In December 2019, the Swiss government initiated six more National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs) as part of the SNSF's funding portfolio. They will sustainably strengthen research on antibiotic resistance, automation, language development, microorganisms, sustainable chemistry and quantum technology. "The thematic scope of the new NCCRs shows there is a huge potential for cutting-edge research and innovation at Swiss higher education institutions," says Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin. Between 2020 and 2023, the SNSF will be investing 100 million francs in the six NCCRs for a maximum duration of twelve years.

More than 50 proposals were received for the 5th series of NCCRs. After scientifically evaluating the proposals, the SNSF submitted a shortlist of eleven potential NCCRs to the government for final selection.

Study to evaluate Doc.CH

Faster PhDs

Doc.CH is an efficient funding scheme that meets a real need. This was the conclusion drawn by a study conducted at the University of Bern in April 2019. The SNSF annually awards a grant to around 50 doctoral students in the humanities and social sciences. Fritz Schlunegger, President of the Specialised Committee for Careers: "On average, doctoral students with a Doc.CH grant need less time to complete their thesis."

But the study also pinpoints some aspects that could be improved. For example, the grant allows doctoral students to devote more time to research, but does not provide enough support for other tasks, such as teaching. "The study gives us some valuable insights," says Schlunegger. "We will take them into account when we next review the scheme."

Data sharing

On the right path

75% of the researchers based in Switzerland provide open access to their research data. However, only around 44% do so using public databases, known as repositories. 38% publish the data in journals or on their own websites, the remaining 18% provide the data on request. These figures are taken from a report* published by the SNSF and swissuniversities in May 2019. The report is based on a survey conducted among more than 2,000 researchers.

Why are some of the data still not freely accessible? Many researchers want to publish their work first. Some have their doubts regarding rights of use and confidentiality. The SNSF understands and respects their standpoint. Researchers funded by the SNSF are not required to share data before publishing their work. And the requirement is waived entirely in the event of any sensitive legal or ethical issues.

***Von der Heyde, M. (2019). Open Research Data: Landscape and cost analysis of data repositories currently used by the Swiss research community, and requirements for the future**

