

Call for proposals: SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (SNSF-CTCs)

Design of a Career Tracking System for the Swiss National Science Foundation

1. Background and purpose

Mandated by the Federal Government, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) supports basic science in all academic disciplines, from history to medicine and the engineering sciences. The improvement of career perspectives for younger researchers has consistently been a key objective for the SNSF. Over 20 per cent of the funds are invested in career funding instruments targeted directly at young researchers, from PhD students to Assistant Professors. In 2016, over a thousand young researchers benefited from career funding. In recent years, the SNSF has implemented supplementary measures to support mobility, work-life balance and gender equality for PhDs and postdocs.

The purpose of the SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (SNSF-CTCs) is to gain a better understanding of the career paths of successful applicants for post-doctoral SNSF career funding schemes and of the medium and long-term impact of the career funding activities of the SNSF. The results will serve as a basis for the future development of career funding policies and instruments. See also Appendix for further background information and resources.

2. Objective

The objective of this project is to develop a detailed concept and study protocol for the SNSF-CTCs with a follow-up duration of 10 years or longer, in collaboration with partners at the SNSF. New cohorts will be added to SNSF-CTCs each year, while data on former grantholders will be collected annually.

The study protocol should address the following points:

- Definition of study population of successful applicants and suitable control groups
- Definition of baseline or time zero
- Operationalization and definition of variables to be collected
- Data collection methods during follow-up
- Definition of outcomes
- Measures to minimise confounding and bias
- Sample size consideration and statistical power
- Informed consent, ethical and data protection issues
- Harmonization with activities of other research funders (for example Wellcome Trust, European Research Council, members of Science Europe – see also references).

Mature drafts of data collection instruments at baseline and follow-up must also be developed. Ethical and data protection issues must be considered and a draft of the ethics submission to the Ethics Committee of the Canton of Bern included if required.

While this mandate is limited to the elaboration of concepts, there is a possibility for further cooperation during the implementation phase.

3. Examples of questions to be addressed by SNSF-CTCs

The following questions are of particular interest: What is the rate of retention in academic science of successful applicants to post-doctoral SNSF career funding schemes and control groups? Is there a gender gap and is it widening or narrowing over time? What are the most important reasons for leaving academia across SNSF career funding schemes, genders and disciplines?

Among applicants who leave academia, what are their most common sectors of employment and career trajectories? How many are using their scientific training or background in their current job? How many are involved in basic or applied research? What is their rate of unemployment across disciplines and genders?

Among applicants who remain in academia, how many receive further SNSF funding as principle applicant or as co-applicant? How many secure permanent academic positions, are promoted to professor, become members of a faculty or directors of institutes? How many stay in academia but continue their career abroad? Etc.

4. Scope and synergies

The cohorts should cover the post-doctoral career funding instruments of the SNSF, including Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, funding instruments at Assistant Professor level and PRIMA (see www.snsf.ch and Appendix for further details). Successful applicants from all disciplines and types of institution (universities, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education, private research institutions) and suitable control groups should be included.

The tendering groups are invited to comment on potential synergies with existing databases. The SNSF holds comprehensive data of applicants and grantees. An extract of the data is available on p3.snf.ch. In 2014, the SNSF has also initiated longitudinal surveys for grantees of the Ambizione funding scheme, with which the SNSF aims to promote the early independence of postdoctoral researchers (see also Appendix).

5. Qualifications expected

Applicants should have documented expertise and experience in longitudinal studies and have a track record in small projects of this nature. Experience in educational research is an asset.

6. Deliverables and timing

- A draft study design, for discussion with the SNSF (end 2017).
- A final study design, with data collection instruments and ethics submission (February 2018).

The total cost of the concept should not exceed CHF 50'000.

7. Tender

Tenders must be submitted in writing by 17 July 2017 to careertracking@snf.ch. They should include:

- Approaches and methods, including set-up of cohorts, possible controls, sampling methods and data collection approaches.
- Practicalities of study execution and data collection to be considered, including comments on expected response rates.
- Information and resources required from SNSF.
- Conditions of cooperation: respective roles in study design, publication rights etc.
- A timeline and budget.
- Project team, references, project portfolio.

Decisions will be communicated by 15 September 2017.

8. Selection Criteria

Criteria for selection are the soundness of the methodology proposed, the orientation of the proposal to the study questions and the usefulness in view of the further development of the funding activities, prior experience with comparable projects as well as cost efficiency.

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Appendix:

- Background Information

SNSF, June 2017

Appendix: Background Information and Resources

1. The SNSF

- SNSF Profile
<http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/profile/Pages/default.aspx>
- SNSF Multi-Year Programme 2017-2020
http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/mehrjahresprogramm_2017_2020_e.pdf
- Research Database P3
<http://p3.snf.ch/>
- Annual Report 2016
<http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/profil/2016/SNF-Profil-2016-2017-en.pdf>

2. Career funding

2.1 Overview

- Promotion of young researchers
<http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/promotion-of-young-researchers/Pages/default.aspx>
- Recent innovations in career funding
<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/careers/innovations-in-career-funding/Pages/default.aspx>
- Equal opportunities in research funding
<http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/gender-equality/Pages/default.aspx>

2.2 Career funding schemes

- Overview of Career funding schemes
<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/careers/Pages/default.aspx>
- Selection guide to funding schemes:
<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/selection-guide-for-funding-schemes/Pages/default.aspx>

2.3 Supplementary measures

- Mobility grants in projects
- 120% support grant
- Gender equality grant
- Protected Research Time for Clinicians

Overview: <http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/supplementary-measures/Pages/default.aspx>

3. Relevant evaluation studies

- Evaluation report on Ambizione particularly chapter 4: Thoughts on a monitoring system for Ambizione
http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/Web-News/ambizione_evaluationsbericht_e.pdf
- Surveys on the Professorships of the Swiss National Science Foundation
http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/Web-News/news_280515_bericht_snf_foerderungsprofessuren.pdf

4. Career tracking studies of other organisations

- Huber, Nathalie; Wegner, Antje; Neufeld, Jörg (2015): MERCI (Monitoring European Research Council's Implementation of Excellence): Evaluation Report on the Impact of the ERC Starting Grant Programme, iFQ-Working Paper No. 16, http://www.forschungsinfo.de/Publikationen/Download/working_paper_16_2015.pdf
- Promovierendenpanel des Deutschen Zentrums für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW), <http://www.forschungsinfo.de/profile/start.html>
- Reimann, Ralph; Wysocki, Eva L. (2015): Karrierewege von FWF-ProjektleiterInnen an der Universität Wien. In: Ash, Mitchell G.; Ehmer, Joseph (Hrsg.): Universität – Politik – Gesellschaft, Vienna University Press
- Richard Heidler (2016): Karrierewege im Emmy Noether-Programm und beim Heisenberg-Stipendium, DFG infobrief 2.16, http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/dfg_im_profil/geschaeftsstelle/publikationen/info_briefe/ib02_2016.pdf
- Stanford PhD Alumni Employment Project, <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/pres-provost/irds/phdjobs>
- Swedish Research Council (2015): KARRIÄRSTRUKTUR OCH KARRIÄRVÄGAR I HÖGSKOLAN, <https://publikationer.vr.se/produkt/forskningens-framtid-karriarstruktur-och-karriarvagor-i-hogskolan/>
- Wellcome Trust (2014): Wellcome Trust basic science career trackers: results of wave 6, <https://wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/wtp059281.pdf>;