

Evaluation of the funding scheme Doc.CH

Evaluation mandate

Call for study outlines

1. Introduction

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) supports emerging researchers in all disciplines with a broad range of funding schemes. The aims and specifications of these schemes are regularly assessed by external evaluation teams.

Doc.CH was first launched in 2013. With this scheme, the SNSF introduced the possibility of independently applying for funding to finance a doctorate in Switzerland (including salary). The aim was to support promising researchers who wish to write a doctoral thesis on a topic of their own choice. Since its introduction, the scheme has been limited to the humanities and social sciences. This restriction was dictated by the limited resources and justified by the fact that the need for such funding was greatest in this area of research, as shown by an [Evaluation of the fellowship programme](#) commissioned by the SNSF in 2010. The Doc.Grants that were planned to replace Doc.CH in the funding period 2017-2020 would have covered all disciplines, but they could not yet be implemented for financial reasons. In view of the funding period 2021-2024, the existing scheme and the possibility of opening it for all disciplines need to be reviewed.

Since 2013, around 790 applications for Doc.CH have been submitted and 234 Doc.CH grants have been approved.

1.1 Primary goal of the review: evaluating the impact of the scheme

- a) The main purpose of Doc.CH is to enable promising researchers to raise their own funding for a dissertation on a topic of their own choice. The humanities and social sciences, in which doctoral students often work on topics that are relatively independent of the supervisors, seem to be particularly suited to such a scheme. Only doctoral students who do a dissertation in the research area of their doctoral supervisor are covered by SNSF project funding. The SNSF wants to know if Doc.CH is effective in filling a gap in the funding of dissertations and if it represents an appropriate addition to the existing range of funding opportunities offered by the SNSF and the universities.

- b) Furthermore, it is necessary to determine how successful the supported doctoral candidates are or have been in completing their dissertation. The completion of the dissertation (from its submission up to the award of the doctorate) within the duration of the Doc.CH grant is therefore a central criterion for assessing the success of the scheme. Also relevant are the grades obtained for the dissertations. Only initial indications are to be expected on this question since only a relatively small share of grantees will have completed their research at the time of the planned evaluation. The evaluation needs to examine whether the doctoral students themselves perceive the financial support and the opportunity of doing an independent dissertation as consistently workable or as variable from phase to phase of the doctoral studies.

1.2 Secondary goal: assessing the specifications, the evaluation procedure and the appeal of the scheme

In addition to the above-mentioned task of analysing the impact of the scheme, the SNSF expects an assessment of the *specifications* (including participation requirements), the *evaluation procedure* and the *appeal* of the scheme, including an analysis of how it compares to other SNSF funding schemes, in particular the financing of doctoral students via project funding. This must be clarified not only from the point of view of those receiving funding, but also from the perspective of doctoral supervisors and those responsible for running doctoral schools at Swiss universities. The SNSF would also be interested to know how the universities perceive this scheme within the overall funding of doctoral students. In addition, the opinion of the members of the SNSF evaluation commissions should be taken into account. A comparison with similar schemes offered by other funding organisations would also be useful, especially with regard to a potential opening of the scheme for all disciplines and for applicants without any relation to Switzerland.

2. Available data and methodology

The SNSF will share its data, in a form that is yet to be defined, with those conducting the study to enable them to evaluate the data and to conduct a survey among current and former grantees. The following figures relating to applications and grants are available to date (as at January 2018):

Year	Applications	Grants
2013	149	44
2014	127	49
2015	162	43
2016	196	51
2017	155	47

In total, 234 grants have been awarded. At present, around 150 grantees are working on their dissertations (ongoing projects, some of them extended). Approximately 55 grants have been completed. 27 grants have been awarded but are not yet underway (as at January 2018).

The group responsible for the evaluation must define the methodology in such a way that a representative statistic of the available data can be compiled. It is also necessary to clarify the question of a suitable control group, in particular to assess the influence of the scheme on the successful completion of dissertations. The evaluators will probably have to carry out their own analyses in order to determine the addresses of former grantees/project employees, for whom the SNSF has no current address.

As part of the assignment, the exact number of persons to be contacted will need to be determined. However, a complete survey is to be carried out among grantees, possibly supplemented by some oral interviews.

Since the share of completed Doc.CH grants will still be small at the time of the study, the SNSF expects only first indications with regard to the effects of Doc.CH on the writing of dissertations (item 1.1 b). However, the study outline should allow for an extension of the study at a later stage, which is still to be determined, in order to be able to make additional statements on the impact of the scheme, including on career development.

The statutory provisions, in particular with regard to data protection and confidentiality, must be complied with in full.

The final report must be written in English, summaries in German, French and Italian need to be provided.

3. Tender

3.1 Content of tender and selection process

Institutions considered suitable by the SNSF are contacted directly. The procedure of commissioning the study is divided into two phases. In the first phase, candidates submit a document of no more than 8 pages presenting the main approach and methodologies of the study. This study outline must be submitted together with the curricula vitae and the list of publications of the persons involved (publications that are relevant to the SNSF study can be highlighted). The following points need to be addressed:

- Approach and methodology, as well as an opinion on the study's feasibility
- What questions can be answered with the approach you have chosen? What challenges do you expect to face?
- Information and resources needed from the SNSF, in particular specifications for the data needed to conduct the study
- Schedule and budget
- Project team, references, comparable projects
- Potential conflicts of interests

The submitted study outlines will be evaluated by the Specialised Committee Careers (FA CAR) of the SNSF and a limited number will be shortlisted. The authors of the shortlisted outlines will then be invited to respond in detail to proposals and questions from the FA CAR. In the end, the FA CAR will agree on a single study outline.

3.2 Financial scope

The study outline must include a draft budget for the proposed study. The overall sum may not exceed 60,000 Swiss francs.

3.3 Contract

At the end of the selection process, the scope and content of the assignment will be set out in a contract between the selected bidder and the SNSF.

4. Selection criteria

- Expertise of the study leader in social sciences and experience in executing qualitative and quantitative studies;
- Profound understanding of research policies and the promotion of young researchers in Switzerland and abroad;
- Good understanding of SNSF funding schemes, in particular career funding schemes;
- Quality of the methodological approach as well as feasibility of the proposed study;
- Schedule and budget.

5. Schedule (proposal)

19 March 2018	Submission of study outlines
8 May	Assessment of submitted study outlines - pre-selection by Specialised Committee Careers and input on shortlisted study outlines
4 June	Submission of detailed response
10 July	Assessment of the submitted responses - final decision and award of the assignment by Specialised Committee Careers
July to August	Signing of contract between SNSF and selected bidder
August	Start of the study
22 January 2019	Presentation of key results
May 2019	Submission of report (including raw data) to SNSF

The study outlines must be sent **by 19 March 2018** to the following address:

Swiss National Science Foundation
Careers division
Wildhainweg 3
P.O. Box
CH-3001 Bern

If you have any questions, please contact:

Marcel Kullin (Tel. 031 308 22 30) or Daniel Sebastiani (Tel. 031 308 22 52)

Further information on Doc.CH: www.snsf.ch > Funding > [Doc.CH](#)

25 January 2018