

Multi-Year Programme 2017–2020

Summary

Research has the power to fascinate. At the same time, it provides an important basis for societal development and – not least in Switzerland with its scant natural resources – for economic prosperity. In this multi-year programme, the SNSF sets out its plans to strengthen and develop Swiss research and contribute to enhancing its already excellent reputation during the 2017-2020 planning period.

Researchers today work in a strongly internationalised, extremely competitive and rapidly changing science system. Digitisation trends and increasing demands for transparency are changing the way in which research is conducted, communicated and evaluated. Against this backdrop and its attendant challenges, the SNSF intends to pursue four **priority targets** between 2017 and 2020:

- Continue to promote **excellence and internationality in research and evaluation** by anticipating future needs, encouraging competition for grants and creating incentives for strengthening cooperation, transparency and good scientific practices.
- Facilitate **early independence for young researchers** and present clear career prospects to encourage researchers to contemplate a career in academia, and to help underpin the excellence and social acceptance of Swiss research in the long term.
- Contribute to **knowledge transfer and innovation**, in particular by launching a new joint programme with the Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI).
- Develop new research areas and channel competencies towards promising fields through **targeted initiatives aimed at setting priorities**.

A purely responsive mode of funding based on competition between applicants will remain the SNSF's top priority with regard to its **funding portfolio**. Most of the available money will continue to be channelled to project and career funding without any thematic, strategic and structural conditions attached.

Project funding will continue to be the SNSF's flagship funding scheme. It allows researchers from all disciplines to apply for funding for a project of their own choice. To innovate the scheme, the SNSF will introduce excellence grants for outstanding researchers, make it possible for funds to be used more flexibly, and extend the running time so that researchers have more freedom to implement their projects as they see fit. The increase in the average annual payment per grant will enable the SNSF to strengthen international collaboration on research projects, in particular. It will also create incentives to improve access to publications and research data.

In **career funding**, the SNSF will create clearer distinctions between the various schemes to focus more strongly on supporting academic careers. The proposed measures include more substantial grants for the early career schemes (Doc. Grants and Ambizione), introduction of an excellence scheme for women (PRIMA – Promote Women in Academia) as well as additional measures promoting mobility and gender equality in all schemes.

It is important to note that the SNSF plays a subsidiary role in the promotion of young researchers, with the higher education institutions taking the lead. The universities plan to create additional assistant professorships with tenure track (APTT), which will offer young researchers clearer career prospects. Mandated by the Federal Council, the SNSF will support this systemic change by introducing APTT Grants. In addition, the universities of applied science and universities of teacher education are studying different kinds of career

paths at their institutions. The SNSF will monitor these developments and adapt its schemes if necessary in consultation with its partners.

The SNSF is pursuing more specific objectives in its **programmes** by specifying thematic, conceptual and/or organisational requirements. In the 2017-2020 period, it will continue to run the National Research Programmes (NRPs) and National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs) with minor adaptations. More far-reaching modifications are planned for Sinergia, which will in future specifically promote collaborative research across disciplinary boundaries that has a high potential for achieving ground-breaking results. By implementing the new funding scheme Bridge, the SNSF and the CTI will jointly close a funding gap between basic research and innovation. The SNSF also plans to introduce priority programmes in the areas of social innovation, digital humanities and clinical research.

As concerns **infrastructure funding**, a key element in the development of many disciplines, the SNSF aims to clarify its role in consultation with the SERI and to focus on the initial funding of research-driven infrastructures. In the 2017-2020 period, it will continue to support the R'Equip scheme for large research equipment, the funding of editions in the humanities, longitudinal studies and biobanks to strengthen medical research, and infrastructures for particle physics, astrophysics and astroparticle physics through FLARE (Funding LARge international REsearch projects).

The SNSF will also continue to support **science communication**, in particular Agora, which promotes dialogue between researchers and the public.

To implement these measures, the SNSF needs an **average annual budget increase of 4.9%**. The additional funds will be used primarily to promote young researchers, to develop the joint programme Bridge with the CTI and to consolidate project funding. The financial planning was elaborated at the end of 2014, prior to the revision of the Federal budget in early 2015. Priorities will be set for the planned measures on the basis of the ERI dispatch 2017-2020.

Relations between Switzerland and the EU have been an additional source of insecurity following the referendum of 9 February 2014. The partial association of Switzerland to the European research programme **Horizon 2020** will elapse at the end of 2016. With this in mind, the SNSF is elaborating scenarios for the event that researchers in Switzerland are again excluded from European funding schemes.