

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research EAER
Federal Councillor Mr. Guy Parmelin

Electronic mail to:
bfi-botschaft@sbfi.admin.ch

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**Statement by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences on the 2023/9 consultation
“Funding of Education, Research and Innovation in the years 2025-2028 (ERI
Dispatch 25-28)”**

Dear Federal Councillor, dear Madam, dear Sir,

We would like to thank you for this opportunity to state our position on the “Funding of Education, Research and Innovation in the Years 2025-2028 (ERI Dispatch 25-28)” within the consultation. In this Dispatch, the Federal Council presents its priorities and the resources reserved for the planned measures.

The Academies set priorities

The Federal Council underlines Switzerland’s interest in maintaining and further improving its position as a leading location for education, research and innovation. The Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences a+ (hereinafter the “Academies” for short) have duly taken note that the Federal Council is planning expenditures of CHF 29.7 billion for the years 2025-2028 in order to continue to play a leading role in the ERI sector, which is fundamental for the welfare of our country. The Academies are aware of the challenging financial situation of the Confederation. The Academies’ six members are prepared to play their part through prioritization and by remaining extremely responsible in the use of the funds received, so that, even in economically difficult times, the greatest possible benefit is achieved with the planned resources.

The Academies' demands

Education, research and innovation form an essential pillar of our democratic society. The Academies contribute important components to this foundation.

The Academies call for the financing of their core tasks (for example, the dialogue between science and politics, which is essential for our society in the wake of the corona virus crisis) to be secured for the funding period 2025 to 2028 as well. In addition to these core tasks, the Academies implement numerous relevant projects that were previously not included in the catalogue of core tasks. If these projects also have to be financed from this source, the Academies' financial base will be eroded. This would lead to a noticeable and lasting impairment for a network of more than 100,000 scientists and scholars who work on a voluntary basis.

Although the savings are drastic for the Academies, they hardly bring any financial relief for the Federal Government. A funding gap of CHF 6.25 million on average per annum, or 8.23% of the Federal Government's contribution to the Academies, means only 0.08% of the total ERI funding amount for the Federal Government from 2025 to 2028.

The Federal Government's ambitious goals that are proposed within the ERI Dispatch and also supported by the Academies, are not reflected in the Academies' funding. The financial basis must be brought into line with the expectations.

A second central demand of the Academies in the response to the ERI Dispatch 2025-2028 is that they be admitted to the Swiss Conference of Higher Education Institutions in an advisory capacity.

We are pleased to explain the Academies' demands below.

The Academies are creating the scientific foundations for sustainable development

When faced with far-reaching changes, it is more crucial than ever today to develop options for action at the national and international levels, to describe connections, form networks and seek a dialogue with the population. Based on the results of the external evaluation commissioned by the SERI, the Academies are in a position to make interdisciplinary scientific contributions to sustainable development - which, nota bene, is a cross-cutting priority topic of the Federal government. The Academies have a legal mandate (RIPA Art. 11) to strengthen cooperation in and between all scientific disciplines and to embed an understanding of science in society. At a time of great challenges, one can see best the concrete value of early detection, taking responsibility, dialogue between science and society, and dealing with ethical issues in medicine and science. We particularly welcome the fact that the Academies will be significantly involved in fostering quantum research and will assume responsibility for, and governance of, the Data Coordination Centre in the field of personalized medicine.

The Academies are an efficient militia organization

This succeeds not least because of voluntary engagement based on the militia system: the Academies receive 0.63% of the federal ERI funds, but they network and mobilize around 100,000 scientists and scholars within Switzerland. They are thus an extremely efficient organization. In its Dispatch, the Federal Council acknowledges that the Academies have fulfilled their mandate over the past funding period. In addition, a recent evaluation commissioned by the SERI of the organization's development, based

on an external business analysis, confirms that the Academies work efficiently.

Funding cuts jeopardize the Academies' militia system

Conversely, this means that even a slight reduction in the financial resources has a noticeable impact. Numerous ongoing activities that benefit Switzerland as a science nation would also be affected. This makes it more difficult for a large number of people to make a motivated commitment. Major challenges lie ahead, which the Federal Council itself outlines in its Dispatch and which the Academies also emphasize in their multi-year planning 2025-2028.

The Academies perform a very wide range of core tasks

The core tasks constitute the basis for the broad work of the Academies. They include complex topics such as strengthening cooperation within and between all scientific disciplines, meaningful cooperation with actors in and outside of the ERI sector, international cooperation, early identification of socially-relevant topics, assessing the opportunities and risks of new technologies, encouraging a perception of ethical responsibility in the sciences, shaping the dialogue between science and society, and promoting innovative technologies. In particular, the dialogue between science and politics has proved essential, notably in the context of the coronavirus crisis, and needs to be further deepened. Furthermore, the Academies are an important actor in the Swiss funding landscape, providing support for long-term research projects. All this requires a reliable organization and infrastructure geared to the long term, through professionally-managed offices.

To illustrate this point, here is an example from the field of medicine: the medical-ethical guidelines of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) provide concrete assistance in sensitive areas of medical practice. Doctors nationwide follow these guidelines, and numerous Swiss Federal Court decisions also refer to them. The Confederation relies on them being regularly updated and adapted to new scientific and social developments, as was the case, for example, with triage in intensive care units during the coronavirus crisis. Even if the drafting of the texts of the guidelines is done on a voluntary basis by experts in the militia system, the SAMS needs sufficient resources to accompany the implementation work on this demanding and socially relevant task.

The Academies, through their engagement in multinational bodies, also make a contribution to maintaining Switzerland's strong position as a research location in the European research area. One example is the participation in the Working Group European Research Area of the All European Academies (ALLEA). These channels are currently even more important for science, in view of Switzerland's current status as a non-associated third country with regard to Horizon Europe. Switzerland also benefits from participation in European bodies that give scientific policy advice. All of these activities have to be funded out of the basic amount. It would be a negative signal to place a further burden on the higher-education and research landscape with funding cuts, particularly against the backdrop of the great uncertainties over future developments in the EU dossier.

Projects are being assigned to core tasks

The Academies note that in the ERI Dispatch 2025-2028, activities that until now were conducted as separately-funded projects or as new tasks are being newly assigned to the core tasks.

The increase in earmarked funds as presented in the Dispatch only pertains to the additional tasks of the Quantum Initiative and the Data Coordination Centre (Swiss Personalized Health Network), which have been recently assigned to a+. The core tasks, comprising ongoing work and already-initiated projects, are not covered, leading to a deficit of about 16% (on average CHF 5.7 million each year from 2025 to 2028, or CHF 22.7 million over four years respectively).

ERI period 2025-2028. All numbers in millions of CHF

	Requirement as per multi-year planning*	Contribution as per ERI Dispatch	Difference
Core mandate	138.9	116.2	22.7
Of which MINT funding	11.5	10.9	0.6
Of which new joint tasks	18.5	0.0	18.5
Long-term projects	60.6	58.3	2.3
Of which editions	13.9	13.8	0.1
Additional tasks	104.2	104.2	0.0
Of which Swiss Quantum Initiative	83.2	83.2	0.0
Of which SPHN DCC	21.0	21.0	0.0
Total	303.7	278.7	25.0

* Excluding additional tasks, which are not included in the multi-year planning

Projects cause an erosion of the financial base

The Academies' financial base is being eroded by projects and joint tasks which are now being newly assigned to the core tasks. The result is a gap of CHF 25 million. An increase in additional tasks together with constant funding means a deteriorated situation in the basic funding. The shortfall cannot be covered by further improvements in business efficiency, as the evaluation report has also shown. **In total, these CHF 6.25 million per year or CHF 25 million respectively account for only 0.08% of the total ERI funding amount for the period from 2025 to 2028. In our view, this can hardly result in any meaningful potential savings for the Federal Government.** As a small organization generating a broad impact in the ERI sector, the Academies are very sensitive to any funding cut. Consequently, the projects that would need to be examined are above all those that have been financed separately up to now.

New joint tasks

Specifically, the following, already-running projects (referred to as "new joint tasks" in the ERI Dispatch) are in jeopardy with the current funding proposal:

Promotion of the MINT sector: The MINT promotion would be able to be continued on the same scale with CHF 10.9 million. However, the establishment of a national coordination office, which would contribute significantly to better control, would have to be dispensed with. Current experience shows that increased cooperation between all partners and all measures is essential to avoid duplication and to organize the funding as effectively as possible. The Academies have been working actively on this mandate since 2013. They bring a demonstrably successful contribution by covering the entire breadth of the MINT spectrum. Building on what already exists, the MINT promotion needs to be stepped up in a targeted manner in order to counteract the shortage of skilled workers and, in particular, to persuade women and girls to take an interest in MINT professions.

Open Research Data: By signing the ORD strategy and establishing a Strategy Council, Switzerland has committed to engaging in this internationally highly-

relevant sector that is absolutely key for research. A withdrawal would not only have consequences for our country's reputation, but could also lead to the exclusion of local scientists and scholars from future developments. The Academies are a member and partner organization of the Strategy Council. They are responsible for implementing various lines of action, including the organization of a Sounding Board of researchers for the Strategy Council. Funding through project-related contributions will expire in 2024. Additional funding will be needed to continue the Academies' commitment to both the Strategy Council and implementation of the ORD strategy from 2025 to 2028.

Funding of research networks: Switzerland benefits tremendously from the establishment of coordination offices of international research networks. Some leeway is needed for meaningful, competitive funding of those networks. If they do not receive increased funding, the Academies will be compelled to examine whether continuing the current funding activities continues to make sense. There is a high risk of a gap appearing in the research landscape's infrastructure.

Young Talents in Clinical Research: If our country is to continue to rank among the international leaders in this highly-competitive field, it is crucial to persuade promising clinicians to take an interest in research early in their careers and to fund them. This unique funding offering fills a gap, as there have been merely heterogeneous local initiatives until now and no funding structures are inherent in the system for this important target audience. Currently, there is no adequate alternative funding option in Switzerland. Without additional funding, this successful programme would have to be discontinued. Young, upcoming researchers need to be funded in order to maintain the quality of clinical research.

Coordination of clinical research: An efficient coordination platform has been set up in recent years, the future of which will be called into question without a financial basis. The need for an established, overarching framework for institutional dialogue and increased cooperation between all actors of academic clinical research and public health at the national level will remain high in the period from 2025 to 2028.

Career funding programmes for doctoral students: The Academies have taken note that the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) intends to discontinue the career funding programme at doctoral level as per 2025. With the discontinuation of the MD-PhD and doc.ch funding programmes, Switzerland as a research location loses two funding instruments enabling excellent young researchers to develop independent research projects and raise the corresponding funds. The SAMS is prepared to take over the funding mandate for the MD-PhD programme with sufficient funding, while an adequate new funding instrument remains to be created to replace doc.ch for the humanities and social sciences.

New project Ambition CH2030+ ("Ateliers du future"): The project has been supported by the SERI for the years 2023-2024 with basic funding for the preparation and acquisition of third-party funding. The project management is in contact with renowned partners (SNSF, SRG/SSR, funding foundations). The aim is to strengthen the diverse and often-local initiatives in the area of sustainability communication and engagement at the national level, and to make them accessible to a broader population. However, the project cannot be implemented without additional funding.

The Academies are aware of their financial responsibility

On this basis, the Academies would like to emphasize once again that they will continue to use all the resources they receive with the greatest possible efficiency and the best possible results. From all these considerations, the Academies draw the conclusion that the funding gap of CHF 6.25 million per annum on average for the core tasks must be bridged.

The Academies are requesting a seat at the Swiss Conference of Higher Education Institutions (SCHEI) in an advisory capacity

We would like to take this opportunity to raise an important point that has been preoccupying the Academies for several years. With the SNSF, the ETH Board, swissuniversities, Innosuisse and the Swiss Science Council, all ERI partners have a seat at the Swiss Conference of Higher Education Institutions. The Academies are the only ERI partner that is not represented at this important conference, although they are working on many issues of importance to the SCHEI, such as MINT promotion, support of young researchers and scientific integrity. Although the Academies already applied for a seat in an advisor capacity at the Swiss Conference of Higher Education Institutions in December 2021, the substance of our application has not been examined to date. We only received an assurance in January 2022 that our application would be examined. In connection with the completion of the evaluation under Art. 69 of the Federal act on the promotion and coordination of higher education, we would like to request once again that the Academies be admitted to this body.

We thank you in advance for a favourable consideration of our requests and are at your disposal to provide further information at any time.

With best regards,



Prof. Dr. Marcel Tanner
President
Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences



Dr. Marianne Bonvin
Managing Director
Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences

The statement is available in English, German, French and Italian at

<https://akademien-schweiz.ch/en/publications/stellungnahme/stellungnahmen-2023/>