



Innovative Policies for Fostering Academic Careers in Switzerland

Policy Highlights

Individual Coaching for Postdocs and (advanced) PhD candidates

Motivation

The doctorate and the post-doctorate can be particularly challenging. While stress often peaks towards the end, significant difficulties can also arise during earlier stages. Stress resilience and frustration tolerance may suddenly decline, leading to uncertainty and anxiety about next steps. In such situations, coaching can be invaluable, helping postdocs and doctoral candidates manage challenges, successfully complete their qualification and prepare for their next career move. Even highly successful early career researchers can benefit decisively from coaching by receiving targeted support to advance their academic career, including progression toward or obtaining a professorship.

Action

The coaching program at the University of Zurich offers postdocs and (advanced) doctoral candidates professional support from experienced coaches specialized in the academic field. Through up to 5 sessions, participants follow a process-oriented approach to analyze their situation, enhance self-reflection, and develop personalized action plans. The goal is to empower early career researchers to move forward with clarity and confidence. Interested candidates arrange a preliminary meeting to clarify their individual situation and coaching needs. All inquiries are treated confidentially. To ensure comprehensive support and efficient use of resources, other services may also be considered as alternatives or supplements to coaching. Coaching topics are varied and often include personal, professional, and academic challenges. Typical requests range from career planning and transitions, over self-management and productivity, to conflict resolution. They also include support with appointment procedures, grants and job interviews as well as writing research proposals.

Learning

The coaching program, established by the UZH Graduate Campus in 2019, has shown clear demand, but it takes time to become widely known. Participants are informed through internal communication and peer recommendations, while some are actively seeking coaching during

times of significant stress. The coaching service requires financial and human resources, including a network of suitable and experienced coaches. Expanding the coach pool to address the wide range of concerns is essential for meeting diverse coaching requests. Not all applicants require (full) coaching; sometimes, a comprehensive preliminary consultation is sufficient. The full cost coverage of the coaching increases the low threshold, an alternative would be a cost-sharing model.

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