



# swiss young academy



## Innovative Policies for Fostering Academic Careers in Switzerland

### Policy Highlights

### Pilot project for quality assurance of PhD supervision

#### Motivation

Supervision quality is vital for the success of doctoral researchers, directly affecting their academic progress and well-being. However, inconsistencies in supervision practices can lead to varying experiences: some receive strong support for their research and career development, while others might face insufficient guidance, unclear expectations, or experiencing conflicts with their supervisors. Due to dependency relationships, doctoral candidates commonly hesitate to address issues or assert their rights. By allowing protected, anonymous feedback, this project aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in supervision practices and contribute to the professionalization of doctoral supervision.

#### Action

In Fall 2024, the University of Zurich launched a pilot project to monitor the quality of doctoral supervision through a standardized, anonymous online survey. Conducted annually, the survey allows doctoral candidates to voluntarily provide personalized feedback on their supervision and research environment, specifically addressing their supervisors or superiors. The second part of the survey, which does not refer to specific individuals, focuses on broader experiences at UZH, including issues such as discrimination, sexual harassment, or scientific misconduct – this setting is essential for legal reasons. Data protection for both doctoral candidates and supervisors is a top priority. Supervisors' data is pseudonymized, with feedback only used if a minimum response threshold is met or after a moratorium period. Aggregated feedback is discussed with supervisors during faculty management meetings held by the deans, aiming to reinforce positive supervision practices and address potential issues. Additionally, the survey informs doctoral candidates about their rights and obligations, such as the doctoral agreement, annual career discussions, employment conditions, and conflict management – areas of which they are not always fully aware, as experience has shown.

#### Learning

It has been important and helpful to involve key stakeholders in the development process of this measure. Additionally, the support and decisiveness of university leadership are crucial for its implementation. Finally, the trust of doctoral candidates and their response rate to the survey is

critical to its effectiveness. The same applies to the openness of the supervisors with regard to the feedback received and their willingness to engage in learning processes based on this feedback. At this stage, it is too early to comment on the measure's implementation, results, or impact, and the associated learnings are yet to be determined.

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