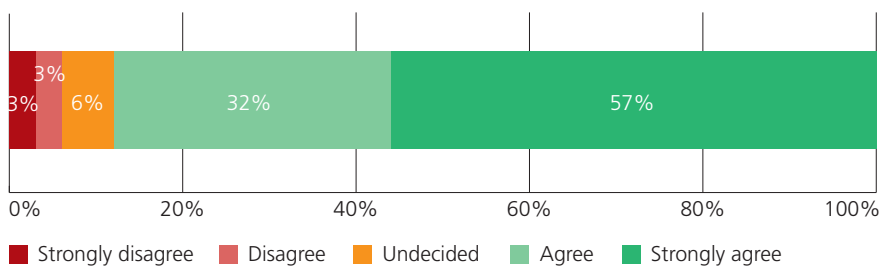


Survey of former scholarship holders

Positive effects of Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships

Researchers from around 100 countries who received Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars and Artists in the past 20 years were asked to take part in a survey to determine their career trajectories, geographical mobility and ties to Switzerland. The study comes to a positive conclusion: the 'Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships' promote scientific exchange and contribute to long-term relationships. The survey was conducted on behalf of SERI by the Bern research office w hoch 2 GmbH.

Level of agreement with statement that the FCS scholarship boosted their personal career development



The results of the survey suggest that FCS scholarships have a major positive impact on career development. n=1194. Source: w hoch 2 GmbH, Bern

Each year, the Federal Commission for Scholarships for Foreign Students (FCS) awards Excellence Fellowships to talented researchers. This gives foreign academics the opportunity to continue their research work at post-doctoral or PhD level (or master's degree level for artists) at a Swiss higher education institution.

The scholarships were introduced back in the 1960s to support young scientists and strengthen research cooperation between Switzerland and over 180 countries. The scholarship programme is an important part of Swiss science policy, but also of foreign, cultural and development policy; about half of the scholarships are awarded to people from developing countries.

High response rate reflects commitment

The research office w hoch 2 contacted 1,983 former FCS scholarship holders who received scholarships between 1996 and 2015. A total of 1,194 people from 105 countries completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 60%. The results offer a first glimpse at the medium-term impact of the scholarship programme. Although not explicitly asked, many former scholar-

ship holders expressed their gratitude for having been awarded the FCS scholarship. This was certainly one of the reasons for the high response rate and illustrates the strong level of commitment that is generally reflected in the responses.

Switzerland as a sought-after place for teaching and research

The findings show that the main reason for applying for an FCS scholarship is to gain access to Switzerland as an educational location. An FCS scholarship is regarded in particular as an opportunity to work in one's own research field under the supervision of renowned professors. The people interviewed are very ambitious and talented researchers who want to advance their careers through a stay in Switzerland. Accordingly, the results show that the majority of FCS beneficiaries continue to pursue an academic career. As intended, the FCS scholarship serves as an instrument for the targeted support of young academics.

Transfer of know-how

The results on geographical mobility show that around three-fifths of respondents were back in their country of origin at the time of the survey. Most people who were

in their country of origin at the time of the survey had returned to their country of origin immediately after their stay in Switzerland. This means that we can speak of 'brain circulation': Academic talents do not seem to migrate to third countries in the long term. A repetition of the survey at a later date could clarify this even more. In line with the FCS development approach, researchers gain know-how in Switzerland and can use it later in their countries of origin. The mobile scholarship holders – i.e. those who were not working in their country of origin at the time of the survey – tend to come from countries with a medium or low human development index rating and are now in a higher-positioned country.

Expansion of networks

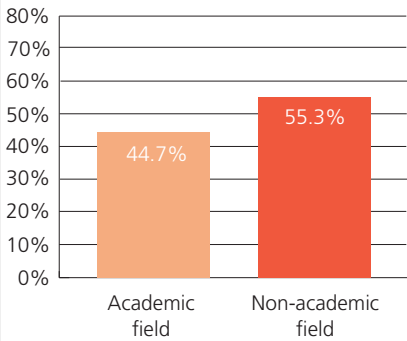
The FCS scholarship leads to a long-term relationship between the scholarship holders and Switzerland or Swiss institutions: at the time of the survey, around two-thirds of all respondents were still in contact with institutions (usually universities, federal institutes of technology or universities of applied sciences) in Switzerland. Furthermore, the respondents stated that they maintained professional or personal contact with an average of 15 people whom they had met during their scholarship period. This shows that an FCS scholarship creates lasting networks and long-term ties with Switzerland. These networks are ultimately of triple benefit: firstly for the individual FCS scholarship holders, secondly for the foreign universities and institutes (i.e. their current employers), and lastly for Swiss universities and mentoring professors of scholarship recipients.

Personal career step

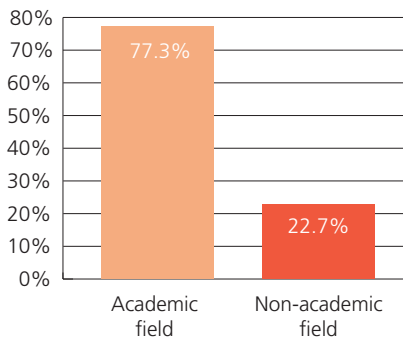
When asked about what the scholarship brought in terms of benefits, the former

Focus: Postgraduate scholarships since 2013

Field of activity of scholarship holders
1996–2012 (n= 705)



Field of activity of scholarship holders
2013–2015 (n= 300)



Until 2012, FCS scholarships were exclusively awarded to Master’s degree students from around 70 countries. Starting in 2013, the focus was shifted to postgraduate researchers. At the same time, the scholarship programme was expanded to cover over 180 countries. Since then FCS scholarships have been referred to more specifically to as ‘Swiss Government Ex-celle nce Scholarships for Foreign Scholars and Artists’

The survey results provide a first assessment of the medium-term impact of the changes made since the new orientation of the scholarship programme.

The results of the survey show clear differences between Master’s degree students awarded scholarships until 2012 and postgraduate researchers awarded scholarships from 2013 on-wards. The latter are more likely to pursue long-term academic activities. As intended, FCS scholarships support young academic talent even more specifically since the new orientation (see chart).

Source of chart: w hoch 2 GmbH, Bern

FCS scholarship holders stated that they had received sound methodological advice from the supervising professors and had managed to establish valuable national and international contacts with their help. The vast majority (89%) indicated that the FCS scholarship boosted their career development and led to personal development. Overall, the survey concludes that an FCS scholarship is a positive life-changing experience for scholarship recipients.

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Further information

Download study (from August 2018):
🌐 www.sbfi.admin.ch/scholarships_eng