

# swissuniversities

swissuniversities  
Effingerstrasse 15, Postfach  
3001 Bern  
www.swissuniversities.ch

Cotuelles de thèse or PhD partnerships between Swiss higher education institutions and partner higher education institutions in Europe and Israel

## Explanatory notes

- on [grant applications](#)
- on drawing up a cooperation agreement
- on the evaluation of applications
- on the validity of the cooperation agreement and project conclusion

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## Introduction

Each year, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) awards funding for cotutelle de thèse projects and PhD partnerships that are the subject of a cooperation agreement between a Swiss higher education institution and a partner higher education institution abroad (Europe and Israel) that regulates at the very least the mandatory points mentioned in [chapter 2.2](#). An allowance of up to CHF 10,000.00 serves to cover additional costs that are generated through completing doctoral study in a cotutelle de thèse or a PhD partnership (doctoral study at two institutions) as compared to completing doctoral study at a single institution. (Additional costs include in particular travel and living expenses of the doctoral student and his/her supervisors.) swissuniversities is responsible for administering the programme.

A cotutelle de thèse or a PhD partnership in the framework of the current programme financed by SERI goes beyond the co-supervision of a PhD thesis and is defined by the following:

- the PhD thesis is completed under the direction of two supervisors. Both PhD supervisors contribute significantly to advising the doctoral student, specifically with regard to selecting the doctoral student, defining the research project, providing support during doctoral study and evaluating the work/research conducted;
- a cooperation agreement regulating at the very least the mandatory points mentioned in [chapter 2.2](#) is concluded between the two participating higher education institutions;
- a joint thesis defence or similar is held, in which both participating higher education institutions are involved;
- a joint certificate or two certificates is/are issued; in both cases, it must be explicitly stated that doctoral study was completed either in the scope of a cotutelle de thèse or a PhD partnership with higher education institution x (see clarification below);
- a relationship to both institutions is established: matriculation as a doctoral student or an employment contract.

The term **cotutelle de thèse** is reserved for collaborations between two higher education institutions that have the authority to confer a PhD. The two institutions issue a joint doctoral degree certificate or two separate certificates. The certificate or certificates must bear the information that doctoral study was completed in the framework of a cotutelle with higher education institution x.

The term **PhD partnership** is used for collaborations between two higher education institutions of which only one institution has the authority to confer a PhD. In such cases, two constellations are possible: 1) a partnership between a Swiss university of applied sciences and arts (UASA) or a Swiss university of teacher education (UTE) and a higher education institution abroad that has the authority to confer a PhD; or 2) a partnership between a Swiss cantonal university or federal institute of technology and a higher education institution abroad that does not have the authority to confer a PhD. Only the institution with the authority to confer a PhD issues the doctoral degree certificate. The certificate must bear the information that doctoral study was completed in the framework of a partnership with higher education institution x.

## 1. Grant application and use of funds

### 1.1 Participation

The call for applications is open to cotutelle de thèse projects and PhD partnerships with recognised<sup>1</sup> partner higher education institutions in the Bologna system<sup>2</sup> and with partner institutions in Israel, in accordance with the current practice of the European research programmes.

**Eligible to participate** are doctoral students who:

- are matriculated as doctoral students at a Swiss higher education institution or who have an employment contract at such an institution;
- are Swiss citizens or holders of a B, C or G residence permit.<sup>3</sup> In exceptional cases, this requirement may be waived if the expert committee can establish a clear and consistent connection between the doctoral student and the relevant Swiss institution;
- have studied at least one year (two academic semesters) at the bachelor's, master's or doctoral level in Switzerland by the application deadline of 31 March of the year for which the call was issued. The duration of doctoral study is calculated based on the date of matriculation for doctoral study.<sup>4</sup> If more applications are submitted than can be accepted, applicants who earned a degree (bachelor's or master's) at a Swiss higher education institution are given preference.
- are under the age of 40 upon submitting the application (application deadline is 31 March of the year for which the call was issued), the age limit of 40 years may only be exceeded in legitimate, well-founded exceptional cases (e.g. disruptions in an applicant's career).<sup>5</sup>

Applications are only considered if a **cooperation agreement** regulating the cotutelle de thèse or the PhD partnership and, at the very least, the mandatory points mentioned in [chapter 2.2](#) has been concluded.

### 1.2 Application submission and evaluation

The [grant application](#) must be submitted to [cotutelles@swissuniversities.ch](mailto:cotutelles@swissuniversities.ch) by the office of the rector/president of the Swiss higher education institution or by an office designated by the rector/president. The deadline is **31 March of the year for which the call is issued**. Applications are assessed by an expert committee composed of three representatives from a cantonal university or federal institute of technology; a representative of a university of applied sciences and arts (UASA); a representative of a university of teacher education (UTE). The committee decides on the amount of funding based on the added value a cotutelle de thèse or a PhD partnership has for the PhD project of the doctoral student. The decision is final; appeals are not permitted. The grant is issued once and cannot be renewed. Applications that were not approved may be revised and re-submitted at a later date. In total, one application per doctoral student and project may be submitted a maximum of three times.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.enic-naric.net/credential.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ehea.info/pid34250/members.html>

<sup>3</sup> Foreign nationals living in Switzerland who have a B, C or G residence permit must enclose a copy of the permit in the application.

<sup>4</sup> Persons who do not have a degree from a Swiss higher education institution (bachelor's or master's), are required to enclose confirmation of matriculation or a student ID of a Swiss higher education institution that details the duration of study in Switzerland (specifically, the minimum duration of one year).

<sup>5</sup> Persons who have reached the age of 40 before the application deadline (31 March) are required to enclose a written justification (cf. [section 1.1 Participation](#)).

### 1.3 Use of funds

The following principles form the guidelines for the use of funds awarded by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), on the basis of the decision of the swissuniversities expert committee “Cotutelle de thèse and PhD partnerships” (in the following: cotutelle or partnership grants). The guidelines complement the disbursement agreement between swissuniversities and the PhD student/PhD supervisors as well as the regulations (for example, the regulation on expenses) of the responsible Swiss higher education institution.

The Swiss higher education institution is responsible for a correct, purpose-oriented use of the funds. The PhD supervisor is obliged to disburse the disposable funds in a way that best supports the PhD student.

#### Basic principle

In principle, the grant is awarded to **cover additional expenses that are generated by the cotutelle de thèse or the PhD partnership** as compared to doctoral study completed at only one institution. Costs incurred outside of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership are not covered (for instance, costs to publish or print the PhD thesis).

#### What can a cotutelle or partnership grant be used for?

The cotutelle or partnership grant helps to cover:

- travel and living expenses of the
  - o PhD student (main purpose)
  - o PhD supervisor at the Swiss higher education institution

Costs for room and board in connection with a stay at the partner higher education institution abroad are deemed living expenses. The applicable expense regulation of the relevant Swiss higher education institution may be applied to reimburse travel and living expenses. The funds do not cover travel to third party countries (i.e. countries other than the partner countries involved in the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership) or to conferences or colloquia that are not related to the cotutelle de thèse or the PhD partnership.

- travel and living expenses incurred by the PhD supervisor of the partner institution for travel to and stays in Switzerland in connection with the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership (supervision of PhD student, meetings between the two PhD supervisors);
- additional expenses in connection with the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership that are borne by the PhD student (e.g. costs for materials,<sup>6</sup> additional fees for the partner institution abroad etc.);
- costs incurred due to the PhD defence or similar, in particular travel and living expenses of examination committee members that are not assumed by the participating higher education institutions. The cotutelle or partnership grant is, however, first and foremost to be used to cover expenses of the PhD student and thus does not cover all expenses incurred by members of the examination committee.

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<sup>6</sup> Upon completion of doctoral study, any procured materials remain in the possession of the relevant department/institute of the Swiss higher education institution.

### **How long is a cotutelle or partnership grant valid?**

In principle, the right to use a grant formally begins with the signing of the cooperation agreement by all responsible parties. The use of funds may be backdated to cover expenses incurred before submission of the application for a cotutelle or partnership grant (starting one year before the submission deadline of 31 March) as long as all responsible parties have signed the cooperation agreement for this period. Only expenses incurred after all parties have signed the cooperation agreement and a maximum of one year before the submission deadline (31 March) are covered.

The right to use the grant formally ends with the completion of doctoral study (PhD defence or similar) or in the case that the project is terminated before completion. A very limited use of the grant money after the PhD defence is possible in individual cases for legitimate reasons, for instance, to cover expenses – in the country of the partner higher education institution – related to the validation of the results of the project completed in the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership (participation in conferences...) or to attendance at the degree conferral ceremony.

## 2. Cooperation agreement

### 2.1 General information

[Applications](#) are considered only if a cooperation agreement regulating at the very least the mandatory points of [chapter 2.2](#) has been concluded. The doctoral students must discuss these modalities with their supervisors. The two higher education institutions draft the details and review the formal agreement; the responsible authorities at the higher education institutions must then sign the agreement. The doctoral students are responsible for ensuring that all necessary steps are taken on both sides (at the Swiss and the foreign institution). Obtaining the required signatures can be time consuming; it is therefore recommended that doctoral students initiate the process promptly. Signatures missing at the time of submission may be sent at a later date, with the exception of the signatures of the responsible persons at the Swiss higher education institution: these must be on the application at the time of submission.

Higher education institutions that do not have a template for an agreement may use the sample cooperation agreement of swissuniversities ([DE-FR](#) ; [EN-FR](#) ; [EN-DE](#)). The text can be adapted to accommodate the particular circumstances of the specific higher education institution and/or discipline; it must, however, at the very least regulate the mandatory points mentioned in [chapter 2.2](#).

### 2.2 Content of the cooperation agreement

The two participating higher education institutions are responsible for the content of the cooperation agreement. The institutions are called on to jointly regulate the administrative and supervisory issues.

#### Required information

The cooperation agreement must at the very least regulate the following points:

- the name of the two higher education institutions;
- the name of the doctoral student;
- the title of PhD thesis;
- name and positions of the PhD supervisors at both institutions, who share equally the responsibility for monitoring the work completed in the scope of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership and are required to fulfil all supervisory obligations vis-a-vis the PhD student;
- the division of time spent working at each institution;
- the award of the doctorate degree and the mention of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership:
  - in the case of cantonal universities and Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, the agreement must specify
    - a) whether both institutions each award a doctorate diploma or a joint diploma, and
    - b) whether the diploma(s) or an accompanying document specifies that it's a doctorate in the context of a cotutelle de thèse with university X.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In the case of a partnership between a Swiss cantonal university or Federal Institute of Technology and a higher education institution abroad without the right to award doctorates, only the Swiss higher education institution awards a diploma. The agreement must clarify whether the doctorate diploma or an accompanying document specifies that it's a doctorate in the context of a PhD partnership with the foreign higher education institution X.

- in the case of universities of applied sciences and arts (UASAs) and universities of teacher education (UTEs), the agreement must specify
- c) whether the doctorate diploma or an accompanying document specifies that it's a doctorate in the context of a PhD partnership with the Swiss higher education institution X.

If the number of applications exceeds the funding possibilities, the Expert Commission may give priority to applications whose cooperation agreement shows that the cotutelle de thèse or the PhD partnership with higher education institution X is mentioned on the doctoral diploma(s) or on an accompanying document.

#### **Additional information**

In addition to the mandatory information mentioned above, the two higher education institutions should also regulate the following additional elements:

- the date of matriculation valid for the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership;
- the anticipated duration of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership;
- the entry into force and validity of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership;
- the applicable fees; specifically, that the doctoral student pays the annual study/semester fees at only one of the partner institutions, with the clarification that one of the two partner institutions formally waives the corresponding fees;
- the higher education institution and the country where the PhD thesis is defended;
- modalities on constitution and appointment to the examination committee for the thesis defence or similar.
- the language in which the PhD thesis is written and defended as well as the language in which oral and written summaries of the thesis are made;
- the publication of the PhD thesis, information on the deposit copy of the thesis, authorial information and printing;
- health and accident insurance of the doctoral student in both countries.

#### **2.3 Information exchange / organisation of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership;**

The responsible offices of the partner institutions or the PhD supervisors organise all necessary procedures for a constant exchange of the information and documents required to organise and conduct a cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership. This includes documentation on regulatory provisions of the country or of the higher education institution regarding the doctoral degree in general as well as the intellectual property rights to the topic of the PhD thesis as pertains to the deposit copy, printing and publication, and the use and protection of the research findings. If necessary or requested, intellectual property protection is regulated in a separate appendix.

### 3. Evaluation of applications: Criteria and selection policy

Cotutelle de thèse and PhD partnerships between Swiss higher education institutions and partner institutions in Europe and Israel<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.1 Evaluation criteria

When evaluating applications, the expert committee considers the following criteria (the review of the formal criteria is conducted by the General Secretariat of swissuniversities prior to the evaluation meeting):

1. Formal accuracy and completeness of documents, in particular of the cooperation agreement that must at the very least regulate the mandatory points mentioned in [chapter 2.2](#) (Note: the signatures of the responsible persons at the Swiss higher education institution must be on the documentation; other signatures may be submitted at a later date). The cooperation agreement must be signed by the rector/president of the Swiss higher education institution or by a proxy named by the rector/president. The headings of the application form must not be altered. The programme applies exclusively to doctoral study.
2. Fulfilment of individual requirements (cf. [section 1.1](#))
3. Equal opportunity: If more applications are received than can be approved, the expert committee decides in favour of a balanced representation of both genders, provided the applications are equal in quality.
4. Diversity of regions and disciplines: Participation in the programme is ideally distributed across as many Swiss higher education institutions and as many disciplines as possible. If more applications are received than can be approved, the expert committee may limit the number of approved applications per PhD supervisor.
5. Design of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership project:
  - *Added value*: Benefits of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership (established relationship to both institutions and dual supervision) and the collaboration with the partner institution abroad for the doctoral student's PhD project.
  - *Complementarity*: Reasonable distribution of research between the Swiss and foreign institution. In the case of PhD partnership between a Swiss university of applied sciences and arts (UASA) or teacher education (UTE) and a partner institution abroad, the specific features of the Swiss institutions regarding research type and methodology must be accommodated.

<sup>8</sup> The call is open to cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership projects with recognised partner institutions (<https://www.enic-naric.net/credential.aspx>) in the Bologna system (<http://www.ehea.info/pid34250/members.html>) and with partner institutions in Israel, in accordance with the current practice of the European research programmes.

### 3.2 Selection policy and allowance

1. Selection policy: The expert committee refers to the following selection scheme for awarding funding.

<p><b>Funding awarded</b> CHF 10,000. -- (in the scope of available funds and subject to point 2*)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-designed cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership project with a realistic implementation strategy;</li> <li>• Convincing presentation of the added value of collaboration with the partner institution abroad for the doctoral student's PhD project.</li> </ul>
<p><b>No funding awarded</b> no funding awarded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept and/or the implementation strategy of the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership project do not (fully) meet the criteria;</li> <li>• Unconvincing presentation of the need for, or added value of, collaboration with the partner institution abroad for the doctoral student's PhD project.</li> </ul>

2. Reduced funding: Regardless of the quality of the application, approved projects that are already in an advanced stage or that will soon reach the project deadline named in the cooperation agreement receive reduced funding. In addition, when deciding on the amount of funding, any allowances granted from other sources or the geographical distance between the partner institutions may be considered.
3. One-time character of the grant: An allowance for a doctoral project may only be disbursed once and covers the entire duration of the project.
4. No entitlement: There is no legal entitlement to receive funding.

### 3.3 Communicating decisions and use of funding

1. Communicating decisions: The General Secretariat of swissuniversities communicates decisions by email to the supervisors and applicants. The expert committee reserves the right to impose additional requirements or make recommendations to modify the project, even in the case of approved projects. There is no correspondence between the General Secretariat of swissuniversities and the dissertation supervisors and applicants regarding the decisions. However, the General Secretariat is available by telephone to the Swiss higher education institutions' contact persons for cotutelles de thèse and PhD partnerships for any necessary clarifications in connection with the decisions.
2. No appeals possible: The expert committee's decision is final. Applications that were not approved may, however, be revised and re-submitted at a later time. A maximum of two new submissions – or in total, one application per doctoral student and project may be submitted a maximum of three times.
3. Disbursement and administration of funds: The funds are disbursed to the Swiss higher education institution. The PhD supervisor at the Swiss institution is responsible for administering the funds; for this purpose, a disbursement contract is drawn up and signed. Upon conclusion of the project, the doctoral student and PhD supervisor at the Swiss higher education institution submit a report to the General Secretariat of swissuniversities (cf. form: Final report). Any unused funds must be returned to swissuniversities.

#### **4. Begin and conclusion of the project**

From the standpoint of swissuniversities, the cotutelle de thèse or PhD partnership begins when all parties have signed the cooperation agreement (only expenses incurred after this date are reimbursed).

Both institutions jointly terminate the cooperation agreement with immediate effect in the following cases: if the doctoral student submits a written notice prematurely ending doctoral study in the framework of the cotutelle de thèse/PhD partnership; or if both PhD supervisors prohibit the doctoral student from continuing work on the project.

After the thesis defence or similar, as well as in the case of premature project termination, the PhD supervisor of the Swiss higher education institution must submit to swissuniversities a statement on the allowance disbursed. Any unused funds must be returned to swissuniversities. The doctoral student and the PhD supervisor at the Swiss higher education institution also submit to the attention of swissuniversities a final report providing an account of the successful completion of doctoral study or, if applicable, of the reasons for premature termination.