

swissnex China

Increasingly, European countries are looking to strike up fruitful partnerships with the major global players in research. **Flavia Schlegel**, Executive Director/Vice Consul General of swissnex China, explains why Switzerland has chosen to collaborate with China in this regard

Firstly, can you outline the mission and aims of swissnex China?

swissnex China aims to connect stakeholders from the academic, public and private sectors from both countries – China and Switzerland – in order to create, support and fuel new networks, collaborations and agreements in the specific domains of science, technology and innovation.

Considering the fact that 90 per cent of research done in China is applied research, the potential for fruitful and rewarding cooperation for Swiss applied researchers is considerable. Can you outline what other factors influenced the decision to form this collaboration with China?

There is a significant and growing trend of Swiss companies with a research base in China. They are in need of highly qualified young Chinese scientists who know the Swiss research system; for example, those who have spent some time in Switzerland. This considerable interest of major Swiss players is in contrast to the low level of cooperation that exists currently. Other countries have a long tradition of cooperation with China. Thus, swissnex China, and the new governmental programme for Sino-Swiss research projects which it runs, will be essential to Switzerland as it catches up and reaches a similar level of activities.

What, in turn, might you suggest Switzerland has to offer its Chinese counterparts as part of this concord?

Switzerland can offer Chinese counterparts a location for high-quality, pioneering education, research and innovation as well as a highly

attractive place for work and living. Switzerland is continually putting its efforts into creating the best possible funding organisations and programmes at international level, with an emphasis on China.

How essential do you consider collaboration between countries and their institutes in the development of innovative, knowledge-based economies?

In the context of international connectedness in research and development (R&D) and innovation processes, the collaboration between countries and their institutes grows significantly. By way of example, climate change, environmental standards (renewable energies) and the fight against epidemics such as AIDS and SARS, have to be tackled internationally and in collaboration between countries. Switzerland's spending on research and development as a percentage of GDP is amongst the highest among OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations, whilst Switzerland's spending on R&D in China is already, in absolute terms, the second highest in the world after the U.S.

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Although swissnex China operates mainly as a coordinating body, it also endeavours to bear an important function in the funding of bilateral initiatives. Can you shed any light on this aspect of the organisation, and provide specific examples of funding programmes?

Based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was signed by Switzerland and China for close cooperation within Science and Technology (S&T), the Sino-Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation (SSSTC) programme enjoys the strong support of the governmental S&T agencies from the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research, as well as the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and the leading house ETH Zurich. swissnex China acts as the Swiss coordinator in China.

Three funding instruments such as the Faculty Exchange and Student Exchange, Institutional Partnership, as well as the Joint Research Project, are designed to build up in-depth scientific collaboration between scientists of the two countries in the following priority areas: life sciences; biotechnology; environment; urban development and sustainability; materials science and medical science.

Can you provide details of the governmental programme for Sino-Swiss research projects which will be coordinated by swissnex China?

The Sino-Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation (SSSTC) programme aims to encourage and strengthen individual contacts by building a multi-level research cooperation between institutions, research groups as well as individuals. The goals for the action phase of SSSTC are to strengthen the academic ties between Switzerland and China through research and academic collaborations, to increase the visibility of Swiss universities and research institutions in China through faculty and student exchange, as well as to encourage long-term institutional cooperation between Swiss and Chinese education and research institutions.

What do you believe are the greatest challenges and obstacles affecting the execution of the initiative, and how do you plan to mitigate them?

The greatest challenge for the SSSTC programme is to use the leverage of this Governmental framework programme with limited funding, to form a culture of collaboration and exchange between

About swissnex China

Mission

International top-ranked universities and leading research institutes, a worldwide outstanding science intensity (citations/per capita GDP), the world's most rewarding work environment, first choice hub for offshore business and research headquarters in Europe, high quality of living and number one in environmental performance and economic competitiveness (WEF ranking) – this is Switzerland and this is the basis of our work!

- **promote.** swissnex China's mission is to create and improve the awareness of Switzerland and, in particular, of Swiss science, technology, innovation and culture in China. Our job is to promote Switzerland as the place that it is, a first choice country for international research cooperation
 - **connect.** swissnex China's mission is to establish a solid, long-lasting network of cooperation between scholars of both countries serving as a base for bottom up initiatives in the future. We bring together the high potentials of Switzerland and China as well as of academics and industry, always eager to channel you towards your perfect research match
 - **facilitate.** swissnex China's mission is to support Sino-Swiss research cooperation, mainly by reducing geographical and cultural distances. The fact that we are 'on site' allows us to realise facilitation activities for all parties such as the organisation of workshops, or the rapid providing of workspace
- swissnex China – mandated by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research SER – is a promotion agency, networking platform, and a coordination institution. But first of all, it is the gateway to excellence!

Interns/ Sabbaticals

swissnex China is pleased to welcome dedicated and interested interns and sabbaticals who wish to gain some work experience at this exciting working space. In 2009 and in 2010, several interns and sabbaticals from the University of Applied Sciences in Berne and Basel, the University of St Gallen, Zurich, the Historical Museum in Berne, the Zurich Federal Institute of Technology, and the Tongji University in Shanghai, have gained experience in project management, as well as undertaken research and analysis about various subjects affecting swissnex China.

The internship and sabbatical schemes last from three to six months. swissnex China would like to take the opportunity to thank their interns and sabbaticals for their precious work and analysis.



ANALYSIS

the science communities of the two countries. To fill the existing information gap between the Swiss and Chinese scientists and provide accurate and timely information about the most recent development and opportunities in China, we need to make optimum use of limited resources and time to secure the right people, not only from academic institutions, but also from industrial R&D departments and governmental S&T commissions, in China as well as Switzerland.

swissnex China also organises and coordinates workshops, seminars and conferences, and recently ran an event, 'Exploring Swiss Excellence in Science and Technology', at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. Can you highlight the significance of such events, and how they help to coordinate research and collaboration between the nations?

By organising such events, swissnex China aims at presenting and raising the awareness of Swiss Excellence in Science, Technology and Innovation in China and to fuel new networks, projects and collaborations between both countries.

For instance, by presenting the Graetzel solar cells at the International Science and Arts Exhibition in May, as well as at the Swiss Pavilion in June amongst the five pioneering projects at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), swissnex China was invited by Dr Yi-Bing Cheng, Adjunct Professor at the Wuhan National Laboratory for Optoelectronics and future Director of the Michael Graetzel Centre for Mesoscopic Solar Cells, to participate at the inauguration of the

new Centre and at the symposium in Wuhan from 19-20 July 2010. The symposium attracted a high level forum for leading international and Chinese experts in the fields of dye-sensitised solar cells (DSC), and swissnex China hopes to fuel new collaborations and synergies based on the organised events in May and June and through the participation at the symposium in July.

By what means does the organisation measure or evaluate its success?

The success of each activity is measured upon the number of participants attending, the number of published media releases but most apparently, whether new networks, agreements and projects could be derived from such encounters.



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