

Guide to Navigating CSH Fellowship Competition: Talk, Interview & Logistics

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If you are bothering to read this guide, it means that you have been shortlisted for a CSH or Bernoulli Fellowship. Congratulations! At this point, you would have already received an invitation to visit the University of Bern, Switzerland, for a job talk and interview. This document is a survival guide to navigating this process.

Typically, the application deadline for CSH Fellowships is at the end of October of each year. The CSH organises a review panel comprising its professors, existing CSH and Bernoulli Fellows and postdocs, who then read, score and rank the applications and proposals following detailed deliberation. Each application and proposal is assigned primary and secondary reviewers and may be subjected to confidential external review, as is the standard practice on professional review panels. The ranked shortlist of the review panel is then examined by the CSH Steering Committee. The top 6 to 8 candidates are invited to attend the annual CSH Symposium, typically held in late January each year. The closed-door interviews occur exactly a day after the Symposium. CSH Fellowship offers typically follow a few days after the Symposium and interviews have concluded.

In the end, this international competition is for us to identify outstanding postdoctoral researchers who are intellectually independent and have done—or will do—work of international standing. The CSH operates on the following motto (based on a quote by Peter Goddard): “We do everything in our power to make sure that you have no excuse not to do anything interesting.” This means that, as a CSH Fellow, we will not only offer you full intellectual independence and career support, but we will provide you with a generous annual research budget (5000 CHF or Swiss francs) with ample opportunities to compete for further funding within Switzerland.

I. Logistics

The logistics for the CSH Symposium and interviews are organised by CSH secretary Danielle Zemp. She will directly book your hotel accommodation if you email her (danielle.zemp@csh.unibe.ch) with your exact check-in and check-out dates. We recommend that you arrive a day before the date of the Symposium. You are welcome to

leave on the day of the interview or stay until the next day. You are responsible for booking your own flight/train/etc. For further details on logistics, including how to get reimbursed, please read: http://www.csh.unibe.ch/services/visiting_the_csh_logistics/index_eng.html

II. CSH Symposium

The CSH Symposium typically begins at 09:00 and ends at 17:00 (including lunch and two coffee breaks), followed by a dinner attended by all candidates and the CSH researchers. Please check the exact schedule, which will differ slightly from year to year. Each candidate is allocated 20 minutes of speaking time, followed by 10 minutes of questions-and-answers (Q&A). **We will adhere strictly to the published schedule.** The Symposium is chaired by the CSH Director. We recommend that you loosely adopt—or at least pay attention to key aspects of—the following talk format:

Preamble (3 minutes): give a concise, bullet-point summary of your profile as a researcher and the work you did during your Ph.D and/or last postdoc.

- Which universities/institutes/etc did you work at for your Bachelors, Masters and Ph.D degrees? What disciplines were your degrees in?
- What is (are) your main field(s) of expertise?
- In your opinion, what are your top 1 to 3 scientific achievements so far? Why do you believe they have made an impact?

Introduction (5 minutes): give a concise but impactful summary of the state of the art in your field of expertise that is *understandable to Ph.D scientists who are not experts in your field*. Remember that the CSH is an interdisciplinary research center of excellence that places a heavy emphasis on interaction between its researchers.

- What are the scientific questions being addressed? Why are they interesting?
- What are the relevant historical milestones that are an important part of your talk narrative?

Main Body (10 minutes): give a detailed description of what you have done so far, *catering to both specialists and non-specialists* in turn. It is a skill to give a talk that caters to different segments of the audience at different points of the talk. For example, one of your slides may encompass general ideas about the physics or chemistry of a problem, but the next slide may zoom in on a technical and/or esoteric aspect.

- What is the methodology being employed? (Theory, computation, observation, experiment, etc.)
- What are the caveats and assumptions? When does your model / method break?
- What are your main results? What are their implications?
- What are natural follow-ups of your work so far?

Future Outlook & Summary (2 minutes): give a concise summary of your research work so far and describe how you would move forward as an independent postdoctoral fellow.

- Feel free to speculate; it is not necessary to be formulaic and lay out work packages for

the next 3 years. Strike a balance between predictable follow-ups of past work and more speculative work. After all, this is an independent fellowship that allows you the luxury to explore your horizons!

- If possible, mention the possible synergies you may have with existing CSH Fellows and researchers. You should be collaborative but not dependent.

The Q&A session may be used to quiz you about aspects listed above that you did not address. If you do not plan to follow any of the advice above, please at least pay attention to this aspect: **you only have 20 minutes; if you have more than 20 slides, you are probably making a mistake in planning and timing.** Remember that the objective is to communicate, rather than rush through and complete a preset slideshow. You are judged on your ability to be communicative.

III. Interview

The interviews of the CSH Fellowship candidates occur on the day immediately following the CSH Symposium. Each candidate is assigned a specific time slot. Each interview lasts 20 minutes, after which the candidate is asked to leave and the hiring committee (comprising the CSH Steering Committee and selected members of the review panel) will spend 10 minutes in deliberation. Fair questions that may be asked by the hiring committee include:

- Scientific aspects covered during your job talk.
- Your opinion on the possible collaborations you may form while at the CSH.
- Your career ambitions and future plans.
- Logistical details of moving to and living in Bern.

You are encouraged to ask questions. In fact, if you have pressing questions and time is running out, you should feel free to interrupt the ongoing discussion and ask politely but firmly to ask your questions.

Some tips:

- Keep your answers short, crisp and impact. Don't ramble, as you will only lose precious time (that you can use instead to ask the panel questions).
- Don't ask the panel members about their fields of expertise (as this is something you could have found out via the internet beforehand).
- Don't ask questions about the CSH, WP, PlanetS, CHEOPS, etc, that you can easily find out via the internet. Again, this will cause you to lose precious time.
- Visualise yourself as a junior colleague whom we are trying to hire and whose professional input and opinions we value greatly, instead of a postdoc working on a fixed set of projects for a professor.
- We are looking for junior but intellectually independent postdocs who can stand on their own feet.