

Governance audit at the Swiss Foundation for the Promotion of Exchanges and Mobility

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation / Federal Office of Culture / Federal Social Insurance Office

Key facts

The Swiss Foundation for the Promotion of Exchanges and Mobility (SFAM) was established at the beginning of 2016 by three federal offices and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) to replace the "ch Foundation" as the operator of the Agency for Exchange and Mobility. Since 2017, it has been the legal entity of the National Agency for Exchange and Mobility, operating under the name "Movetia". The foundation reports annual operating expenses and revenue of around CHF 4 million. This not only includes operating expenses in the narrower sense, but also the 27 staff members (FTE) who fulfil performance mandates for the federal offices and for which the foundation is paid. The support programmes that the foundation runs on behalf of the Confederation total approximately CHF 33 million (as of 2018). Two private foundations also finance Movetia projects.

Unfortunately, the organisation shows incompatibilities with the Confederation's governance principles. In particular, the personal connection between the Foundation Board and the office management as well as the private legal form are fundamentally not permitted. This attracted the attention of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO), the Federal Finance Administration and the Federal Council, which in February 2019 commissioned the Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research to draw up a consultation basis for a new organisation and management structure for the Movetia agency, explicitly taking into account the governance principles.

Challenges, aspects of governance and conflicting objectives

A new, governance-compliant legal structure for the agency and the establishment of an independent institutional board will not solve all the problems. Various challenges that appeared to have been resolved with the creation of SFAM in 2016 need to be reconsidered. In concrete terms, this means, for example, the involvement of the cantons, the creation of a single competence centre for all exchange and mobility issues despite different legal frameworks and responsibilities, the possibilities for the federal offices to exert influence, and streamlined organisation with simplified management.

Cantonal involvement and coordination of the funding areas

For the SFAO, the involvement of the cantons is also a key requirement for the new organisation and management structure. In order to get things moving in the education sector, the cantonal and federal mechanisms need to be harmonised. It is also important to coordinate the various federal funding areas, and this requires a coordination platform.

Finally, it is important to clarify whether and how at all the contribution system should be outsourced. During the review period, Movetia operated under its own name, but the

federal offices reviewed and approved all funding contracts themselves. The SFAO sees little merit in setting up a new institution with an independent board if its business operations still require the offices to be involved in day-to-day business. In order to contain the administrative burden on this modestly sized agency, the governance principles should be implemented with prudence.

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