

ETH Domain Internal Consultation On the Strategic Plan 2025-2028 of the ETH Board for the ETH Domain

Template for the institutions' feedbacks

Institution: ETH Zurich - University Assembly (Hochschulversammlung)

1. General Comments

- The document makes use of rather bold language and buzz words that seem inappropriate for the ETH domain. We would recommend a more modest tone. For several terms, their specific meaning in the context of this document is unclear, e.g., “dual autonomy”, “digital thinking”, “equity”, and “excellence”. These terms should be defined on first use. Generally speaking, we feel that terms and concepts like “equity”, “return-on-investment”, “value chain” apply to companies, but seem inappropriate for an academic institution, whose primary mission is education and fundamental research. Whilst these activities undoubtedly contribute to the prosperity of Switzerland, they cannot and should not be measured in this way.
- There is generally a rather strong focus on applications, when the core strength of the ETH domain lies in fundamental, basic research. Fundamental research eventually paves the way to novel applications, but rarely in a directed way. Freedom of research is therefore paramount to the success of the ETH domain. The budget restrictions in combination with the focus on short-term strategic areas risks to inappropriately restrain fundamental research in the ETH domain. Over-reliance on 3rd party money creates dependencies that will further limit freedom in the ETH domain.
- Concrete measures and timelines are missing to reach goals on sustainability and to maintain quality in teaching and enhance student and staff well-being despite continued growth in student numbers. We generally wonder to what extent the current growth strategy is consistent with sustainability requirements. We would hope that the ETH domain sought to play a pioneering role in the field of sustainability and to position itself as a leader in this area, in Switzerland and internationally. As such, "climate change" should be a clear priority at all levels, i.e., in research, teaching, innovation, and ETH should strive to achieve net zero on its campi ahead of Switzerland as a whole.
- Although it is pointed out repeatedly that the ETH Domain is committed to excellence in all areas, this commitment implicitly refers to the academic areas only. Explicit mention should also be made of the administrative and technical staff who provide key services in many dimensions and thus contribute in a crucial way to the success of academia.

2. Specific Comments

Chapter	Pages	Comment (with concrete propositions whenever possible)
II. Contextual Challenges and Opportunities	6	replace “including minorities” with “especially underrepresented groups”
IV. Long-term Positioning of the ETH Domain	7-9	
A. Vision	7	
B. Mission	7	
C. Unique Strengths	7-8	replace “value chain” with scope or similar as academic institutions are not part of a “value chain”

D. Guiding Principles	8	ETH domain fosters an inspiring, creative, and SAFE work environment; typo p30-231; Sustainability should be wider in scope than just climate and also comprise ETH governance; “meaningful return on investment” fails to recognise the spirit and scope of academic institutions and fundamental research
E. Key Enabling Factors	8-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dual autonomy needs first to be defined; replace “core tenet” with “decisive prerequisite” to put stronger emphasis on required autonomy - “This ensures” CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND “an efficient distribution... - “The ETH domain reports transparently on ALL its activities and the use of ALL its resources”; write ALL to also include 3rd party and 4th party funding. - Critical mass: this should refer not only to students and researchers but to supporting staff in all areas as well: “A critical mass of excellent students, researchers <u>and supporting staff</u> increases ...”. - final sentence “However, third-party income can only represent a complementary funding mechanism, as it is unpredictable and thus unstable”, AND IT IS RESTRICTED TO PARTICULAR ENDEAVOURS. A DEPENDENCY ON 3rd PARTY MONEY WOULD LIMITS THE FREEDOM OF RESEARCH AND TEACHING.
V. Strategy 2025-2028		
A. Strategic Areas of the ETH Domain	11-18	- Figure 3 is difficult to understand - this should be reworked; engagement with society is only listed under human health, but should apply to all strategic areas
<i>Human Health</i>	12-13	- engineering should be listed as one of the contributing disciplines; mental health should be included as one of the foci
<i>Energy, Climate and Sustainable Environment</i>	13-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - remove “Europe” from “Switzerland, Europe, and the world” as CH is part of Europe and Europe part of the world - replace "With its large panel of activities in fields linked to energy, climate changes, environment and biodiversity, the ETH Domain is ideally suited to support these federal goals" by "The ETH Domain's large panel of activities in fields linked to energy, climate changes, environment and biodiversity is needed to achieve these federal goals" - replace the last sentence by "It will thus actively inform and support the Federal Council's long-term climate strategy as well as its biodiversity strategy and action plans." When formulated this way, the ETH Domain's activities are not tied directly to a specific strategy of the government but are put forward as enablers. It also adds the previously missing point that the decision makers shall have access to the information the ETH Domain provides to inform their strategy. - (iv) confusing to read “human well-being” in this context - remove? - Typo: twice (iv)
<i>Responsible Digital Transformation</i>	14-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - define “digital thinking” - digital (0/1) is a strange term in this context, is computational thinking meant? - typo line 6: “other. , this”; - we welcome the support for Open Science, but it will take substantially more than data management tools to make this happen, and appropriate investments should be made
<i>Advanced Materials and Key Technologies</i>	16-17	
<i>Engagement and Dialogue with Society</i>	17-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define “responsible dialogue” in the first sentence, or remove “responsible” - Add a sentence on how ETH already collaborates with schools to remove the existing gender gap in STEM subjects at matura level.

B. Core Tasks	19-29	
Top quality Research-Based Education	19-21	
<i>High-quality education as priority</i>	19-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>change 2nd part of sentence “Central to this aspect are the quality of teaching and the performance of students, as well as” to “as well as ensuring student well-being, meeting their expectations, and their future professional perspectives.”</i> - <i>“creativity and INTERNATIONAL competitiveness” to emphasize that the competitiveness is between institutions not students</i> - <i>Measures 2025-28: formulate concrete plans of how education quality is monitored as student numbers increase; in particular, commit to monitoring the student/assistant/faculty ratio and the number of hands-on lab courses and seminars to prevent that this deteriorates as student numbers increase</i>
<i>Ensuring favourable conditions for a growing population of students</i>	20-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>We are missing a clear statement that also with modern technology scaling of teaching resources is not possible without appropriate parallel investments.</i> - <i>We are missing a discussion of how the growth in student numbers could be slowed. This might include closer collaborations with local FHs to increase their attractiveness for some students.</i> - <i>add “SCALABLE” innovative teaching and learning concepts supported by digital technologies” (context)</i> - <i>add “includes the creation of new TEACHING, LEARNING AND WORKSPACES” (measures)</i> - <i>What is meant with “managing students’ expectations”? (measures)</i>
<i>Continuing education</i>	21	- <i>Idea for Box Task 1: Winner of KITE Award</i>
World-Class Research	22-23	
<i>Leading international position in research</i>	22	
<i>Research integrity</i>	22-23	- <i>“in the context of collaborations with international AND INDUSTRIAL partners (context)</i>
<i>Open Science and Open Research Data</i>	23	
State-of-the-Art Large-Scale Research Infrastructures	24-27	
<i>Conceptualisation, development and operation of large-scale research infrastructures</i>	24	
<i>Large-scale research infrastructures of strategic relevance submitted to the Swiss Roadmap 2023.</i>	25-27	
Knowledge and Technology Transfer (KTT)	28-29	
<i>Contribution to Switzerland’s innovative capacity</i>	28	
<i>Promoting an innovation ecosystem in the ETH Domain</i>	29	

C. Further Key Tasks	30-33	- many of the points below are not merely “further tasks” but rather “key enablers” or “prerequisite conditions” for the ETH Domain to fulfil the goals above
<i>Attractive careers and respectful working conditions</i>	30-31	- Attractive careers: this section should refer not only to students and scientific staff, but to the many professions in the non-scientific domain which need to be developed as well. - “Combat bullying, harassment, RACISM, discrimination, ...” (context) p30 Measures: - replace women in “management” positions with “women in LEADING positions” - “Targeted measures are developed to combat and take action against” ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION. - “recruitment of people with PHYSICAL AND MENTAL disabilities” (measures) - “and providing COST-FREE support in stressful situations FOR ALL OF ITS MEMBERS” PBS Counselling is not accessible for post-docs or technical/administrative staff (key elements) - Maybe focus also on prevention of stress experience (key elements mental and psychological health) and extension of community-building services (sports, music, debating/networking groups) - it is not clear what is meant with work opportunities for co-workers above 50 years of age: does this concern recruitment of senior professors? Who is targeted with retirement arrangements 60/70?
<i>Sustainable real estate management</i>	31-32	- affordable housing is also important for locals; generally diversity through social background could be highlighted more when talking about diversity - “focus on functionality, ACCESSIBILITY, cost-effectiveness and sustainability” (p. 31, 1st paragraph) - “teaching, LEARNING and research areas” (context) - “work- AND LEARNING place concepts (measures) - “supports the creation of AFFORDABLE student housing” (measures)
<i>Farsighted financial management</i>	32-33	- state that adequate reserves are also needed to be able to make use of 3rd party money as currently external money cannot always be adequately used because of general financial restrictions
D. Organisational Development of the ETH Domain	34-35	- “needs to remain responsive to possible initiatives and developments emanating from other parts OF the Swiss ERI system...” typo
VI. Financial Requirements	36-39	
<i>Financial requirements of the institutions to fulfil their tasks</i>	36	- inflation estimate of 0.7% appears to be on the low end; it might be important to consider the impact of higher inflation and increasing student growth rates
<i>Financial requirement for Joint Initiatives in the Strategic Areas of the ETH Domain and for large-scale research infrastructures</i>	37	- acknowledge that budget levels must ensure that the ETH domain retains its flexibility - earmarked money for narrow projects limits the ability of the ETH domain to invest in bottom-up initiatives
<i>Financial requirements for the implementation of federal strategies and decisions</i>	37	
<i>Financial requirements for the organisational development of the ETH Domain</i>	37	

<i>Financial scenarios for 2025-2028</i>	37-39	- This section does not read convincingly. It would be better to start with the lowest scenario and to point out that in this scenario only the status quo could be kept, but investments in future opportunities & challenges, e.g. higher student numbers and sustainability, and unforeseeable events would be severely limited. Starting from this scenario, the other scenarios should then sketch out what ADDITIONAL opportunities could be created. - change “new” -> ADDITIONAL to read “Recruitment of ADDITIONAL staff, especially professors and group leaders, will be limited.”
The Strategic Plan in the context of the ERI Dispatch	40-42	
<i>Transversal Themes</i>	40	
<i>Central challenges for the ERI landscape</i>	40-42	
<i>Other topics relating to Swiss higher education policy</i>	42	- ETH Zurich and EPFL ARE DEVELOPING measures to address this challenge and support students, such as providing preparatory courses (“Brückenkurs” at ETH Zurich and the “Cours de mathématiques spéciales–CMS” at EPFL) or splitting examination sessions.
<i>Financial scenarios</i>	42	