

Meeting of the ETH Board of 27/28 September 2017

Increase in tuition fees at ETH Zurich and EPFL

At its meeting of 27/28 September 2017, the ETH Board expressed its support for an increase in tuition fees at both Federal Institutes of Technology. The intention is to gradually increase tuition fees by a total of 500 Swiss francs over a two-year period from autumn 2019. The next step is for the ETH Board to open a hearing in the ETH Domain and conduct an office consultation. The ETH Board also elected Gabriele Mayer as a new member of the Eawag Directorate, the ETH Domain's aquatic research institute.

Bern, 28 September 2017 – The ETH Board intends to increase tuition fees at ETH Zurich and EPFL. From the 2019/2020 academic year, fees are to be gradually increased by a total of 500 Swiss francs over a two-year period from their current level of CHF 1,160 to CHF 1,660 per year in 2020. ETH Zurich and EPFL offer top-quality courses of study. Due to their scientific and technological focus, these are almost exclusively high-cost courses. In turn, an ETH education offers students outstanding career opportunities. The tuition fees for the two Federal Institutes of Technology in Zurich and Lausanne have hitherto been positioned in the bottom third of Swiss universities. In German-speaking Switzerland, ETH Zurich even has the lowest tuition fees of any university.

An increase in tuition fees has been under discussion for several years now. They were last increased in 2004, though this was only an adjustment in line with inflation. In March 2016, the ETH Board expressed its intention to increase tuition fees. The ETH Board feels that the planned increase of 500 Swiss francs per year is moderate and socially acceptable. To ensure everyone has access to a course of study at a Federal Institute of Technology, both Institutes intend to provide various cushioning measures. Following today's policy decision, the ETH Board is initiating an internal hearing in the ETH Domain and an office consultation. The definitive decision will be made following the evaluation of the hearing and the office consultation, probably in spring 2018. Implementation is planned to take place in two stages from the autumn semester in 2019.

Investment in teaching

The two Federal Institutes of Technology will invest the additional income from the increased tuition fees mostly in teaching. In so doing, they will be able to further improve their high-calibre education. The Swiss economy has a great need for engineering and science graduates. Over the last ten years, student numbers at both Institutes have increased by around 60 percent – far faster than the government funding invested in the ETH Domain. This is a positive trend, but it does pose major challenges for the two universities. To ensure a good student/teacher ratio and provide the necessary infrastructure, additional funding is indispensable in the ETH Domain in times of increasingly scarce financial resources and increasing student numbers. At the same time, both universities are continuing to make great efforts to optimise teaching and incorporate innovations into education, such as online courses, MOOCs and flipped classrooms.

Moderate and socially acceptable increase plus cushioning measures

The ETH Board stresses that the envisaged increase in tuition fees is moderate and will take place in a socially acceptable manner. With an increase of around 40 Swiss francs per month, students at the two Federal Institutes of Technology will contribute a total of around CHF 9,000 towards their education costs over the regular study period of five years, which is a very low figure given the actual costs of a course of study. Moreover, these students have outstanding career opportunities and salary prospects.

There are plans for cushioning measures so that all students can afford to study at a Federal Institute of Technology. These include increasing the grants fund and further measures to avoid cases of hardship. At both Institutes, students who resided abroad prior to commencing their studies will continue to pay the same level of fees as Swiss-educated students. This is part of the values of the ETH Domain, for which internationality and openness are central success factors.

With tuition fees of 1,660 Swiss francs per year, the two Federal Institutes of Technology will rank below Università della Svizzera Italiana (CHF 4,000), the University of St Gallen (CHF 2,852) and the University of Basel (CHF 1,700), and just above the University of Lucerne (CHF 1,620), the University of Berne (CHF 1,568) and the University of Zurich (CHF 1,548). It is also worth noting that courses at institutes of higher vocational education are usually significantly more expensive.

Gabriele Mayer elected as new member of the Eawag Directorate

At its meeting of 27/28 September, the ETH Board elected Gabriele Mayer as a new member of the Eawag Directorate. She will principally strengthen the Directorate in the fields of compliance, corporate governance and administration. Gabriele Mayer has worked at Eawag, the ETH Domain's aquatic research institute, since 2007 and is currently Head of Finance and HR.

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The ETH Board is the strategic management and supervisory body of the ETH Domain. The ETH Domain is made up of the two Federal Institutes of Technology, i.e. ETH Zurich and EPFL, as well as the four federal research institutes PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag. The members of the ETH Board are appointed by the Swiss Federal Council. The ETH Board supervises the development plans of the institutions, is responsible for strategic management accounting and ensures coordination. It draws up the budget and the financial statements of the ETH Domain and coordinates the value maintenance and continued functionality of the properties. It is the authority responsible for appointments and represents the ETH Domain before the federal authorities. A staff assists the ETH Board in the preparation and implementation of its business.