

Meeting of the ETH Board of 7/8 March 2018

ETH Domain invests in digital change

The ETH Domain will support the Swiss economy and Swiss society with specific measures to meet the challenges of digitisation. Until 2019/2020, the ETH Board is planning to strengthen computer sciences and IT in research and teaching, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it will establish a network of centres for technology transfer in digital production processes. Furthermore, the ETH Board discussed the planned increase in tuition fees. A consultation process took place until late January. After further considerations, the decision will be made by summer 2018.

Berne, 8 March 2018 – At its meeting of 7/8 March 2018, the ETH Board decided to support the Federal Council's action plan for digitisation with specific measures. The action plan aims to prepare the Swiss economy and Swiss society for the opportunities and challenges of digitisation. The ETH Domain will implement two central measures for which the ETH Domain has been earmarked in the Federal Council's report on "The challenges of digitisation for education and research in Switzerland"¹. In doing so, the ETH Domain will reinforce its role as an engine of digitisation in Switzerland and assume its responsibility for Switzerland as a centre of science, thus contributing towards the mastery of the societal and economic challenges of digitisation. All in all, the ETH Board will invest CHF 29m in 2019 and 2020.

Two central measures of the digitisation action plan

The first measure of the digitisation action plan that concerns the ETH Domain is intended to enhance the extension of competence in the form of seven additional professorships in the field of computer sciences at ETH Zurich and EPFL in Lausanne. They will complement the new professorships which have already been planned in this field at both universities. As early as in 2013–2016, ETH Zurich and EPFL appointed new incumbents to a total of 21 existing professorships with computer sciences and IT in mind. With these new bearings, ETH Zurich and EPFL will remain dynamic and constitute a driving force for technological developments.

The second measure will strengthen cooperation between research and industry. This will be about the establishment of a national network of regional technology transfer centres in the field of advanced manufacturing. Advanced Manufacturing is one of the ETH Domain's four strategic focus areas, along with Personalized Health and Related Technologies, Data Science and Energy, and covers digital applications in production like, for example, 3D printing or the manufacturing of materials and buildings designed with the help of computers. The research institutes PSI and Empa play a particularly important part in this second measure, together with partners from outside the ETH Domain.

Discussion about an increase in tuition fees

The ETH Board discussed the planned increase in tuition fees. After it declared itself in favour of raising tuition fees by CHF 500 p.a. in September 2017, consultations have taken place in the last few months. By the end of January, the ETH Board had received a variety of feedback arguments for and against an increase.

At present, the ETH Board is having some of these concerns examined. The ETH Board remains of the opinion that an increase in tuition fees is appropriate. The main arguments are still the fact that the number of students is increasing while the financial resources provided by the Confederation remain the same. In addition, the planned increase is a commensurate and socially acceptable adaptation of students' contributions to their high-quality education since tuition fees have not been raised for more than twenty years and are, at ETH Zurich and EPFL, among the lowest in Switzerland. To ensure that all students are able to afford to study at the two universities, the ETH Board attaches importance to effective cushioning measures of both Federal Institutes of Technology.

¹ This document is available in German and in French.

The precise configuration of an increase is still being prepared and requires further examination to ensure that the concerns that have been voiced can be put under more detailed scrutiny. The configuration of the cushioning measures and students' access to it, in particular, will have to be specified in detail by both Federal Institutes of Technology. The decision about an increase in tuition fees will be made by summer 2018 to ensure that it can be implemented in good time for autumn 2019.

Allocation of funds for 2019

For 2019, a total of CHF 2,541m of federal funds should be available to the ETH Domain. This is tantamount to zero growth. The lion's share of these funds will be required for operations and further development of both Federal Institutes of Technology, as well as of the four research institutes PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag, and will be allocated by the ETH Board on the basis of performance. Part of the funds will be spent on the four strategic focus areas, as well as on large-scale research infrastructures such as the National Supercomputing Centre CSCS at ETH Zurich, the neuroinformatics Blue Brain project at EPFL and the extension of the SwissFEL facilities at PSI.

Consolidated Report 2017 and appointments

The ETH Board also approved the consolidated reporting 2017. The ETH Domain's Annual Report with the consolidated financial statements for 2017 will be submitted to the Federal Council and the national Parliament and will be published in early May. In its report, the ETH Board highlights various aspects of the development of the ETH Domain and reports on the attainment of the strategic objectives defined by the Federal Council.

The ETH Board's appointment of professors, its award of the title of professor and its cognisance of resignations will be published in a separate media release.

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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.