

Comments on the Target agreement between the Board of the Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH Board) and the l'Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)

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Below are our remarks/comments/questions :

Section 1.1: Teaching

- We support aligning student numbers with teaching staff and infrastructure capacities
- The emphasis on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching appears overly ambitious. We caution against an overreliance on AI.
- Ethics and sustainability education needs stronger integration into the curriculum beyond general awareness, with clearly outlined objectives.

Section 1.2: Research

- Although AI has significant potential, we advise a more targeted and realistic approach rather than broad generalizations, ensuring that it serves as a supportive tool rather than a central focus.
- EPFL's commitment to open science is contradicted by the increased reliance on services from major corporations. We strongly urge EPFL to prioritize open-source alternatives in alignment with EPFL's role as a leader in open scientific practices in particular Swiss or European vendors.

Section 1.3: Research Infrastructure

- We strongly support the emphasis on maintaining and enhancing research infrastructure. However, the document should acknowledge the critical role of specialized human expertise necessary to operate such infrastructures with appropriate value and support.

Section 1.4: Knowledge and Technology Transfer

- Enhanced emphasis should be placed on collaboration not only between EPFL and industry but also across EPFL campuses.

Section 2.2: International Positioning

- The strategy for Asia remains vague regarding a region that is very diverse. Given the technological and scientific advancements in countries such as China and India, a more intentional and detailed approach to collaboration and outreach is necessary.

Section 2.3: Role in Society

- EPFL's societal contributions, including job creation, economic support, and informing policy, should be communicated more effectively to the public. This should emphasize the diverse and substantial impact of EPFL's research and educational initiatives.
- We appreciate EPFL's existing focus on supporting science policy and engagement. However, we propose further clarification on integrating such skills systematically into Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD curricula rather than treating them as supplementary activities.
- There is a lack of emphasis on collaboration with non-commercial entities, non-profits, legislators and policymakers

Section 4.1: Working Conditions and Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion

- We strongly support the establishment of the new Vice Presidency for Human Development (VPH) and initiatives aimed at strengthening staff capacities, particularly ongoing training for those in managerial and leadership roles.
- The EPFL Staff Commission initiative is highly valued.
- We welcome the inclusion of defined pathways for internal career development and mobility within EPFL. We would suggest specifying for whom.
- Diversity efforts should extend beyond gender, actively ensuring diverse individuals feel welcomed and included.
- While current support initiatives for tenure-track professors and senior scientists are commendable, we propose extending these initiatives to senior postdocs due to potential overlap in topics.

Section 4.2: Encouraging Scientific Talent Development

- The proposed "PhD Employee" guide is appreciated. Many of the same points can also be applied for Postdocs, we support the creation of an internal Welcome Center to provide one-stop, standardized information, for all of the mid-level academic staff that will aid in attracting the best talent to EPFL and to allow for a quick start.
- There are mentions of the mid-level academic staff in this section. It is not clear whether this refers to the whole of the corps intermédiaire or different parts of it. We believe that the language should be better aligned for precision as we are a diverse community, at different levels with differing needs.
- We would like to add that to support scientific talent, there needs to be a better focus on coaching, mentoring and leadership training as valuable soft skills.

Best regards

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EPDA