

Comments on Consultation on the Strategic Development Plan 2025-2028

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EPFL's strategic plan development team for the period of 2025-2028 contains a comprehensive description of interesting issues and actions around 5 major objectives:

- ensuring high-academic standards,
- promoting equity and accessibility to education,
- tackling high-priority worldwide problems,
- strengthening dialogue with society,
- ensuring sustainable development.

Our organizations support this encompassing social and scientific vision for our school.

EPFL direction acknowledges the difficulties ahead given the current period and makes efforts to uphold those values by promoting new methods of learning, lifelong learning, and outreach. Finally, EPFL management recognizes the importance of every level in EPFL hierarchy in the successful functioning and development of the objectives, and also highlights the importance of ensuring a diverse and inclusive environment.

We believe that the current plan lacks emphasis and clarity to issues currently summarized in passing in multiple subsections, in particular under "Wellbeing".

In addition, we believe there is insufficient emphasis on the role the Intermediate Body (Corps Intermédiaire; CI) plays within the excellence of EPFL. It is this body comprising PhD students, postdocs and scientific staff that generate much of the research output and carry out the educational duties that has paved the way for the successes of EPFL. However, for example, the mention of postdocs only appears 3 times in the document. To have continued success in attracting and maintaining our skilled technical staff and scientists, we must also support the intermediate body's lifelong learning and their sustainable career development.

There is a strong emphasis on EPFL growing and building a diverse community, as one of the smallest constituencies on campus but with a large impact, particularly in the areas of education and research, we believe that all initiatives should have the feedback and equal participation of the Corps Intermédiaire.

Therefore, we would like to suggest the following items to be revised and further developed in subsequent drafts of the Strategic Plan:

1) Wellbeing among PhD students, Postdocs and scientific staff

i) Towards the creation of a culture of mutual respect, EPFL should commit to expand the available resources for the prevention of harassment, and improve the mechanisms for denouncing harassment cases. This would include ensuring anonymity, preventing retribution, and institutional support of the victim especially in cases of power dynamics. Overall, there is a general lack of acknowledgement of the problem of sexual harassment and discriminating communication towards women at EPFL, either being peer to peer, or top-down. We acknowledge the recent creation of the VPT to address these issues and we believe this vice presidency should be further supported.

ii) We believe that in the current draft of the strategic plan the mental health crisis that is currently striking EPFL students is only mentioned in passing. This crisis particularly affects the most vulnerable levels of the EPFL hierarchy. Given the commitment expressed in the Strategic Plan to give back to Swiss society, we believe that explicitly reinforcing this commitment would demonstrate to Swiss society that EPFL cares for the mental wellbeing of its youth.

The need for stronger measures becomes particularly urgent in light of recent events that intersect between privacy, working conditions and data security. While we acknowledge EPFL's commitment to data management with a focus on privacy and cybersecurity (5.6), we assert that it's crucial for these principles to be first and foremost applied internally at EPFL. It should be made clear how EPFL-wide email and data is controlled and who has access to personal email accounts.

This section should be expanded with specific preemptive measures, rather than palliative, to address the root causes of the mental health crisis at EPFL and not as a short-term reaction and rapid remedy to a specific case.

iii) In regards to the quality of life states in Section 5.1, point 2, p 19, we would like this section to be extended to reflect the reality of members of the intermediate body. We believe that PhD students and postdocs, given the nature of the work, will not be recipients of many of the listed improvements such as workload anticipation, deadline management, or work from home, without specific guidelines. There is also no mention of what is in development on how to manage work/life balance. Finally, given the consistently highlighted dual status of PhD candidates as being students and employees, we would like EPFL to make clear and transparent commitments towards burnout prevention and ensuring that PhD students can maintain a healthy work/life balance.

iv) The emphasis on maintaining and developing new infrastructure for research, as discussed in Section 5.2, should extend to university services like food services, career center, housing, and sports facilities. Easy access to these services is crucial for enhancing the experience of PhD students and Postdocs at EPFL. We believe infrastructure considerations should not forget that the members of EPFL will be ones that inhabit, use and maintain it. Access to affordable quality services (ie. affordable access to fitness and healthy nutritious food) are necessary to support and effectively use these new investments. Given EPFL's commitment to improving the quality of life, work, and study, as well as the mental well-being of its community, it's vital that these fundamental issues are addressed with more urgency and action.

2) Life long learning, continuing education and transversal skills

i) The section on New forms of teaching (4.2) emphasizes how to train our future leaders. We are happy to see it includes a section in regards to lifelong learning for careers, that explicitly mentions PhDs and postdocs, however this should also include the scientific staff in particular as they are part of EPFL's strategy to increase public engagement (5.5)

We strongly believe in this and propose the following change on p12:

From: Fully embedding transverse skill development into the curriculum prepares masters students, PhD students and postdocs to impact society in careers outside academia.

To: Fully embedding transverse skill development into the curriculum prepares masters students, PhD students and postdocs to impact society in careers outside academia, **and equips scientific staff to participate with the public and with industrial stakeholders.**

ii) To effectively attract local and international talent for local and global impact (4.3) EPFL is aware of the need to increase its desirability and competitiveness. The more integrated these international talents align with the realities of the professional landscape of Switzerland, the better they may contribute to the development of the country.

Unfortunately, support for this is lacking for certain groups such as PhD and postdocs that do not have access to certain resources at institutions like the transversal skills and career center (CCTC) or to events organized by EPFL Alumni. Currently much critical information is distributed amongst human resources, the career center and the alumni centre. As these centers have overlapping goals, and with a focus (4.1) on 'the pooling of internal efforts and through the development of its governance and culture' to leverage our collective strengths, we believe a better arrangement between these

resource nodes (similar to the ETHZ Vice President for Personnel Development and Leadership) so all members of the CI have equal access to these resources.

iii) The fundamental sciences at EPFL (5.2) are strong, due to the state of the art infrastructure that also includes our scientific collaborators e.g. our technical staff, which (see p24) ‘implies the valorization and the management of the careers of technical staff with cutting-edge relevant expertise’. We also need to strengthen the development of our scientific staff. On p27, it is stated that it is important for EPFL to create and provide ‘appropriate intellectual environment and the evaluation criteria and promotion mechanisms, for centers or institutes but also, more importantly, for individuals, with well-defined career plans for all categories of collaborators, be optimized for pursuing fundamental sciences.’ We believe these goals are very important for scientific staff and need to be clarified further, in particular with the emphasis on continuing education, the need for transversal skills as well as proposals on how to realize these well-defined career plans.

iv) Continuing education (5.4) is promoted for the broader public and for EPFL alumni to equip adult learners for the changes in both work and society. We believe that this section should include a strengthening of the opportunities of the corps intermédiaire as well to expand their toolkit to better fit industry needs. As PhD students and postdocs enter the workforce, they should also benefit from upgrading courses for transversal and technical skills that will be offered.

We propose the following two changes:

1) On p12,

From: The institution will also collaborate with the Alumni office to address upskilling and reskilling needs, sustaining a vibrant community of lifelong learners.

To: The institution will also collaborate with the Alumni office to address upskilling and reskilling needs, sustaining a vibrant community of lifelong learners, **including former EPFL students and postdocs**

2) On p37,

From: We will also work closely in hand with the Alumni office, so that the upskilling and reskilling needs of EPFL alumni is taken directly into account when considering the development of the portfolio

To: We will also work closely in hand with the Alumni office, so that the upskilling and reskilling needs of EPFL alumni **and postdocs are** taken directly into account when considering the development of the portfolio

In conclusion, we applaud EPFL for putting in the Strategic Plan an emphasis on the continuing learning and betterment of its members. Importantly, the corps intermédiaire, consisting of our three parts, PhD students, postdocs and scientific staff, plays an important role in the research and productivity of EPFL. We would appreciate the corps intermédiaire to be acknowledged in the document and for them to participate equally in all aspects of EPFL, in particular in services already offered to one part of our body.