

How to Apply to Join LCSO?

You may not be familiar with the correct way to apply, especially if you don't know well the Swiss education and funding system. Please read this file carefully before applying! In addition, have a look on the "LCSO essentials" file on our website to learn more about our group and see if we will be a good fit for you.

1) Type of positions available at LCSO

- **Regular EPFL positions:** Thanks to internal EPFL funding, we can hire around one PhD every year and one postdoc every two years. Research can be on any topic. **For this type of positions, it is important to apply at least 12 months before the desired starting date.** In particular, the selection process for the PhD position is usually done in September-October to start in September of the following year. **In principle, all research topics ongoing in the group are open for regular positions, although topics may be prioritize according to the needs.**
- **Positions resulting from successful grant applications:** These positions for either PhDs or postdocs are linked to a successful project application, so the research topic is less free. Timeline is less predictable as each grant has a different period to announce the results. Therefore, **the positions will be specifically announced** on our website, twitter (X), bluesky and LinkedIn accounts. Starting such positions is usually possible faster after the announcement of the grant result (typically 3 to 6 months).
- **Coming with your own funding:** We are of course happy to support your application to personal PhD or postdoc fellowships in Switzerland or from your home country. However, you need to know that EPFL has strict rules for minimal salaries (minimal starting yearly salary for **PhD student is CHF 55'150** and **CHF 87'900 for postdoc**) and **only few fellowship programs can cover these salaries.** Therefore, our favorite option is to apply for personal fellowships only if the position is already financially secured by regular or project funding. If you still want to apply to a fellowship without any backup financial support from our laboratory, we strongly encourage you to apply to positions in other laboratories at the same time, as fellowships have become extremely competitive nowadays.

2) Dual application system of EPFL

Applying to EPFL can be confusing, as there are two parallel application processes: applying to the research group and applying to the doctoral school (EDCH). In contrast to US schools, **successful application to the doctoral school is not sufficient to secure a PhD position in a research group.** In fact, obtaining a position in a research group is usually more challenging and time consuming than applying to the doctoral school, and having a research group supporting your application to the doctoral school makes this process much smoother. **Therefore, we strongly recommend applying first to a research group.** It is important to remember however that the EDCH has specific deadlines for considering applications: January 15, April 30 and September 15. More details at: <https://www.epfl.ch/education/phd/edch-chemistry-and-chemical-engineering/edch-for-applicants/>

Formal eligibility criteria: All candidates with a master degree or recognized equivalent can apply for a PhD (it is of course OK to apply before having the final diploma if you can show that you are on a good way to get it, you will be provisionally accepted under conditions to send a copy of your diploma later). Candidates with a four- or five-year bachelor degree can apply, but may be requested to follow extra lectures during their PhD. Candidates with only a three-year bachelor degree cannot apply.

3) The E-Mail

Paper applications are not necessary anymore. Email application to jerome.waser@epfl.ch is the way to go.

Important points:

1) Addressing: Start your email with Dear Prof. Waser (Title last name is used in Europe). Also **OK:** Dear Prof. Jerome Waser, Dear Prof. Jérôme Waser.

Not OK: Dear Prof., Dear Sir/ Dear Madam, Dear Jerome (only for group members), Dear Prof. Jerome, Hi Prof., ...

2) Tell who you are: (shortly): Where you did your study, what is your current level, when you will get your degree, and if you did something particularly relevant for your application (which research did you do, internships (industrial, international...)). Do not give details, those are for the letter of motivation.

3) Tell why you apply. Why are you specifically interested in LCSO. Can you point to specific publications of the lab that attract your interest? If you apply to a specific announcement, what is your specific interest?

Not OK: Very general comments are useless: "I want to join your group because you are a leader in the field of organic synthesis". In addition, copy-pasting of extracts from our website does not give a good impression of genuine interest.

4) The supporting documents

- There are five supporting documents needed for PhD application: Letter of motivation, CV, Transcript of grades, research summary and list of referees. For postdoc, a research proposal is asked in addition. Selection will be based on the evaluation of all documents. It looks more serious if you have attached them as pdf to your application with the corresponding file names!
- **Letter of motivation:** It is the detailed version of your application email. You can go more in details about the topics of the email. You can also mention your career plan, personal experience, character or diversity background,... and how they make you a good candidate for LCSO. It is very important to use your own words to describe your interest, and not a text taken from our website, the internet or generated by AI.
- **CV:** Please provide a detailed academic CV. Highlight which experiences you think are relevant for your application. In particular, research experiences in academic laboratories or industry play an essential role in the selection process. Ideally, at least one of these experiences should be in synthetic organic chemistry.
- **Transcript of Grades:** GRE and overall medium grades are not so useful, please provide details grading for all your courses, as the grades related to the field of synthetic chemistry are more important to be selected for interview. If available, provide also ranking. If you don't have ranking, please be aware that grading system vary a lot from country to country, so you should comment on it, especially which grade corresponds to a top 20%. It is better to provide the original grades with explanation rather than only a correspondence in A, B, C,... system. **There is no rule for minimal GRE** or grades in synthetic chemistry, but please be aware that you will be compared to other candidates during the selection process.
- **Research summary:** Short (2 pages). Make chemical drawing yourself using ACS style. You are welcome to send copy of publications if you have already some, but this is not a replacement for the research summary, which can be used to assess your personal communication skills and scientific understanding. For PhD applications, having publications already **is not a strong selection factor**, as the career stage is too early. For postdocs in contrast, this becomes a central part of the evaluation.
- **List of referees:** Please give email addresses. Priority should be given for referees that supervised you for research work. If you keep "obvious" referees out (like master or PhD thesis supervisor), please justify in your cover letter why you did not list them.
- **Research proposal** (for postdocs only): 1-2 pages: what research would you propose to do at LCSO?

5) Application Evaluation

- Within 10 days, I will acknowledge your application if it is complete and fitting an open position announced in the group, and if your application is under consideration or not for the next selection round. Candidates under consideration will be informed after the indicated deadline if their application is finally selected or not for the first round of interviews. If you did not receive an answer within 10 days, please first check **if your application was complete** according to these guidelines. If yes, I may have missed your message in the flood of emails, so please send your application again.
- **Selection round 1** (around 10% of candidates): Selected candidates will be invited for a 1:1 online interview with Prof. Waser. The interview usually takes roughly one hour. It will start with a short discussion about career and motivation. You will then be asked to present yourself and your previous research experiences in a short power point presentation (10-15 min). The presentation will be interactive, with interruption if there are questions. You will then be asked to solve an organic chemistry problem (it

can be done either by sharing a chemdraw window, any other drawing program or tablet, or even on a piece of paper shown to the camera). At the end of the interview, you will have also the occasion to ask questions you may still have. At this stage, in-depth discussion of research projects for the PhD will not yet be done.

- **Selection round 2** (around 3-4 candidates for each open position): Selected candidates from round 1 will be invited for a second round interview. For all candidates within reasonable travel distance, this interview will take place in person and travel and accommodation costs will be paid by LCSO. The interview will start by a personal and research presentation to the LCSO group members of about 20 min on power point. It will be followed by a problem solving session. The candidate will then meet and discuss personally with all group members in small sub-groups. **At this stage of the application, the factor of fitting within the team is the most important**, and feedbacks of all group members will be collected and analyzed for the final decision. The candidate(s) who give the best impression will receive a provisory offer and be informed on how to apply to the doctoral school and visa/working permit procedures. Hiring is final only if the application to doctoral school and working permit are successful, although we have no example of failure in these processes so far at LCSO.