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rETHink

Making ETH fit for the future

Zurich, 25 September 2020

ETH President Joël Mesot launched the rETHink project in 2019 to drive ETH Zurich's institutional development and ensure that it retains its stature as one of the world's best universities.

Taking the requirements of the professorships and the academic departments as their basis, members of the ETH community from all areas and hierarchical levels come together in dozens of boards to consider how ETH Zurich can further improve. The project is divided into six workstreams, which are closely interconnected in terms of content and systematically build on the findings and decisions of one another. Work has already kicked off in three of the six workstreams, which are analysing the need for action and developing specific solutions in a broad-based, iterative process involving all university groups and the Executive Board.

Overview of the individual subprojects (Workstreams)

Executive Board, basic architecture & boards (Workstream 1):

The appointment of the two new vice presidents – for Knowledge Transfer & Corporate Relations and for Personnel Development & Leadership – marks an important milestone in the project. With this move, ETH is ensuring that these two increasingly important areas are strengthened and further professionalised. The next step is to review the collaboration between the three institutional levels – professorships, academic departments and Executive Board – and optimise it where necessary.

Professorships (Workstream 2):

Launched in March 2020, this workstream analyses the professorships in terms of what they require and what is required of them. This takes into account the professorship as a whole, i.e. the professorship as an organisational unit including all group members. In the first step, three working groups will discuss how the professorship should be organised in future, for example regarding tasks or

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how work is distributed within the professorship. This includes discussions on which of the professorships' current strengths must be retained at all costs and how to lighten professors' workloads. One of the aims of this workstream is to clarify how to find the right balance between the multifaceted tasks of a professorship (e.g. research, teaching, public relations, technology transfer). About 25 focus group discussions are currently in progress, with some 150 people participating from all university groups. This should produce a comprehensive overview of the professorships at ETH.

Support for professors (Workstream 3):

Workstream 3 builds on the findings and decisions from Workstreams 2, 4 and 5. As soon as it has been established how the professorships, the academic departments and the central administrative units are to be organised in future, it is important to clarify the best way to prepare professors for their multifaceted tasks and how best to support them with this development. This applies, for example, to their leadership and management role and to their involvement within the institution as a whole (e.g. their participation in boards). Workstream 3 will kick off in Q2 2021.

Organisation of academic departments (Workstream 4) and organisation of central administrative units (Workstream 5):

Workstreams 4 and 5 are directly related to each other and to Workstream 2. Here, the focus is on reviewing the tasks, skills and responsibilities of the three institutional levels (professorship, academic department and central administrative units) and making adjustments where necessary. Workstreams 4 and 5 will clarify, among other things, which services are to be provided centrally and which will be decentralised – for example, IT services and room reservations. Workstreams 4 and 5 will both kick off in Q4 2020.

Culture development (Workstream 6):

For six months now, ETH members from all university groups have been discussing the values that they believe ETH Zurich should commit to upholding and how these should be lived out in practice. These are based on the values defined by the Strategy Commission for 2021–2024 (responsibility, openness, diversity, team spirit and excellence). Dialogue about values and culture started in July, initially in smaller groups (seven dialogue groups each with about six participants) and is now being held in ever larger ETH organisational units. A survey among ETH staff is also planned in parallel, as well as a blog to provide a platform for ideas and exchange. In mid-2021, proposals on how to put the shared values into practice, establish a shared leadership culture and strengthen the sense of belonging among all ETH members will be put forward and expanded on at an ETH-wide rETHink symposium.

Further information on the current status of the rETHink project is available at:

<https://ethz.ch/en/the-eth-zurich/portrait/strategy/rethink.html> →