MEETING OF 27 APRIL 2017


The meeting starts at 12h15 in room ME.B1.10

1) Agenda and approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 28.03.2017
The agenda is adopted as is.

2) General information
A. Billard contacted Mme Sarah Springman, ETHZ Rector, to invite her to the CCE General Assembly so that she could make a presentation but unfortunately her schedule is too dense to find a date that would suit everyone before the end of the semester. She thus suggested that the ETHZ Vice-Rector M. Joachim Buhmann should come in her stead. The CCE members accept her suggestion and A. Billard will take it upon herself to organise his visit.

3) Organisation of the CCE equivalent at the ETHZ
A. Billard comments on the organisation of the CCE equivalent at the ETH Zürich. It is responsible for the nomination of the best teacher (teacher award) and has many members, some of which constitute an executive committee. However, it is unclear whether this committee is designated by the members of the CCE equivalent or whether they are elected. It is fact though that the Rector is a full member of this committee and is elected by its members. The committee itself is comprised of the representatives of each department, which are equivalent to the EPFL sections. This manner of organisation supports A. Billard’s proposition to link the CCE and the CDS. Just like the CCE, the ETHZ equivalent entity has a president and a vice president who are not members of administrative staff, while the Rector is a member. Its members are also elected by their entity equivalent to EPFL’s AE. It holds monthly meetings with a certain number of activities they need to organise during the academic year. Some of its activities, such as the convergence with gymnasiums, the evaluation of teachers and the consultation on current and future directives, are quite similar to the ones of the CCE.

The following points are discussed:
• Erasmus program and its horizon, which has still not been determined;
• Digital Humanities: the MS course seems to have been postponed and only 2 of the 6 candidates have been selected to follow it. Not so long ago the course was required to have enlisted at least 20 students to take place. It appears there have been quite a few changes.
• According to their contracts, PhD students must devote at least 20% of their time to teaching but it seems that in reality this number is closer to 10%.
H.-J. Ruppen explains that teaching is a necessary part of the PhD curriculum and suggests that PhD students receive a certification of their teaching abilities at the end of their studies as a means of valorisation.
4) Talk with Pierre Vandergeynst, Vice-President for education

MAN reform: regardless of the additional work supplied, failure and success rates have not changed. P. Vandergeynst has discussed the matter with MAN students and it appears that their studying methods are not as good as could be hoped for. Students sit the exam without ever really having tried to complete an exercise on their own (without the help of assistants). The connection between theory, practice and completing an exercise on one's own is at the heart of the issue. J. Sam shares her experience of showing a mock exam to her students and explaining to them how to read the instructions and in what manner to answer; it seems that once the element of surprise removed success rate rises.

Students: the number of French students rises progressively, which means that they adapt to EPFL demands. Their Bac S average is currently closer to 17/20 including the subject of philosophy. O. Burdet suggests that it would perhaps be useful to introduce a presentation on methodology of studying during the welcome days to make students more aware of studying methods. R. Tormey is the co-author of a book entitled "Apprendre à travailler", which covers studying methods for engineering students. A copy of this book should be handed out to all new students. A Belgian university has created a knowledge test the results of which give students a quick overview of their level before they start university curriculum. The students who complete this test receive 2 ECTS credits. The test was implemented 15 years ago and today's curriculum results are once again at the same level as in the time of mandatory entry testing. This shows that fewer students sign in after taking the test and that more and more students do take the test.

S. Deparis would like to know whether it would be possible to make the MAN program available to students who have not yet started their BA1 at the EPFL. Oftentimes students don't have the PAM level, and access to the MAN program could allow more girls who do not necessarily have a scientific Maturité in gymnasium to catch up. P. Vandergeynst considers that knowing the results of the MAN program would help implement the best knowledge testing system at the end of the gymnasium. P. Vandergeynst has met with student class delegates to ask their opinion on the MAN program and one of the delegates has explained that some students fall back into their gymnasium back habits and, while understanding what the program is for, do not properly commit to their studies. It also appears that architecture students who follow the MAN program consider themselves to have already failed and give up even though the gymnasium math level is the same for everyone. J. Sam wonders whether the classes dispatched in the MAN program are adapted to the needs of these students.

P. Vandergeynst has underlined to these students that classes of the MAN program should be adapted for every level of failure, be the grade of the student 1 or 3,4. P. Soubeyrand also highlights the fact that MAN level is too high when compared with the BA1 level of architecture students, which makes it more difficult for them to succeed. S. Deparis notifies that math teachers are currently consulting architecture teachers on how to better adapt the math curriculum for BA1 architecture students.

Teaching workload:
M. Holliger wonders why a small salary should not be paid to assistants. P. Vandergeynst informs that it would be a possibility to pay them. As far as P. Vandergeynst knows, the teaching workload varies considerably from one section to another. It would be necessary to evaluate the specific needs of every section and establish corresponding budgetary specifications. The commonly considered 20% would be more than enough. Financing organisms firmly insist that a PhD student who perceives a salary for working 100% should not be paid for the 20% of the mandatory teaching time at EPFL. The costs of teaching done by PhD students represent roughly 2 million CHF.
Financing organisms request that the demands upon PhD students teaching should be clarified and put into correspondence with the salary they perceive and organisms finance. The demands should also be brought into strict accordance with legislation. A method to estimate the time spent teaching should be implemented. PhD students should be given classes on how to teach their subject to guarantee a uniform quality of teaching. Such classes already exist and PhD students should be encouraged to follow them. G. Fantner would like to know what the current procedure is for PhD student who complete their thesis in 3 years and wish to leave without completing their teaching workload. P. Vanderghynst insists that their contracts bind PhD student to complete the required teaching workload.

The harmonization of the rules should be applied to the whole school. It is reminded that ISA allows to upload the number of hours spent for the AE. Some faculties use this disposition more than others. P. Vanderghynst considers that sections should manage their own AE-AC classes costs; he supposes that he would be able to grant the financial means for it and enquire on the teaching quality. The final harmonization project should be ready by the end of 2017.

A consortium of universities (MIT, Imperial, Harvard, etc.) has recently realised that too often the research alone was considered to be enough to measure the quality of teachers’ work and to give sufficient grounds to promote them. R. Tormey is discussing the matter with a group of students to define what they expect from teachers’ evaluations and will then consult teachers to establish how best to measure and evaluate teachers’ work. Teachers have a specific social role that should be recognized and rewarded.

The meeting ends at 13h40
Minutes / S. Muller