Subject: Strategic Plan 2017-2020 for the ETH Domain.

Mr President, Dear Colleague,

The Council of EPFL Teachers - CCE - thanks you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Plan 2017-2020 for the ETH domain. I attach below a few remarks from the CCE on this text.

Sincerely yours,

Aude Billard
CCE President
CCE Position Statement on the Strategic Plan 2017-2020 of the ETH-Board.

We appreciate the commitment of the ETH-Board to teaching and to « guarantee academic freedom » as well as the vision that « teaching and research are closely linked ».

While the document gives some details on the freedom practiced in research activities, it does not specify how academic freedom is practiced in teaching. The CCE suggests extending [Page 14, 3rd paragraph] as follows:

The Domain of the EPF respects henceforth the diversity of opinions and methods of work in research and teaching.

While teaching topics may be decided by the school as a whole, teachers should be free to determine the manner in which they present the topic of their teaching. This freedom makes teachers responsible for the quality of their teaching and gives value to their creativity. It also helps motivate the teachers.

Next specific comments to parts of the text. The original text [translated from French to English by the CCE] is copied in italics.

[Page 11] “L’EPFL counts […] 329 professors and about 3’500 teachers, researchers and technical and administrative staff”

Professors are teachers; we cannot distinguish between teachers and professors. It is also surprising to mix researchers with technical and administrative staff. Given the important role that teaching and research take in the strategic plan, it is desirable to count teachers separately from other staff members. The same applies to researchers. It would also be important to specify the numbers for each institution. Number from ETHZ are currently missing.

[Page 12] From the Master level, teaching is completely bi-lingual (French-English).

The term completely bi-lingual implies that the teaching can be followed as much in French as in English. This is not currently the case at EPFL. The courses are not all given in the two languages. Teaching can be considered at best as bi-lingual if we take the liberty to interpret bi-lingual as the simultaneous practice of the two languages in a year of training. Still, certain sections offer courses which allow students to follow a Master in a single language. There is not, therefore, bilingualism even in a broad sense, for these trainings.

[Page 20] The graduates of the EPF […] are equally used to taking responsibility and managing teams in a scientific environment, as well as in the economy and civil society.

To our knowledge, EPFL students have no specific occasions to manage teams during their curriculum. In some curricula, they participate in teams, typically during practical work done in groups.

[Page 20] When recruiting or nominating professors, one takes into account the potential of the candidates as a scientist and as a teacher.

No matter how well a professor may teach, s/he cannot teach arbitrary courses. The needs for teachers with competences in specific subjects are also a factor in recruitment. We propose to expand the paragraph as follows:
During recruitment or nomination of professors, one takes into account the potential of the candidates as a scientist and as a teacher, and the teaching needs of the faculty the candidate may join.

[Page 20]: Education and further training of teachers: The two EPFs continue the consolidation of their solid base as benchmark establishments of education and further training for teachers of higher secondary schools and of specialized higher education schools in natural sciences, the science of engineering and in mathematics.

Architecture is generally considered separately from engineering. Assuming that continuing education applies to education of teachers in HES, the paragraph above should be changed as follows: […] the science of engineering, architecture and in mathematics.

[Page 21]. Supervised research activities constitute the major part of the training and work for the Master.

At EPFL, supervised work at the Master level takes up at maximum 50% of the credits and this is true only in some sections. It does not, therefore, constitute the majority of the training. Moreover, the training is not always linked to research activities and consists more of practical and scientific activities with applications in professional life.

Finally, we note a contradiction in the definition of the various training offered with the ETH domain (in French to avoid ambiguities brought by the translation):

- [Page 18]. Complémentarité des voies de formation et des orientations de recherche: Le système de formation dual pratiqué en Suisse se caractérise par un enseignement axé sur la pratique professionnelle et par un autre fondé sur la formation académique.
- [Page 20]. C’est la raison pour laquelle les profils des cursus d’études proposés dans les deux EPF (cf. encadré) et les qualifications de leurs diplômés diffèrent volontairement de ceux des autres types de hautes écoles, et en particulier des hautes écoles spécialisées (mesure 1.2).

and the mesure 1.2 on page 20 :

- [Page 20]. 1.2 Affinemenet et perfectionnement des profils d’études spécifiques: Les deux EPF préparent et consolident la formation qu’elles dispensent, qui est fondée sur la recherche et axée sur la pratique.