

January 16, 2023

Dear Members of the ETH Zurich Executive Board

We, the Executive Board of the Women Professors Forum (WPF), have written this letter in response to the invitation that has been extended to ETH Zurich bodies for feedback on *Guidelines on the employment of professors of ETH Zurich beyond the normal retirement age*.

As stated in that document, such an extension is intended only for exceptional cases. It is therefore important that the procedure to identify such exceptional cases is transparently regulated and that the granted exceptional extensions, and the role of the faculty receiving them, are transparently reported. In doing so, we recommend consideration of the following points:

Rules for Transparency

The criteria for granting such exceptions should be clearly defined, and the procedure for their assessment should be established in further detail. Currently, the criteria in Section 2.1 are as follows:

“³.. the professor's academic track record must be evidenced by outstanding scientific publications, successful acquisition of third-party funding, national and international honours and awards, membership of relevant scientific committees, transfer of knowledge into practice and substantial commitment to teaching.

⁴The available performance evaluations in accordance with Art. 4a of the ETH Professors' Ordinance are also used to make the decision.”

The above criteria are reasonable, as it would be non-trivial, and likely impossible, to place more quantifiable metrics, such as, the requirement that the researchers belong in the top 5% of their respective fields. However, the procedure to determine whether a faculty member fulfils the above-listed criteria should be transparent. As the above list is similar to the fulfilment of criteria for academic advancement, this could be a task of the ETH Tenure Committee. The assessment of excellence should be a process that is unbiased and separate from the evaluations from one's own department.

Finally, similar to the process for new hires, such extensions should be publicly announced and statistics kept and published, similar to those in place for hiring and promotion procedures. Statistics involving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) criteria should also be kept and published.

Tasks/Duties

An extension should come with a clear purpose and definition of tasks. Currently, the tasks are defined in the draft document based on the following clauses in Section 2.1:

“¹The tasks at the heart of the continuing professor's activities must be strategically significant and institutionally relevant both for ETH Zurich and for

Switzerland as a science location. Ideal typical functions are the establishment or expansion of a scientific area of competence with international appeal or the assumption of a renowned institutional leadership position within or outside ETH Zurich.

²Continuing professors must also be highly committed to ETH Zurich. They place their actions at the service of the institution, **take on an active and integrative role across institutional and disciplinary boundaries** and thus leave a positive and lasting mark on the reputation and advancement of ETH Zurich.

⁷**The provision of teaching services in consultation with the responsible department forms an integral part of his or her range of duties. In exceptional cases, release from teaching duties is possible.”**

The above definitions **in bold** are not explicit; it would be helpful to explain whether faculty would be eligible for, or tasked with, roles such as department head or executive roles within ETH Zurich.

It should be ensured that these tasks do not overlap with activities of the newly hired faculty member, who is often hired in succession of the soon to be emeritus position. Clause 8 of Section 2.1 briefly mentions this issue, but it is important to highlight this point in a dedicated section concerning protection of young academics. In such a section, it should be clearly stated that:

- The hire of a succeeding academic should not be postponed based on a possible extension.
- The resources in terms of financing and space allocation of the successor will not be limited during the extension period of the outgoing faculty member.
- The identified task of "development or expansion of a scientific area of competence [...] or the assumption of a renowned institutional leadership position" (clause 1, Section 2.1) should not diminish, compromise, or in any way interfere with the sphere of influence of the succeeding academic.

Employment contract and remuneration, duration

Sections 3.2 and 2.3, which bear the same name, seem to contradict each other, at least in part: while Section 2.3 states that "extensions will normally be up to a maximum of age 70," Section 3.2 mentions "no formal upper limit on employment." This should be revised.

Funding

As specified in clause 1, Section 2.4, the salary of an extended position will be taken on by the Executive Board. It is important that the salary not burden the departments, as this further alleviates the formation of preparatory individual reserves. However, such formation of reserves seems to be permitted per clause 4 of Section 2.4, which states that "The continued use of the reserve of the professorship is to be regulated on a case-by-case basis". Despite the clarification that "general saving [...] with regard to the [...] continued employment phase" is to be avoided, it remains unclear how the absence of such an intention can be verified or proved. To avoid formation of such reserves at the level of a professorship, the use of individual reserves for such extended employment purposes should explicitly not be permitted. Departmental reserves could be used for points b+c of Section 2.4.

Accommodation

Section 2.5 mentions that “Accommodation and use of infrastructure is regulated on an individual basis. As a rule, accommodation is provided within the perimeter of the department”. This will demand resources from the department and take away resources from succeeding or newly hired faculty, which directly contradicts clause 2 of the same section.

Approval procedure

Based on what we suggest in the paragraph “Rules for Transparency”, we propose a revision of Section 2.6, clause 4:

⁴The aforementioned documents are submitted for evaluation by the ETH Tenure Committee¹. Should the committee decide positively, it forwards its recommendation to the President, who issues an offer of continued employment to the professor after consulting the members of the Executive Board (analogous to an offer of appointment). The department’s input is elicited at this stage to find space and infrastructure arrangements.

This input has been compiled and approved by the ETH WPF Executive Board.

With best regards,

The ETH WPF Board

¹ We here mention the ETH Tenure committee to avoid creation of a further evaluation body within ETH Zurich. However, it can also be an individual specialized committee. This is different to the process followed for promotion from associate to Full professor, however, it should be reminded that this procedure is meant to be exceptional, contrary to the promotion from associate to full, which is as a rule successful for the majority of faculty.