

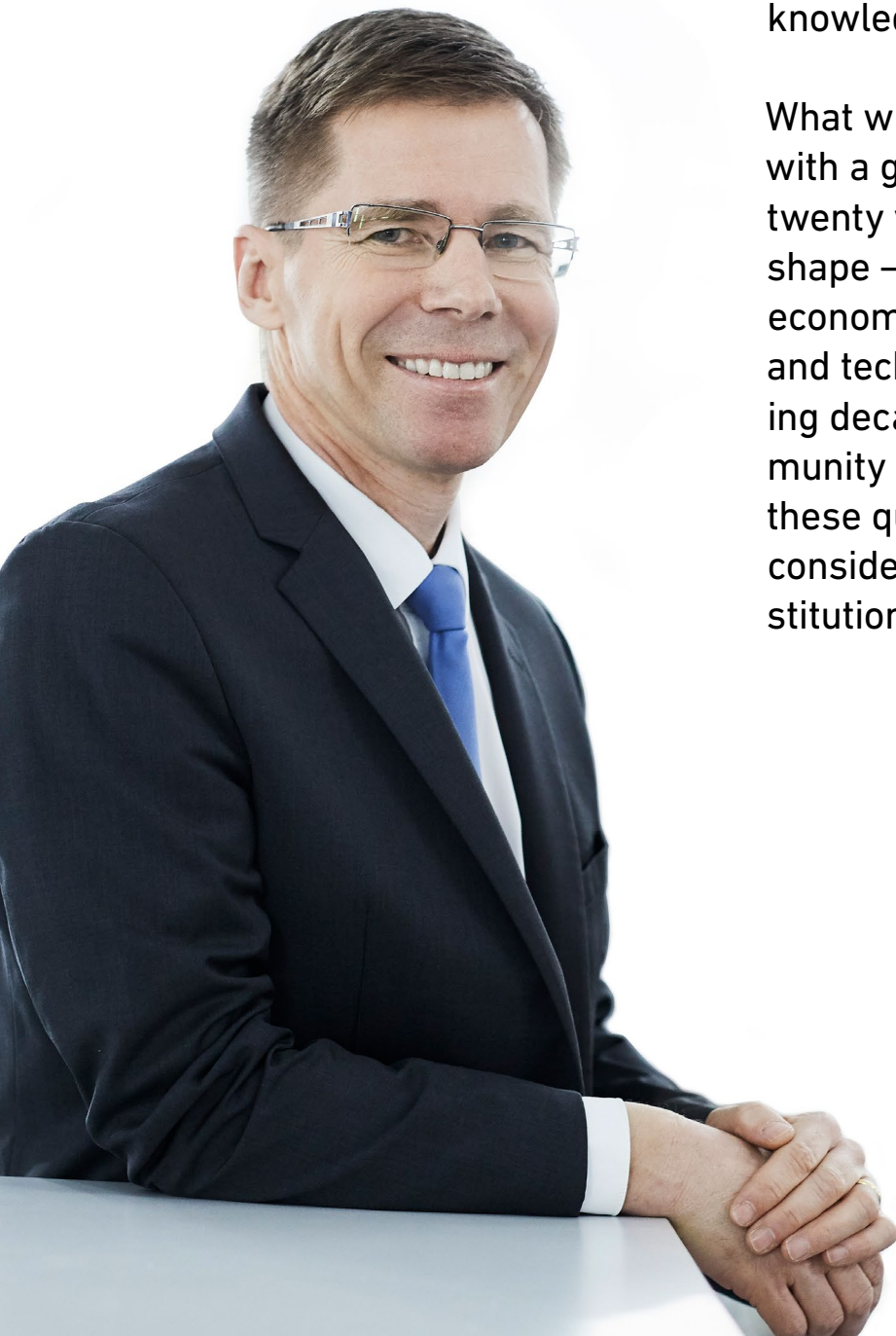
Institutional Priorities 2025–2036



Foreword

At ETH Zurich, we understand that in a world shaped by complexity, higher education institutions have the responsibility to serve society as beacons of clarity, robustness, and trustworthiness – especially in the areas of education, research, and knowledge transfer.

What will a leading Swiss university with a global reach look like in ten or twenty years? How will ETH Zurich shape – and be shaped by – social, economic, political, environmental, and technological trends in the coming decades? The ETH Zurich community has thoroughly reflected on these questions and more. We have considered many aspects of our institution's future evolution, including



the critical importance of maintaining our leadership in basic research, knowledge transfer, and higher education. We also take to heart the trust vested in us by Swiss society and global communities.

I would like to express my gratitude to the entire ETH Zurich community for their creative energy and engagement in what has become a robust, long-term strategy development process we have undertaken together as an institution. Guided by the institutional priorities articulated in this document, I remain confident that ETH Zurich will continue shaping the university landscape and assisting society in effectively addressing the challenges ahead. In that spirit, I hope this long-term strategic vision will serve as a valuable guide for all decision-makers and stakeholders engaged with our institution.

Joël Mesot

President, ETH Zurich

Introduction

ETH Zurich's Executive Board launched a process in 2021 to reflect on how ETH Zurich envisions its long-term evolution – as a future-fit university committed to its primary mission of serving society. The ETH Zurich community engaged in defining the institution's long-term strategic priorities, which address cross-cutting issues relevant to the entire institution. The 2025–2036 time frame was selected, as it aligns with three shorter, four-year planning cycles in which the institution regularly engages.

In this context, the ETH Zurich Community considered several challenging questions: Which forces are likely to drive change in the long-term evolution of the higher education landscape? Which of these forces might have the greatest impact on how ETH Zurich teaches, conducts research, and engages with society in the coming years? Finally, what institutional priorities should the Executive Board establish to navigate such a future context while safeguarding the university's intellectual freedom and strengthening its position as an international leader?

The Executive Board deliberately focused on institutional topics that ensure freedom to pursue excellence in research shaped by the institution's 16 departments. Such freedoms serve as the foundation for ETH Zurich's world-class education.

On the following pages, the Executive Board presents ETH Zurich's long-term institutional priorities and commitments. The purpose of this document is to shed light on the direction in which the institution will navigate in the coming years. It serves as a compass – a leadership tool – for ETH Zurich's internal decision makers. It can further serve as a framework for meaningful dialogue with members of the ETH Zurich Community. The implementation of the institutional priorities will be driven by the sub-strategies of the academic and administrative units as an effort of collective responsibility.

The evolution of the university and the ability to successfully execute the above articulated institutional priorities are inextricably linked to the financial sup-

port of the Swiss Confederation and third parties. ETH Zurich remains deeply appreciative of this support. Recognizing the challenging times that lay ahead, ETH Zurich will continue to strive to honour, and safeguard public trust. The people of Switzerland vested such trust in recognition of the importance of high-quality education and excellence in research and its value for Switzerland's future economic prosperity and societal wellbeing. Furthermore, ETH Zurich is committed to safeguarding democratic principles embodied by the Swiss Confederation in the execution of its activities.

In the spirit of embracing resilience in our increasingly complex world, ETH Zurich will also aspire to remain agile and pragmatic in its approach to addressing any future changes, developments, and opportunities which it might not have anticipated at this stage.

By 2036, ETH Zurich aspires to:

- **Advance and promote the fundamentals.**
- **Serve society as a trusted source of knowledge.**
- **Become a champion and living lab for all-scope decarbonization and circularity.**
- **Become a lifelong learning institution and community.**
- **Master the continuous blurring of boundaries.**
- **Be a leader in the development and deployment of responsible AI.**



Long-term strategic priority

Advancing and promoting the fundamentals

ETH Zurich understands that in an increasingly complex world, its core mission to serve society is more pertinent than ever before. Therefore, it believes that higher education institutions have the obligation to serve as beacons of clarity, robustness, intellectual freedom, and trustworthiness – especially in the areas of education, research, and knowledge transfer.

In this context, **ETH Zurich will continue advancing and promoting excellence in curiosity-driven basic research, teaching fundamental knowledge and skills as well as engaging in innovative partnerships, entrepreneurial ventures, and science-policy activities.** These activities provide value to Switzerland, secure its international attractiveness as a country at the forefront of innovation and technological progress, and enable the ETH Zurich Community to have direct involvement in addressing global challenges.

Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Provide the empowering framework and continue to safeguard academic freedom to pursue excellence in curiosity-driven basic research and proactively communicate its value and importance as a foundational pillar of the institution. ETH Zurich understands that basic research is key to improving and maintaining societal wellbeing as well as the economic success and resilience of Switzerland. It recognizes the importance of awareness raising and social sensitization as to its role in Swiss and global communities.
- Focus on nurturing world-class engineering as a key long-term pillar of the institution. This includes support for pathways for scientists and engineers to apply strong technical skills and system approaches to address both the needs of the Swiss economy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on an increased engagement with societal actors.

- Continuously improve the teaching of fundamental knowledge and skills at the highest level to ensure that all ETH Zurich students are equipped to deal with current and future challenges. Training students to think critically about the acquired knowledge and to connect it, enables them to effectively use and transfer knowledge to the Swiss economy and public sector, to act responsibly in our society and to prepare our industry for a sustainable future.
- Assist students and scientists in searching for and accelerating the establishment of knowledge transfer activities such as innovative partnerships and entrepreneurial ventures – Swiss based as well as globally – to ensure ETH Zurich's growth in this space.
- Communicate and live ETH Zurich's values of openness, responsibility, inclusion, respect, empowerment, and ingenuity across all its activities. These values are fundamental to ETH Zurich and reflect the United Nations' 17 SDGs as our guiding principles.





Long-term strategic priority

Serving society as a trusted source of knowledge

Social discourse and communication channels are becoming increasingly fragmented in a highly complex world. Trust in and credibility of knowledge providers are essential in effectively informing audiences (while cutting through the informational noise). ETH Zurich recognizes that the ability to reach and engage with diverse audiences across a variety of channels will be key to furthering society's understanding of science and its implications.

In this regard, **ETH Zurich aspires to continuously serve society as a trusted source of knowledge and to assist societal actors in solving pressing challenges. It will invest in strengthening its ability to communicate and engage with partners from the civil society, policy, the private and the public sector across different channels.** This ability will also be essential in promoting the fundamental enabling factor underpinning scientific advancement, namely intellectual freedom. ETH Zurich will, therefore, promote intellectual freedom across all the activities of the institution while recognizing that with such freedom comes great responsibility and the need for high ethical standards.

Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Strengthen its capacity for communication and engagement of the institution and its members in a dialogue and collaboration with society.

- Communicate – proactively, regularly, and institution-wide – about how intellectual freedom is to be understood and lived at ETH Zurich. The institution will provide a safe space for discussion and expression of opinions in the framework provided by the Swiss legal system.
- Implement internal criteria for an institution-wide approach to the collaboration with external stakeholders that may have a different understanding of intellectual freedom than ETH Zurich and implement policies for security-relevant research.
- Participate in a social dialogue across Switzerland, promoting and explaining the importance of intellectual freedom in academia.
- Ensure that ETH Zurich's scientists and students remain trustworthy knowledge providers of scientific and technological developments, and that they are recognized as valuable partners from other sectors of society, nationally and globally.

Long-term strategic priority

Becoming a champion and living lab for all-scope decarbonization and circularity

Greenhouse gas emissions are at record levels and rising. Decarbonization and circularity are essential for addressing these challenges and for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. To prevent irreversible climate damage, emissions must be reduced along all types and value chains. Decarbonization aims to cut emissions, especially carbon dioxide, by transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and adopting sustainable and regenerative practices, thus creating a healthier planet for future generations. Additionally, circular approaches offer further innovative solutions, focusing on resource efficiency and waste minimization by prioritising reuse, recycling, and regeneration. This systemic shift enhances eco-effectiveness and reduces waste compared to linear approaches.



In this context, **ETH Zurich aspires to become a champion, living lab and trusted partner for all-scope decarbonization and circularity. It will thus act as a role model for a holistic approach to sustainability, combating climate change, reducing pollution, conserving resources, and fostering economic resilience.**

Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Implement its Net-Zero Roadmap and continuously explore state-of-the-art decarbonization projects.
- Scale successful pilot projects to introduce circular processes across various parts of the institution.
- Analyse internal barriers, financial implications, and legal hurdles to introducing circularity at scale across the institution and propose solutions to these challenges.
- Continue investing in education, research and partnerships with external stakeholders related to the advancement of all-scope decarbonization and circularity.

Long-term strategic priority

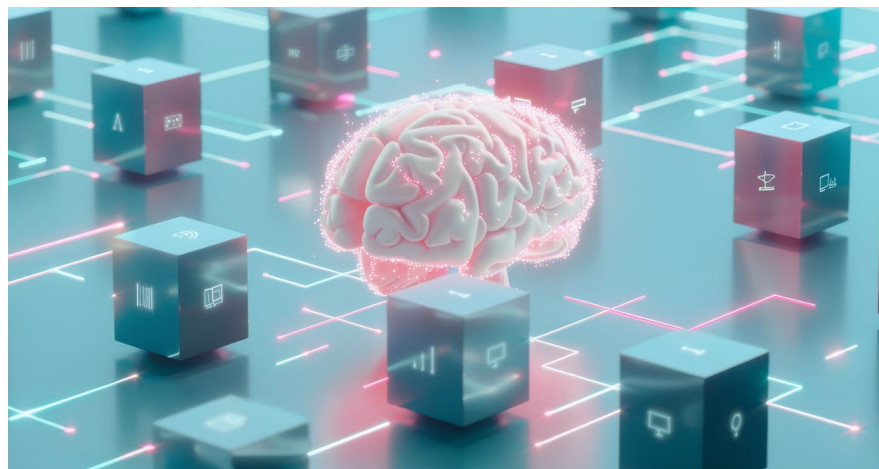
Becoming a lifelong learning institution and community

The population distribution of nations varies greatly. Industrialised nations are likely to benefit from longer life spans, raising the average age of their citizens. Future professionals will not only live longer, but also enjoy long and diverse careers. Labour markets will evolve accordingly, requiring professionals to update their knowledge and skills continually. This quest for continuous professional relevance will create an increased demand for programmes targeting experienced learners and hence, necessitate a lifelong learning approach in higher education.

In this context, **ETH Zurich will continue to evolve as a lifelong learning institution with a robust portfolio of advanced study programmes, as well as learning paths for ETH Zurich employees. This portfolio will be developed in addition to the world-class education on the undergraduate and graduate levels for current and future leaders of academic institutions, the public and private sector.**

ETH Zurich will focus on developing programmes and credentials to further research-based, technical education and social and leadership competencies relevant for professional growth of current and future leaders or reintegration into the labour market. ETH Zurich will capitalise on its existing research and core competencies. For greater flexibility and accessibility, these programmes and credentials will be digitally enabled whenever possible.

In addition, ETH Zurich will cultivate an active community of lifelong supporters and interested stakeholders, regularly and proactively engaging them throughout their lifetimes.



Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Develop collaboratively a comprehensive portfolio of programmes, courses, and credentials from across all departments and research centres to support the lifelong learning experience at ETH Zurich.
- Adopt a unified pricing approach as well as execution structure for the portfolio of such programmes across the entire institution.
- Develop a strong alumni community as well as a community of interested stakeholders while nurturing these communities with relevant events, activities, interactions, and content offerings on a continuous basis.



Long-term strategic priority

Mastering the continuous blurring of boundaries

In today's dynamic academic and professional landscapes, traditional boundaries between distinct disciplines, sectors, communities, and working environments are increasingly becoming fluid and interconnected. Mastering this continuous blurring of boundaries will be inevitable for institutions to remain relevant and innovative. For instance, many pressing societal challenges cannot be effectively addressed within the confines of a single discipline. This concept promotes interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration that bridges theory with practice, as well as new approaches for working and learning in, e.g., physical and virtual environments.

The effective mastering of an open and innovative cultural mindset requires creativity and organisational agility. ETH Zurich recognizes the importance of embracing such developments with an eye for opportunity and innovation.

In this context, **ETH Zurich aims to operate seamlessly and integratively, enabling it to navigate complex environments while fostering both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration. Organizational agility and a commitment to reinvention will be crucial for the institution to excel in delivering its core activities.**

Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Foster a culture of organisational agility, pursuing new and creative approaches across all its activities while regularly evaluating their effectiveness.
- Invest in structures and projects, both in education and research, enabling scientific interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinary collaboration.
- Invest in the necessary technology and infrastructure to enable a seamless virtual and physical learning and working experiences across the institution's activities.
- Equip students and staff with the relevant social and technical competencies that empower them to effectively navigate future working contexts.

Long-term strategic priority

Being a leader in the development and deployment of responsible AI

ETH Zurich recognizes that further progress in the development and deployment of AI is inevitable, and its impact is expanding. The integration of AI into our everyday lives will likely optimise many tasks as well as change many patterns which have evolved over time. It could disrupt established social structures, transform labour markets, and leave a significant environmental footprint (e.g., in terms of energy consumption). The shift to a different perspective – one where human intelligence and AI work together in synergy rather than competing with one another – will need to be promoted and advanced. Therefore, a responsible, human-centred, and transparent approach in how we develop and deploy AI will be critical for the advancement of society.

In this regard, **ETH Zurich aspires to embed AI tools across the institution including in learning, teaching, research, and administration in a responsible, transparent, and ethical manner.** The institution acknowledges that although AI can serve as an enabler, it also brings along significant ethical risks which can negatively impact individuals and our society at large.

Commitments

By 2036, ETH Zurich will:

- Support students and staff to increase their AI literacy.
- Continue investing in interdisciplinary AI research in line with the institution's values and ethical standards.
- Proactively use AI-enabled tools that have been vetted for quality and ethical standards, to optimise the learning and teaching experience as well as internal administrative processes across the institution.
- Promote the responsible, human-centred, and transparent development and use of AI across institutional activities.
- Monitor closely the use of AI tools to assess their impact and respond swiftly if unforeseen harms are detected.
- Engage in a continuous dialogue with the broader society on AI-related questions and concerns.



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As we look to the future, these institutional priorities will guide ETH Zurich in navigating the challenges and opportunities of the coming decade. Through periodic reviews, we will ensure their continued relevance in a rapidly evolving world. The Executive Board extends its gratitude to the ETH Zurich Community for their valuable contributions and invites you to remain actively engaged as we work together to shape the path ahead. Your questions, feedback, and insights are always welcome at office-president@ethz.ch.



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