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## **Guidelines on the assistant professorship system at ETH Zurich**

(from 3 December 2024)

*The President of ETH Zurich issues,*

*based on Art. 2 para. 2 Ordinance of the ETH Board on Professors at the Federal Institutes of Technology ("Professorenverordnung ETH") of 18 September 2003<sup>1</sup> and Art. 7 para. 2 let. a and b Ordinance Governing the Organization of ETH Zurich ("Organisationsverordnung ETH Zürich") of 21 November 2024<sup>2</sup>,*

*the following guidelines:*

### **1. SECTION: GENERAL PROVISIONS**

#### **Article 1 Principles and objectives**

<sup>1</sup> With assistant professorships, ETH Zurich would like to offer excellent early-career scientists an attractive, internationally competitive environment to start a successful academic career. The tenure track system offers the opportunity to retain highly qualified scientists at ETH Zurich at an early stage. For assistant professors without tenure track, the aim is for them to successfully apply for a tenured professorship before the end of their fixed-term appointment.

<sup>2</sup> For assistant professors, an appointment at an early career stage is sought. The respective net academic age is taken into account in the comparative performance assessment of candidates. The principles for calculating the net academic age are provided by the Office for Faculty Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> All assistant professors are supported in their academic and personal development. The departments facilitate the integration of new assistant professors by arranging meetings with the various functionaries within and outside the department as soon as they take up their post and by organising a personal introduction at the next departmental conference and conference of professors.

<sup>4</sup> Assistant professors, like associate and full professors, have freedom in research and teaching as well as their own resources to carry them out. Each department defines the expected scope of teaching in a transparent manner.

<sup>5</sup> Assistant professors are voting members of their departments with the same rights as the associate and full professors. This does not apply, for example, to matters relating to professorship planning in connection with assistant professorships, evaluations of assistant professors (in accordance with Sections 3 and 4), promotions of associate professors to full professors, and the continued employment of professors beyond the normal retirement age.

<sup>6</sup> Like all professors at ETH Zurich, all assistant professors must adhere to the requirements of ETH Zurich, in particular the provisions of labour law, the financial regulations, and other compliance requirements. They live and promote scientific integrity and the values of ETH Zurich and are committed to a high-quality mentoring culture. At the time of the second and third evaluation (see Art. 6), the Office for Faculty Affairs shall obtain the relevant information from the responsible offices of ETH Zurich for the attention of the President. This also includes information on the existence of ongoing or completed procedures for reports in accordance with the *Regulations for members of ETH Zurich regarding concerns about and reporting of inappropriate behaviour and conflicts in the workplace* (RSETHZ 615), in accordance with the *Ordinance of ETH Zurich governing the procedure*

<sup>1</sup> SR 172.220.113.40

<sup>2</sup> RSETHZ 201.021

to address allegations of scientific misconduct (RSETHZ 415), or in accordance with the *Guidelines for ETH Zurich employees on reporting suspected malpractice* (RSETHZ 130.1). The President may interrupt the tenure procedure in ongoing proceedings until they have been concluded and make continuation dependent on the outcome of the relevant proceedings.

## **Article 2      Selection procedure and funding**

Assistant professorships are filled with or without tenure track.

- a) Appointment with tenure track:  
Assistant professorships with tenure track<sup>3</sup> are anchored in ETH Zurich's professorship planning. After successfully completing the tenure procedure (see Section 4), the decision is made, usually after six years, to promote to a tenured professorship. Funding for the assistant professorship and the reserved full professorship must be secured in the long term as part of the financial planning of the departments. Several assistant professors will not be appointed in competition for a reserved full professorship (landing place). The President decides on the advertisement of assistant professorships. The selection procedure is the same as for tenured professorships.
- b) Appointment without tenure track:  
Assistant professorships without tenure track are financed by third-party funds from recognised funding instruments with corresponding selection procedures (e. g. ERC or SNSF). The assistant professor is selected by the respective department and the funding organisation. The host department pays part of the professor's salary as a contribution to the teaching engagement of the professorship, unless the salary is already fully funded (100 %) by a grant. In this case, the department makes other financial contributions to the professorship. Conversion into assistant professorships with tenure track is not envisaged in principle.

## **Article 3      Appointment and employment**

<sup>1</sup> Assistant professors (with and without tenure track) at ETH Zurich are appointed by the ETH Board at the request of the President.

<sup>2</sup> The fixed-term employment lasts a maximum of eight years in total<sup>4</sup>. This maximum term of employment can be extended upon request for good cause<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant professors are initially appointed and employed for four years<sup>6</sup>. After the second evaluation (see Art. 6 Para. 2), the President decides whether to submit an application for reappointment and renewed employment to the ETH Board. If, for objective reasons, no application for reappointment is intended, the assistant professor has the opportunity to issue a statement on this, after which the President makes the final decision.

- a) Assistant professors with tenure track:  
In the event of a positive decision by the President, the reappointment and renewed employment is generally for a further three years. In the event of a negative decision, no tenure procedure is initiated, and the assistant professor can be reappointed and employed for a maximum of one (additional) year.
- b) Assistant professors without tenure track:  
In the event of a positive decision by the President, the reappointment and renewed employment is generally made for the remaining term of funding from the relevant funding instrument. Further reappointments and renewed employments and those for a longer period of time are only possible upon justified application by the department and on condition that

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with Art. 10 para. 1 of the ETH Professorial Ordinance (SR 172.220.113.40)

<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to Art. 17b para. 2 let. a ETH Act (SR 414.110)

<sup>5</sup> Art. 17b para. 3 ETH Law (SR 414.110) and Art. 9 para. 2bis ETH Professorial Ordinance (SR 172.220.113.40)

<sup>6</sup> Art. 9 para. 2 ETH Professorial Ordinance (SR 172.220.113.40)

funding and accommodation are secured and the maximum permitted period of employment is adhered to.

<sup>4</sup> The employment ends at the latest at the end of the contract period. The continuation of a fixed-term appointment as a researcher within the meaning of Art. 17b para. 2 of the ETH Act<sup>7</sup> and the Ordinance governing scientific employees of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich<sup>8</sup> following the appointment as an assistant professor at ETH Zurich is excluded.

## **2. SECTION: MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

### **Article 4 Mentoring**

<sup>1</sup> Each assistant professor is assigned at least one associate or full professor in the department as a mentor. Any additional mentors may also be professors from another department. Mentors are appointed by mutual agreement between all parties involved and must be notified to the Office for Faculty Affairs within three months of taking up the post.

<sup>2</sup> A change of mentor can be initiated by mutual agreement between all parties involved and in consultation with the department. The Office for Faculty Affairs must be informed promptly of any changes in this regard.

<sup>3</sup> Guidelines on mentoring are provided by the Office for Faculty Affairs with a description of the tasks and responsibilities of all those involved in a mentorship.

### **Article 5 Leadership development**

All assistant professors are expected to actively dedicate themselves to developing their leadership personality and strengthening their social and leadership skills during their employment at ETH Zurich. They are offered support and guidance (including guidelines concerning the leadership development) and have a contact person from the Unit Consulting for Professors at their disposal.

## **3. SECTION: EVALUATION PROCEDURE**

### **Article 6 Evaluations**

<sup>1</sup> As a rule, every assistant professor is evaluated three times (with tenure track) or twice (without tenure track) by the department:

- i. 1.5 years after taking up the professorship (first evaluation);
- ii. 3 years after taking up the professorship (second evaluation);
- iii. 5 years after taking up the professorship (third evaluation).

For assistant professors without tenure track, the third evaluation is replaced by a detailed discussion with the head of the department or her or his deputy and the mentor at least six months before leaving.

<sup>2</sup> The result of the second evaluation forms the basis for the department's application to the President for reappointment for a further appointment period in accordance with Art. 3 para. 3. The head of the department informs the President of the result of the evaluation and submits a corresponding application with reasons and the result of the vote, including attendance and decision quorums, in good time before the end of the first appointment period. In the case of assistant professors with tenure track, the corresponding evaluation report also includes a discussion of the prospects of success with regard to the tenure procedure.

<sup>3</sup> For assistant professors with tenure track, the result of the third evaluation forms the basis for initiating the tenure procedure in accordance with Section 4.

<sup>7</sup> SR 414.110

<sup>8</sup> SR 172.220.113.11

## **Article 7            Organisation and responsibility**

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation of assistant professors is the responsibility of the associate and full professors of the respective department<sup>9</sup>. For this purpose, they hold evaluation conferences in accordance with Art. 8, at which the associate and full professors of the department with voting rights also pass the resolutions for the applications for reappointment and renewed employment and, in the case of assistant professors with tenure track, the applications for continuation of the tenure procedure at Presidential level. Voting rights must be exercised personally.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the research focus, the department may invite further associate and full professors of ETH Zurich who are closely related to the subject as guests (without voting rights) in an advisory capacity.

## **Article 8            Evaluation conference and evaluation report**

<sup>1</sup> The head of the department or the deputy must be present at the evaluation conference, as must the mentor.

<sup>2</sup> At least half of all persons entitled to vote must be present for the evaluation to be carried out. A quorum of two thirds is required to pass resolutions. Resolutions are passed with a quorum of two thirds of those present and entitled to vote.

<sup>3</sup> For each evaluation, the evaluation conference appoints a chairperson from among the entitled voters. This chairperson is responsible for the organisation, implementation, and management of the evaluation, including all meetings, for obtaining any expert opinions, statements, or letters of recommendation, and for preparing the evaluation report. Mentors of an assistant professor (see Art. 4) may not chair their evaluation.

<sup>4</sup> The evaluation is based on the self-report in accordance with Art. 12, usually a presentation by the assistant professor followed by a Q&A session, and a discussion round without the assistant professor, in which other elements of the evaluation dossier (see Art. 10) may also be discussed. During the final discussion round, all participants are given the opportunity to express their opinion. On the basis of the discussion, the chairperson drafts the evaluation report, structured according to the relevant evaluation criteria and including significant minority opinions, which are labelled as such.

<sup>5</sup> The evaluation report is approved, after which it is signed by the chairperson of the evaluation and may no longer be changed.

<sup>6</sup> The chairperson meets with the assistant professor and the mentor and discusses the signed evaluation report. The assistant professor is given the opportunity to view the signed evaluation report (anonymised if necessary) and to submit a statement.

## **Article 9            Evaluation committee**

<sup>1</sup> The department may install an evaluation committee as a standing committee or ad hoc committee to prepare the evaluation and the resulting draft evaluation report for the evaluation conference in accordance with Art. 8 para. 4. In this case, the evaluation dossier is presented at the next evaluation conference and the draft evaluation report approved, if necessary after an update in accordance with the discussion that has taken place.

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation committee consists of a chairperson and at least four other persons. All persons are elected by the evaluation conference from among its members. Members of the ETH Tenure Committee (see Art. 15) may not sit on an evaluation committee at the same time. Evaluations are carried out by at least five members of the evaluation committee, including the chairperson. The mentor is invited to the meeting as a guest, unless she or he is already a member of the committee.

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<sup>9</sup> Narrower conference of professors at higher levels assigned to the department (conference of associate and full professors)

- a) **Standing committee:**  
The members are elected for a term of office of generally two years. Re-election is permitted. The chairperson is appointed from among the committee members on a case-by-case basis.
- b) **Ad hoc committee:**  
The chairperson and the other members are elected on a case-by-case basis for an upcoming evaluation.

## **Article 10      Evaluation dossier**

The documents created as part of the evaluation procedures (including tenure procedures, if applicable) are kept by the Office for Faculty Affairs in a confidential evaluation dossier. This includes the following elements for each evaluation, where applicable:

- a. self-report in accordance with Art. 12;
- b. evaluation reports in accordance with Art. 8;
- c. selection of the expert reviewers with the corresponding justification;
- d. letter to the expert reviewers;
- e. expert opinions;
- f. motions and recommendations of the department including voting results, attendance and decision quorums;
- g. for assistant professors with tenure track: statement and recommendation of the ETH Tenure Committee;
- h. statements by the Rector and Vice Presidents;
- i. statements by the assistant professor, if applicable;
- j. documentation of the communication of decisions to the assistant professor.

## **Article 11      Evaluation criteria**

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA<sup>10</sup>) signed by ETH Zurich, the assessment of assistant professors' performance focuses on the quality of their work.

<sup>2</sup> A catalogue with the evaluation criteria is provided by the ETH Tenure Committee (see Art. 15).

<sup>3</sup> The assistant professors and their department, represented by the head or the deputy and by the mentor, create a common understanding of the desired performance and, on the basis of the catalogue of criteria, of the relevant evaluation criteria within the first six months of taking up the post. These are taken into account appropriately in the subsequent evaluations.

## **Article 12      Self-report**

For each evaluation and, if applicable, for the tenure procedure, the assistant professor prepares a self-report in which the own performance is documented. The report must be written in English. The minimum requirements regarding the content of the self-report are provided by the ETH Tenure Committee (see Art. 15).

# **4. SECTION:    TENURE PROCEDURE**

## **Article 13      General provisions on the tenure procedure**

<sup>1</sup> The tenure procedure, in which suitability for a tenured professorship at ETH Zurich is determined, is conducted in a multi-stage, consecutive procedure a) at departmental level and b) at Presidential level at the request of the department.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://sfdora.org>

- <sup>2</sup> The tenure schedule pursuant to Art. 6 may be adjusted in justified cases. For an extension, a corresponding application must be submitted by the department to the President. If the academic qualification for a tenured professorship is achieved prematurely, the tenure procedure can be opened at an earlier date and accelerated if necessary.

#### **Article 14      Tenure procedure at departmental level**

- <sup>1</sup> On the basis of the results of the third evaluation, the evaluation conference decides whether external expert opinions should be obtained for the continuation of the tenure procedure.
- <sup>2</sup> If the evaluation conference decides that no external expert opinions should be obtained, the assistant professor will be informed in writing by the head of the department that the tenure procedure should not be continued. The head of the department shall give the assistant professor the opportunity to issue a statement. The President must be informed of the negative decision by means of a departmental letter with detailed reasons and the result of the vote, including attendance and decision quorums. Any statement by the assistant professor shall also be enclosed with the letter. The President may request that external expert opinions be obtained. If the President confirms the decision not to obtain external expert opinions, the tenure procedure is terminated.
- <sup>3</sup> In the event of a positive decision (or if the President requests external expert opinions), the chairperson of the evaluation shall obtain at least six independent expert opinions from internationally recognised experts working at institutions outside the ETH Domain. The evaluation conference is responsible for selecting the experts. At least four expert opinions must be obtained from persons who were not proposed by the assistant professor. The experts must disclose any previous and current relationships with the assistant professor.
- <sup>4</sup> On the basis of the evaluation dossier, the evaluation conference decides whether an application for promotion to a tenured professorship should be submitted to the President.
- <sup>5</sup> If no application for promotion is made, the head of the department will inform the candidate of this in writing. The assistant professor may issue a written statement within four weeks. The department informs the President of its decision in writing, giving detailed reasons and the result of the vote, including attendance and decision quorums. Any statements from the candidate must be enclosed. The President may reject the decision of the department and request a new examination and a new decision, if necessary on an expanded basis with additional expert opinions or after hearing the candidate and the head of the department. If the President confirms the negative decision of the department, the tenure procedure is terminated.
- <sup>6</sup> In the event of a positive decision, the head of the department usually submits the application for promotion to a tenured professorship to the President no later than 18 months before the end of the assistant professor's employment contract. In addition to a detailed justification, the application must also contain the result of the vote, including attendance and decision quorums. Reference must be made to dissenting minority opinions. The main statements from the expert opinions must be commented on. The complete evaluation dossier must be attached to the application.

#### **Article 15      ETH Tenure Committee**

- <sup>1</sup> On behalf of the President, the ETH Tenure Committee monitors the tenure procedures at Presidential level throughout the university and ensures compliance with ETH-wide quality standards.
- <sup>2</sup> The ETH Tenure Committee adopts its own rules of procedure.
- <sup>3</sup> Each department is represented on the ETH Tenure Committee by one associate or full professor. Each member has one vote. The members are appointed by the President in consultation with the Executive Board for a term of four years; reappointment is possible. The President appoints a chairperson from among the members of the ETH Tenure Committee.

- <sup>4</sup> Members of the ETH Tenure Committee who belong to the same department as the assistant professor or who have taken on a mentorship for the assistant professor must step aside during the final discussion and decision-making process.
- <sup>5</sup> The ETH Tenure Committee bases its work on the candidate's complete evaluation dossier. It may also request additional documents from the candidates and from the departments and, if necessary, obtain its own expert opinions.

## **Article 16      Tenure procedure at Presidential level**

- <sup>1</sup> The President submits the department's application and the complete evaluation dossier to the ETH Tenure Committee for a written recommendation regarding the promotion of an assistant professor to a tenured professorship.
- <sup>2</sup> The chairperson of the ETH Tenure Committee draws up the letter of recommendation to the President on the basis of all documents, the public presentation of the assistant professor with subsequent discussion, and the discussion in the committee; the letter must also contain the result of the vote. The letter of recommendation finalised among the members of the ETH Tenure Committee is signed by the chairperson and submitted to the President, generally no later than six months after receipt of the departmental application.
- <sup>3</sup> The President shall then make her or his decision regarding the promotion to a tenured professorship, generally before the beginning of the assistant professor's seventh year of service at the latest. He or she shall take into account any information pursuant to Art. 1 para. 6 and may consult the chairperson of the ETH Tenure Committee before reaching a final decision. The decision of the President will be communicated to the assistant professor in writing.
- <sup>4</sup> If the tenure decision is favourable, negotiations will then take place between the President and the assistant professor regarding the latter's appointment and permanent employment, after the successful conclusion of which the President will submit a corresponding application to the ETH Board. If the ETH Board rejects this application, the employment relationship ends at the latest at the end of the contract period.

## **5. SECTION:    FINAL PROVISIONS**

### **Article 17      Transitional provisions**

- <sup>1</sup> Assistant professors without tenure track financed by ETH budget funds and appointed according to previous guidelines are generally reappointed for three years.
- <sup>2</sup> These guidelines do not apply to evaluation procedures that are ongoing at the time of the guidelines' entry into force and that were started under the previous guidelines. In these cases, the provisions of the Guidelines for the Assistant Professorship System at ETH Zurich, as issued by the President on 1 February 2015 remain applicable.

### **Article 18      Entry into force and scope of application**

These guidelines enter into force on 1 January 2025. They apply to all assistant professors at ETH Zurich who are appointed from this date. Assistant professors who were appointed before these guidelines came into force can choose whether the previous guidelines of 1 February 2015 or the guidelines of 3 December 2024 should be applied to them.

THE PRESIDENT OF ETH ZURICH  
(Prof Dr Joël Mesot)