Manual for the Procedure of Evaluations in the ETH Domain

(as of September 26/27th, 2012)
1. Background

1.1 Legal basis for quality assurance in the ETH Domain

Good governance and management of the institutions of the ETH Domain require periodic evaluations of their teaching and research units. With the last major revision of the ETH Law (which became effective as of January 1, 2004), Art 10a was introduced that puts the responsibility for quality assurance explicitly into the hands of the institutions of the ETH Domain. Art. 10a of the ETH Law assigns the task of evaluations of teaching and research to ETH Zurich and EPFL, and analogously does so for the four Research Institutes of the ETH Domain (Art 23). Quality assurance was given high priority in the law naming it immediately after the major activity fields of the institutions of the ETH Domain, namely education, research and services. The corresponding Ordinance for ETH Zurich and EPFL contains a clause giving the institutions the responsibility for quality assurance, while that for the Research Institutes lacks an explicit mentioning of quality assurance.

Excerpt of the ETH Law

**Art. 10a Quality assurance**
The ETHs shall review the quality of teaching, research and services at regular intervals in accordance with the legislation on support for universities; they are responsible for long-term quality assurance.

**Art. 23 Applicable law**
In the absence of any separate statutory provision relating to Research Institutes, the provisions relating to the ETHs shall apply analogously.

**Art. 25 Duties**
The ETH Board shall:
c. issue rules and regulations on controlling and perform strategic controlling;
f. supervise the ETH Domain;
(The respective Ordinance of the ETH Board on ETH Zurich – EPFL (SR 414.110.37) also makes explicit reference to quality assurance by the two institutions.)

**Art. 34a Evaluation and measures**
The Department shall evaluate the extent to which the performance mandate has been discharged and if necessary propose appropriate measures to the Federal Council. The Department shall submit an interim report to the Federal Assembly on the discharge of the performance mandate together with a proposal for the next performance period.

According to Art 25 of the ETH Law the ETH Board acts as the strategic controlling body of the institutions of the ETH Domain (paragraph 1, letter c). In that function it takes note of the evaluations that are commissioned by the institutions of the ETH Domain and then are brought to its attention by the Presidents of ETH Zurich and EPFL, or by the Directors of the Research Institutes. Under special circumstances the ETH Board may, however, commission its own evaluations based on its supervisory role (paragraph 1, letter f).

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1 Commentary on Art 10a in the message for the revision of the ETH Law:
(d) Die Qualitätssicherung und damit verbunden die Evaluation von Lehre und Forschung ist eine Aufgabe der ETH (und der Forschungsanstalten). Sie stellt einen kontinuierlichen Prozess dar und ist entscheidend für die Überprüfung der Leistungserbringung und für die Planung künftiger Leistungsperioden. Sie ermöglicht zudem die nationale und internationale Vergleichbarkeit der Hochschulen.[...]
(f) L’assurance qualité et l’évaluation de l’enseignement et de la recherche sont une tâche des EPF (et des établissements de recherche). Elles constituent un processus permanent et sont déterminantes pour l’examen de l’accomplissement des divers objectifs et pour la planification des périodes de prestations suivantes. Elles permettent en outre de procéder à des comparaisons nationales et internationales.
1.2 History of decisions taken by the ETH Board

The ETH Board has been discussing and clarifying its role for the different evaluation types within the ETH Domain and agreed on the applying principles and rules at various meetings since 2005. The most important items are:

- June 28/29th, 2005: Item 55 Evaluations in the ETH Domain (decision on evaluation procedures for the Institutions of the ETH Domain)
- December 9/10th, 2009: Item 65 Evaluation of Eawag (discussion on governance issues in the context of the evaluation of an entire institution)
- May 18/19th, 2010: Item 16 Review of the Procedure for Evaluations of Units in the ETH Domain
- May 23/24th, 2012: Item 13 Complements to the Procedure for Evaluations in the ETH Domain (1st reading)
- September 26/27th, 2012: Item 10 Complements to the Procedure for Evaluations in the ETH Domain (2nd reading)

This manual aggregates the decisions of the ETH Board and is based on the respective underlying documents. While the basic content and meaning of the documents is used in its original wording, some sections have been rephrased or slightly adapted.

2. Types of evaluations within the ETH Domain

Three major types of evaluations are to be distinguished, as they each call for specific procedures (table 1).

I. **Evaluations of individual units of an institution of the ETH Domain** (type I.a) such as departments, schools, research units, or of entire Research Institutes (R.I.) (type I.b). Each unit of an institution of the ETH Domain and the R.I. have to be evaluated at least once within an 8-year period. The evaluation is commissioned by the Executive Board of ETH Zurich or EPFL, or by the Directorate of a R.I. After conclusion, the evaluation is brought to the attention of the ETH Board who takes note of the results. The process also includes the yearly "Dialog" meetings of the ETH Board with the institutions of the ETH Domain through which the ETH Board executes part of its strategic controlling function (see also article 17 of the rules of internal procedure; ‘Geschäftsordnung’). Following up on the implementation of the evaluations constitutes part of the Dialog, thus closing the quality assurance cycle.

II. **Special cases:** In special cases the ETH Board may commission an evaluation itself in its role as the supervisory body of the ETH Domain. Such situations may arise if strategic decisions are pending, in "out-of-line" situations, or if evaluations involve more than one institution (e.g. evaluations with a thematic focus).

III. **Intermediate evaluation of the ETH Domain:** The so-called intermediate evaluation of the ETH Domain takes place in the middle of the performance period (article 34a of the ETH Law and message on Education, Research and Innovation (ERI). It is commissioned by the State Secretary for Education and Research, who defines the terms of reference and names the experts. The evaluation also encompasses the strategic planning of the ETH Board for the next performance period. The ETH Board provides an answer to the findings of the experts that is brought to the attention of the State Secretary along with the self-evaluation of the ETH Domain and the expert's report (peer report). The results of this particular evaluation present an essential element for drafting the next ERI message of the Federal Council to Parliament.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluated Unit</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Definition of Terms of Reference and Selection of Expert Committee</th>
<th>Execution</th>
<th>Self-evaluation</th>
<th>Peer Review</th>
<th>Peer Report delivered to</th>
<th>Response to Peer Report</th>
<th>Response to Evaluation*</th>
<th>Strategic controlling</th>
<th>Follow up on implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department (ETHZ) or School (EPFL) or Department/Lab of Research Institute (R.I.)</td>
<td>I.a</td>
<td>Executive Board of ETH Zurich and EPFL** or Directorate of R.I.</td>
<td>Department (ETHZ) School (EPFL) Department (R.I.)</td>
<td>Department (ETH Zurich) School (EPFL) Department/Lab of R.I.</td>
<td>Department (ETH Zurich) School (EPFL) Department/Lab (R.I.)</td>
<td>International Scientific Expert Committee</td>
<td>Executive Board of ETH Zurich and EPFL or Directorate</td>
<td>Department head / Dean and discussion with Executive Board / Directorate</td>
<td>Executive Board ETH Zurich or EPFL or Directorate to the attention of ETH Board</td>
<td>ETH Board (taking note)</td>
<td>Dialog meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Research Institute (R.I.) of the ETH Domain (PSI, Empa, Eawag or WSL)</td>
<td>I.b</td>
<td>Directorate of R.I.**</td>
<td>Directorate of R.I. to the ETH Board (approval)</td>
<td>Directorate of R.I.</td>
<td>Departments</td>
<td>International Scientific Expert Committee</td>
<td>Directorate of R.I.</td>
<td>Departments together with Directorate</td>
<td>Directorate of R.I. to the attention of ETH Board</td>
<td>ETH Board (taking note)</td>
<td>Dialog meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence Center of the ETH Domain (or of their units)</td>
<td>II.a</td>
<td>Leading House (i.e. ETH Zurich, EPFL, or PSI)</td>
<td>Leading House; validation by ETH Board Committee for Competence Centers (BCC)</td>
<td>Leading House</td>
<td>Competence Center</td>
<td>International Scientific Expert Committee (Scientific Advisory Board)</td>
<td>Leading House</td>
<td>Competence Center together with Leading House</td>
<td>President or Director of Leading House to the attention of ETH Board</td>
<td>ETH Board (taking note)</td>
<td>To be defined from case to case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special (extraordinary) evaluation</td>
<td>II.b</td>
<td>ETH Board (approval)</td>
<td>ETH Board (or delegate)</td>
<td>Unit(s) to be evaluated</td>
<td>Expert Committee (scientific/financial/legal/governance; according to specific purpose)</td>
<td>ETH Board</td>
<td>Unit/s to be evaluated</td>
<td>President or Director of Executive Board of ETH Zurich, EPFL, R.I. to the attention of ETH Board</td>
<td>ETH Board (approval)</td>
<td>To be defined from case to case</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* the evaluation compromises the self-evaluation, the peer report, and the response of the evaluated unit
** see ETH Law, Art 10a and Art 23
*** for the Intermediate evaluation, a separate process description is available.
3. Evaluations in the ETH Domain: Quality assurance process, distribution of tasks & according rules

3.1 The quality assurance process

The evaluations in the ETH Domain are part of a continuous quality assurance process that was decided by the ETH Board on June 28/29, 2005, on the basis of Art 10a of the ETH Law. For evaluations of type I, the standard procedure and the distribution of tasks between the ETH Board and the institutions were defined accordingly (figure 1).

![Figure 1 - Distribution of tasks between the ETH Board and the management of the institution regarding the evaluations of units in the ETH Domain.](image)

In view of coordination, the institutions of the ETH Domain are asked to inform the ETH Board about planned evaluations at least on a yearly basis (steps ② and ③ of the quality assurance cycle in figure 1). This would potentially enable the evaluation of the same disciplines concomitantly throughout the domain with possibly the same experts. However, although serious efforts have been undertaken, such an endeavor turned out to be not feasible up to date.

3.2 Distribution of tasks between ETH Board and management of the institution

The main objective of the above chart (figure 1) is to demonstrate that evaluation is a continuous process, thus the circle. In addition it shows where and for which items the ETH-Board comes into the picture, these are steps [written in bold] ②, ③, ⑪ and ⑫. Furthermore it indicates the steps for which the set of rules presented in the subsequent paragraph is to be applied: these are ①, ②, ③, ④, ⑤, ⑪ and ⑫.
3.3 Content of set of rules for evaluations monitored by the ETH Board

In addition to the definition of the quality assurance process and the distribution of tasks between the ETH Board and the management of an institution, the ETH Board specified the according rules for some of the steps of the quality assurance circle (cf. figure 1). If subsequently not otherwise indicated, the rules specified by the ETH Board apply to the evaluation types I – III (cf. table 1):

A. **Frequency of evaluations**: Departments, faculties, research institutes and projects have to be evaluated at a frequency that allows the whole institution (ETHZ, EPFL, MoU tied R.I., Competence Centres) to be covered in 8 years.

B. **Planning of evaluations and information**: The Board will be informed about the planned evaluations for the next 2 years and given a yearly update of the plans at its September meeting.

C. **Balancing**: Research, education and technology transfer issues have to be addressed adequately. However, the main focus of evaluations of Departments/Schools lies on evaluating their strategy, research activities, research infrastructures as well as on evaluating the content of the curricula.

D. **Terms of Reference (ToR)**: The terms of reference have to be in line with the specific objectives of the subject of the evaluation and address at least the following topics:\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>The international recognition and innovative potential of the subject under evaluation. The satisfaction with the obtained degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>The total output of the subject under evaluation, expressed by bibliometrics, technometrics(^3), licenses or more common indicators like the number of delivered degrees or the number of students or doctorates. The input in term of human resources and funding is to be taken into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Assessment of the impact of the work. The choices in research, teaching and technological transfer are to be compared to overall developments in society and science. Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal and external dynamic</td>
<td>The ability to close research or education lines that have no future and to initiate new ventures projects. The capacity of the management to run projects in a professional way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For evaluations of whole institutions of the ETH Domain (type I.b) and for evaluations commissioned by the ETH Board (type II.b; cf. table 1), the Terms of References (ToR) shall be approved by the ETH Board. This enables the ETH Board as the strategic and supervisory body to amend or adjust the ToR for the Peer Reviewers e.g. in respect of strategic issues of the ETH Domain. Following good governance the composition of a Peer Review Committee as well as the ToR will be decided by the same body.


\(^3\) Patents and citations of patents
Composition of Evaluation Committees: In general, evaluation committees need to be diverse in expertise and experience as well as culture, age and gender.

For evaluations of whole Research Institutions (type I.b) as well as for special evaluations (type II.b), the criteria for the composition of Peer Review Committees as well as the procedure prior to the decision of the ETH Board have been specified by the ETH Board. The details are to be found in Appendix E1 Specification for the composition of Peer Review Committees. Especially in the case of special or extraordinary evaluations (type II.b), the Peer Review Committee should not be composed solely by experts being proposed by the institution under evaluation.

Before deciding the composition of a Peer Review committee, the ETH Board shall be informed about the (current or former) relationship (incl. apparent & potential conflict of interests) of the foreseen Peer Reviewers with the Institution or the project to be evaluated. It is upon the Institution to hand in this information when proposing Peer Reviewers to the ETH Board in the context of evaluations of type I.b., type II.b., and additionally when proposing Peer Reviewers for the Intermediate Evaluation (type III). Appendix E2 Institutional checklist for Peer Reviewer’s Impartiality contains a non-exhaustive enumeration of relationships that should be made transparent to the nominating body (either the ETH Board or the State Secretary for Education, Research & Innovation). A proposed Peer Reviewer causing a conflict of interest will not necessarily be excluded as Peer Reviewer, as most of the top experts have some kind of relation (e.g. former collaboration, personal contacts) to a project or an Institution to be evaluated. It is up on the deciding body to assess and balance the conflict of interest made transparent when deciding about the composition of a Peer Review Committee.

In the context of special evaluations (type II.b.), confidentiality declarations shall only be foreseen in cases when confidential information on the personal, project or lab level are touched. Appendix E3 provides an example for a confidentiality declaration.

Post-processing: The evaluation report and the action list shall be submitted to the ETH-Board 6 month after the evaluation at the latest. The follow-up of the action list will become part of the annual DIALOG of the ETH Board with the Institutions of the ETH Domain.

Appendices:

E1. Specification for the composition of Peer Review Committees
E2. Institutional checklist for Peer Reviewer’s Impartiality
E3. Example of a Confidentiality Declaration
This note applies for evaluations of Research Institutions (type I.b) and for special evaluations (type II.b). Its intention is to support the process of evaluation as well as the interactions between an Institution of the ETH Domain and the ETH Board for composing and approving a Peer Review Committee.

Part I: Preparation phase

a) Principles for suggesting Peer Reviewers to the ETH Board
   - The Institution being evaluated or being part of the evaluation has the right to propose names of independent Peer Reviewers.
   - In cases well justified, both, the Institution as well as the ETH Board have the right to reject proposed Peer Reviewers.

b) Criteria for the composition of a Peer Review Committee
   As far as applicable, the following criteria should be considered when composing a Peer Review Committee:
   - An appropriate range of competencies;
   - An appropriate balance between academic and industrial expertise and users (depending on the goal of the evaluation and the terms of reference);
   - A representative of Swiss Federal Government (in case the Institution provides substantial national services); and
   - Diversity in respect of gender and of geographical origins (or nationalities) of independent experts;
   - Eventually, some members of a former evaluation (if applicable) may be included;
   - For special evaluations commissioned by the ETH Board or the State Secretary for Education & Research may include Peer Reviewers proposed by The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), or Experts outside of the ETH Domain;
   - Fulfiling the criteria for impartiality (cf. E2 Institutional checklist for Peer Reviewer’s impartiality) as declared by the Institution to be evaluated.

Part II: Deciding the composition of a Peer Review Committee in the ETH Board

Given the situation, the Director or President of the respective Institution to be evaluated is a member of the ETH Board, she/he shall abstain from voting.
Appendix E2. Institutional Checklist for Peer Reviewers Impartiality

Before deciding the composition of a Peer Review Committee, the ETH Board shall be informed about the (current or former) relationship (incl. apparent & potential conflict of interests) of the foreseen Peer Reviewers with the Institution/project to be evaluated. It is upon the Institution to hand in this information (cf. next page) when proposing Peer Reviewers to the ETH Board in the context of evaluations of type I.b., type II.b., and additionally when proposing Peer Reviewers for the Intermediate Evaluation (type III).

Peer reviewer impartiality and integrity are essential for scientific evaluations. Conflict of interest issues arise when there is a danger that unrelated considerations could influence the outcome of a peer review. The following criteria help to determine to what extent a conflict of interest could exist. For the ETH Board, circumstances leading to conflict of interest issues may include (non-exhaustive enumeration):

Different sorts of relationship
- A family relationship, close personal ties or personal conflicts, dependent relationships or personal advantages or disadvantages;

Scientific cooperation or competition
- An existing, a planned or recently concluded close academic cooperation, such as undertaking a joint project or a joint publication within the last 5 years;
- A direct academic competition of a foreseen Peer Reviewer with the project to be evaluated;
- A former (within the last 5 years) or an actual membership of the same academic institution or an imminent transfer of a proposed peer reviewer to the respective institution or vice versa, including honorary professorships or joint appointments;
- An employment related dependency or supervisory relationships (e.g. supervisor - student relationship) within the last 5 years;
- An involvement in ongoing or very recently concluded appointment procedures (professorial or other; e.g. as applicant or member of an appointment panel);
- A (outspoken) negative attitude/opinion of the research method/project objective (not neutral point of view prior to the evaluation);
- An application for becoming a member of a Directorate/Executive Board of one of the six institutions of the ETH Domain within the last 5 years;
- A dependency in a scientific organization.

Financial or commercial interests
- A personal financial or commercial interests in the outcome of the Peer Review;
- A common membership in a Board of Directors (board of administration, or board of management), or a Board of trustees with a person being directly involved in the evaluation or affected by its results.

Advisory/supervisory bodies and functions
- If a person foreseen as a Peer Reviewer has been serving within the last 5 years, or is currently serving in an advisory body (e.g. an academic advisory board) of the Institution foreseen to be evaluated, or – in the case of the intermediate evaluation – of one of the six Institutions of the ETH Domain;
- If a current member of a School Board or of a Directorate of an Institution of the ETH Domain has been serving within the last 5 years, or has been elected recently, or is foreseen as a member of an advisory/supervisory body of the reviewers’ home institution.

Impartiality endangered for other reasons
A proposed Peer Reviewer causing a conflict of interest will not necessarily be excluded as Peer Reviewer, as most of the top experts have some kind of relation (e.g. former collaboration, personal contacts) to a project or an Institution to be evaluated. It is up on the deciding body to assess and balance the conflict of interest made transparent when deciding about the composition of a Peer Review Committee. In doubtful cases, it is recommended to discuss the list of proposed Peer Reviewers with the President of the ETH Board prior to submitting it for the board meeting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of proposed Peer Reviewer (incl. affiliation)</th>
<th>Relationship(s) towards the Institution / Project to be evaluated</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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I herewith declare, that

☐ for all proposed Peer Reviewers their relationship(s) towards the Institution/Project to be evaluated are thoroughly and truthfully indicated, and

☐ to my best judgment, no conflict of interest in the sense of the non-exhaustive enumeration (cf. previous page) is existing.

_______________________________ _______________________________
(Place and Date) (Signature)
Appendix E3. Confidentiality Declaration for Peer Reviewers (example)

As a peer reviewer you are obliged to maintain confidentiality of the information contained within the documentation for the peer review, of the evaluation process, and its outcome.

You understand that you will be held personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation, unless otherwise instructed.

Therefore, it is your duty to comply with the following legally binding obligations:

a. To maintain absolute secrecy about any confidential information that is made known to you in the context of your activities as a member of the Review Committee.

b. To use confidential information that is made available to you either in written or in electronic form in the context of your activities as a member of the Review Committee exclusively for the purposes of the review process; not to pass on the information to any third party; and to delete information from all data media or to destroy said media after the conclusion of the mandate.

Your duty to maintain confidentiality remains in effect beyond the conclusion of my activities as a member of the Review Committee.

All requests for information content or evaluation results which come from the press are to be rejected on the grounds of confidentiality. Press inquiries which are sent to Peer Reviewers shall be forwarded to the Communication Team of the ETH Board.

☐ I'm aware of my duties as a member of the Review Committee to maintain confidentiality as described in the section above.

_______________________________
(Name)

_______________________________ _______________________________
(Place and Date) (Signature)