AVETH survey on representation of permanent scientific staff at ETH

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Abstract

The present survey was conducted to get a general opinion of ETH permanent scientific staff on their representation within the ETH political system. Based on 125 completed answers (response rate ≈46%) it summarizes the perception of their current situation and their preferences. Whereas the majority (42%) prefers to be represented by AVETH on the ETH-level, 28% would like to have an own representation and 26% express their affiliation to the Lecturers Conference (Konferenz des Lehrkörpers – KdL). To benefit from existing structures and knowledge, and taking into account that a KdL representation on the department level does not exist (all professors are individual member of the respective Department Conferences) an own representation affiliated to AVETH appears therefore most reasonable.

![Preferred representation of ETH permanent scientific staff within the ETH political system](image.png)
# Table of contents

1  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1  Why this survey? .................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.2  Methodology of the survey .................................................................................................. 1  
2  Quantitative analysis – Permanent scientific staff representation ............................................ 2  
   2.1  Current situation .................................................................................................................. 2  
   2.2  Preferred situation .............................................................................................................. 3  
   2.3  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 4  
3  Qualitative analysis – Comments ................................................................................................ 4  
   3.1  “Career” .................................................................................................................................. 4  
   3.2  “Permanent positions and appreciation of the work of scientific staff” .............................. 4  
   3.3  “ETH-politics” ....................................................................................................................... 5  
   3.4  Additional comments ........................................................................................................... 5  
   3.5  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 5  
4  Summary ................................................................................................................................... 5  
5  Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................... 6  

Appendix I – Survey questions ..................................................................................................... 1  
Appendix II – Scientific employment functions at ETH ................................................................. III
1 Introduction

1.1 Why this survey?

The survey was conducted by the Politics Team of AVETH, a discussion and working platform of ETH scientific staff members focusing on ETH politics. It was initiated after a discussion within the university assembly (Hochschulversammlung) about representation of the various university groups within ETH and within the respective political organs of the various departments. Particularly for permanent scientific staff, i.e. ETH scientific employees with an unlimited contract in function level 10-12 (Funktionsstufe 10-12; FS), this representation is often not clear. These employees often lead their own research group and therefore might be treated comparable to professors. According to the ETHZ-ETHL-Regulation (414.110.37 Art. 17, para. 2) university members are allowed to only participate in one university group.

All non-professoral scientific staff including scientific assistants (wissenschaftliche Assistenten, FS 7+8), doctoral students (Doktorierende, FS 7), postdocs (Postdoktorierende FS 8), scientific employees (wissenschaftliche Mitarbeitende, FS 9+10), senior assistants (Oberassistenten, FS 9+10), scientific collaborators (leitende wissenschaftliche Mitarbeitende, FS 10+11) and senior scientists (FS 12; without entitled professors) are represented by AVETH on the ETH-level and by the department associations within their department, respectively. Whereas also “scientific collaborators” are in permanent employment, the term “senior scientist” is commonly used at ETH for non-professoral permanent scientific staff. This simplifying terminology is not in line with the different ETH employment functions and may therefore be misleading. An overview on the different ETH employment functions is given in Appendix II.

As per December 2014, 128 persons were employed at ETH as scientific collaborator, 126 as senior scientist I (FS 12; 56 thereof being entitled professors - Titularprofessor/-in) and 15 as senior scientist II (all being entitled professors). The currently 71 senior scientists entitled professor are per definition represented on the ETH-level by the Lecturer’s Conference (Konferenz des Lehrkörpers – KdL). In addition, all ETH lecturers, i.e. persons with an ETH teaching assignment (Lehrauftrag) within the academic year, per definition are represented by KdL independent of their ETH function (RSETHZ 505). Membership in the KdL can then be considered an additional channel for participation within ETH-politics. However, there is no representation on the department-level referring to the status of being a lecturer. Whereas the scientific staff as mentioned above (FS 7-12 without entitled professors) is represented by the department associations of AVETH, all professors are individual members of the Department Conference, considered as the highest political organ within a department (RSETHZ 201.021).

The main goal of the present survey was to summarize the general opinion of ETH permanent scientific staff about their current and their preferred representation within the ETH political system.

1.2 Methodology of the survey

The survey was conducted in May and June 2015 and sent by email to 269 ETH permanent scientific staff members from which 125 completed answers were received, corresponding to a response rate of ≈46%. Only completed answers were considered for analysis. The survey
was anonymous (no IP tracking) and conducted using the survey tool “SelectSurvey” provided by ETH. The survey questions are listed in Appendix I.

2 Quantitative analysis – Permanent scientific staff representation

2.1 Current situation

ETH permanent scientific staff are generally well incorporated into teaching. Whereas the majority (66%) has a teaching assignment for both semesters of the academic year (spring and autumn) 23% have a teaching assignment for only spring or autumn semester and only 11% are not at all engaged in teaching (Figure 2). A total of 89% of ETH permanent scientific staff is therefore represented by KdL.

![Figure 2: Distribution of teaching assignments amongst ETH permanent scientific staff](image)

In contrast, only 22% of ETH permanent scientific staff have the perception of being represented by KdL (Figure 3). A number of 31% is uncertain about their representation and the biggest group with 45% feels represented by AVETH.

![Figure 3: Perception of current situation](image)
2.2 Preferred situation

On the ETH-level, 42% of ETH permanent scientific staff prefer the representation by AVETH and 28% would like to have an own representation (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Preferred representation on ETH-level

On the department level the situation is very similar to the preference on the ETH-level with only negligible changes of the percentages (Figure 5). However, since all professors are individual members of the Department Conference a KdL representation does not exist on the department level.

Figure 5: Preferred representation on department level

According to 72% of ETH permanent scientific staff, topics related to teaching should be generally addressed by their ideal representation, followed by career (70%) and ETH politics (57%). Counseling (37%) and particularly events (12%) are of minor interest (Figure 6). According to 16 individual answers, additional topics of interest to ETH permanent scientific staff are research and research strategies, their status in terms of autonomy, the general recognition of the scientific staff (Mittelbau) and the representation of their interests within ETH.

Figure 6: Current topics of concern
2.3 Conclusion

- A total of 89% of ETH permanent scientific staff has a teaching assignment and is therefore member of KdL on the ETH-level. However, only 22% have the perception of being represented by KdL clearly demonstrating a lack of information.

- The preferred representation is very similar for both, ETH- and department level. The majority prefers an AVETH representation (42% / 45% [ETH / Department]) followed by an own representation (28% / 26%) and KdL (26% / 27%).

With a relatively limited overall number of ETH permanent scientific staff (the head count of 269 indicates the smallest group of scientific staff at ETH) an own representation affiliated to either AVETH or KdL appears to be most effective to benefit from existing structures. Since a KdL representation on the department level does not exist (all professors are individual member of the respective Department Conferences) an affiliation to AVETH appears most reasonable. Generally, ETH scientific staff with a teaching assignment have two representations to participate within the ETH university politics, AVETH and KdL.

- The most important topics to be addressed by their ideal representative organization are teaching (72%), career (70%) and ETH politics (57%).

3 Qualitative analysis – Comments

The survey was an opportunity for ETH permanent scientific staff to express their opinion on concerned topics. A total of 24 comments were received corresponding to 19% of the total number of responses considered in this analysis. As summarized below, the comments were mainly related to (1) career, (2) the importance of permanent positions and the appreciation of the work of scientific staff and (3) ETH-politics and the political structure.

3.1 “Career”

- Intransparency of career possibilities and missing recognition
- Reduce hierarchy with smaller professorships to enable young researchers careers
- Lack of career paths
- Lack of transparent structures to enable career
- Career opportunities for senior scientists and the perspective after retirement of hosting professor
- Position at ETH after retirement

3.2 “Permanent positions and appreciation of the work of scientific staff”

- ETH as a whole heavily depends on the Mittelbau which gets insufficient credit for its contributions.
- Non-permanent staff can often carry a load of teaching and supervision, but need to develop their own careers so that they can find a job elsewhere. Their contribution is often highly undervalued.
- Teaching, supervision and research of the Mittelbau (particularly highest levels) is not properly valued within ETH. Many conduct independent research, bring in own funds (for
which an appointed professor must sign), supervise doctoral students but are considered unable to independently judge at their doctoral exam.

- Not enough permanent scientific positions to maintain (in good quality) infrastructure, scientific services, practical courses (teaching)
- When experienced people leave they are not replaced, but a lot of knowledge leaves ETH with them and is lost for the organization.
- Small number of Senior Scientists at ETH

3.3 “ETH-politics”

- Mittelbau is left out of important political decisions (e.g. appointment of new professors).
- The Mittelbau should be much more involved in committees, etc.
- Senior scientists sind in einer merkwürdigen Zwischenposition, und ihre Stellung ändert von Departement zu Departement. Sie gehören eigentlich nicht mehr zum Mittelbau, sind aber auch nicht vollwertige Mitglieder der Professorenschaft. Man müsste wohl eine eigene Vertretung organisieren. “Senior scientists are in a strange intermediate position which varies amongst the different departments. They actually do not belong to the scientific staff but also are not fully acknowledged faculty members. One should probably organize an own representation.”
- In MAVT, two senior scientists are members of the department conference (Dozierendenvertreter)
- The formal organisation of ETH and the relation between department, institute and competence center

3.4 Additional comments

- Teaching regulations
- The importance of scientific staff in appointment committees for professors
- Gender equality
- Management abilities
- Employment and payment of doctoral students

3.5 Conclusion

According to the 24 individual comments, ETH permanent scientific staff are mainly concerned about missing career opportunities and the missing appreciation of the scientific staff in general as well as permanent positions in particular.

4 Summary

The high response rate of ≈46% demonstrates the great interest of ETH permanent scientific staff in improving their current representation situation within ETH. Whereas the vast majority (89%) is by definition represented by KdL, only 22% feel represented by it. Whereas the majority (42%) prefers AVETH as their representation on the ETH level, an own representation is preferred by 28% and a representation by KdL by 26%. These percentages are very similar for the preferred representation on the department level. To benefit from existing structures, and taking into account, that a KdL representation on the department level does not exist, an own representation affiliated to AVETH appears therefore most reasonable.
5 Acknowledgements

This survey and its analysis were only possible with the help and support of a number of people. We would like to particularly thank the AVETH Politics Team for the productive discussions during the setting up of the survey.
Appendix I – Survey questions

E-MAIL:

Dear senior scientists,

The representation of senior scientists in commissions amongst the various ETH departments is currently not clearly regulated and very inhomogeneous. It is unclear what would be the best solution. Therefore AVETH (Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich) is asking you for your input to improve how senior scientists are properly represented within ETH.

We compiled 6 questions, so please take 3 min to fill in this anonymous survey until June 9, 2015: (link)

If you have any questions please contact: politics@aveth.ethz.ch

Many thanks and best regards

Your AVETH team

SURVEY:

The representation of senior scientists at ETH is currently not clearly regulated and very inhomogeneous. Therefore AVETH (Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich) compiled the following 6 questions:

1. How do you think you are currently represented within the ETH political system?  
   Required answer*  
   a. AVETH – Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich  
   b. KdL – Lecturers' Conference (Konferenz des Lehrkörpers)  
   c. I don't know … but I am interested  
   d. I don't know … and it is not of my interest

2. By which organization would you like to be represented within the ETH political system?  
   You may find more information about the organizations on their websites: AVETH and KdL. Required answer*  
   a. AVETH  
   b. KdL  
   c. Own representation  
   d. It is not of my interest
3. Who should represent you within your department? *Required answer*
   a. Scientific staff (Mittelbau)
   b. Faculty (Lehrkörper)
   c. Own representation
   d. It is not of my interest

4. Do you have a teaching assignment (Lehrauftrag)? *Required answer*
   a. Yes ... both spring AND autumn semester
   b. Yes ... but only spring OR autumn semester
   c. No

5. What topics should be considered by your ideal representative organization? *Multiple answers possible*
   a. Career
   b. Counseling
   c. Events (Podium discussions, Apéros, ...)
   d. Politics
   e. Teaching
   f. Other, please specify: ___________________________ ________

6. Are you currently concerned with an important topic related to ETH politics?
Appendix II – Scientific employment functions at ETH

The following ETH function chart was published by Human Resources in 2009 as an “Overview on functions and development possibilities for ETH scientific staff” (“Übersicht der Funktionen und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten des wissenschaftlichen Personals an der ETH Zürich”). The current survey was sent to scientific collaborators I + II (128 persons) and senior scientists I + II (141 persons).

Development opportunities for scientists – ETH Zurich
Non-permanent contract (max. 6–12 years)