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quality assurance

# Institutional accreditation EPFL, Verification of the fulfilment of conditions

Report | 13 decembre 2024



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## Part A

# Decision of the Swiss Accreditation Council

13 December 2024





The Swiss Accreditation Council publishes its accreditation decisions:  
<https://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/decisions/>



**Part B**  
**Verification report**

6 November 2024



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## 1 Verification procedure

### 1.1 General information

On 24 June 2022, the Swiss Accreditation Council accredited École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) as a university subject to one (1) condition.

In its decision, the Accreditation Council specified the following deadline and means of verification<sup>1</sup>:

Deadline: 24 months. EPFL must submit a report on the fulfilment of the conditions to the Accreditation Council by 24 June 2024.

Means of verification: Verification will be performed 'sur dossier' with two experts.

The Accreditation Council has commissioned the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ) to verify fulfilment of the conditions.

### 1.2 The procedure

EPFL sent the report on the fulfilment of the conditions to the SAC on 20 June 2024. The SAC office forwarded the report to the AAQ on 24 June 2024, with the mandate to carry out the evaluation in accordance with the established procedures. The AAQ then recruited two of the members of the group of experts who had carried out the external evaluation in the context of the 2022 accreditation and signed a new mandate contract:

- Prof. Di Rocco, Sandra. Head of School, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden
- Prof. Beretz, Alain. Strasbourg University, France

On 24 October 2024, the preliminary report on the verification of the fulfilment of the conditions was forwarded to EPFL, which expressed its considerations in a formal position statement on 6 November 2024. Based on the experts' report and EPFL's position statement, the AAQ then finalised the report including a proposal addressed to the SAC. The complete dossier was forwarded to the SAC Secretariat on 6 November 2024 and dealt with by the SAC at its meeting on 13 December 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> HEEdA Accreditation Ordinance, Article 15(3)

## 2 Verification report

### 2.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of conditions

#### Condition 1:

L'EPFL doit renforcer sa stratégie de communication afin d'assurer l'imprégnation des processus d'assurance qualité et de ses résultats dans la communauté EPFL et vers les parties prenantes externes. La stratégie doit inclure des mécanismes permettant à l'institution de contrôler que la communication ait un impact et que son système qualité soit compris et intégré à tous les niveaux.

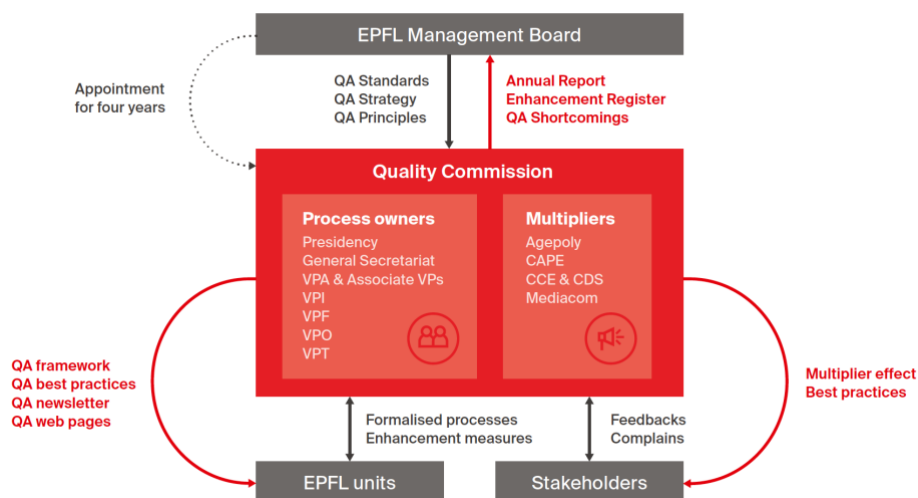
#### Description

In response to SAC's decision and the resulting accreditation with one condition, the EPFL Management Board established a permanent Quality Commission (QC) on July 6, 2022, to succeed the Institutional Accreditation Steering Committee, which had overseen the self-evaluation and accreditation process.

The QC was tasked with overseeing and ensuring the institution-wide implementation of quality assurance principles. The commission is meant to play a pivotal role in advocating for a culture of quality and promoting awareness of the key elements of EPFL's QMS.

The Quality Commission is composed of various stakeholders, including:

- **Process owners**, who are responsible for ensuring that specific institutional processes are compliant with EPFL's Quality Policy. They identify and address unresolved quality issues within their respective areas.
- **Representatives of key groups** such as Agepoly (the student association), the EPFL Assembly, Mediacom, the Conference of Teaching Sections (CDS), and the Teaching Support Center (CAPE). These representatives serve as multipliers, amplifying the commission's messages throughout the institution.







This commission meets regularly to discuss quality-related matters, and since its formation, it has held several meetings dedicated specifically to fulfilling the SAC condition on standard 5.1. Through these meetings, the commission developed a strategy to enhance communication, promote positive behaviors in favor of quality assurance, and document the success stories emerging from quality assurance efforts across EPFL.

### **Communication Strategy**

The Quality Commission's communication strategy centred on promoting a culture of quality across all levels of the organization. The plan prioritized seamlessly incorporating quality assurance practices into the daily tasks of staff, with the goal of making a culture of continuous improvement the standard across the organization.

To achieve this, specific objectives were outlined: providing opportunities for the EPFL community to deepen their knowledge of quality assurance, establishing clear milestones to guide progress, evaluating both outcomes and stakeholder feedback regularly, and ensuring that quality initiatives were fully implemented through effective feedback mechanisms.

The Quality Commission established a two-tiered system of responsibility for the implementation of its strategy. At the first level, process owners were tasked with reporting on improvement actions based on feedback from satisfaction surveys and evaluations of schools or courses, among other tools. At the second level, the Quality Office was responsible for collecting these reported improvement measures from the process owners and overseeing the monitoring of activity, outcome, and impact indicators.

The EPFL Management Board approved a final version of the strategy on 20 October 2023, after discussion with the ETH Board and the EPFL Assembly.

#### Quality assurance in the Compliance Guide

As part of its communication strategy, in April 2023, EPFL integrated a section devoted to quality assurance into its Compliance Guide providing information about processes, terminology and main contact people. The Compliance Guide serves as a blueprint for all employees and students, outlining the essential rules, practices and values in force at EPFL, HR services ensure all members of the community take knowledge of the document once joining the institution.

#### Communication Channels

The Open Campus Newsletter was introduced in 2019 by the institution's communication office (Mediacom) to update the EPFL community on Management Board decisions, including new appointments and consultations. As of 2024, 43 editions have been published, and its effectiveness is measured by a nearly 60% average opening rate, with 600 clicks on average following links. Initially, 27% of the community used the newsletter as a primary source of information, which increased to 50.9% by 2024. In 2023, a section on quality assurance was added, but a survey conducted in 2024 revealed that 56.3% of respondents did not read the quality assurance section, with only 9.2% reading it frequently.

The Quality Newsletter began in July 2023 to provide biannual updates on quality assurance activities. Despite moderate opening rates (ranging from 56% to 66% for staff and 58% to 63% for students), its reach is still limited, with only 7.1% of respondents in a 2024 survey indicating they read it frequently. The Quality Office monitors key indicators, including opening rates, and



conducts targeted surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of the Quality Newsletter. It anticipates continued growth in the newsletter's reach and engagement over time.

The Quality Office web pages, launched in 2014, are a platform for communicating EPFL's quality culture and key results from instruments like accreditations and evaluations. Since 2020, the Quality Office has monitored web traffic, with activity peaking in 2021 during institutional accreditation. In 2023, a thumbs up/down feature was introduced to allow the community to rate newly implemented improvement measures. The first round of voting registered an institution-wide participation of 1,497 votes. The tool was intended not only to gauge the spread of quality culture but also to raise awareness and encourage active engagement among different stakeholder groups. By 2024, 82.1% of respondents had never visited the quality office web pages, and only 1.5% visited frequently, though 63.2% of respondents engaged with the voting feature without linking it to the Quality Office pages.

#### Further quality-centered outreach

Beyond the quantitative impact measured for the above-mentioned communication initiative, the managing board refers to other targeted quality-centered outreach initiatives. Since 2019, about 120 students and 180 professors have been involved in various quality assurance activities, and 80 to 100 people are interviewed annually by the Quality Assurance Manager. Such examples of active involvement and participation bring an additional insight into EPFL's measures to achieve the fulfillment of the condition.

#### External Communication

In addition to internal communication improvements, EPFL has also focused on external communication to ensure that stakeholders outside the institution are informed about the quality assurance processes. Initiatives included:

- The ETH Board: EPFL actively participates in discussions with the ETH Board to ensure alignment with national policies on quality assurance. The Board was informed of EPFL's accreditation results and the steps being taken to fulfill the SAC condition.
- National and International Engagement: EPFL engages regularly with other Swiss universities and international quality assurance organizations. The institution is a member of the European University Association (EUA) and actively participates in the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQUAF). These collaborations help EPFL stay up to date on best practices in quality assurance.

#### Addressing Feedback and Impact Evaluation

A key component of the communication strategy involved evaluating its effectiveness, addressing the impact of newly implemented or enhanced communication channels. To achieve this, EPFL conducted a comprehensive survey in April 2024 to gauge the community's readership and familiarity with the newly added quality assurance section in both the Compliance Guide and the Open Campus Newsletter, as well as to measure engagement with the newly established biannual Quality Newsletter.

The survey achieved a participation rate of 11.8%, which is similar to the catering satisfaction survey (12%) but notably lower than other surveys like the Mental Health and Well-being survey (23%) and the Staff Satisfaction survey (40%). EPFL is currently exploring the issue of "survey fatigue" and is considering alternative methods to assess stakeholder satisfaction. These methods may include semi-qualitative interviews or focus groups, offering a more in-depth

approach to understanding the needs and perspectives of the community. This shift aims to diversify feedback collection and reduce the overreliance on traditional surveys.

The impact of the quality assurance initiatives is also monitored through output indicators such as page views and clicks on the Quality Office web pages, alongside outcome and impact indicators from user satisfaction surveys.

The findings show progress in increasing awareness of EPFL's quality culture, though the institution acknowledges that fostering this culture is an ongoing effort, and it remains committed to further enhancing communication and engagement over time.

### *Analysis*

The SAC had recommended that EPFL must strengthen its communication strategy to ensure that the quality assurance process and its results permeate the EPFL community and reach external stakeholders. The establishment of the Permanent Quality Commission (QC) by the EPFL Management Board is an adequate response to this recommendation and represents a significant step towards institutionalizing quality assurance at EPFL.

By succeeding the Institutional Accreditation Steering Committee, the QC ensures that the institution-wide focus on quality remains a priority beyond the initial accreditation process, and that the quality system is understood and integrated at all levels.

The QC's diverse membership reflects an inclusive approach that promotes a shared understanding of quality assurance within the EPFL community. The inclusion of process owners guarantees alignment with EPFL's Quality Policy, while representatives of key groups such as Agepoly and the EPFL Assembly serve as multipliers and play a crucial role in disseminating information and fostering a quality-oriented culture.

The QC's communication strategy is comprehensive and well-structured. By integrating quality assurance into daily tasks, EPFL demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement. Clear goals, regular evaluations, and feedback mechanisms provide a robust framework for accountability and transparency. The two-tiered system of responsibility for the implementation of the QC's strategy contributes to the integration of quality processes and their monitoring.

The creation of communication channels, such as the Open Campus Newsletter and the biannual Quality Newsletter, as well as the integration of a quality assurance section in the Compliance Guide, further reinforces EPFL's dedication to raising awareness and educating its community.

The SAC had also recommended that strategy must include mechanisms to ensure that communication has an impact. EPFL has engaged into an active monitoring of outcome and impact indicators. While initial challenges with survey participation rates have been addressed, ongoing efforts to increase engagement and complement surveys with other interactive features demonstrate a proactive approach to monitoring the impact of the quality policies and fostering community involvement in quality initiatives. EPFL's outreach initiatives, including regular engagement with external stakeholders, underscore its commitment to maintaining high standards and aligning with best practices in the field of quality assurance

In conclusion, the EPFL Management Board's efforts to address the SAC condition and promote a culture of quality are commendable. The Quality Commission's initiatives, coupled with a robust communication strategy and active stakeholder involvement, provide a solid foundation for continued progress in fostering a quality-driven environment at EPFL.

The experts consider that the condition is fulfilled.

## **2.2 AAQ proposal**

The AAQ takes note of the group of experts' analysis and conclusions, which it considers well-founded and sound. The AAQ finds the measures implemented by EPFL convincing with respect to the fulfilment of the condition and proposes to the Swiss Accreditation Council to confirm EPFL's institutional accreditation for the remaining term of validity, i.e. until 24 June 2029.

In addition to the measures directly related to the fulfillment of the conditions connected to standard 5.1, which constitute the focus of this external evaluation, EPFL has undertaken a broad range of actions to address the recommendations made in the expert report during the initial accreditation. These wide-ranging efforts are detailed in the report on the fulfilment of the condition. While not considered within the scope of this procedure, they demonstrate the institution's strong commitment and promising work toward enhancing its quality assurance system.

## **2.3 Statement by the higher education institution**

EPFL expresses its satisfaction with the positive assessment provided by the group of experts, while also mentioning the positive collaboration established with AAQ.



## Part C

# Statement of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne

4 November 2024



Agence suisse d'accréditation et  
d'assurance qualité  
M. Ch. Grolimund  
Directeur  
Effingerstrasse 15  
3001 Berne

Lausanne, le 4 novembre 2024

### Prise de position de l'EPFL relative à la vérification de la condition

Monsieur le Directeur,

La Direction de l'EPFL a le plaisir de vous remettre la prise de position de l'EPFL, suite à la réception du rapport de l'AAQ du 24.10.2024, relatif à la vérification de la condition.

Nous prenons acte de ses conclusions et notons avec satisfaction que les experts et l'AAQ estiment que la condition qui grevait l'accréditation institutionnelle de l'EPFL a été remplie.

Nous tenons à remercier les experts pour leur avis favorable et pour leur analyse rapide.

De même, nous exprimons notre reconnaissance à votre agence, en particulier à Mme Claudia Di Lecce et à vous-même, pour les conseils et pour l'accompagnement que vous avez bien voulu nous prodiguer.

Nous nous prions d'agréer, Monsieur le Directeur, nos salutations les meilleures.



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