

Interview with Dr Raphaela Hettlage, ETH Diversity

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You are the new head of ETH Diversity since 1 September 2021: could you tell us about your background and new role?

I have a PhD in Social Anthropology and for my research I worked on the intersections of gender, migration and age. After my PhD, I worked in two institutions in Bern on the topic of gender and diversity. They were two different jobs, not research related; one position was in the Equal Opportunities Office for the City of Bern and, in the other, I was the deputy leader for the Equal Opportunity Office, University of Applied Sciences, Kanton Bern. Working for a City Council meant that our work and projects were determined by the decisions of politicians. At the University of Applied Sciences, my role was, among other things, to coordinate the Equal Opportunity commission, which had Delegates from all the departments, which are physically scattered around the Kanton of Bern. My experience of both politics and an educational context gave me the knowledge that, to develop a strategy, you really need to understand the context in which you are working, and the networks, in order to change perspectives.

I am not new to ETH, I originally worked here in 2001 in the Institute of Economic Research as a teaching assistant for Prof. em. Renate Schubert, the former head of the Equal Opportunity Office. In 2019, Renate Schubert invited me back to work with her again, on a project to create "EQUAL tools," a resource currently on our Diversity at ETH website. This experience means that I know ETH from a number of perspectives: from working within a research group with students and postdocs, and also working at the core of ETH. Now that ETH Diversity is situated in the Octavo in Oerlikon we are far away from the campuses and I do not have direct contacts to the students on the campus, which I miss.

My role is still developing. I feel very welcome in the new role, and the ETH community is ready to support an office under the new title of ETH Diversity. In the new format, and under the Vice President for Personnel Development and Leadership (VPPL) we plan to go out into the ETH community, to show ourselves and make visible what we do. It has not always been easy to work on the Diversity issue in an educational context, but now there is a wave of support – students, postdocs, faculty and professors (as well as the Schulleitung / Executive Board) pushing for improvements in this area. There is pressure for there to be projects, ideas and a vision for ETH on this topic. It means that the new office has been established in a very good climate. Our main role is to co-ordinate everything across ETH, to create a diversity strategy and an environment where people can collaborate and even strive for an inclusive culture. We want to help to focus people around diversity.

I am supported in this work by my great team, who have a range of perspectives and experience working at ETH and are very helpful. I also discuss the topics with Nadia Dörfinger, our new head of Collaboration and Diversity, the head of the Office of VPPL, Maximilian Buyken (who led the Equal Office temporarily in 2020/21) and his colleague Dr Sarah van Leeuwen. Our team is also well integrated in networks across Switzerland such as IDEAS, CESAR, and IARU.

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The ETH Diversity office was established in 2021 to replace the Equal! Office – can you tell us about the plans for the new office, its role and the vision for the future?

Equal! Office's name change arose after we sent an outline draft for a new Diversity Strategy to the ETH Executive Board. The Board approved the outline and assigned us the task to create a full diversity strategy in the next two years, which will be participative and consult the ETH community. It is very central to the new strategy that we consult, and do not work alone in one room, but rather encourage people to bring in their own ideas. Following the approval of plans for a newly developing diversity strategy, ETH President Joël Mesot asked us to change the Equal! office's name with immediate effect. The change happened very quickly and was easy to implement because it resulted from a directive from the university leadership. However, we are aware, that there is a danger that people will think that gender equality at ETH is no longer as important as before. We need to make sure that the ETH community knows that we are still focused on gender equality initiatives too. At the moment there is an urgency within the ETH community and the society as a whole to address issues such as systemic and individual racism, migration, social and educational background as well as accessibility and inclusion alongside with gender equality issues. It is therefore paramount to mention that whilst we are expanding our work to help create a more inclusive environment for work and study, thriving for gender equality will remain a priority. It will take an extra effort to keep this part of the ETH Diversity office's work visible.

We are examining the topic of integrating the aims of diversity into the study curriculum, aware of an exhaustion about looking solely at gender in this topic. It does remain important, for progressing gender equality at ETH, that there continue to be goals and targets in place. It may be hard to agree about them, and to reach them, but they need to be there. With Diversity and Inclusion, it is more difficult to define specific goals, because it is mostly about an inclusive culture. We need to establish a culture of inclusion that can shape ideas and will be based on justice, principles and equal opportunities.

The ETH Gender Action Plan is still part of our working life, but we are finding that it is less used in Departments and by the Executive Board. We need to find something else as we build the strategy for diversity. There will be a transition period for a couple of years, with the ETH Rat's five-year Gender Action Plan still being used at that level. We plan to incorporate aspects of the Gender Action Plan into the Diversity Strategy. The annual meeting of departmental representatives on the Gender Action Plans is currently being replaced by a Diversity meeting and we are building a network around the original gender delegates. We will also widen the ETH representation, for example with representatives from LET who work on diversity and inclusion in teaching.

In summary we have many topics that the ETH Diversity Office will address:

- A Diversity Strategy will be delivered in the next 2 years.
- We continue to focus on reconciliation of study/work and care responsibilities on all levels.
- Advancement of women at ETH.
- Implicit/unconscious bias in the workplace (working with the section on Leadership and Development in VPPL).
- Inclusion in Educational Development at ETH.
- Equality monitoring and Analysis.
- How to implement inclusive communication at ETH.

We need to live Diversity at ETH and not be continually examining visions and/or implementing random quick fixes.

The Equal! Office was a place that the ETH community contacted about gender and diversity issues in their teaching and learning environment: what are the plans for the future responses to these kind of diversity enquiries?

We would like ETH Diversity to be a hub for all the questions from the ETH community on diversity issues. We hear from working groups within departments, students who think that there should be more diversity or gender consciousness in lecturers' presentations, or complain about diversity-related teaching problems. We can gather problems together as resources for the ETH community and share them with ETH members developing diversity and inclusion. Another problem is that lecturers may not respond properly to issues that arise in the classroom environment and, as result, worsen the situation. Faculty need training in advance to help them to respond well to such situations.

What responsibility or role has ETH Diversity in supporting issues in the teaching and learning environment? What is your scope for action?

We can encourage the creation of inclusive classrooms with good teaching, where people are welcomed from different backgrounds, ideas and treated with respect. We would like to see their background used and an awareness in the teaching staff about biases. We are in favour of this approach and our scope for action is to promote this vision. Our strategy will be to facilitate the view at ETH that inclusive teaching and classrooms are part of an inclusive culture. Whereas research is a core competence at ETH, teaching is also an important focus, and ETH is working on the balance between research and teaching, and how to promote diversity in those areas. The new strategy will also look at how to achieve a constructive way forward in what could be perceived as two separate issues instead of an interactive framework.

How do you envisage that LET and ETH Diversity could work together on implementing diversity in curriculum and faculty development?

We can work together to foster an inclusive culture at ETH – tools, theory, tactics and developments. Teaching should be inclusive teaching. We can reflect on ETH culture. It will take time to change things. We need to clarify what we mean about how to make this happen – hence working on the Diversity strategy now!