

Life

Never done learning

Three ETH employees talk about how new challenges help them grow and how they always stay curious.

Saving for old age

After the referendum on occupational provision, we ask: How do things stand with ETH's pension fund?

Creative and dependable

Apprentices take responsibility and handle projects independently. A visit to Young'n'Rising.

ETH zürich

4

15

18



The marathon before the competition

How the Cybathlon team prepares for the big event, p. 12

Dear ETH community,

Teaching and learning are our core business. Year after year, ETH Zurich educates thousands of students. But what does learning look like for us, the university's employees? What are we doing to ensure we're not standing still? A new initiative from the Vice-Presidency for Personnel Development and Leadership is devoted to ensuring that we engage in lifelong learning. In this edition, three employees reveal what this means to them and how constantly learning helps them respond to their professional challenges.

The pilots at the Cybathlon, which is set to take place in Kloten in just a few days, face very specific challenges. Using assistance systems, people with impairments will be mastering various everyday tasks – and pitting themselves against teams from across the globe. We have accompanied the employees that work behind the scenes at the event. If you would like to experience the Cybathlon first-hand, you can attend the live event from 25 to 27 October.

Happy reading!
Your *life* editorial team



events take place at ETH Zurich every year. Two new guides are now available to help organisers plan these events to be more sustainable and, in doing so, make a contribution to ETH Zurich's climate goals. Anyone who puts in a conscious effort to make their event sustainable and inclusive can now be awarded a gold or silver label.

→ ethz.ch/sustainable-events

Wanted: images of climate change

In advance of the KEEP IT CO₂OL exhibition, *focusTerra* is organising a photo competition. They are looking for images that demonstrate the beauty of nature, visible effects of climate change or climate protection measures. In addition to being awarded superb prizes, the winning photos will also be included in an advertising campaign for the new exhibition.

→ ethz.ch/focusterra-keep-it-cool-en

Science for refined palates

Thomas Michaels, Professor of Soft and Living Matter Physics, is inviting gourmets to Cook the Science, a kind of ETH cookery show. Together with well-known chefs and food producers, he is presenting the fundamental physical and chemical properties of foods and how they change when they are processed.

Events are in English. Dates and registration at:
→ ethz.ch/cookthescience





In search of colonial traces

ETH Zurich's natural history collections are home to tens of thousands of artefacts from former overseas colonies – a rich variety of rocks and minerals, insects and animal and plant specimens. A new exhibition at the ETH Library takes a look at their past and explores the connection between natural science and colonialism. The exhibition is being held in "extract", an exhibition space in the ETH Main Building. Entry is free and the exhibition can be visited during the Main Building's opening hours.

→ extract.ethz.ch/en/



Save the Date: Christmas Reception

Just like every year, the Executive Board is inviting all employees to round off the year together at the Christmas Reception, which will be held on Thursday, 19 December 2024 at 5 p.m. on the Höggerberg campus. The invitation containing further information will be sent via email.

Publishing information
life – The ETH community magazine is published quarterly in English and German by Corporate Communications.

Editorial team
 Mona Blum, Christoph Elhardt, Nicole Kasielke, Karin Köchle, Deborah Kyburz, Corinne Landolt, Raffael Stegmayer, Michael Walther, Simon Zogg

Cover
 Cybathlon employee Marionna Münger (Photo: Marco Rosasco)

Design
 MADE Identity AG

Lithography
 Marjeta Morinc

Printing
 Linkgroup AG

Proofreading
 Linkgroup AG (German), Lilian Dutoit (English)

Translation
 Louise Killeen
 Translations Limited

Circulation
 13,575 copies

Contact
life magazine, ETH Zurich, HG F 39, 8092 Zurich
life@hk.ethz.ch

Further information and subscriptions:



**“You can inspire
people to be curious”**

IN FOCUS



A new initiative from ETH Zurich is geared towards inquisitive employees who practise lifelong learning. The three examples in this article reveal what this looks like in their daily work routines.

“I had to learn how to question my own thought patterns.”

Miriam Kälin describes herself as being like a sponge. “I absorb all the information I can find, read every little snippet and want to know and be able to do everything.” This curiosity comes in useful in her job as Head of Information and Experience, as she and her 25 colleagues need to have an up-to-date and accurate answer to everything. “At our Campus Info counters or in our live chat, all kinds of people are looking for information or need something. I’m always learning something new.”

What Miriam is doing on a small scale is the task that ETH Zurich has set itself on a much larger scale: “As an organisation too, we must never stop learning,” says Martin Ghisletti, Head of Development and Leadership. He adds that in a world that is rapidly changing, ETH needs employees who stay curious and constantly want to further their personal development, including with and in their job. Yet learning is in no way limited to just courses and continuing education and training. On the contrary: “We mainly learn by doing new things and sharing our experience with colleagues,” says Ghisletti.

“I had to free myself from established thought patterns”

Before she came to ETH Zurich four years ago, Miriam worked in the tourism industry. Most recently, she led the group

tour section at bus company Eurobus. At ETH, she quickly realised that it would be impossible to know everything. “The wealth of information and topics at the university is huge. So I have to focus on the knowledge that is relevant to my department and that my colleagues need.”

Miriam’s move to ETH was a step out of her comfort zone. She recalls an experience when she had to give a presentation to introduce the Service Centre of the Future project to other senior members of staff. She had meticulously prepared the content and practised the presentation. Yet when she entered the lecture hall, she suddenly felt very small. Despite being used to speaking in front of people, she started to falter, stumbled over her words and wanted the ground to swallow her up.

The experience unnerved her, so she decided to work on herself: “I had to learn to prepare myself for speeches, presentations and meetings, but not just in terms of the content.” Today she is mindful of negative thought patterns that get in her way. One of these, for example, was the following: “Everyone who has been at ETH a long time knows more than I do.” With the support of a colleague from the Office of Personnel Development and Leadership, she learnt to turn these ways of thinking around. “Today I know that even as a

← Miriam Kälin

In her job at ETH, learning to Miriam means constantly trying out new formats and learning spaces – like doing a group exercise in the forest for more efficient teamwork.

newer member of staff, I have practical experience that I can contribute and share with experienced colleagues.”

Continual learning is part of Miriam’s daily life – in the individual tasks she completes, but also as a supervisor. “You can inspire people to be curious and keep championing this.” She adds that it is also important to have the right learning formats. “In our meetings for section heads, for example, there is a fixed agenda item in which we present things we have learnt from our daily work, such as digital tips or shortcuts.”



↑ Tobias Walser

“Fitting all my research and thoughts into a two-minute pitch was overwhelming.”

“I can’t please everyone”

When Tobias Walser presented his ideas on the future of the university to the then ETH President Lino Guzzella for the first time, he had butterflies in his stomach and a raised pulse. “I had to fit many days of research and all my thoughts into a two-minute pitch. Initially, that was completely new territory for me and overwhelmed me somewhat,” the native of Eastern Switzerland recalls. At the time, he had just moved from the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) to the Office of the ETH President. After a few shaky attempts, Tobias noticed that he was getting better each time. “I learnt to get to the point quickly. That’s something that I benefit from to this day.”

Tobias, who has a doctorate in environmental engineering, is constantly and consciously learning in his professional career: "I look for tasks that will help me to grow." At the FOPH, the natural scientist dealt with legal texts on nanomaterials and learnt how to express things precisely in few words. And when he was the coordinator of a major research project comprising 12 research groups from different universities and clinics, he had to liaise between the very different worlds and ways of working of doctors and ETH researchers. He came to realise that he doesn't acquire knowledge and new skills through courses and continuing education and training but rather through meeting challenges in the workplace and through engaging with other people. "My training gives me a good foundation. But new experiences and inspirational colleagues are what really count," he says.

The same is also true in his current role as Coordinator of the Department of Health Sciences and Technology. When Tobias took on the role, he realised how much responsibility he was shouldering. And he has many strong personalities to contend with, who all have an opinion on what the strategic direction of the department should be. "This took me out of my comfort zone at first," he recalls. But in hindsight, he is glad for the experience: "After numerous conversations, I came to understand that I can't please everyone, and this gave me the courage to set a course." In his opinion, this isn't something that you can learn in the classroom. "You simply have to try things out and find out what works best – starting again each time." And if Tobias realises that he isn't making progress by himself, he isn't afraid to ask for help. Over the years, he has been building up a network that he can count on in difficult times. "This too was an important realisation for me: I don't always have to be able to solve everything by myself."

"The first time you conduct an experiment, so many thoughts go through your head"

Cara Sickinger makes herself heard. In the monthly meeting with the Rector, for example, where she represents the concerns of doctoral students in her role as Co-President of the Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH (AVETH). But also with respect to the

↓ Cara Sickinger



“Now, I find it easier to ask colleagues for help.”

members of the association to whom she has to explain the decisions she has made. Yet this isn't something that comes easily to her. “I'm quite a cautious person and prefer to ask everyone's opinion before making a decision,” she says.

Taking a prominent stance is part of her role at AVETH. Since she has been involved with the association, she has learnt more and more every day how to do this. Like Miriam Kälin and Tobias Walser, she too had a steep learning curve at first and a moment when she felt overwhelmed. It was in the spring, just a few weeks after she had taken office, when she found out that political protests were to take place at ETH Zurich, like they had at other universities. There was pressure to take up a position. The AVETH Board made the joint decision not to support the protests.

She explains that not having to make decisions alone in situations like this and many others has helped her. “This enables you to rely on the fact that good decisions will be made,” she says. She has also learnt to call on the support of others. This too required some effort: “I often had inhibitions and believed I would get on people's nerves. Now, I find it easier to ask colleagues for help. I'm getting much faster at writing such emails.”

Cara has been engaged in collective action from an early age: After completing her secondary school education, she travelled to South Africa to do volunteer work. During her degree, she joined the student association, organised events and helped out at the bar. And before she became Co-President of AVETH, she was an active member of the Scientific Staff Association at the Biology Department at ETH. She has always enjoyed gaining new experience and getting to know new people. And these experiences have given her courage.

Her work as a researcher has also allowed her to cast aside her fears

that something might go wrong: “The first time you conduct an experiment, so many thoughts go through your head. Now I know that you sometimes simply have to run the experiment to see what's not quite right yet.”

#StayCurious

From 19 to 21 November 2024, an event promoting life-long learning is being held at ETH Zurich. All employees of ETH Zurich are warmly invited to attend.

Information and registration:



Where did third-year mediamatics apprentice Anouk Schuler take this photo?

Take a guess and send your answer to life@hk.ethz.ch by 8 November 2024. You could be the lucky winner of one of two ETH umbrellas to keep you dry on rainy autumn days.



Prize



SNAPSHOT

Got a photo?
Send us your own snapshot for the next edition now:
life@hk.ethz.ch

ANSWER

December 2023 edition: Orlando Wächter from Facility Services took this photo in the stairwell of the new ML machine laboratory, right next to the Student Project House. Congratulations to winners Dario Ackermann and Beat Ulrich.



Ela interviews Silke

In the **Dominoes** column, ETH members interview a colleague of their choice. In the next edition, this person then goes on to interview someone they know or want to become better acquainted with.

DOMINOES



Ela Burmeister

45

Laboratory manager/technician
in D-BAUG

Has been at ETH for 10 years

Silke Schön

57

Lecturer in D-PHYS and member
of FIRST-Lab operations team

Has been at ETH for 27 years

Silke Schön reveals to Ela Burmeister why she loves orchids and what the plants have to do with her scientific background.

Ela Burmeister: How long have you been working at ETH and what brought you here?

Silke Schön: I started at ETH in 1997. A long time ago. For me, it was the next logical step in my career. Prior to that, I was a postdoc in the USA, where I worked at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. At ETH, I had the opportunity to conduct research and qualify as a professor.

Ela: And what exactly is your position?

Silke: At first, I worked as a senior assistant in the Department of Physics. Now I'm involved in the management of the FIRST-Lab. FIRST stands for "Frontiers in Research: Space and Time". When the lab was created, it was the first technology platform at ETH. Anyone who is conducting research in microsciences and nanosciences needs expensive equipment. The idea is that not every professorship has to purchase their own equipment but can use the FIRST-Lab instead. Our team and I are responsible for maintaining the equipment. We know how to use it and train the ETH researchers who want to work with it.

Ela: What do you enjoy most about your work?

Silke: I enjoy working with young researchers. Whether they attend one of my lectures or work in the lab. The doctoral students are very inquisitive, have brilliant ideas and motivate me time and time again to think in new ways. It's a process of give and take. On average, around 50 research groups use the FIRST-Lab. That forces me to engage with new topics, something I really enjoy doing.

Ela: If you could change one thing at ETH, what would that be?

Silke: I feel there is a lack of opportunities for ETH employees who work for a technology platform or in a competence centre operation team to actively shape and develop their careers. There are many paths if you want to pursue an academic career but not for laboratory management.

Ela: Do you have any advice for young women who are at the start of their career in science?

Silke: Plenty! What is important to me, particularly with respect to doctoral students in the FIRST-Lab, is to find out where your strengths lie, look for opportunities that complement these and bear in mind that you don't have to do everything alone. I would advise young women researchers in particular to seek out support – in the form of a mentor, for example. Having a good network is important if you want to get ahead.

Ela: We have spoken a lot about your work. What do you do in your free time?

Silke: I have a passion for growing orchids. I'm a crystallographer, a materials scientist in other words, and love symmetry. The same applies to my orchids – they are simply organic, not inorganic. I love their natural symmetry and beauty. When they flower, that's the most amazing reward for me. When I'm tending to my plants, I can switch off and leave everyday life behind.

Ela: That sounds really cool. Do you have an orchid farm?

Silke: I wouldn't describe my plants as an orchid farm. I have over 30 orchids, as well as many other plants. Certainly around a hundred! Luckily, my husband supports me in my hobby.

Ela: What is your favourite colour orchid?

Silke: My favourite orchid is the Vanda. Its blooms range from purple to blue – a colour that is rare among orchids.

Ela: Does your passion for orchids also influence your travel plans?

Silke: Only indirectly. I visit exhibitions locally when they are on. But I don't travel specifically to see a certain orchid. However, I have just been to Indonesia and saw Vanda in the wild. Their natural habitat is the rainforest, as orchids need a warm climate with high humidity. However, the plants don't grow in the soil and don't need a substrate. They cling onto the trees with their roots.

Ela: I have one final question I'd like to ask: If you had enough money and resources, would you continue to work?

Silke: My work is an important part of my life and I couldn't simply give it up. Perhaps I would change my area of research a little and finance the research myself. Life would be much easier if I no longer had to apply for research funding. It's a very demanding part of an academic career.

**“Every move has
to be exactly right”**

BACKGROUND



Four years of work for a three-day competition: In a few days, the Cybathlon is taking place for the third time. Who are the people behind this major event? And what motivates them? Find out in our report.

“Red areas are off limits,” says Marionna Münger and points towards crates that have been painted red. She is standing in her sports gear on a wooden staircase in an industrial hall in Winterthur and is explaining one of the obstacles for the Cybathlon Challenges. “The artificial knee should have to make the same sequence of movements as a natural joint. Without these red crates at the edge, the pilots could cheat by tilting the leg to the side.”

Marionna has been employed on the non-profit Cybathlon project at ETH Zurich since 2023. Prior to this, she volunteered at the multi-day international competition where people with impairments use assistance technologies to complete various everyday tasks. Now, one of her responsibilities is making the sporting decisions relating to the individual Challenges.

Furniture stores and 3D printers

On the day we visit, at the end of August, she is working at the Cybathlon facilities in Winterthur, on the huge Rieter site. Anyone who comes here for the first time would do well to heed the advice Marionna sent in an email before our arrival: “Please call me if you can’t find the (hidden) entrance when you arrive.”

The hall is bustling with activity. It looks like a furniture store. Everywhere, there are elements for the various disciplines of the Cybathlon: black tables on stacked euro pallets, transport



↑ Complex: Plans for the transition between the disciplines.

trolleys carrying individual doors and shelves of plastic cups, screwdrivers and cans of spray paint – productive chaos – yet everything has its purpose and place. All of these objects will later become part of the competition.

“You’re not wrong about it looking like a furniture store,” says Marionna in response to our initial impression. “A lot of our components actually come from Ikea. A Kallax shelving unit, for example, has exactly the same dimensions worldwide and can be purchased at a reasonable price across the globe.” This is one of the ways that the Cybathlon team makes sure that all eight international host locations (hubs) have the same course setup as in Switzerland.

“We produce other parts, especially small ones, with a 3D printer,” adds Marionna.

“This enables the international teams to print their parts easily from their location using our plans.”

Good planning is half the battle

“Today we’re mainly focusing on how we can perfectly coordinate the transition between the different competition disciplines,” explains Marionna as she gives us a tour of the hall and points out three men who are standing at a table discussing a plan. “Switching between events is very complex. Every move has to be exactly right. And done quickly. Just as complex is the table that records the different transitions,” says Marionna.

She then has to move on to attend an online meeting, as there is still a lot to organise and coordinate. “At the moment, I spend around 50 percent of my working time in meetings,” she says as she leaves us.

A charming workplace for purposeful work

In a charming five-room apartment in one of Zurich’s period buildings, the Cybathlon team is working on a huge vision: a barrier-free society. Next to the door there is a chart containing East Asian script, in the kitchen a dartboard, and sitting in front of the screens are staff members wearing headsets, engrossed in their virtual meetings.

One of them is Katja Stoffels. It’s no coincidence that Katja is part of the Cybathlon team. “Previously, I worked for media agencies, devising marketing strategies for big companies. But I didn’t

find the work satisfying. So in 2019, I found a job here with more purpose. Now, I meet real people with real challenges. I find this fascinating and I'm learning so much."

Katja is organising the participation of the various teams and helping them with registration and coordination. "The ultimate aim is to ensure that each and every person is at the start line and able to take part." This is not always an easy task. The participants are located across the globe, and the Cybathlon is a complex event. "In our communications, I have to break everything down into the essential elements – into small chunks and simple terms so that everyone receives the key information clearly."

Anni Kern is familiar with this. She is the Co-Head of Cybathlon, and her responsibilities include communication and events relating to the multi-day international competition. She has been a dedicated member of the Cybathlon team since 2016. Over a coffee, she ex-

plains what motivated her to get involved: "I want to help, increase awareness in society and provide people with a realistic picture of what is possible if you have an impairment, and which tasks still need technological assistance and lots of research and development." She adds that this is important to enable people to change their mindsets. "We have to want inclusion, otherwise nothing will happen."

With passion and precision to the finish line

It's clear that Anni is someone with big ambitions, someone who gets things done. She often gets up at 5.30 a.m. and sits straight down at her PC with a cup of coffee. This means she has already done some of her work by the time her two daughters are getting up and getting ready for school. She describes herself as tenacious, resilient and "passionate for the cause".

So close to the start of the Cybathlon, this is absolutely essential. Just like everyone else in the team, Anni too has lots of meetings and often has to be available at short notice and prioritise many different things. This is precisely the reason why good teamwork is important, the Cybathlon Co-Head



↑ Anni Kern

explains. "We're all working under huge pressure and are relying on each other. There is no task that isn't intertwined with another."

The team has been preparing for the Cybathlon, which is taking place at the end of October, for four years. Anni can't wait for the competition to start. But she adds that she does get stage fright: "For the first few minutes, I get very nervous and hide behind a door, for example. Once everything is over and has gone well, I feel hugely relieved and wonderfully happy and tired!"

Anni too then has to head off into a meeting room.

For further information on the Cybathlon and tickets, visit cybathlon.ethz.ch

↓ In the Cybathlon facilities in Winterthur, elements for the various competition disciplines are being tested.



ETH's pension fund: how do things stand?

What have you always
wanted to know about
the world of ETH?

Please send your questions
to life@hk.ethz.ch

In September, we voted on reforms to occupational benefits provision. But what is the situation for Publica, the pension plan that ETH employees are insured with?

Margot Ziekau and Stefan Karlen:

The attractiveness of a pension fund is determined by three fundamental factors: savings contributions, the conversion rate and the rate of return on retirement savings. With respect to savings contributions, ETH (as the employer) puts in two thirds of the contributions, while employees add a third. This means that ETH contributes significantly more than the statutory 50 percent that is commonplace in the private sector. As the level of savings contributions is also relatively good compared to other pension funds, we are able to build up attractive retirement savings.

When a person retires, these savings are converted into an annual pension based on the conversion rate (unless they decide to take a lump-sum payout). With a conversion rate of 5.09 percent, Publica is slightly below average. The conversion rate is primarily a reflection of life expectancy, which is above average for ETH employees. On a positive note, however, the last time the conversion rate was cut, older insured members of Publica benefited from generous compensation payments to make up for the loss to their pension.

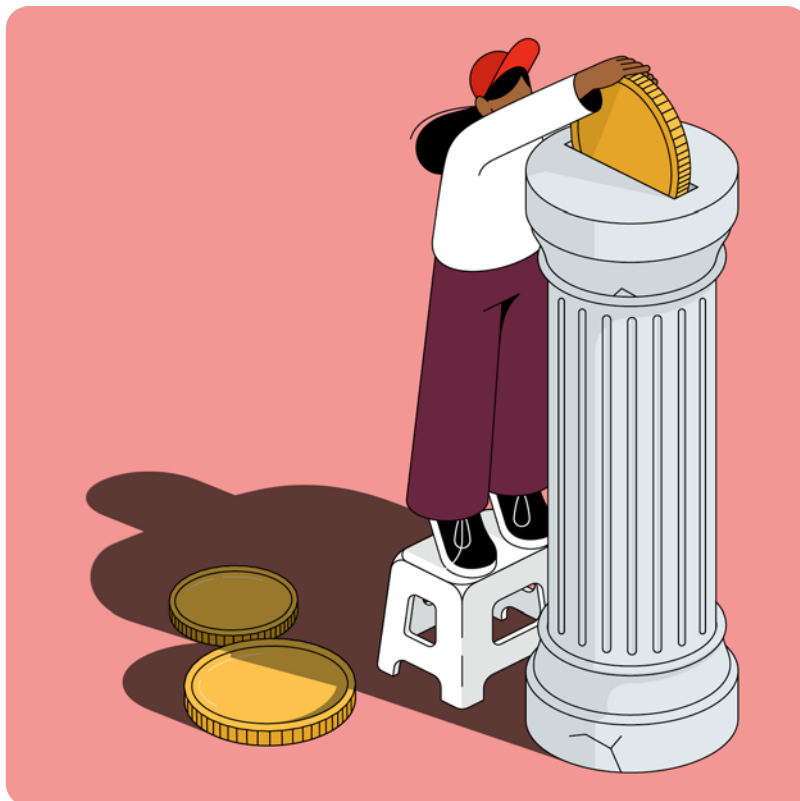
By contrast, the low rate of return on retirement savings is a less attractive aspect for Publica members. For many years, it has been equal to the minimum interest rate laid down by the Federal Council. As the "third contributor", this interest rate therefore continues to only play a secondary role in the pension fund. In December, a decision will be made as to whether the interest rate will be increased from its current level of 1.0 percent to 1.25 percent.

With a funding ratio of 103.2 percent (as of 31.07.2024), Publica is able to meet all its obligations. The fact that the ratio is not higher is due to historical reasons: Publica was established as a result of restructuring – with starting capital that covered the obligations but allowed hardly any capacity for risk. The conservative investment strategy has been revised somewhat in recent years. As a result, performance should improve in the medium to long term and facilitate a more attractive return.

In light of increasing life expectancy and second-pillar retirement pensions that have been reduced significantly in recent years, it is especially important that young people start to make arrangements for their retirement early on. They should try to make additional savings to ensure they have a high enough pension to fall back on when they retire. They can do this by making voluntary monthly contributions or one-off payments to Publica, which can be deducted from taxable income.

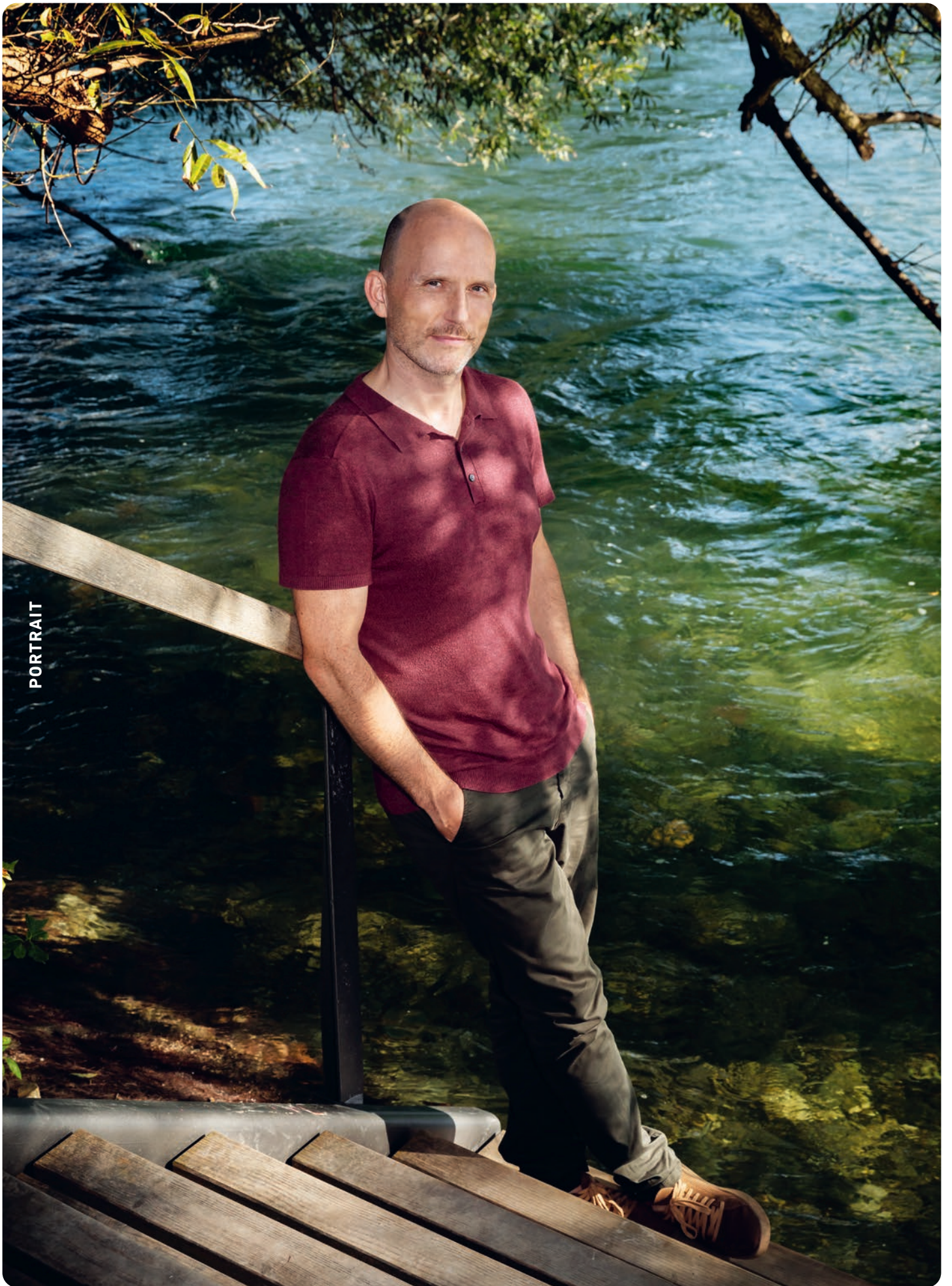
Margot Ziekau
employee in D-MATL and Vice President of the
Parity Commission of Publica

Stefan Karlen
employee in D-GESS and member of the Parity
Commission of Publica



ASK THE EXPERTS

Illustration
Karin Hauser



PORTRAIT

From the Science Olympiads to PAKETH

Marco Gerber has been managing the PAKETH (Examinations and Academic Calendar) project since May 2024. His passion for science, people and nature runs through every aspect of his life, culminating in his new role.

Marco loves nature. When he was small, his parents often took him and his sister camping – for Marco, this has always been a wonderful adventure and a way of disconnecting that he still holds dear to this day. You will often find him getting onto his bike, laden with a tent, and embarking on extended tours, such as from Geneva to Nice or from Domodossola to Pisa. “When I’m on these tours, I get to know the natural world and the topography in an entirely new way. The routes reveal themselves to me much better than when I’m on the train, and despite making slow progress, I get around quite a lot,” says Marco. In addition to camping and cycling, Marco enjoys hiking and, as a native of Bern who still lives in the capital, he likes to cool off in the Aare river on hot days. “I’ve not been swimming in the Limmat river yet. But I love Zurich and I’m really enjoying working here again,” he says.

A life of science and volunteering

Marco revealed his varied interests and his thirst for knowledge even as a child: First, he wanted to be a palaeontologist, then a biologist. He also developed a passion for surgery and, of course, it would have been amazing to discover new planets as an astronaut. After finishing secondary school, he decided to study biochemistry at the University of Bern. “I didn’t find it easy to leave school behind. The broad range

of subjects there really suited me,” Marco recalls. “But biochemistry also seemed to be very wide-ranging: from computer science and immunology to quantum physics, a whole host of doors were opened to me in different fields.”

After finishing his Master’s degree programme, Marco decided against completing a doctorate and moved instead into the private sector to learn some new skills. He soon took on a range of management roles. Yet he was drawn back to the world of science when he found a position at the umbrella association of the Science Olympiad, working most recently as its Co-CEO. “The work at the umbrella association suited my personality completely: I was involved in ten different subject areas and working together with students, doctoral students, teachers and professors,” Marco explains. Just like the departments at ETH, the association for each subject area had its own culture, different skills and idiosyncrasies. Something that really left an impression on Marco was the fact that he was mainly working with volunteers on the Science Olympiads.

He decided that he also wanted to volunteer for a good cause and reached out to WWF Bern eight years ago. He was welcomed with open arms, took care of the accounts and – before he knew it – was elected to the Board as Treasurer, where he is now also the Co-President.

PAKETH project management: tackling the implementation phase

Marco got his first taste of ETH when he took over the management of the organisational team of the International Chemistry Olympiad, which was held at ETH in 2023. Now, he is the project manager of PAKETH, which was

established by Rector Günther Dissertori. PAKETH is the German acronym for the Examinations and Academic Calendar at ETH Zurich. The aim of the project is to simplify academic support processes and the examination system and achieve greater flexibility. “Alongside an exceptional project team, I am tasked with implementing the concept that has already been devised and adopted by the Executive Board,” says Marco. “This is a huge challenge, as PAKETH covers so many areas of ETH.”

But Marco is ideally prepared to cope with this: The thirst for knowledge he is known for in his personal life has helped him get to grips with the university’s processes and organisational structures. Just as in his work at the umbrella association of the Science Olympiad, he will also be working with all kinds of people on PAKETH.

Another challenge is the fact that while there are people who really support PAKETH, there are also those who are critical of the project. “Change is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to evolve. PAKETH is something new for us all. That’s why it’s all the more important to ensure good communication with the departments and with the students,” Marco adds. Over the coming months, he will be investing countless hours in the project from his office with views of Zurich and the Limmat. Given that he has managed this leap into the unknown world of ETH so well, perhaps next summer he will finally brave a leap into the cool waters of the Limmat?

→ ethz.ch/paketh-en

A visit to Young'n' Rising

8.30 Morning check-in: What's on the agenda today? Coach Martin Schneider and the apprentices discuss the day's schedule.



9.30 Online meeting with a potential new customer. The apprentices discuss the assignment and – after the meeting – decide by themselves whether to take it on.



10.15 During the coffee break, the team talk about what they did last weekend. Who was at the togETHER staff party?



11.20 Computer science apprentices Mariia and Linus discuss the status of a current project.



A team of apprentices that organises itself, handles projects independently and has a lot of fun in the process – does that really exist? It certainly does, as a visit to Young'n'Rising at ETH's Octavo site in Oerlikon reveals.

Young'n'Rising is a team that is independently led by apprentices at ETH Zurich. It offers services in the areas of IT, commerce, mediamatics and interactive media design for ETH members. The around 70 projects the team has completed to date include systems for sanction searches and reserving workspaces, as well as an image video for the job fair. Since July 2024, apprentices have been expanding the portfolio of services – by helping out on the ETH Start course or providing business support in the departments, for example.

There are currently 11 apprentices on the team, plus their coach Martin Schneider. He has been involved with Young'n'Rising since it was founded in 2019 and has mentored over 50 apprentices during this time. "The idea for Young'n'Rising came about when we received feedback from qualified apprentices in IT Services: looking back, they would have liked to have had more contact with customers and worked in a

way that was closer to that of the private sector," says Martin, explaining how Young'n'Rising was established. "So we decided to allow a group of apprentices to handle projects independently."

Gaining independence

Apprentices handle the project management for all assignments that Young'n'Rising receives. This is a responsible task, as Mahi Arain, a third-year apprentice, confirms. Mahi has been in charge of project management since February 2024 and has learnt a lot of new things in this time: "Previously, I was quite shy when it came to engaging with customers. Thanks to my time with Young'n'Rising, I find this much easier now. I've also learnt how to work independently. And this is precisely the goal of Young'n'Rising."

Jumping in at the deep end

Handling customer orders independently, acquiring practical experience, enhancing one's skills and working together in interdisciplinary teams – these are the aspects at the heart of Young'n'Rising. "From the very first day, the apprentices learn how to manage time pressure and the expectations of customers," says Martin Schneider, explaining the learning outcomes. "They receive direct feedback on their work from customers – not only when things

have gone well but also if there have been difficulties with a project. This allows them to learn how to deal with negative feedback and to respond appropriately."

In his role as a coach, Martin stays in the background. "When the apprentices need my support, I'm there for them, of course. But they have to actively ask for my help," he explains. "Often, they come up with better and more creative solutions than I could ever suggest!"

Commercial apprentice services added to the portfolio

Young'n'Rising receives many different assignments – for application developments, automation solutions or the creation of videos and printed products, for example. Since the start of 2024, the creation of a commercial apprentice business team has allowed them to also take on assignments from the commercial field. "Up until now, we have mainly been supporting our customers with events and administration," says Johanna Ghisletti, a second-year apprentice, explaining her role. "The apprentices receive great feedback from customers," adds Heike Reinheimer. In her role as a commercial apprentice trainer, she mentors Johanna and her colleague Adshayan Kantharaj. "It would be great if our portfolio of services could become more well known." Something can definitely be done about that...

To find out more about Young'n'Rising, visit → young-n-rising.ethz.ch



Flags and free transport

In 1972, representatives of the Union of Students at ETH Zurich (VSETH) entrusted their historical flags to the care of the National Museum Zurich. They were accompanied on their journey by the VSETH free tram. The free tram initiative, which also originated in student groups, was advocating free local public transport at the time.

Photo
ETH Library,
Image Archive

Similarly, and also shown in the picture, former airline Swissair provided its passengers with double-decker buses that linked Zurich's main railway station with Zurich-Kloten airport between 1960 and 1980. The airport was later connected to the Swiss rail network, enabling travellers to reach it quickly and conveniently by train.