

Directive on Terms of Employment of EPFL Assistants

LEX 4.4.1

1 October 2005, status as at 15 September 2025

The Direction of the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne,
based on Art. 2 § 2 of the *Ordonnance-cadre relative à la loi sur le personnel de la Confédération* of 20 December 2000 ([RS 172.220.11](#)) and
based on Art. 3 of the *Ordonnance sur le personnel du domaine des écoles polytechniques fédérales* of 15 March 2001 ([RS 172.220.113](#))
hereby adopts the following.

Article 1 Scope

¹ This Directive governs the terms of employment of assistants, i.e. persons employed by EPFL, after ETH graduation or equivalent, to pursue a PhD.

² Moreover, assistants are also defined as persons who, after graduation, are given short-term employment as an assistant in the framework of a teaching and research project.

³ This Directive also applies to “Sciencepreneurs”. These people are assistants with a degree who create a start-up and receive an approved financial grant for their project.

Article 2 Subordination

¹ Assistants are hired by their immediate superior in agreement with the school’s human resources manager.

² Assistants report to an immediate superior. This may be a full, associate or tenure-track assistant professor or another person appointed by the dean of the relevant school or, alternatively, by a member of the EPFL Direction.

³ The hiring of Sciencepreneurs and the maximum duration of their employment are validated by the VPH.

Article 3 Employment Contract

¹ The employment contract is drawn up in accordance with Art. 16 of the *Ordonnance sur le personnel du domaine des EPF* ([OPers-EPF](#)). In addition to the employment contract, each employee is given a detailed job description outlining, amongst other things, their tasks and responsibilities. This description distinguishes between research, teaching and personal training activities. It is regularly updated to reflect progress in the assistant’s work and evolution of their academic status (admission to PhD studies). The EPFL Vice Presidency for Human Development keeps an up-to-date model employment contract in French and English. The employment contract and job description are available in English for employees who do not speak French.

² The work rate may be adjusted as appropriate to specific situations (maternity, dependent child(ren), officer military service or any interruption due to *force majeure*). The school dean and HR manager have the authority to adjust the work rate.

Article 4 Employment Duration

¹ Assistants are hired for a fixed term based on one-year contracts. The total employment duration as an assistant may not exceed six years (Art. 17b, § 2, letter b of the ETH Act¹). However, the employment duration may on request be extended in the event of lengthy absence due to illness,

¹ Federal Act on the Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH Act) of 4 October 1991 (RS 414.110).

accident, maternity, adoption or other good cause (Art. 17b, § 3 of the ETH Act); the school dean and HR manager have the authority to adjust the employment duration.

^{1 bis} In the event of maternity leave, the EPFL Vice Presidency for Human Development will inform the doctoral school and the director of the doctoral programme in question. The doctoral school will confirm the automatic extension of deadlines, in particular that of the oral examination, by the duration of the maternity leave, as well as of any possible longer extension, in application of Art. 4 § 1.

² The annual assessment of thesis work according to the EPFL doctorate ordinance is a determining factor in whether to update or renew the contract.

^{2bis} In the event of maternity leave, the current contract is automatically and immediately extended by an equivalent period.

^{2ter} In the event that the assistant is permanently excluded from the doctoral school pursuant to Article 8 paragraph 2 or Article 10 paragraph 4 of the Ordinance on the Doctorate², or Article 3 of the Ordinance on Disciplinary Measures³, their employment contract shall be terminated early.

^{2quater} Unless terminated early, not renewed in accordance with applicable law, or in the case of a resignation, the employment relationship of assistants ends at the earliest on the date of the oral examination and at the latest on the date of the public defense.

³ Assistants who have completed their thesis within a period of about four years may remain employed, at their professor's request, subject to the maximum period of six years. In this context, transfer to another laboratory or another school is possible, subject to justification. A new contract is drawn up to replace the previous one.

⁴ For assistants hired for a specific project after graduation, employment is limited to three years maximum.

^{4bis} The maximum duration of employment for Sciencepreneur assistants is three years. The total duration of employment at EPFL may not exceed the six-year limit set by Art. 17b, para. 2, letter b LEPF.

⁵ If a PhD is undertaken in the course of the third year, any exceptional extension of the six-year period is the responsibility of the Associate Vice President Doctoral and Lifelong Education.

⁶ Art. 4 § 3 does not apply to assistants working for architecture studio professors, provided that they have their main activity outside EPFL.

Article 5 Holiday leave

¹ The holiday leave entitlement must be utilised in the calendar year in which it arises.

² Professors (or delegates) plan and agree the dates of holiday leave with their assistants, which shall be a minimum of two consecutive weeks per year.

³ Assistants must take their holiday leave upon their own responsibility. Professors (or their delegates) must ensure that holiday leave is taken by their assistants.

⁴ If there is a balance of more than 5 days of unused holiday leave at the end of the year, assistants must furnish a justification for this and request a carry-over from the professor (or their assistant). If the carry-over is approved, the parties will agree on a plan for taking the unused holiday leave.

⁵ Taking into account that the contract may end at the earliest on the date of the oral examination and at the latest on the date of the public defence (i.e. 6 months after the oral examination at the latest), professors (or delegates) must ensure that the holiday leave is taken by their assistants before the end of the contract. Otherwise, unused holiday leave must be paid for by the unit (laboratory).

² That is, when the progress of the work or the doctoral candidate's knowledge is deemed insufficient.

³ That is, in the case of serious disciplinary misconduct.

⁶ At the end of the assistant's contract and before the assistant concludes another EPFL employment contract, all holiday leave must have been taken.

Article 6 Entry into Force

This Directive entered into force on 1st October 2005 and was revised on 25th January 2021 (version 1.3), 30th May 2022 (version 1.4), 3rd April 2023 (version 1.5), 1st January 2025 (version 1.6), 15th July 2025 (version 1.7) and 15th September 2025 (version 1.8).

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