

## life in lockdown

Dear ETH members.

In this issue we had planned to include a report on the final preparations for the Cybathlon, originally scheduled for 2 and 3 May - and we were really looking forward to telling you all about it. Like most of you, however, we here in the life editorial team have been forced to rethink our plans and start again from scratch. The Cybathlon is just one example of how our university has been affected, and we will now have to wait a while before we can feature it as our cover story, like we had originally planned. The newsflashes are another example: you would normally find them spread across exactly this double page, but in the current environment they suddenly feel far less relevant.

Despite all this, we still wanted to treat you to a small slice of ETH - and felt it was especially important to do so in this tough new situation we're all facing. That's why we have decided to publish this issue despite the rather trying circumstances - and to structure it around a simple question that has never been more important than right now: how are you? We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has given us an insight into how they are finding life just now, and to everyone who has supported us in other ways.

We did also want to make sure that this issue would bring you some degree of normality, however. That's why we've also included articles that don't focus on the coronavirus crisis – like page 10's interview with Michael Hengartner, the new President of the ETH Board, and the portrait of ALEA Award winner Gabriela Hug on page 14.

We still aren't sure when exactly the next issue of *life* will materialise, or in what format. In the meantime, however, you can still visit the ETH website for lots of interesting stories about the university.

On behalf of everyone on the editorial team, I hope you enjoy reading this issue of life – and we can't wait until we return to life as we know it at the "bricks-andmortar" ETH!

Anna Maltsev, Editor-in-chief, life magazine



#### **Publishing information**

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ETH members in their home offices

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Climate Partner ° climate neutral

"I feel a real sense of team spirit and solidarity among all of us."



"The most difficult thing has been the fact that the research group and PeKo committee members can't just drop by and see me at my desk now. We're still in touch with each other regularly, however, so I'm always there to help them with their questions. Online meetings are no substitute for talking face to face, but it's a small price to pay in the process of dealing with coronavirus. I feel a real sense of team spirit and solidarity among all of us, and I'm really proud that ETH is setting such a good example through the measures it's taking to protect us."

Jrène Müller-Gantenbein, administrative assistant in D-BAUG and PeKo Vice President

# So, how are you?

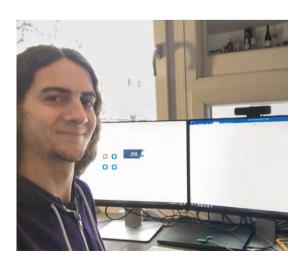
The spread of coronavirus has led ETH Zurich to start operating in emergency mode. We asked ETH members about the challenges they are currently facing and how they're overcoming them.

"Everyone has to do what they can in a situation like this. In addition to studying at home, we've been working in an interdisciplinary team to get the Students4-Hospitals initiative off the ground – linking up students who want to volunteer their help with hospitals who are looking for assistance. As a medical student, I also work part-time on the front line at the Baden cantonal hospital, which has been really fulfilling and a different kind of experience."

Rahel Schmidt, Bachelor's programme in medicine







"VSETH's normal activities have ramped down a lot because there aren't any internal events happening at the moment. Instead, what we're doing is helping concerned students who need information on what is going to happen with their studies. What I really feel is the lack of personal contact, just through the little conversations that you have during lunch or over a beer in the evenings. That's why it's so important for us to pay attention to communication at the moment."

Tierry Hörmann, VSETH President





"At first it definitely feels strange that you can only see your colleagues on a screen. You get used to it, though, and I'm seeing the benefits more and more now. It's really easy to record video interviews automatically, and I find that I can concentrate more at home when I'm writing documents. And when I do start to feel a bit cooped up, I go outside for a minute to get some fresh air."

Leo Herrmann, Corporate
Communications intern



"Giving a lecture to 300 students from my home was challenging, but I think it went well overall. The fact that we are devoting so much energy to online lectures and conferences could actually stand us in good stead for the future. I recently gave my first paper at a conference in Washington without having to travel there, for example."

Andreas Wallraff, Professor of Solid State Physics



"The lack of social contact is probably the biggest challenge for all of us."

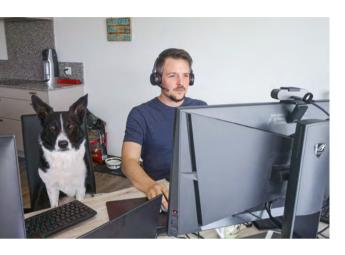
"Working at home has gone pretty well so far, but having two school-aged children at home means I have to be really organised. We always have an hour of school at 9 o'clock and then I try to do some work. If I have to participate in an important meeting, I allow the kids some TV time or they go and play in the garden. The lack of social contact is probably the biggest challenge for all of us, but especially the kids."

Annegret Kern, employee on the Cybathlon team "There are some areas of my robotics research that I can't work on at the moment because I don't have access to the lab equipment, so I'm having to find alternative ways of spending my time. Fortunately, methods like 3D printing have made it easier to create prototypes. This in turn is opening up new sources of components and is encouraging us to rethink our current approaches."

Marcel Schuck, researcher in D-ITET

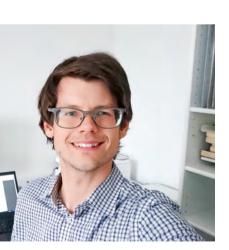


# "We've managed to solve most problems by applying a bit of creativity."



"The Service Desk is the front line for all IT enquiries, and we're dealing with huge demand at the moment. We didn't know anything about the IT equipment that employees had in their own homes before this all started, but we've managed to solve most problems by being flexible and applying a bit of creativity. To take something positive from the situation, ETH has managed to make more progress in its digital services over the past three weeks than it has over the last five years."

Mark Buschor, Head of ITS Service Desk



"In Corporate Communications we often deal with issues that need immediate action, so that experience has helped us handle this situation. We were very quick to restructure the team and some of our communication channels as necessary, shifting the focus to the subject of coronavirus and internal communication. With the help of IT Services, we were able to relocate an Executive Board town hall online for the first time – it worked well, but it was a bit of a gamble as we didn't have time to run a test."

Norbert Staub, Deputy Head of Corporate Communications and member of the coronavirus crisis unit



"It's difficult for doctoral students who are currently writing their theses but can't get access to their labs. Some of them are unsure what will happen to their contracts and grants if they can't complete their research in the agreed time, so AVETH is trying to mediate in those cases. We're also arranging some social interaction opportunities to ensure that nobody has to sit at home feeling lonely."

Rosa Visscher, doctoral student in D-HEST and AVETH President



How about you? Visit us online to add a comment about your experiences and discuss them with other ETH members.

www.ethz.ch/how-are-you >

# Tips for remote working

Working from home for such a long time presents a new challenge for all of us. We dropped by to ask HR how we can best tackle it – while staying mentally and physically fit.

## N°1

Start and finish your working day intentionally. For example, head into the evening by tidying your desk or making up a to-do list for the next day.

## N°2

Spend your breaks away from your desk, and keep using them as an opportunity to socialise – why not use videoconferencing for a virtual coffee break with colleagues?

## **N°3**

Discuss expectations regarding working hours and availability within your team. Give your family clear visual cues about your working time, e.g. close the door when you're working (if possible) or hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign.

## N° 4

There's a serious temptation to keep raiding the refrigerator when working from home. Eat regular meals and keep water on your desk.

## N°5

Make sure you plan to get enough physical activity – at least as much as on a "normal" working day. Here you can take advantage of the time you would normally use for commuting.

## N° 6

Reading the news once or twice a day is enough. A constant stream of negative information can have a significant impact on mood.

## N° 7

Feedback and appreciation help to motivate people. Try to find ways to keep the university's feedback culture going strong.

## **N°8**

Within your team, keep talking about what you're working on at the moment – it's less obvious right now, so these updates help keep us feeling connected to what we're doing.

## Nº 9

When working virtually, it's especially important that everyone is clear on who's doing what. Recording agreements and decisions in writing can help with this.

You can find more tips at www.ethz.ch/homeoffice-tips ->

Joël Mesot, President of ETH Zurich

## The new normal

It doesn't seem so long ago that life was traveling along its normal way. And yet, everything is different now. Today, we're facing something that started as an epidemic, then rapidly developed into a global pandemic, like an avalanche swallowing an entire valley. We saw it coming...but at first, we didn't really believe that it would hit us.

Since the middle of March, ETH Zurich has been operating in emergency mode just like the rest of the country. This crisis has shifted priorities, broken habits and snatched each and every one of us out of our regular routines - at work, at home and as citizens. Everything else has taken second place to slowing the spread of the virus – and rightly so – in order that we can protect the health of the most vulnerable among us and safeguard our healthcare system. The Swiss Federal Council has passed emergency legislation shutting down large areas of public life, something that has had a drastic impact on our university's operations. We have had to switch from classrooms to online teaching overnight, and - with the exception of coronavirus research we have been forced to reduce all other laboratory research to a minimum. And all of us have had to get used to the idea of working from home. This is a tough test for a university that normally thrives on discussion - a community that is usually brimming with life.

And yet the decisions that the Executive Board had to make have not paralysed our community. On the contrary, the crisis has unleashed an unprecedented – and incredibly impressive – wave of creativity, commitment and willingness to help. I have already spoken and written several times about how amazed and proud I am about the efforts we have made so far to come together as one and overcome the current situation. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank all those

who are helping to minimise the negative impact on our university and finding ways to make the most of the opportunities arising from this crisis.

Although we have been exposed lately to a constant stream of stressful and troubling news, we must maintain a sense of hope a hope that is fostered by our students' initiatives and the examples that our professors and staff are setting. They are showing Switzerland how they are standing up for our community during the crisis and, in doing so, are illustrating the strong stuff that our university is made of. We will need to continue drawing on these qualities - our togETHer spirit - in the coming weeks and months,

because we haven't overcome the virus yet. We are faced with a formidable challenge in ensuring that we will be able to reboot our scientific powerhouse without any lasting damage. After all, as a public university we depend on healthy federal finances, and our federal government in turn depends on a thriving economy. We are now in an economy that is straining under the weight of the crisis and will first need time to recover.

Nevertheless, it is worth taking a moment today to think about what we could learn from the current situation on a social, professional and personal level. I believe that once we have overcome these extraordinary times together, ETH Zurich will be a different place. Many factors that worked before and have helped to make our university so successful will continue to work in the future. But there





The Executive Board analyses the situation daily – from home and via videoconference.

will be things that we want and need to do differently. I invite you all to think about what we want to bring with us into a post-coronavirus world. Even before the crisis broke out, we had launched the rETHink project with the aim of equipping our university for the future – togETHer. Take care and stay well.

Joël Mesot

J. Masot

## Navigating change with vision

ETH Zurich's organisational structure is changing. The new system now includes the Office of the President, launched as a merger of four former offices back in January. What is the purpose of the new Office? What does its new Foresight team do, and what does Jürg Brunnschweiler, Chief of Staff to the President, hope to achieve?

#### Text Florian Meyer Photo Oliver Bartenschlager

Choosing a destination, aiming for the right direction, trying to stay on course, scaling the challenges that arise - sometimes, running a university and navigating organisational changes is not unlike embarking on a trekking expedition. You might know where you're aiming for, but your route involves a landscape that's dotted with forks in the road, surprises and uncertainties. And you need to take regular stock of your progress, whether your journey is smooth or you're grappling with the kind of extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in today. Is your route still the right one, or do you need to recalibrate?

As ETH follows its own path, it must consider how to fine-tune its performance, processes and structures to ensure it still ranks among the world's top universities in 50 years' time. This is what ETH President Joël Mesot has to consider as he manages the university's strategy and overall development. To open up a wide discussion forum on where ETH is going, the Executive Board has set the organisational development project rETHink in motion and has already made some progress.

#### Four offices merged into one

One example of this is Mesot's decision to restructure his Executive Board domain. ETH Global, ETH Sustainability, Strategic Development and the former President's Staff were amalgamated in

January of this year and now operate as the Office of the President. Chief of Staff to the President is Jürg Brunnschweiler, whose career at ETH began at the Office for Faculty Affairs 18 years ago. His most recent role before the new posting was at the helm of ETH Global, the unit with responsibility for the university's international relations and global standing. "ETH has expanded in a lot of respects since I began working here, and it now faces a more complex set of challenges," says Brunnschweiler.

## Taking over operational tasks

He welcomes the steps that Mesot has initiated in developing ETH further. "My aim in this transformation process was to take the burden of several operational tasks off the President's shoulders, leaving him room to focus on the overall strategic management of ETH."

Brunnschweiler's remit also includes liaising with the various offices of the other Executive Board members. Office heads were introduced to each Executive Board domain in January as a way of facilitating this, and Brunnschweiler represents the President in their plenary discussions. Working together with Katharina Poiger, Secretary General to the Executive Board, they consult one another on major cross-cutting issues and bring them to the attention of the Executive Board. "The aim of this is to ensure that the President and the Executive Board can devote their attention to strategic decisions and significant challenges, like the ones we are facing this year," says Brunnschweiler.

The new Office of the President provides strategic and operational services designed to promote ETH Zurich, the President's vision and his priorities. It is composed of four teams and three additional members who look after matters including communications from the President and strategic projects such as rETHink and "Open ETH" (formerly ETH+).

The teams are Foresight, Sustainability, International Affairs and Community & Outreach. The Sustainability team coordinates the university's efforts to boost what it does in the area of sustainable development. International Affairs, meanwhile, governs ETH's international communications and assists professors, students, academic departments and administrative posts with their international teaching and research connections. The Community & Outreach team is responsible for projects and events that are designed to enhance the positive image ETH Zurich has cultivated worldwide. It seeks to build an international community of stakeholders that help to enhance the visibility and impact of the university both in Switzerland and abroad.

#### Sharpening our image of the future

The Foresight team is a brand-new addition to ETH. The clue to its purpose lies in its name: it harnesses a range of measures to help the university's organisational structures deal more efficiently with the as-yet-unknown obstacles it will



From bottom-right: Roman Klingler, Anders Hagström, Carmen Iten, Johannes Heck, Elise Nardin, Viktoria Ivarsson, Chris Luebkeman, Julie Cantalou, Marianne Lucien, Elisabeth Pöschl, Jürg Brunnschweiler, Romana Mayer, Simone Bucher, Fiona Könz, Christine Bratrich, Lucia Arpagaus, Nikolaus Gotsch, Tobias Walser, Claudine Beck, Isabelle Castagna, Anna Maria Stallmann, Christina van Ligten, Katarin Hruba, Omar Kassab (Not pictured: Patricia Heuberger)

face in the future. Equipping them with this skill will create a deeper understanding of what ETH is likely to have control over in the future. Rather than using scientific forecasting methods, Foresight encourages an approach that helps stakeholders identify areas that require action and are set to have an impact on the future.

"Across the globe, university education

and fundamental research are changing. Foresight will provide us with as broad a platform as possible to reflect on what those changes mean for ETH and its future," says Chris Luebkeman, the American who heads the Foresight team. Educated as a structural engineer and geologist, he received his doctorate in architecture at ETH. He has been

involved in strategic and global foresight matters for some 20 years now, most recently as part of a global consulting firm. Since joining ETH in January this year, he has been working with the other 24 office members to help the President guide ETH with vision.

www.ethz.ch/office-of-the-president ->



## "We all need to pull together"

Michael Hengartner has been President of the ETH Board since February. In this interview, he explains how he sees his role, whether the merger of WSL and Eawag will definitely go ahead, and what the ETH Domain has in common with a marriage.

Interview Anna Maltsev, Florian Meyer Photos Stefan Weiss

## President Hengartner, what did you think when you heard that you were going to be President of the ETH Board?

I was, and still am, enormously proud and grateful that I was able to take on this job. And I am looking forward to getting to know as many ETH Zurich members personally as possible. Keep up the great work!

# Your father and your wife both studied and did their doctorates at ETH Zurich. Do you have any other links to our university?

My wife actually even won the ETH Silver Medal back in the day. As a researcher, I was involved in many joint projects with various ETH colleagues and was a lecturer here for a number of years.

As Rector of the University of Zurich, I was in regular contact with the President of ETH Zurich. I feel very closely connected to ETH and am sure that some of my six children will study here.

As the President of the ETH Board, you are now responsible for the entire ETH Domain. How would you describe your leadership style?

I work on a consensus-oriented basis. For me, it's important to have a culture of respectful debate. You can have a controversial discussion and then still go for a beer together afterwards. And at some point, you need to reach a consensus. In academia, you need a large majority, otherwise things really drag on when it comes to implementation.

## And what do you think characterises your new role?

The ETH Board is the interface between academia, politics and science. As the President of the ETH Board, I need to ensure that the interests of the ETH Domain are represented when it comes to politics. At the same time, I need to consider how the ETH Domain can help to achieve our country's strategic objectives and how it can contribute towards Switzerland's competitiveness and innovative power.

## Do you have a strategy for satisfying the various political, economic and scientific demands?

This is the challenge that I find most exciting! I rely on good personal relationships, clear communication and searching for common goals. If you can't find a common denominator between matters, that's when a clash becomes inevitable.

However, as soon as you have that common denominator, you can focus on that.

"You can have a controversial discussion and then still go for a beer together afterwards."

Michael Hengartner, President of the ETH Board

The ETH Board has a supervisory role within the ETH Domain. Is it not problematic that the institution leaders are also represented on the ETH Board?

That's actually extremely important for cooperation. The ETH Board is

also responsible for coordinating the ETH Domain and its strategic development. The only way for us to achieve our objectives is to pull together and move in the same direction. And when it comes to supervisory mandates for the individual institutions, it goes without saying that their leaders are not included here.

## Is the role of the ETH Board going to change in future?

The role of the ETH Board is a matter of politics. We have a mandate, the ETH Act and the ETH Ordinance. If changes are to be made to our role, the Swiss National Council and Council of States will need to change the act.

## The ETH Act is indeed going to be revised now. Which parts are particularly important to you?

We are discussing lots of exciting aspects here. For me, making the retirement age for professors more flexible is the most interesting one. This would mean we wouldn't automatically lose professors when they turn 65. If both parties agree, we could keep employing them until they are 70, for example, and continue to benefit from their knowledge and skills. That would be hugely positive for our scientific productivity and our reputation.

# People are worried that the planned revision will reduce the autonomy of the institutions. What do you think about this?

The multi-level autonomy is one of the biggest success factors of the ETH Domain. Every level of the institution should only have the responsibilities it needs to fulfil its tasks. Everything else needs to be delegated downwards. This applies to the ETH Board, as well as the executive boards, the department and institute management teams, and professors. Academia depends on this freedom.

## "You need to work on a marriage so it doesn't end up in a dramatic situation like that."

Michael Hengartner, President of the ETH Board

## Does something need to change here with the revision?

No. However, there is one point where all institutions agree that this change would not be good for them. The suggestion comes from the Swiss Federal Audit Office and implies that the institutions would no longer have the option to take legal action against a decision made by the ETH Board.

## Where do you stand on this suggestion?

In the history of ETH, this option has only been taken twice to date. In both cases, the appeal was rejected. If that happens every decade or so, I'm not concerned by it. My aim is to ensure that cooperation is so good that no one ever feels like they have to take legal action against the ETH Board. This would mean that something had really gone wrong. There are better ways to resolve things, even if you have a difference of opinion. It's like in a marriage: if you were to take your spouse to court because you'd had a marital dispute, this would destroy your marriage. You need to work on your marriage so it doesn't end up in a dramatic situation like that.

# In addition to the revision of the act, the planned merger of the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (Eawag) has also been a topic of much discussion. How definite is the decision?

As the ETH Board, we can give a recommendation, but the decision is down to the politicians. At the moment, however, we are only in the internal consultation process. In other words, we are asking members of the ETH Domain what they think about it. First, we need to collect this feedback, then we'll see.

## And what do you think about it all?

Our strategic role is to consider how to proceed with the ETH Domain. Although we need to tackle the matter of climate change now, it would be wrong to simply delegate this to these two institutions and think we've done our part with a merger. The merger could play a part in the solution, but we also have very strong environmental sciences departments at ETH Zurich and the University of Bern. They all need to work together if we want to resolve the issue together.



"Every level of the institution should only have the responsibilities it needs to fulfil its tasks."

Michael Hengartner, President of the ETH Board

## What would the merger mean for ETH Zurich?

That's exactly the question we've asked. Would you consider it to be something positive? Do you see it as a threat? Would you like to play a part? Can you think of another solution? I'm excited to see the responses we get from the consultation. Once we've got these, we'll need to discuss it with the cantonal universities.

# Something that hasn't been discussed a lot, at least not publicly, is the budget allocation in December. Why did the ETH Board shift the basic budget in favour of EPFL?

The ETH Board did not change the basic budget in favour of EPFL. It increased EPFL's basic budget – but not to the detriment of the others.

## Was that a one-off decision or are there going to be further financial changes?

There are always going to be financial changes. It's the responsibility of the ETH Board to decide how we invest the country's budget to generate the highest level of research and teaching for Switzerland and to ensure that the ETH Domain continues to be just as successful.

## What has been your greatest success to date?

Convincing my wonderful wife to say yes! I am eternally grateful for her support.

www.ethrat.ch/en →

## Gabriela Hug

Professor of Electric Power Systems

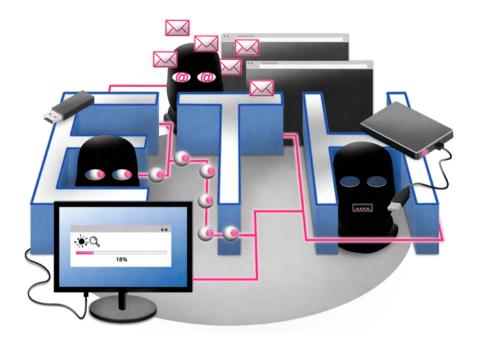
## Role-swapping

Text Rebecca Lehmann Photo Florian Bachmann

Gabriela Hug and her family spend a lot of time in ice hockey stadiums, where her three sons often spend up to six days a week cruising the ice between mid-August and the end of March. Hug, 41, and her husband are there to cheer them on from the sidelines whenever they can. In fact, that's exactly where the couple began their story. "We're all huge ice hockey fans -I find it's a great place to top up my energy levels, so I can feed that into my daily life," she says. Hug and her group are conducting research on integrating renewable energy sources into existing power grids, in view of Switzerland's commitment to move away from fossil fuels by 2050. The Solothurn native is dedicating herself to this cause through her own efforts too – she is planning to install solar panels on the roof of the house she recently built with her husband. The couple runs like a well-oiled machine: while Hug works on her research, her husband looks after the household and children. "It's still considered unusual to swap roles like that, but hopefully that attitude is on its way out,"

As one of three female professors in the Department of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering, Hug is also a mentor a role that she fell into somewhat by chance but one that she's glad to take on. As an electrical engineering specialist, she helps a range of female colleagues with their academic careers both within and beyond her department, as part of formal programmes and in an unofficial capacity. In her research group, she is committed to establishing working conditions that are compatible with family life - something that led her to receive the ALEA Award recently. "It was a huge honour and made me feel that I'm doing something right." □





## Robbing data thieves of opportunities

There are lots of advantages to working digitally, but it can also put your desktop PC, laptop or smartphone at risk. Here's a guide to protecting your data and devices.

#### Text Karin Köchle Illustration Philip Bürli

Electronic tools have become an indispensable part of our working lives – but as much as they help us, they are also the resources that put us most at risk of data loss and misuse. Around 1 million emails come to ETH Zurich addresses every day, and at least half of those are unwanted messages that filters manage to keep away from our computers. But as fraudsters find increasingly sophisticated methods of hooking us in, there are still some emails that slip through the net – like phishing attempts with falsified sender addresses that encourage us to click on links and disclose our personal data, or Word attachments designed to infect our devices with malware. Beyond our email applications, there is also the risk of internet sites installing malicious software or data becoming lost without a backup.

Here, we've compiled a few simple steps that you can take to make your IT environment much more secure.

## Handle emails with care

Only click on links and open attachments if you know the sender, you're expecting the attachments, and the links look plausible. By hovering your mouse over the sender's address and links, you can see them in more detail and decide whether they're legitimate. If you're unsure, you can get in touch with your IT support provider for advice. And it's essential that you do so if you've inadvertently clicked on a suspicious link or attachment.

#### Keep your devices up to date

Make sure your operating system, virus scanner, browser and any other applications are all up to the latest security standards, especially if you're working on computers that aren't managed by IT Services or any other IT support network you belong to. Updated systems have a much better chance of warding off attacks from internet sources.

## Back up your data

Backups are created automatically on computers managed by IT Services – you can tell which ones these are because they have a blue sticker with a serial number and barcode. These backups allow data to be restored up to 90 days after it has been erased. Importantly, the backups don't include the C drive. On computers you manage yourself, you should back up your data daily. If you belong to a department IT support network, find out what backup options it offers.

### Use secure passwords

Create a different password for each application you use – the longer and more unusual each is, the more secure it will be. You should also manage your passwords in a password manager program; your IT support network can help you set this up. Remember that it's always better to ask too many questions than not enough. And these tips don't just apply to what you do at work – you can also use them to make your own personal devices more secure.

www.ethz.ch/it-security >>



## Award-winning energy achievements

With some 12,000 students and employees, the Hönggerberg campus is practically a small town in itself. And like any small town, it needs energy. In 2013, the campus installed a geothermal probe system to maximise the efficiency of its energy usage. This system stores excess heat (from server rooms, for instance) up to 200 metres deep in the ground so that it can be used for heating during the winter months. As the heat is extracted, the temperature drops and the system can thus be used for cooling in the summer. Now known as the Anergy Grid, the development has made it possible to save around 5,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, and even led to ETH winning the Swiss energy prize Watt d'Or in January. (Photo: Josef Kuster) www.ethz.ch/anergygrid  $\rightarrow$