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Stellungnahme der VAUZ zur Vernehmlassungsvorlage: «Umsetzungsstrategien 2030 zur Sustainability Policy»

Sehr geehrte Frau Vize-Rektorin

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 'Vernehmlassungsvorlage: Umsetzungsstrategien 2030 zur Sustainability Policy'.

The report is a welcome acknowledgment by the university of the importance of addressing the climate crisis by outlining the need to 1) reduce the environmental impact of the university's activities and 2) laying out principles for research and teaching. However, the policy currently lacks ambition and does not demonstrate clear leadership by the university to take the action required to reduce emissions in line with achieving the goal of maintaining global temperatures below a 1.5°C rise. In order to tackle the climate crisis, the university will have to take bold steps; a wholesale change in operations and in the culture of academia will be necessary. Above all, it is imperative to empirically establish the University's environmental impact and then to set goals for the reduction thereof. Without concrete figures, any action will remain unverifiable and unquantifiable.

The "operations" and the "research and teaching" documents have similar approaches. Importantly, the tone of the two documents keeps the responsibility for the implementation mostly on individual faculties. Thus, one of our main concerns is that without a strong university-wide implementation strategy, progress will be slow, faculties will be unsure what is expected of them, and how best to proceed. We believe that the University should take the lead rather than deferring to individuals, institutions, and faculties to act.

More specifically, we would like to highlight our concerns about the following points in the report:

- It is when addressing specific operational areas of the university that the policy most lacks rigor. In particular, the policy fails to outline a clear overriding ambition for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, objective 3.1 of the "Sustainability Policy: University Operations" argues that the university will aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with cantonal and federal goals. This is vague and, although the

policy states that intermittent goals will be outlined by 2021 at the latest, the policy presents a missed opportunity to commit the university to an overall goal.

- In this respect, there is no mention of climate neutrality (**Kohlenstoff Neutralität**) in the documents, or any discussion of how the university can offset its emissions. Reduction of emissions is key, but taking measures to offset unavoidable emissions will be a primary component in transitioning towards a sustainable future.
- **Objective 3.4:** It is unfortunate that the 2000kw initiative for buildings, passed by the City has only been mentioned in passing and has not been more fully explored. This should be the standard for all university buildings.
- **Objective 3.6:** Another of the areas where the 'sustainability policy: university operations' is most lacking, is regarding business travel. The policy recognizes that business travel is a significant contributor to the emissions caused by the UZH and that robust action is required. It is therefore disappointing that the policy lacks concrete proposals for how this can be implemented.
- The section in the document on teaching and sustainability proposes the reduction of waste and implicitly discusses sustainability. Overall, objectives do not translate into effective actions except for **Objective 2.3**. This objective is the only one that involves measurements with impact.
- **Objective 1.6:** Here policy is approached from a more practical perspective, discussing efficient use of resources per department while performing research. While a good step, it remains unclear how this will be done, and what metrics will be used to measure progress.
- Responsibility for taking action is mostly deferred to individuals, institutions, and faculties instead of the UZH establishing concrete measures and taking responsibility for its impact on the environment. In the "research and teaching document", **Objectives 1.2–1.4** formulate the general message that the university will provide support for sustainability education as well as support to foster interdisciplinarity. While we welcome the University's pledge of support, with **Objective 1.1** it is clear that most initiative have to come from the departments and faculties; the departments will reflect on their paradigms of sustainability and how they will change towards an improvement of it. Though well intended, statements of this type will most likely result in little effect.
- The document finishes on a section dedicated to the exchange with the public. We highlight **Objective 4.2** about researchers communicating proactively with decision makers for its importance on the impact in the canton of Zürich, but we were surprised on how short this section was, and would have wished for a more detailed discussion.

Overall, we believe that the sustainability policies as they stand now do not actively commit to mandatory changes or effective measures to reduce waste and carbon footprint. In order to improve the performance of the entire university, we first need to understand where we stand, how efficient we are, and how much carbon we produce. Furthermore, while we very

much support the administration's efforts for pursuing a sustainable future for the UZH, we believe that more concrete actions are necessary. Taking all of this into consideration, we actively encourage the UZH:

1. To strengthen the sustainability team and give their members the ability to enforce policy implementations throughout the university.
2. To posit as a concrete goal the measurement of the carbon foot print of the entire university across all areas for continuous monitoring and for the development of a timeline to become carbon neutral.
3. To follow the example of other institutions of higher education across the world by pledging to be carbon neutral by 2025.
4. To elaborate policies addressing business flights—without discriminating against any groups of employees—that includes a ban on short haul flights when train connections are available for less than 8 hours of travel and that includes the off-set by faculties and institutions of all emissions caused by business travel. One possibility would be to make off-sets mandatory and to incorporate them into expenses claims.

We very much welcome that the university is beginning to seriously tackle the question of its sustainability and that it is acknowledging its responsibility in this area not just for the institution, but also for our society, and our global community.

Kind Regards

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