



Mission statement  
and university strategy  
2015 – 2025

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## A university in tune with society

Our society is undergoing tremendous change. How we, as a society, master this change depends on a variety of factors. What is certain, however, is that academia will play a central role. As a university of applied sciences, the ZHAW offers insights that are grounded in science and develops solutions and concepts that are socially viable. This makes the ZHAW a leader in this world of change. However, if it is to remain in tune with society, the ZHAW must maintain an ongoing dialogue with its own community and with its partners in society, politics, business and academia. The key elements of this dialogue are summarised in the ZHAW University Strategy 2015–2025.

The strategy was revised in 2020 to ensure that it is fit for the future and was again approved by the Council of ZFH. While the three strategic goals defined in it – “knowledge-based and competence-oriented”, “transformative” and “European” – continue to point the way forward, greater weight has now been given to “lifelong learning”, “sustainable development” and “digital transformation”.

The university strategy acts as a compass for the ZHAW. It allows us to remain in motion and in tune with our times without losing our orientation. This keeps the ZHAW ready to act and actively contribute to making a success of the changes our society is currently undergoing.



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President of the ZHAW Zurich University  
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**Mission statement**

Graduates of the ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences possess reflective, professional, research and practice-based competences which can be applied in demanding professional fields in our knowledge-based society. The dual emphasis of higher education is guaranteed by the programmatic coupling of studying with research and development, as well as with practical application.

What is fundamental to all of our degree and continuing education programmes is their scientific foundation and evaluation, as well as the systematic reflection of the competence-oriented educational process involving students, lecturers and external experts from the spheres of science, practice and society. In this way, the basis for successful life-long learning is laid.

Qualitatively and quantitatively strong research and development which focuses on specific areas gives the Zurich University of Applied Sciences its incisive profile as regards content. The research and development is linked with our degree and continuing education programmes, with business services and with practice - conceptually and organisationally, as well as in terms of subject and staffing. Furthermore, it is oriented to international scientific communities and standards.

The sustainability of our society is a central concern at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, which is a stimulating place for transformative science, oriented towards

societal challenges. This knowledge is based on an understanding of innovation which takes into account cultural, ecological, economic, legal, social and technical challenges. Transformative education, research and development, and also services, are anchored disciplinarily and are often set up interdisciplinarily and transdisciplinarily, as well as involving inter-university cooperation.

The Zurich University of Applied Sciences is regionally integrated and cooperates with international partners. It is oriented towards global challenges and markets and it is a university with a focus on Europe. It actively participates in the further development of the European Higher Education and Research Areas, as well of European economic, social and cultural environments.

Qualified and motivated service-oriented employees and management are a prerequisite for the Zurich University of Applied Sciences to accomplish its mission and achieve its goals as a well-managed university. The university creates an environment which allows it to attract, promote and keep the right people. It creates and lives out a university culture based on individual responsibility, creativity, an ability to reflect and deal with conflict, esteem, dialogue, participation and its principles of diversity and equal opportunity.

Physical and technical infrastructure are of a high standard. They support and facilitate the university in achieving its strategic goals, maintaining a competitive

**advantage in a competitive environment and enhancing the international attractiveness of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.**



**Strategic goals  
and directions**



“Knowledge-based and competence-oriented”, “transformative” and “European” are the three goals of the ZHAW strategy 2015–2025. They do not constitute a closed programme, but rather a process, a work in progress.



## **Knowledge-based and competence-oriented**

Graduates of the ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences possess reflective, professional, research and practice-based competences which can be applied in demanding professional fields in our knowledge-based society.

### Directions

- ① The ZHAW fosters the independent, self-reflective and cooperative development of knowledge and competence based on internationally compatible competence profiles. Furthermore, the ZHAW supports individualised educational programmes, insofar as this is possible in view of subject-specific disciplinary requirements and available resources.
- ② At the ZHAW, fundamental and systematic importance is given to the research-based development of knowledge and competence, which is seen as the basis for reflective and transformative cooperation with professional practice, as well as to critical thinking.
- ③ The ZHAW purposefully combines analogue and digital educational formats, makes use of their respective

advantages and harnesses its digital transformation to support the cooperative and individualised development of knowledge and competence, independent of time and location.

④ Both in admissions and during the course of studies, the ZHAW takes into consideration knowledge and competence which has been acquired by students through non-formal and informal education (“recognition of learning”).

⑤ The ZHAW recognises and supports the continuous development of individuals through educational and learning processes in different life situations and throughout their active professional lives (“lifelong learning”).



## **Transformative**

The ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences assumes joint responsibility for cultural, ecological, economic, legal, social, technical and sustainable development and for the sustainability of our society, seeing itself as a catalyst for innovation.

## Directions

① The ZHAW offers its students transformative experience and educational formats. It fosters sustainable competences and educates students who are committed to the preservation of livelihoods as set out in the Sustainable

**Development Goals (SDGs).** The ZHAW contributes to the sustainable development of the economy and society by providing scientific principles and innovations and by taking an active role in the Zurich tertiary education area.

② The ZHAW consolidates its solution-oriented research and development and its pursuit of innovation, both methodologically and as regards content. The university sees itself as a societal knowledge transformer and innovator and works together with social partners creatively and in a multifaceted manner as a fundamental part of its understanding of research and its research profile.

③ In addition to the main research focus areas of the individual Schools, researchers take part in shared interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and development areas beyond the limits of their Schools and in national and international programmes.

④ The ZHAW promotes its young academics at all levels and in a manner specific to their field. In areas in which years of continuity must be demonstrated and where high, internationally recognised quality of research and development is provided, as well as in its transformative focus areas, the ZHAW promotes doctoral students through cooperation with universities as well as through participation in national and international doctoral programmes. This supports the dual competence profile of its lecturers and researchers.

⑤ The ZHAW contributes to the digital transformation and innovation of the economy and society, thereby strengthening the international competitiveness of the canton of Zurich. To this end, the ZHAW plays an active role in the Zurich tertiary education area so that the strengths of the individual universities complement one other and scientific principles can be established that support society, politics and the economy in their transformation processes.



## European

The ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences is regionally integrated and cooperates with international partners. It is oriented towards global challenges and markets and is a university that identifies with the European higher education area and its understanding of education.

## Directions

- ① Graduates of the ZHAW are educated interculturally.
- ② The ZHAW is an attractive university for ambitious students, lecturers and researchers from abroad and is in demand as a partner university in the creation of international university networks and programmes.
- ③ Employees at the ZHAW cultivate an intensive exchange with international scientific communities and partners from professional practice.

④ Research and development at the ZHAW is regionally integrated and internationally networked. It is conducted in multinational partnerships and within national, European and international research programmes.

⑤ The ZHAW actively participates in the profiling and development of the European higher education, research and innovation area.



**Explanatory notes**

With its mission statement and university strategy 2015 2025, the ZHAW is stimulating dialogue and thus laying a basis for action in the next ten years. The mission statement and university strategy identify where the ZHAW will be directing its attention in the future. They do not constitute a closed programme, but rather a process, a work in progress. There are also university areas and goals which are not at the strategic level. The three goals and the concepts used are explained below. These explanations form a starting point and basis for further internal discussions and for dialogue with our external partners.

### **Knowledge-based and competence-oriented**

#### **Focus on reflection and implementation**

Competence means the way in which a person is able to apply his or her knowledge, experience, abilities, accomplishments and interests under the conditions and in view of the requirements of a particular context of activity. The ZHAW has to enable its students to process scientific knowledge and put it into practice within the context of demanding activities. This transformation of knowledge is complex and demands a well-trained ability to reflect. The ZHAW, as an institution of higher education, can therefore not only convey knowledge, but can also link the development of knowledge and competence.

#### **Theoretically and empirically based education**

Higher education that is knowledge-based and competence-oriented is based on various theoretical (societal, professional, educational and those related to action and learning) principles, and on empirical principles that are relevant to the specific subject. At the same time, higher education

must be oriented towards societal requirements, the demands of the job market and the expectations of the students. These demands are often contradictory and they need to be negotiated. Such contradictions are characteristic of a university of applied sciences and cannot be avoided.

#### **Non-standardised demand for action**

Graduates and employees of the ZHAW work in demanding areas of activity in which ever fewer model solutions and standard processes can be applied. They need to be able to transform their knowledge and know-how responsibly into decisions and actions, in uncertain situations, with conflicting norms, under high-risk conditions and under time pressure. This demands much more than just specialist knowledge.

#### **Students are actively involved and take on responsibility**

Knowledge-based and competence-oriented higher education thus aims at the balanced development of professional, personal, social, communicative and cooperative competence, all against a background of the humanist ideal of

education held by society at large. The ZHAW sees its students as jointly responsible and actively involved in their educational process. Furthermore, the ZHAW makes possible individualised knowledge and competence development, insofar as this is tenable in view of subject-specific disciplinary requirements and available resources. The ZHAW supports this process through a targeted and systematic application of technology. Students thus also gain the ability to organise themselves and to qualify themselves further independently.

### **Transformative**

#### **Comprehensive understanding of innovation**

The concept of “transformative science” is an umbrella term for various cultural, ecological, economic, legal, social, technical and scientific developments which aim at sustainable development and a sustainable society. Such an understanding of knowledge necessitates a permanent discussion of values and a comprehensive understanding of innovation. This places new demands on the ZHAW, as an institution of both higher education and research.

#### **New emphasis as regards content and methods**

Transformative education will enable students to understand transformation processes, and then later to promote these actively in the working world. Transformative research and development, which supports

the sustainability of our society, has a specific profile as regards content and scientific methods.

### **Challenges of the future**

Where content is concerned, key societal challenges and issues are the main focus, with a view to finding innovative, safe solutions in areas such as energy, the environment and resources, health, climate, agriculture and food, social and living spaces, human-technology cooperation, mobility, and in access to knowledge and information.

### **Research in networks:**

#### **Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary**

Where methodology is concerned, transformative research and development means that subjects are frequently worked upon interdisciplinarily and transdisciplinarily. “Interdisciplinary” is understood to be scientific cooperation between people from at least two disciplines. “Transdisciplinary” means not only going beyond disciplinary limits, but also transcending the knowledge system, i.e. that users of knowledge are also included in the execution of research projects. One challenge of transdisciplinary procedure is taking into account the diverse perspectives of science and society.

### **ZHAW as knowledge transformer**

Transformative knowledge therefore integrates societal partners into the process of knowledge development more fully than has been the case, i.e. both in the definition of the research and development design (“co-design”) and also in



the research and development process (“co-production”). With transformative research and development, comprehensive knowledge is thus created, which is useful and useable for various societal stakeholders and institutions.

## **European**

### **European identity**

Ever since the ZHAW was founded, internationalism has been a strategically important goal – and this continues to be the case. Education, as well as research and development, have to develop within the context of international exchange, and to be oriented towards international standards. The “European” direction for the next ten years does not, however, mean limiting international activities to Europe, but indicates rather the ZHAW’s self-perception. “European” means that the ZHAW, as a Swiss university, also sees itself as an active part of the European higher education area and participates in it. Switzerland belongs to Europe historically, culturally, economically, and where educational history is concerned, and it is integrated into this area. The history and institutions of Switzerland are inconceivable without Europe.

### **Future challenges can only be solved together**

Future key challenges affect Switzerland and Europe to the same extent and cannot be solved by either of them going it alone. To overcome these challenges, education plays an important role, along with research and development. This

applies to subjects such as the employment market and migration in Europe, care systems in the health and social sectors, nutrition, the ageing society, mobility and regional development questions, how we treat the environment and resources, as well as issues of social cohesion.

### **Benefit for regional partners**

But the European focus of the ZHAW is significant in its cooperation with its business partners too, since the European Union is Switzerland’s most important trade partner, and every second job in industry depends on Europe. With its strong European and global partnerships, the ZHAW also supports the positioning of its local, regional and national business partners in Europe and throughout the world.

### **The ZHAW is part of the European Higher Education and Research Areas**

In the higher education and research context, the developments in the European Union are the most important system of reference for Switzerland. Within the framework of its “Europe 2020” strategy, the European Union is focusing intensively on the significance of education and research for the future of society and the prosperity of European societies. Through various initiatives, programmes and projects, combined under the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and ERA (European Research Area), European universities, institutions and associations are advancing knowledge of complex questions regarding

**development and the future. The ZHAW is therefore actively participating at various levels in the further development of the European higher education area and is taking part in European education and research initiatives. Through this participation, the ZHAW is strengthening its European partnerships and thus also its worldwide networks and international focus.**

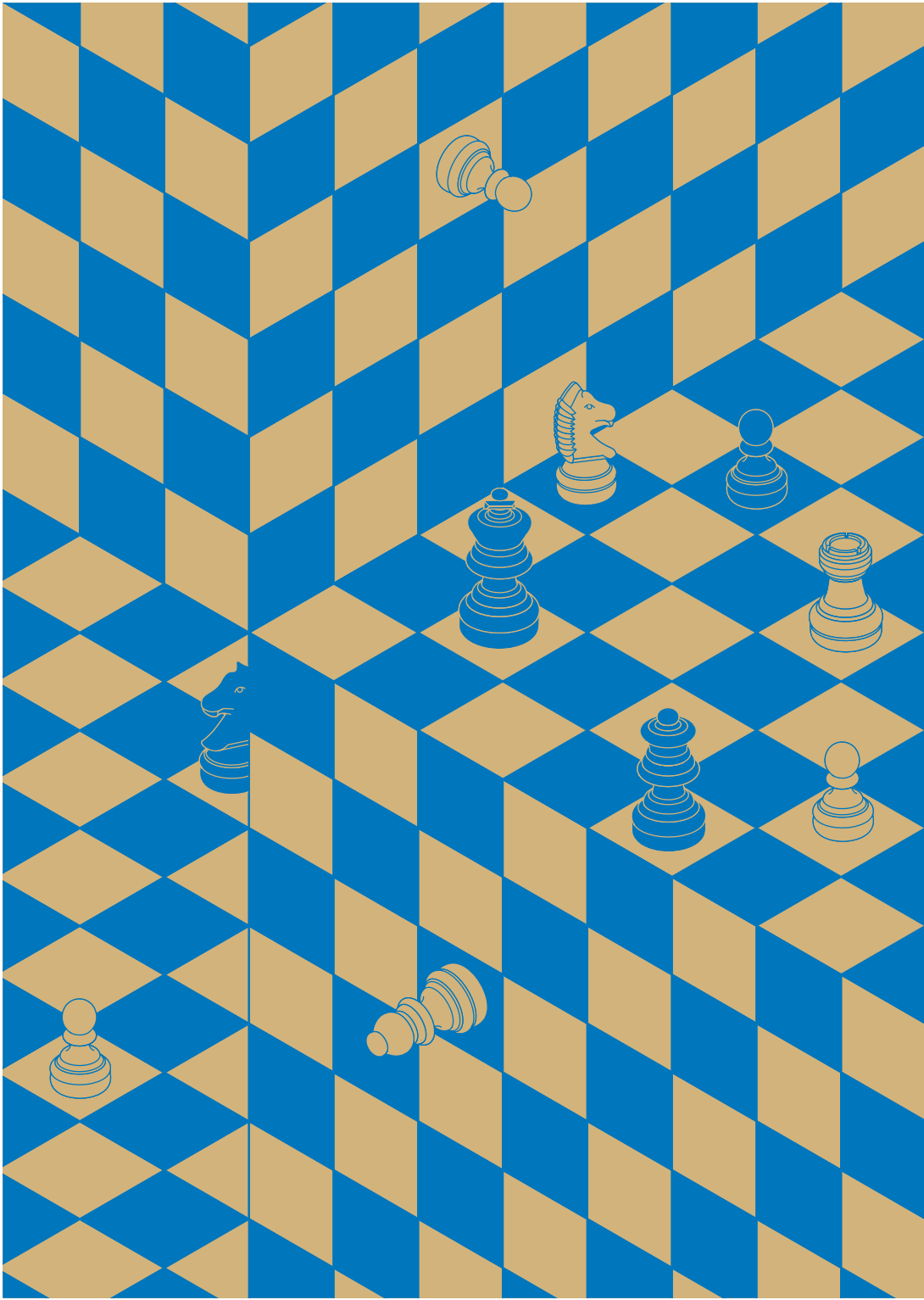
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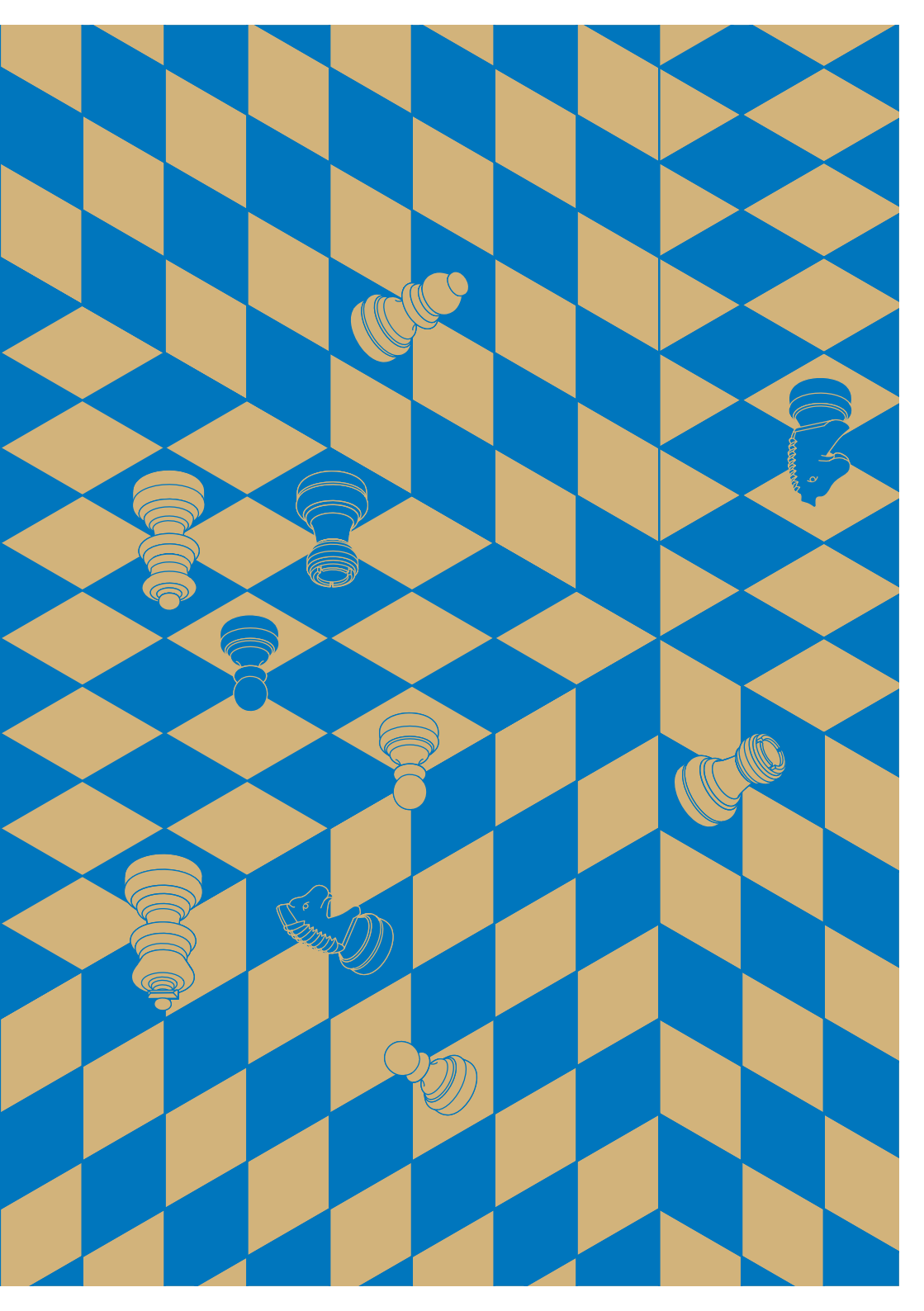
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