

Audit of the construction project "Biosystems Science and Engineering"

ETH Zurich

Key facts

The ETH Zurich is building a new laboratory and office complex in Basel – "Biosystems Science and Engineering", or BSS. The complex will cost around CHF 218 million. The Confederation is investing some CHF 171 million in the project, making this guarantee credit the largest item in the ETH Zurich construction programme. The BSS project is in the implementation phase. The excavation is complete and the lower-ground shell is in progress.

During its audit, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) observed that the project is generally running to schedule and that everyone involved is highly committed to it. In addition, a follow-up audit of the recommendations issued in 2016 was carried out.¹ Some of these recommendations have been implemented.

There is room for improvement in project management

The BSS project has no valid processes and binding procedures in place for change management. The consolidated, general financial overview of project alterations is not available. There are no continuous processes for the financial management of the overall project. In future, cost developments and forecasts must be clearly presented, actively managed and readily consultable. The financial project management is not yet appropriate for such a large project.

The BSS is a complex project requiring a considerable number of specialists. The management by ETH Zurich's Real Estate Management department is thus demanding. However, at the time of the audit, relevant project management principles were still being prepared.

The division of responsibilities between the customer side and the provider side needs to be more clearly structured and defined; for instance, the project management by the owner should be more consistent and differentiated according to level.

There is no observable consistency of organisation and management. The latter aspect is not sufficiently developed for a professional real estate owner. A lot of things are in the process of being fleshed out, but this should have been done at an earlier stage.

Risk management should be actively practised and pursued

The participants have jointly identified the project risks, and a comprehensive, phased risk projection is available. However, the associated risk management is still being defined. Certain responsibilities have not yet been allocated and documentation is incomplete. Risk management needs to be adjusted to the current status of the project. This means that active and ongoing management must be ensured.

Original text in German

¹ In this regard, see "Audit of the supervision of work performed in the area of construction" (audit mandate 16264).