Best practice regarding projects of Master's degree in a company

This document presents the rules to be respected for the organization of Master's degree projects in a company.

Throughout the document, the term "laboratory" refers equally to the diverse entities of research at EPFL (laboratory, Chair, institute, etc.).

Subject of the project of Master's degree in a company

The Master's degree project in a company remains above all a requirement for the award of an academic degree, and thus has to contain an academic dimension defined and approved by the professor or Senior Scientist responsible for this project. Even if it is carried out in a company, the Master's degree project must contain a research and innovation component and so contribute to the advance of the science in its domain.

The professor or Senior Scientist responsible for the Master's degree project in a company must be affiliated to the section of the student. Only the Section Director may authorize the supervision of a Master's degree project by another collaborator of the School.

Types of collaboration between an EPFL laboratory and your company

Three scenarios of collaboration between a laboratory and a company are described below:

**Case 1** - A pre-existing research contract between the professor or the Senior Scientist and the company was established prior to the realization of the Master's degree project in a company with one or several collaborators of the laboratory working within the framework of this project. This agreement between the company and the laboratory specifies the aspects of confidentiality and intellectual property.

In this case, the standard agreement for an industry-based Master's project does not apply, and must be adapted on a case-by-case basis. The professor then has to contact the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) to discuss the documentation required.

It is important in particular that the rules of confidentiality and intellectual property to which the student is subjected by the company are compatible and coherent with rules applied to the collaborators of the laboratory involved in the project.

In the particular case where the company is a "spin-off" created by the professor, it is important that any potential conflicts of interests are correctly handled by the laboratory.

**Case 2** - The professor or Senior Scientist has an interest in collaborating with the company within the framework of a project of an industry-based Master's project, with the potential for future research mandates, but a contract of collaboration does not yet exist.

By mutual agreement, the professor or Senior Scientist and the company will define the academic and industrial aspects of the subject. The standard agreement for a Master's project in a company is particularly adapted to this scenario, while remaining optional. If it requires further adaptation to match the terms agreed between the laboratory and the company, the request must still be approved by the TTO.
The search for a student to realize the Master's project can be made only after this phase of dialogue on the contents of the subject and on the methods of the collaboration has been finalized.

**Case 3** - The professor or Senior Scientist has had no preliminary contact with the company and the subject was proposed by the company by means of the internships platform of the School or through the contact obtained by an interested student.

As a prerequisite to giving approval, the professor to whom the student asks to oversee the Master's project must contact the company to clarify:
- the academic contents of the subject, in particular the aspects of research and innovation,
- the points of confidentiality and intellectual property concerning the information exchanged between the School, the student and the company and those directly connected to the results of the Master's project itself.

The professor or Senior Scientist is entitled to refuse to supervise the proposed if the conditions discussed with the company do not suit him/her, or do not meet the requirements of the School on the subject.

At this stage, it is important to remind all parties that the collaboration implicit in authorizing the industry-based Master’s project must benefit the research efforts of the host laboratory. It is also important that the laboratory’s wider research is protected, and not simply offered to the company within the framework of the Master’s degree project.

Without exception, no professor or Senior Scientist can approve a proposed Master’s degree project without first contacting the company prior to the commitment of all parties. Regular contact also has to take place throughout the realization of the Master’s degree project.

On his/her side, the student is not authorized to make a formal commitment with the company without having first found either a professor or Senior Scientist who has agreed to supervise his/her industry-based project.

**Deposit of the report under ISA - "Compartment confidential"**

If the professor or the Senior Scientist responsible for the Master’s degree project in a company is informed that the "Confidential" box was marked by the student during the registration of the project on IS-Academia (EPFL's internal platform), s/he must be fully informed about all pertinent details of the information covered by the confidentiality clause, before validating this option.