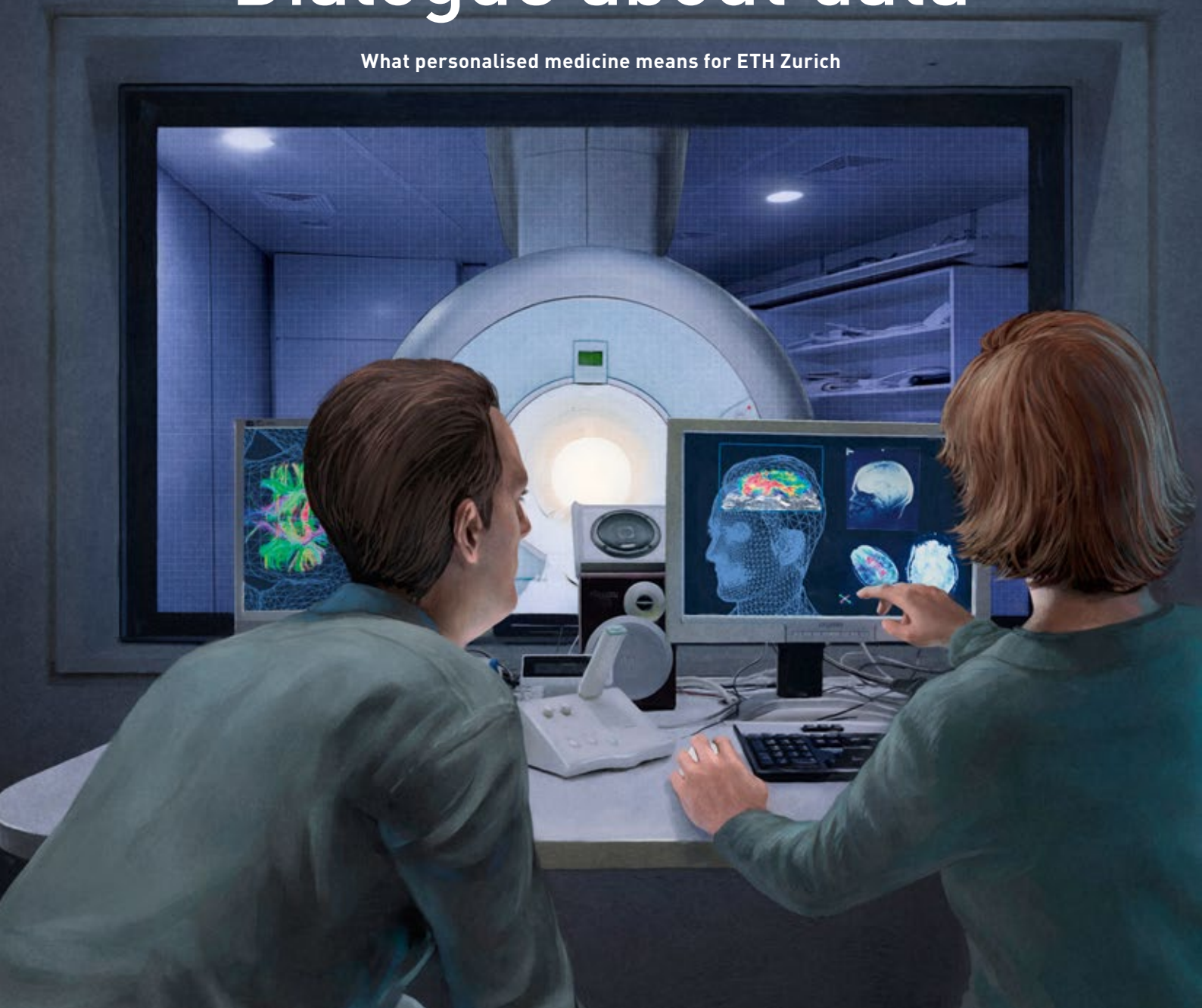
ETH zürich

life

ETH community magazine
April 2016

Dialogue about data

What personalised medicine means for ETH Zurich



"refine" project

New database for HR and financial data

ETH is aiming to establish a new resources and finance platform ("refine") by 2018, and to this end is currently migrating all financial and HR data to a state-of-the-art SAP database. The process will not mean any changes for the use of ETHIS (ETH Information and Support system)
www.ethz.ch/internalnews →

Vocational education and training

New director Fabienne Jaquet

Photo: Andrea Schmits

Fabienne Jaquet is the new director of vocational education and training at ETH Zurich. On 1 June, she will succeed Dieter Schorno, who is retiring on 30 June 2016 after 18 years at ETH. Fabienne Jaquet has accumulated years of experience at login Berufsbildung AG, which serves as a training association for SBB and over 60 partner companies from the world of transport.
www.ethz.ch/vocational-training →

Key figure

0.3%

The "against mass immigration" initiative is affecting research: only 0.3 per cent of Horizon 2020 projects are now coordinated from Switzerland. Between 2007 and 2013, this figure was 3.9 per cent.
www.sbfi.admin.ch →

Illustration: Patric Sandri

"Critical Thinking" Initiative

A new annual programme, a new head

The second "Critical Thinking" annual programme focusing on teaching has arrived. Its aim is to encourage students to look beyond the boundaries of their specialist fields and explore new territory – and it contains some resources specifically for lecturers too. On 1 January 2016, the Executive Board appointed Gerd Folkers (D-CHAB), who has led the Collegium Helveticum for many years now, to act as the head of the "Critical Thinking" Initiative.
www.ethz.ch/ct-annual-programme →

ETH Store

Dome-shaped chocolates

You can now buy chocolates in the shape of the main building from the ETH Store on Sonneggstrasse. You can choose between milk chocolates with an almond/gianduja filling or dark chocolates with hazelnut/gianduja, both produced by the Lucerne-based company Max Chocolatier. Larger quantities can be ordered by filling in a form from the online shop.
www.eth-store.ch →

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Conference

How ETH Zurich nurtures talent

The ETH Zurich Lokaltermin conference on the subject of "Honing talent at ETH" was held on 3 March 2016. ETH President Lino Guzzella, Rector Sarah Springman and Detlef Günther, Vice President Research and Corporate Relations, each spoke about the prerequisites for successful training and further education in these times of networking, technology and accelerated change.
www.ethz.ch/support-services-studies-careers →

Cybathlon

Photo: Alessandro della Bella

Discounted tickets for employees

Tickets for the Cybathlon in Kloten are now on sale. Be there on 8 October 2016 to see which teams will come out on top with the most sophisticated technology and the most skilled test pilots. ETH employees can buy tickets at the discounted price of 15 francs (instead of 20) from the information desk in the main building or from Campus Info on the Hönggerberg campus. The event will see people with physical disabilities competing against each other using the latest assistive technology.
www.cybathlon.com/en →

New confidant

Bernhard Plattner elected

At the start of February, ETH welcomed a new confidant as the point of contact to deal with any matters relating to research integrity and good scientific practice: Bernhard Plattner. He is a computer engineering professor emeritus (D-ITET).
www.ethz.ch/researchethics →


Photo: Giulia Marthaler

Archives of Contemporary History

50 highlights from 50 years

The Archives of Contemporary History (AfZ) are turning 50! In their anniversary year, the AfZ will be exhibiting 50 documents at the renovated Hirschengraben 62 to show visitors their history since 1966.
www.afz.ethz.ch/en →


Photo: Archiv für Zeitgeschichte

Human Resources

Your opinion counts: Take part in the ETH employee survey from 30 March to 22 April 2016.

www.ethz.ch/employee-survey →

AVETH

New president appointed

Arik Jung (D-PHYS) has become the new AVETH president. A PhD student at the Laboratory for Solid State Physics (D-PHYS), he was elected by the Academic Association of Scientific Staff on 2 March 2016 and will succeed Florian Thöle (D-MATL).
www.aveth.ethz.ch →

Education, research, innovation

Discussion of research policy

The Swiss Federal Council has published its dispatch on the promotion of education, research and innovation (ERI Dispatch) for 2017–2020. It focuses on topics including the next generation of researchers and human medicine. It also proposes amendments to the ETH Law. The universities are worried about financing.
www.sbfi.admin.ch →
www.swissuniversities.ch →

Personalising medicine

Why is it that the same disease can vary dramatically from person to person? ETH researchers are working closely with health professionals to find personalised answers to questions like this.

Text Florian Meyer
Illustration Markus Roost & Roland Hausheer

Each of us only has one life. That's why our health is such a valuable commodity. And the factors which determine how healthy someone really is are as idiosyncratic as a person's body and personality. "Personalised medicine" refers to the concept of a more personalised approach to understanding and treating people's disease characteristics than was previously the case. For researchers at ETH Zurich, it provides an excellent opportunity to develop new concepts of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation in collaboration with clinical researchers.

"Personalised medicine is a very important – and longer-term – challenge for the scientific community," says Detlef Günther, Vice President Research and Corporate Relations, "and it is clear that ETH Zurich, the universities and the university hospitals will need to work even more closely together." Two years ago, Günther was personally involved in a project with researchers from the University of Zurich and the university hospital in his role as an analytical chemist (D-CHAB). The project developed a high-resolution imaging measurement technique which allows breast cancer to be detected more accurately.

Over the next four years, ETH Zurich intends to promote teaching and fundamental research in the field of medicine across the university. To this end, it will be continuing the strategy of the past four years, which led to the founding of the Department of Health Sciences and Technology (D-HEST) in 2012. The Swiss government also intends to support personalised medicine from 2017 to 2020 with a national funding programme and an improved corpus of data.

Photo: Gian Marco Castelberg

"Like the cogs in a Swiss watch"

For Detlef Günther, ETH Vice President Research and Corporate Relations, personalised medicine is a task that brings ETH Zurich, universities and university hospitals closer together.

Why is personalised medicine important for ETH Zurich?
Natural and engineering sciences have now reached a level of knowledge which enables them to contribute significantly to medical progress. Biological, computer-aided or imaging processes provide data which can be linked with the clinical data collected by the university hospitals, thus enabling new ways of developing more personalised treatments for patients. This is a fantastic opportunity for ETH and for the field of medicine.

As Vice President, how do you intend to support this development?
As they are all tackling the same issues, it is the researchers themselves who are primarily driving this collaboration. I don't need to take charge in that regard. As Vice President, I am concentrating on the underlying conditions. As personalised medicine and medical technologies provide virtually unlimited potential for research projects, and we are already supporting lots of projects, ETH will continue to make this field of research a priority from 2017 to 2020. And we are playing an active role in the national funding programme which is aiming to standardise the handling of patient data and basic biological data across Switzerland.

Where do you see the challenges?
If we really want to develop more personalised diagnoses or therapies, the research groups will have to work together, like the cogs in a Swiss watch. All contributors will need to remain aware of the big picture, and we will need a form of publication which acknowledges everyone involved – like they have today at Cern. There are ethical and legal issues regarding the data which will have to be regulated and discussed with the public.

What does this mean for collaboration with other institutions?
ETH has a good relationship with the universities and university hospitals in Basel and Zurich, and personalised medicine gives us another reason to work even more closely together.

One discipline which has seen a huge shift towards personalised medicine is biology. The Departments of Biosystems Science and Engineering (D-BSSE) and Biology (D-BIOL) have recently expanded their collaboration with the university clinics and universities. "In the field of biology, we are investigating why a person stays healthy or falls ill at a molecular level," explains Rudolf Aebersold, Head of the Department of Biology. "Today, we have the opportunity to combine our biological knowledge base with medical knowledge for the benefit of the patient."

Approaching individuality
One driving force in this field is genome sequencing: today's sequencing technology can examine the genetic information in the genomes more quickly and more comprehensively. As a result of falling costs, this technology is being used more and more to analyse the human body. Furthermore, these methods can also generate additional molecular data. For example, the researchers can investigate the side effects of certain medicines for the heart and liver at various molecular levels. "This creates data sets which, for the first time, are comprehensive enough to enable reliable yet individual results," says Ralph Schlapbach, a lecturer at D-BIOL.

When two people catch the same infection, why is it that one may fall gravely ill and the other may not? It is true that genetic changes alter a person's risk of developing certain disease characteristics, but they are rarely the only cause of an illness. How ill someone becomes also depends on environmental influences and the person's lifestyle.

In order to investigate complex biochemical processes such as metabolism or the development of cancer, ETH biologists took an integral approach from early on: rather than studying the genome in isolation, they examine it in conjunction with vital proteins, metabolites and other biomolecules. This integral approach paves the way for an understanding of individual courses of diseases. "From

a biological perspective, we need to understand how 'genomic variability' contributes to individual differences in the development of a disease," says Rudolf Aebersold, Professor of Systems Biology.

Dialogue on data

Dialogue with clinical researchers on the subject of data is vital, as combining biomolecular data with medical data will allow us to create more personalised treatments for patients. This dialogue requires specialised technology platforms such as the ETH Phenomics Center (EPIC), NEXUS Personalized Health Technologies or the Functional Genomics Center (FGCZ), which provide the necessary research infrastructure while their staff design studies and develop methods together with the researchers.

Key participants in the dialogue on data include bioinformatics experts such as Niko Beerenwinkel, Professor of Computational Biology (D-BSSE) and Co-Director of the Competence Center for Personalized Medicine UZH/ETH (CC-PM), or Gunnar Rätsch, Professor of Biomedical Informatics (D-INFK). As huge quantities of complex data are generated, new methods of bioinformatics and statistics are required in order to separate the medically relevant data from the mass of information, and to link up different data sets. This, however, requires a legal and ethical framework which applies to the whole of Switzerland.

Light at the end of the tunnel

The imaging methods also generate data. These methods are increasingly capable of mapping the structure of organs and the processes in the body, according to Sebastian Kozerke, Professor of Biomedical Imaging (D-ITET) and spokesperson for the Competence Center for Experimental and Clinical Imaging Technologies (EXCITE Zurich). New methods make it possible to detect diseases early and monitor the treatment process.

The latest research results from Kozerke's group indicate that metabolic changes can be measured non-invasively and in real time, using magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS). As reported by the editors of the Radiology journal in March 2016, this evidence is the light at the end of the tunnel, as it will lead to improved findings with regard to coronary blood vessel diseases. Sebastian Kozerke concludes: "Even as a technological researcher, I am interested in the study of the whole person and how health is connected to well-being and lifestyle." ■

www.cc-pm.uzh.ch →
www.nexus.ethz.ch →
www.fgcz.ch →
www.excite.ethz.ch →
www.personalizedhealth.ch →

How ETH Zurich can contribute to personalised medicine

"The meaningful integration of molecular data and clinical information is an exciting challenge for us."

Daniel Stekhoven, Head of bioinformatics and statistics at NEXUS and blog author

"Imaging is our window into the body. The interplay between imaging, treatment development and treatment monitoring is becoming more and more important."

Sebastian Kozerke, Professor of Biomedical Imaging (D-ITET)

"Our integral, multidimensional approach and the creativity of our method development are our competitive advantages."

Ralph Schlapbach, Managing Director of the Functional Genomics Center (UZH/ETH)

"Technology platforms serve as hubs to bring together expertise from different research groups in one place."

Claudine Blaser, Managing Director of the ETH Phenomics Center

"We biologists are not health professionals – we specialise in personalisation and in the molecular principles of individuality."

Markus Aebi, Professor of Mycology (D-BIOL)

"In order to develop innovative treatments in the field of personalised medicine, it is vital to forge close links between molecular biology/technology and clinical development."

Wilhelm Krek, Professor of Cell Biology (D-BIOL)

"We're not saying people should only eat insects"

Carlos Mora and Monika Wehrli see themselves as mediators of research and technology with regard to social issues in Switzerland.

Text Florian Meyer **Photo** Marvin Zilm

The Swiss think tank "reatch" is committed to raising the public profile of science and technology. Undergraduate Monika Wehrli and doctoral student Carlos Mora, both from ETH, are members of the reatch Executive Board. We spoke to them about their motivations.

What was it that led you to found reatch?

Mora: We were a group of students who wanted to increase society's trust in science and in technological change. We don't think science gets enough attention in political and public debates, and scientific arguments aren't always taken seriously. That's why we founded reatch as a think tank for science and technology in May 2014.

Do you feel that people have reservations about science?

Mora: We are aware that there is widespread scepticism towards science. In public debates and TV formats such as "Arena" [a political discussion programme in Switzerland], people do quote scientific arguments but they always focus on emotions rather than facts, and they pit study against study and statistic against statistic. All of this devalues science itself.
Wehrli: We want to combat this scepticism with new event formats where we can approach people, present facts and standpoints, hold discussions and answer questions.

Did you found reatch in response to the acceptance of the "against mass immigration" initiative in Switzerland in February 2014?

Wehrli: No. The key thing for us was that there are scientific subjects, such as energy, genetic engineering, pre-implantation diagnostics, food technology or the use of insects as a food source, where it is crucial to engage in dialogue with society.

What is your current project with edible insects?

Wehrli: This year, insects were approved as a food source in Switzerland, so we are going to hold an exhibition called "Insects – the food of the future?" with insects for people to try. But we're not saying that people should only eat insects.

Do you see yourselves as lobbyists or as "enlighteners"?

Mora: We see ourselves as mediators between science and society, not as a political force. We're not just bound to ETH – we have links with various universities. We highlight the possibilities and risks presented by a finding or a piece of technology, but we never claim that our standpoint is the "only truth".
Wehrli: We often invite guests from the world of politics to our events, but reatch is not politically active. We're not on the right or the left. Our standpoints are based on scientifically substantiated facts. They are more rational than arguments based on feelings.

You deal with topics such as animal testing and genetic engineering. These are emotional subjects. How do you handle these issues?

Wehrli: We prioritise facts over emotions. But there is room in the discussions for emotional standpoints. We accept that.
Mora: As a think tank which champions science, we want to lead discussions away from emotions so that, even if people don't agree with each other, at least their views are based on verifiable facts and arguments.

What experience have you had with controversial topics at your events?

Wehrli: We held a discussion on animal testing not long ago. There weren't any particularly vehement reactions. And we weren't arguing either for or against – that would be oversimplifying the issue. We present the standpoints to people who are not experts in such a way that they can form their own opinion. If we can just get them to understand that there are different standpoints out there, we have achieved a lot.
Mora: People are very interested in bioethics and topics that are subject to referendums in Switzerland. We held an event on the new genetic technology "CRISPR/Cas9", which is a groundbreaking biochemical method of editing DNA. There were more people there than we've ever had before. This tool makes it possible to modify genetic make-up in a much more targeted way. This opens up new possibilities for fundamental research and gene therapy, but it also allows us to intervene in embryos. That's a sensitive issue. That's why it's crucial to engage in dialogue with society so the technology can be introduced in a positive way.

How do you communicate complex topics without harming the facts?

Mora: We simplify as little as possible and as much as is necessary. ■

reatch – think tank for science and technology

Carlos Mora (28) is a biologist and is studying for a doctorate at the Institute of Chemical and Bioengineering at ETH Zurich. He is the vice president of the executive board at reatch and runs the working group on science, technology & society.

Monika Wehrli (22) is studying Food Science at ETH Zurich. She is in charge of finance on the reatch executive board and also runs the working group on food technology.

The name **"reatch"** stands for "research and technology in Switzerland" and sums up the focus of the think tank, which communicates scientific subjects within the context of social issues.
www.reatch.ch →

Everything from a single source

Changes to the central bodies of ETH Zurich: the Infrastructure Divisions were replaced with administrative departments in January 2016. life presents three of these departments and shows how processes, activities and services have changed.

Text Inken De Wit
Photo Oliver Bartenschlager

The organisational changes in the central bodies of ETH Zurich are evident at Campus Info. Both in the main building and on the Hönggerberg campus, Campus Info serves as a central contact point for everyone – visitors, employees or students. "Whether you're looking for Einstein's office, trying to find an event, need advice on sending a parcel or want information about parking, Campus Info can help," explains Stephanie Braunwalder, Head of Visitor and Information Management in the Services department.

In order to bring all of the services that were previously spread over several offices at the two ETH sites under one roof, an area has been converted in the HIL building on the Hönggerberg campus. The official opening event was held on 23 March 2016. As well as providing all kinds of information, this office also offers postal and mobility services, and issues office supplies.

In the main building of ETH Zurich, Campus Info is split over two locations for structural reasons. The existing information desk in the entrance area has now been integrated with Campus Info, which has its main premises on floor D. After extensive renovation work, these premises now feature an information desk, electronic mailboxes and consultation areas. Just next door is the printing centre. And beyond the public area, there are a number of other rooms where employees sort post and process enquiries.

Campus Info

Whether you need a copycard, stamps, information about an event or general information about ETH Zurich, Campus Info can help you out. In the future, it will also serve as a meeting point for all groups. Campus Info is open 7.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday on the Hönggerberg and Zentrum campuses.
www.ethz.ch/campusinfo →

All services in one place

Responsibility for Campus Info lies with the new Services department, which amalgamates the teams from the previous Services Division and the Office for Events and Services. "Now all of our on-site services are in one place," says David Müller, Head of Services. Campus Info only represents the front-end services. "We also cover all of the back-end services behind that," explains Müller. This means that the 110-strong team also deals with event management, ETH logistics (including the post), transport and the printing centre. "If someone is planning an event, they will come to us for the licence, then we can help with planning and implementing the concept, including printing posters and invitations, and we can also help with transporting furniture and anything else required for the event." The only services not covered by the new department are the maintenance personnel and building services such as lost property and key management, which will remain under the responsibility of the Information and Service Centre (ISC) in the Facility Management department.

Everything for students

But the changes to the central bodies don't end there. The Infrastructure Divisions are now known as administrative departments and some staff units have been converted into departments (see info box). So, for example, the former Student Orientation and Coaching (SoC) staff unit is now the Student Services department.

"There has been a lot of organic growth over the years, which meant that activities which belonged together were not always covered by the same department," explains Regula Christen. She is Head of Student Services (StS), which is responsible for all student matters together with the Academic Services department (previously the Rectorate). While Academic Services is the contact point for undergraduates, postgraduates and lecturers for matters relating to ▸

Stephanie Braunwalder, David Müller and Evdokia Nazikidis Robert are excited about the new Campus Info in the main building.

teaching, Student Services provides support and advice on all other issues, including accommodation or questions about finance and grants. "The reorganisation allows us to make better use of synergies when developing new services," says Christen.

Everything for purchasing

The Financial Services department has also been restructured. Along with the Accounting and Controlling departments, it forms an independent subunit of the Executive Board domain for Finance and Controlling. "Almost all of our activities revolve around procurement – i.e. the purchasing of goods and services," explains Head of Financial Services Beat Schneiter. Along with negotiating favourable terms by centralising the purchase of materials and services, this area of responsibility also involves handling legal matters and drafting purchasing guidelines. "We also provide tools for purchasing processes and offer support in negotiations."

"This improves coordination of catering, retail and street food services."

Beat Schneiter,
Head of Financial Services

Furthermore, the department is responsible for insurance and risk management services as well as support for travel and for partner organisations.

As well as the coordination of over 20 restaurants and cafés, the mobile food stalls on the Zentrum and Hönggerberg campuses and the purchase of office supplies have also been assigned to Financial Services since January. This has involved two members of staff from the Services department moving to Schneiter's team on Scheuchzerstrasse.

"We can make better use of synergies when developing new services."

Regula Christen,
Head of Student Services

"This improves coordination of the catering, retail and street food services on campus and we hope that, in the future, we will be able to apply the experience gained from the online shop in terms of office supplies to our handling of academic consumables," explains Schneiter. This would mean that, in addition to pens and paper, other consumables could be ordered online and processed directly in the logistics centre. "But that's still some way off," concedes Schneiter.

It will also be some time before all of the organisational changes, down to the last e-mail address, door plate and Internet link, are fully implemented. Despite the months of preparation, a huge number of details still have to be considered alongside the major changes. ■

Changes to the ETH organisational structure

As of 1 January 2016, the central bodies consist of 14 administrative departments and 10 staff units. Four former staff units have become departments: Services, Student Services, Educational Development and Technology, and Safety, Security, Health and Environment. As the Rectorate is now called Academic Services, the term "Rectorate" can be used to refer to the Rector's entire area of responsibility. Since the start of 2015, the staff units have included ETH Global and ETH Sustainability. All central bodies support the Executive Board and the academic departments. Unlike the staff units, administrative departments have final responsibility for processes along with substantial formal financial powers.

Organisation Ordinance of ETH Zurich:
www.rechtssammlung.ethz.ch →

Overview article on "Internal news":
www.ethz.ch/new-organisation →

More places for the little ones

ETH Zurich is expanding its childcare provision. From autumn 2016, the kihz Foundation will provide daycare for around 450 children.

Text Andrea Schmits **Photo** Marcel Biefer

330 children are currently registered with kihz, the foundation run jointly by the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich. In the autumn, around 120 more children will join them. This increase has been made possible through the expansion of daycare facilities at various sites: on the Hönggerberg campus, the new kihz Feyerabend daycare centre will open on 1 September on the ground floor of the HWO building, which is currently under construction and will primarily comprise student accommodation. Anyone who is interested will be able to visit the premises on 27 May (provisional date). The Foundation is also looking into providing a "supervised playroom" at the kihz Feyerabend centre, where parents could bring their children on the spur of the moment.

"After the expansion, we should be able to offer places at a kihz daycare centre to children who are currently on the waiting list – as long as parents can be flexible in terms of location and days," says kihz director Monika Haetinger.

Zentrum is also expanding

There is a lot going on around the main building on the Zentrum campus as well. A new daycare centre will open on Sumatrastrasse in November 2016. In addition, the current Platten kindergarten will be gradually converted into a daycare centre from August onwards: the kindergarten will be closing in summer 2017 due to a decision from the cantonal Office of Elementary Education which means that private kindergartens will no longer be subsidised.

The Wolfbach and Irchelpark kihz daycare centres will also be closing, as the University of Zurich needs the premises – which were not ideal for daycare centres anyway – for other purposes. Despite this, the total number of daycare places will be increasing by around 30 percent. As most children do not attend daycare for the entire week, several children can usually benefit from what is officially one daycare place. "This means that, from the autumn, we will be able to look after around 450 children," says Haetinger. "And this care is available for up to eleven hours a day." This is not just an expansion in quantitative terms: "After the move, we will be able to provide higher-quality premises which will provide better support for our educational work."

While the daycare centres look after children from the age of four months until they start kindergarten, kihz also offers services for parents with school-aged children. The Foundation has increased its holiday club provision from 12 to 15 theme weeks a year and also provides the "kihz Mobil" on-demand service: a pool of 40 staff who offer flexible childcare support, either at home or during events at the university. ■

www.kihz.ch/index_EN →

Hello Kids!

The "Hello Kids!" service point has been available since October 2014 to help ETH members with childcare issues. "Parents really appreciate the services offered by Hello Kids!" says Carole Siegfried, the project leader. "By the end of January 2016, we had dealt with around 200 enquiries."

www.ethz.ch/hellokids →

kihz children visit the site where the new Feyerabend daycare centre is being built.

Paul Tanner
Chief Curator of the Collection of Prints and Drawings at ETH Zurich

Leaving after 24 years

Text Andrea Schmits **Foto** Florian Bachmann

Paul Tanner has been Chief Curator of the Collection of Prints and Drawings at ETH Zurich for nearly a quarter of a century. Now the 65-year-old art historian has decided it's time to retire. "I have always been guided by the four pillars of art collection," he says as he looks back over his career: "Collect, preserve, research and communicate."

It was important for him to focus on specific areas: "We don't take one piece from here and another from there – we collect whole groups of works by particular artists." Today, the Collection of Prints and Drawings comprises around 160,000 items, making it the largest collection in Switzerland. For Tanner, the Collection's exhibitions stand out as high points in his career. He particularly enjoyed the themed exhibitions, which displayed works by different artists on a common theme and which were especially popular with the public as well.

The end of April marks the start of a new phase of Tanner's life. He is optimistic about it: "I'm looking forward to spending time on other things." But art will always be part of his life: "I will still be visiting exhibitions and I hope to organise one or two more myself." Paul Tanner's successor Linda Schädler will take up her new role on 1 May 2016. ■

www.gs.ethz.ch →

Felicitas Pauss, President of the Lecturers' Conference (KdL)

Illustration: Kornel Stadler

Helping new teaching styles to take flight

At ETH Zurich, I have the privilege of working with incredibly creative people. This is particularly evident in research collaborations. By exchanging ideas with colleagues, a problem which seemed impossible to solve becomes a challenge, and then an innovative project.

The innovative power of a university is primarily judged by the public in terms of its research. They forget that those same creative minds are also lecturers who are introducing young talent to their field of study and preparing them to assume responsibility as critical members of society.

Teaching mostly happens behind closed doors. That means that the major changes taking place in lecture halls and auditoriums are largely going unnoticed. ETH has been specifically supporting new teaching styles and methods for years, in part through the Rector's Innovedum fund. But in general, there is too little recognition of how innovative teaching methods can be, and how much commitment and energy some lecturers put into these methods. At least, that is the conclusion we reached at the Lecturers' Conference (KdL), where we also created the KITE Award, a biennial prize for "Key Innovation in Teaching at ETH".

The aim of this award is to honour innovative approaches to teaching, to motivate more lecturers to get on board with the changes that are happening, and to help further improve the quality of teaching at ETH. That's the theory anyway. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Will the new award strike a chord with people and achieve its goal?

Race for the KITE

The initial signs are good. We have received two dozen entries from 12 academic departments for the first KITE Award. These include both individual lectures and entire degree programmes, as well as additional services which support teaching. A selection committee has assessed the proposals – and was impressed by the breadth of the entries. Three projects have been chosen for the final shortlist, one of which – well, I would love tell you more about the projects but I'm not allowed to.

The three projects will be showcased on 27 April in the Audi Max hall, before Rector Sarah Springman presents the winner with the KITE Award 2016. You are very welcome to attend the award ceremony. ■

Felicitas Pauss
www.kdl.ethz.ch →

VSETH

Watch out for the Golden Owl!

Owls are peculiar creatures – nocturnal, with excellent powers of observation and a mystical air, they have always been a symbol of wisdom. That's why the students chose this symbol for their award for excellent teaching.

For the past 10 years, ETH students have been honouring the best lecture or course in each of the 16 departments with the Golden Owl. At the end of the spring semester each year, Bachelor's and Master's students – around 14,000 in total – are invited to rate the year's roughly 2300 lectures and courses. The student associations then select the best performance in each department. The aim of the Owl is to reward excellent work and to provide an incentive in cases where there is room for improvement.

So what are the characteristics of an Owl? The lecturers honoured with the award demonstrate an exemplary attitude to their work and their students, and new teaching methods and styles are highly valued. At the start of the year, all of the previous award winners met up to discuss innovations in teaching, and it is hoped that similar meetings will be held more often in the future. Who knows how many more excellent teaching ideas might emerge? The winners were all given a silver pin in the shape of the Golden Owl, ensuring that they will be easier to spot from now on.

With any luck, you might just be able to catch an Owl as it flutters through the corridors of ETH.

Kay Schaller, VSETH president
www.vseth.ethz.ch →

Power from biowaste

Since April 2015, ETH members have collected around 1300 kg of organic waste in special bins in the HIL building on the Hönggerberg campus. The biogas generated from this waste can be used to supply power to a four-room flat for 49 days. Based on the huge success of this trial, the "Organic Energy" project will now be rolled out across the entire Hönggerberg campus.

www.ethz.ch/organic-energy-en →