

Press Release

Suspicion of image manipulation in publications

Allegations under investigation

Zurich, 9 April 2015

Allegations that were made online against an ETH professor have now been picked up in the media. On learning of the accusations, ETH Zurich immediately appointed an investigative commission.

ETH Zurich became aware in January of internet comments expressing the suspicion that images may have been manipulated in publications. Olivier Voinnet, Professor of RNA Biology at ETH Zurich, is listed as author or co-author of these publications. The allegations, published on the websites Pub-Peer and Retraction Watch, concern the illustrations in these publications; the studies' findings are not in doubt.

ETH Zurich takes these allegations very seriously. The university's Executive Board instructed Professor Detlef Günther, ETH Zurich Vice President for Research and Corporate Relations, to immediately set up an investigative commission tasked with conducting a judicious and impartial assessment of the situation. The investigation will be led by a four-person commission and chaired by an external expert independent of the ETH Executive Board. All relevant publications will be examined. Since the investigation will be comprehensive, it is not yet clear when the commission will deliver its findings. ETH Zurich will give a full report as soon as all the facts have been satisfactorily established. ETH Zurich has also established contact with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the University of Cambridge. Both of these institutions are also named in these allegations and have set up their own independent investigative commissions.

ETH Zurich has [procedural rules for misconduct in research](#) that apply in this case. The investigation will adhere strictly to this defined process. The investigative commission will submit its report to the Executive Board, which will then determine, on the basis of the facts presented, the next steps and any required measures.

"These allegations have come as a surprise to the Executive Board at ETH Zurich. Olivier Voinnet is a scientist whose outstanding research findings have been confirmed repeatedly by other research

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groups,” says Günther. “In order to make an assessment of the allegations, we must await the findings of the investigative commission. It is now of the utmost importance – both for ETH and for Olivier Voinnet – that we allow the investigative commission the time and space they need to carry out their work and deliver an independent evaluation. We will therefore wait until we have received the commission’s report before issuing any further comment.”

Further Information

ETH Zurich
Media Relations
Phone: +41 44 632 41 41
mediarelations@hk.ethz.ch