

Helsinki 3 June 2024
Dnr. HY/3567/05.02.02/2024
Ref. Request to investigate alleged scientific misconduct

DECISION ON A NOTIFICATION (DATED 10 MARCH 2024) OF AN ALLEGED VIOLATION OF RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

The facts of the notification and its processing

On 10 March 2024 Alexander Magazinov submitted a notification concerning an alleged violation of responsible conduct of research to the Chancellor of the University of Helsinki. The notification concerned some of the publications of doctoral researcher Reyhane Eghtedarian (Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland, FIMM) and the role of assistant professor Helena Kilpinen (Helsinki Institute of Life Science, HiLIFE) in the recruitment process of Eghtedarian. Eghtedarian has, according to the notification, misled the research community and research funders and the general public over her research and exaggerated her research achievements or merits in her CV. Kilpinen, in turn, has, according to the notification, inappropriately used her seniority and influence in the recruitment process of Eghtedarian.

The Chancellor has asked Eghtedarian and Kilpinen to deliver their statements on the notification. Eghtedarian submitted her response to the Chancellor on 15 April, 2024. Kilpinen submitted her response to the Chancellor on 2 April, 2024. Magazinov was offered a possibility to deliver a statement on the responses of Eghtedarian and Kilpinen. Magazinov submitted his statement to the Chancellor on 23 April, 2024.

According to the Regulations of the University of Helsinki, Section 20, the Chancellor is in charge of inquiries concerning alleged violations of the responsible conduct of research.

Grounds for the decision

The notification primarily accuses Eghtedarian of overstating her research accomplishments. It is stated in the notification that Eghtedarian's CV contains several publications that are either of low quality or may be produced by entities generating falsified research to sell authorship positions (papermills). According to the notification, Eghtedarian has listed such publications in her CV, which manifests misleading the research community and research funders and the general public over her research achievements. The notification also raises doubts on the quality and reliability of these publications. It is stated that, for instance, some of the publications contain references to somewhat dubious articles, the ethical permits of the research are to some extent inadequate, or the reviewers of the publications have been collaborators of the authors. In addition, it is claimed that Eghtedarian has served as a peer reviewer of her previous collaborators in three instances.

Eghtedarian has in her response in detail described her actual role in each publication mentioned in the notification. It is evident that Eghtedarian has not had the role of principal investigator in the research behind the publications. Nor had she been the main author of the publications. According to her response, she has, for example, conducted experimental research, conducted laboratory experiments and prepared summarizing tables. Eghtedarian has, thus, not been responsible on the design of the publications or on the ethical permits of the research projects. The role of the Eghtedarian has been rather assisting and it is evident that she has not had a position in which she would have been responsible for acquiring research permits or would have been obliged to do other tasks that typically belong to the role of principal investigator. When Eghtedarian has been listed among the authors of the publications, it is natural that the publications are listed in her CV and application documents. The notification submitted is not of authorship of the publications and the documents provided in the case does not give reason to suspect the authorship of Eghtedarian. There is therefore no evidence on exaggeration of research achievements and misleading the research community. The notification is, thus, in this respect unfounded.

In addition, the notification concerns allegedly problematic peer review activity of Eghtedarian. It is stated in the notification that Eghtedarian has served as a reviewer of the articles of her frequent collaborators. Three such articles are listed in the notification. Eghtedarian states in her response that her action as a peer reviewer took place only after the collaboration has ended. The documents presented in the case do not give reason to doubt the veracity of Eghtedarian's statement, although cautiousness should be adopted when receiving peer reviewer's tasks after a short period of time from the end of research collaboration.

In the notification it is stated that Kilpinen as a prospective supervisor of Eghtedarian should have identified the alleged problems of Eghtedarian's previous research and Kilpinen used her seniority to proceed with the recruitment. More broadly it is stated that the application procedure carried out by the University of Helsinki has been realised in a way that obvious flaws have been enabled. The notion "obvious flaw" refers to allegedly overblown CV of Eghtedarian that, according to the notification, should have been detected in the application procedure.

Kilpinen has submitted a response to the Chancellor in which the details of the recruitment process have been described. According to the response, the CV of the applicant has only had a role in the initial screening of the candidates and the final decision had been based on a

comprehensive evaluation of the candidates by multiple group leaders. The documents presented to the Chancellor clearly show that the recruitment procedure of doctoral students for FIMM-EMBL International Doctoral Programme had been thorough and the procedure consisted of, for example, one-to-one interviews. In addition, Kilpinen has participated only the initial screening of the candidates and has not evaluated Eghtedarian's application. It is, thus, evident that Kilpinen has not used her position inappropriately to promote Eghtedarian's application. The notification is in this respect manifestly unfounded.

Decision

Based on the grounds discussed above, I find that there is no reason to suspect violation of responsible conduct of research in the actions of doctoral researcher Reyhane Eghtedarian and assistant professor Helena Kilpinen. There is no need for further action in this process.

Chancellor

Kaarle Hämeri

Legal Secretary to the Chancellor

Sakari Melander

Appeal:

This decision is not subject to appeal (Section 5 of the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act).

If the complainant or the respondent is dissatisfied with the outcomes of the preliminary inquiry or the investigation proper, they may request a statement from The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). This must be done within 30 days of receiving the Chancellor's decision.

Further information:

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Tämä asiakirja on allekirjoitettu

Asian HY/3567/05.02.02/2024 asiakirja

Lista allekirjoittajista

Allekirjoittaja

Todennus