

BIOXHIT ends on a high note



One hundred and thirty scientists from all across Europe gathered at EMBL Hamburg on 17-18 April for the fourth and final meeting of the €10 million EU Framework Programme 6 project BIOXHIT (Biocrystallography on a Highly Integrated Technology Platform).

BIOXHIT, which started in January 2004 and was led by EMBL Hamburg's Victor Lamzin and Manfred Weiss, brought together scientists from all European synchrotrons and leading software developers from both academia and industry in a timely and unprecedented joint effort. It aimed to take the best of current technologies at major European centres for research in structural biology, and consolidate them into an integrated platform for high-throughput structure determination using X-ray crystallography with synchrotron radiation. From here, new methods and technologies were developed and expert knowledge spread throughout Europe.

"Overall, BIOXHIT has been very successful," says Victor. "Not only did it serve as the seed to make all European synchrotrons collaborate towards a common goal, but it also produced new technologies, many of which are already fully accessible to the wider life sci-

ences research community, numerous scientific publications and a training structure which is unique worldwide."

During the project's four-and-a-half year lifetime, more than 200 researchers, with 66 funded by the project, have been working on BIOXHIT goals at the various partners' institutions. In total, BIOXHIT has supported 135 EC-funded person-years.

The meeting was preceded by a one-day conference, 'Synchrotrons and Lasers for Structural Systems Biology', at which international experts in the field predicted the future of structural biology once state-of-the-art new X-ray sources become available.

What the future holds is not yet certain, but everyone involved was convinced that the momentum and developments of BIOXHIT should not stop with the end of the project. The hope is that the EC will see the opportunities that a follow-up project will present for structural biological research in Europe. "BIOXHIT's developments not only affect the synchrotron and methods development community, but have begun to make a real impact in biological and medical research," says Victor.

And you thought work was a way of escaping the kids...

Sunday 30 March was 'open house' at EMBL Grenoble, as around 30 families of staff came to find out what mum or dad does every day. An event that occurs every couple of years on the shared EMBL/ESRF/ILL campus during beamline shutdown, it allowed spouses and kids to visit the microscopes and storage ring and to learn a bit about structural biology. After the visit, coffee and cakes were served to the adults while the children charged noisily up and down the perfect 'runway' provided by the hallway. "It's such a nice change from a normal working day," commented Administrative Officer Mary-Jane Villot.



Research Technician Delphine Guilligay and family at the open day



L-r: Cologne-based teacher trainer Prof. Dr. Klein gets to grips with the microscope; having fun with the Protein Folder kit; teachers Carmelina Marrone and Grit Spremberg proudly display their crystals

Teachers explore the structures of life – ELLS in Hamburg

EMBL Hamburg hosted its first European LearningLAB for the Life Sciences (ELLS) teachers' workshop – and the first to be held in German anywhere – on 24-26 April.

Seventeen eager teachers from Germany, Austria, Belgium and Sweden came for the course, entitled 'Strukturbiologie – ein Blick auf die Chemie des Lebens' ('Structural Biology – Deciphering the Chemistry of Life'). Like other LearningLABs, the aim of the event was to help the teachers understand the subject better and to take related activities back to their classrooms.

Several volunteers helped organise the

course alongside ELLS Education Officers Alexandra Manaia and Philipp Gebhardt. Hamburg group leaders Jochen Müller-Dieckmann and Manfred Weiss gave talks and participated throughout the course, and their PhD students Hubert Mayerhofer and Linda Schuldt helped with the activities, which included protein folding and producing lysozyme crystals. Aidan Budd and Klaus Scheffzek from EMBL Heidelberg also contributed presentations, and Roman Hillig from Bayer-Schering Pharma was in attendance to talk about the role of structural biology in drug

development. Parts of the course took place at the International School in Hamburg, thanks to participating teacher Sally Draper-Though, and the visitors also enjoyed a visit to the beamlines and a Hamburg night out.

"It was a very successful LearningLAB, in particular because we were able to use the additional facilities at the International School," said Philipp. "The course being in German, too, meant that the teachers could express themselves fully. Additionally, all the speakers made the effort to design their talks to appeal directly to this audience."