

Mathias Treier is a new Group Leader in the Developmental Biology Programme. He joins the EMBL after doing postdoctoral work at the University of California, San Diego where he worked on the development of the hypothalamic-pituitary axis in the mouse to understand mammalian organogenesis. At EMBL he will extend his research towards understanding the regulation of mammalian homeostasis focusing on the role of novel tissue specific transcription factors in the hypothalamic-pituitary system.

Liliana Minichiello has been appointed interdisciplinary Team Leader for the Developmental Biology Programme and the Monterotondo Research Programme, following the departure of Group Leader José Luis de la Pompa at the end of last year. In Italy she will continue her work on signaling mechanisms and gene regulation in the nervous system, focusing on the mechanism of signaling of Trk receptors by comparative analysis of mice carrying point mutations on different tyrosine residues of the TrkB receptor. Moreover, she will screen for downstream effectors induced by TrkB activation using microarray technology.

awards, honors & cetera

Frank Gannon has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Szeged in Hungary. The award ceremony took place at the University of Szeged on the 26th of November. The citation from the University refers to the high quality of his research output, his commitment to the development of molecular biology throughout Europe, his involvement in the transfer of molecular biology research to the biotechnology industry and his leadership of EMBO.

Matthias Hentze was among 14 recipients of the prestigious Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize for the year 2000. The award, with a value of 3 million DM, is given by the Deutsches Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for outstanding achievement in science. The prizes are given to support researchers in their exploration of ideas which might otherwise lie dormant due to lack of funding. Hentze will continue his work on genetic diseases, especially in the area of iron metabolism, and hopes to help bridge the gap between molecular biology and clinical medicine. (See related press release on OIPA's home page.)

Would you like to contribute to the next issue of EMBL & cetera?
Just send a message to info@embl-heidelberg.de.
Deadline for submissions is Monday, April 3, 2000.

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Who's new?

Biochemical Instrumentation Programme: Thomas Köcher (PhD student in Wilm Group) Cell Biology and Cell Biophysics Programme: Joël Beaudouin (PhD student in Ellenberg Group), Rune Kjekken (Postdoc in Griffiths Group), Markus Zettl (PhD student in Way Group), Hanne Varmark (PhD student in Cayetano González Group), Alan Hamill (Staff Scientist in Hörber Group), Susan Owens (Scientific Assistant in Nilsson Group) Developmental Biology Programme: Xavier Cahu (PhD student in Bouwmeester Group), Ulrich Weihe (PhD student in Cohen Group), Simone Beccari (PhD student in Rørth Group), Anne Pacquelete (visitor in Rørth Group), Luis Teixeira PhD (PhD student in Rørth Group), Thomas Vaccari (PhD student in Ephrussi Group), Concetta Ambrosino (Postdoc in Nebreda Group), Laurent Perez (PhD student in Nebreda Group), Carsten Weiss (Postdoc in Bohmann Group), Mathias Treier (Group Leader), Emma Stavropoulos (Technician in Nebreda Group), Gaspar Jekely (Postdoc in Rørth Group), John R. Engen (Postdoc in Superti-Furga Group), Nathalie Vanzo (Postdoc in Ephrussi Group), Julius Brennecke (Trainee in Bohmann Group), Anna-Corina Treier (Postdoc in Treier Group) Gene Expression Programme: Marica Grskovic (PhD student in Hentze Group), Joël Beaudouin (PhD student in Ellenberg Group), Angela Relógio (PhD student in Valcárcel Group), Michaela Rode (Technician in Izaurralde Group), Catherine Ovitt (Postdoc in Treier Group), Bruno Galy (Postdoc in Hentze Group), Delphine Sitterlin (Postdoc in Izaurralde Group), Sabine Hentze (Scientist in Hentze Group), Birthe Fahrenkrog (Postdoc in Izaurralde Group) Structural Biology Programme (including Biocomputing Unit): Håvard Hauge (Postdoc in Nilges Group), Klaus Scheffzek (Staff Scientist in Saraste Group), Noemi Fukuhara (PhD student in Conti Group), Arthur Oubrie (Postdoc in Saraste Group), Susanne Fischer (Postdoc in Böttcher Group), Ines Domgall (PhD student in Böttcher Group), Peter Winn (Postdoc in Wade Group), Salvador Ventura Zamora (Postdoc in Serrano Group), Erik Zeitler (Visitor in Serrano Group), Jerome Basquin (Technician in Suck Group), Rainer Birkenbihl (Postdoc in Suck Group), Gabriele Sonnenmoser (Technician in Leonard Group), Connie Lee (Editorial Assistant in Saraste Group) Personnel Section: Edoardo Leva, Marie Bildsten

Grenoble Outstation: Paul Backe (PhD student in Cusack Group), Vassily Bavro (PhD student in Weissenhorn Group), Manos Mavrakis (PhD student in Ruigrok Group), Tim Grüne (PhD student in Müller Group) Hamburg Outstation: László Sallai (PhD student in Tucker Group), Manuel Anida (PhD student in Wilmanns Group) Programme on Mouse Biology: Michael Huebner (PhD Student in Rajewsky Group), Agnieszka Sadowska (PhD student in Witke Group) EBI Hinxton: Matthieu Louis (PhD student in Holm Group)



Matthias Wilm won a "BioFuture" prize from the German Research Ministry for a proposal in the field of Mass Spectrometry. The 2.7-million DM award is to be used to promote the research of a team over a five-year period. 800 individual researchers and research groups competed for the 32 prizes that were awarded.

Council member **Peter Gruss**, Director of the Department for Molecular Cell Biology at the Max-Planck-Institute for Biophysical Chemistry in Göttingen, Germany, was awarded the German President's "Zukunftspreis" for 1999 for achievements in the field of Developmental Biology. The award was created to foster successful transfers of results from basic research into practical applications. It was presented to Gruss and colleague Herbert Jäckle by President Johannes Rau in a televised ceremony on December 8, 1999.

A stalwart of EMBO, **Mare Kriis**, has retired. "Mare has been central to all of the activities of EMBO for over 25 years and has been a model of efficiency in the office," Frank Gannon says. "We will greatly miss her when she changes her lifestyle to spend more time in Estonia."

False Positives

Here are this month's contributions in our search for the "Best of PubMed." Have a look at these PMID numbers...

2106967

9606311

9632504

9390943

Send contributions to info@embl-heidelberg.de

EMBL & cetera

3

February 2000

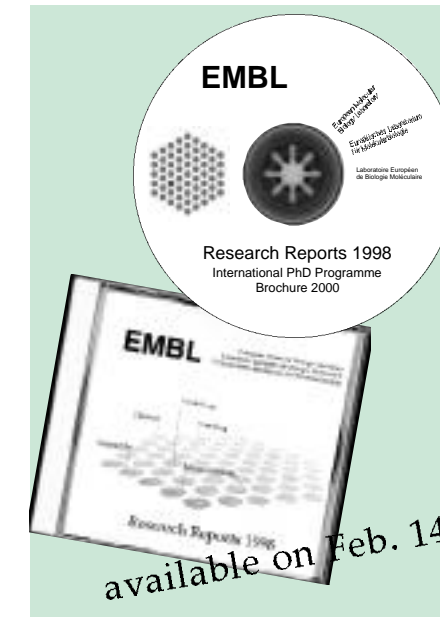
Newsletter of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory
published by the Office of Information and Public Affairs

EMBL Council passes resolutions on important ILO, EBI issues

The Council of 16 Member States governing EMBL met in November, 1999, to discuss a number of issues of vital importance to the Laboratory. Among these were recent decisions by the International Labour Organization's Administrative Tribunal, funding for the EBI, and proposed changes in Staff Regulations. The Council heard from both the staff and management and passed resolutions aimed at finding solutions to these pressing issues.

Director General Fotis C. Kafatos gave a detailed presentation of the draft proposal for EMBL's next Scientific Programme, which will cover the period from 2001-2005. Fotis is currently on the road visiting all of the member states, to discuss the plan in depth with scientists and representatives from government ministries. After these meetings, the Laboratory will prepare a final version of the Programme to be voted on by Council at the end of this year.

Latest ILO rulings announced... [page 2](#)



Research Reports on CD-ROM

The 1998 EMBL Research Reports have shrunk! What used to be a thick green book has now been produced as a CD-ROM for Mac and PC platforms. The disk also contains EMBL's PhD Programme Brochure for the year 2000. The new format will permit full-text searches, quick links to updates on our WWW site, and the inclusion of media such as films, etc. Copies will be distributed starting Feb. 14; they can also be requested from the

alumni feature...

where's Patricia Kahn?



[page 4](#)

EMBL alumni have gone on to do fascinating things, both in and out of science. This issue presents the first installment of a regular series on our former colleagues. Patricia Kahn started her EMBL career as a staff scientist in the Differentiation Programme; later she joined the Data Library, where she was instrumental in establishing SWISS-PROT at EMBL and helped to develop the concept of the EBI. Since her departure she has established an international reputation as a science journalist, first as a European correspondent to Science magazine, and now as associate editor of the *International AIDS Vaccine Initiative Report*.

from the sister sciences...

Uncertainty & optics

The integration of a basic principle of quantum physics with a classic equation for the behavior of light and lenses is giving two EMBL researchers important new insights into problems of resolution in microscopes.

[page 6](#)



Contents

November Council meeting	2
Alumni feature: Patricia Kahn	4
from the sister sciences	6
The EMBO Corner	7
Science & Society	7
Alumni @ EMBL	9
People @ EMBL	10

EMBL Council responds to ILO ruling,

Latest ILO News:

On Feb. 3, 2000, the ILO dismissed several complaints regarding salary adjustments awarded by Council in 1996 and 1997, stating, "The Tribunal has no reason to conclude that salary levels decided upon for the year 1996 [and 1997] jeopardise the basic conditions of employment to the preservation of which the complainants are entitled."

When the EMBL Council met in Heidelberg in November, among the top issues on the agenda were Ruling 1887 of the International Labour Organization's Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT), a major loss of resources at the EBI due to changes in EU funding policy under the Fifth Framework, and a number of themes related to staff regulations.

from the Staff Association

The ILO case

The ILO ruling, announced in July, 1999, came in response to a case filed by some members of staff regarding Council's pay award from 1995. The wording of the decision left room for interpretation as to how this should be done. The Director General and Administrative Director made an announcement to staff about the situation (as outlined in the Director General's Supplement to EMBL & cetera 2); the issue was subsequently discussed in an open forum at a meeting called by the Staff Association (see the article below).

Presentations were made by both Laboratory management and the Staff Association. Following discussions, the Council agreed that the text of the Judgment could lead to "significantly different interpretations" and passed a resolution pledging to "seek authentic interpretation urgently from the ILOAT in

order to enable the Council to take necessary action without delay." It also pledged "in principle to fund the salary adjustments identified in the Co-ordinated Organisations 40th and 45th Reports with effect from 1 July 1995 through a revision of the CVI."

In mid-January, the ILOAT responded to the request for clarification with the following statement:

"...For the Tribunal, the terms of its ruling are clear. It is now up to the Laboratory to execute it in the way it understands it. If the complainants are dissatisfied with the manner in which the judgment is executed, it would be open to them to file a further application with the Tribunal for the execution of Judgment 1887".

According to Administrative Director Barton Dodd, "This obviously does not provide the definitive guidance that Council took the initiative to seek. We have forwarded the response to Council

What is happening with the ILO Case?

During the weeks leading up to the most recent EMBL Council Meeting, which was held in November, the ILO salary dispute became a source of tension throughout EMBL. Preparatory events for the Meeting (the general assemblies held by the Administration and by the Staff Association, and also the Staff Association ballot for determining how to pursue the case) inspired heated discussions concerning the pursuit by Staff of an 8% salary scales increase that would take into account missed adjustments from 1991 through 1995, versus a settlement for only the 2.1% salary increase that should have been adopted in 1995. This issue dramatically polarized the Staff. Furthermore, these discussions made it clear that a gap in communication and trust had formed between the Staff and Administration. On the positive side, however, these events were taken as a warning that the situation had reached a critical point. As a consequence, steps were taken to convince the Council that this issue must be dealt with fairly, and as soon as possible.

As the Director General pointed out at a third general assembly that was held on November 30th, Council did, in fact, take the problem seriously. This was partly the result of the efforts of the Administration. This outcome was also strongly influenced by a well attended session in which the delegates were given the opportunity to meet members of Staff, and by the results of the ballot, which convinced many of the delegates that the Staff are not, in fact, just being greedy. As things stand now, Council has agreed in principle to implement the legally valid interpretation of the ILO court ruling, once a clarification of this point has been made by the ILO. Furthermore, they decided to initiate the inquiry regarding the clarification themselves, rather than leaving it to the Staff to do

at their own expense (note: the ballot of former Staff which had to be postponed until after the meeting due to problems in obtaining contact addresses, has now been postponed indefinitely since Council is doing the work involved in clarifying the verdict). Together with the Administration, Council is taking steps toward implementing the appropriate salary increase, attempting at the same time to minimize the negative impact on the Staff and on the competitiveness of the institute. Toward this end, the Director General has been instructed to gather and present alternative solutions for the problem at the next meeting of Council in March. Most importantly, these ideas will be gathered in consultation with the Programme Coordinators and with the Staff Association, a positive step toward re-establishing communication between the Administration and Staff. In this context it is important to mention that Administration is regularly consulting members of the Staff Association, as they did before the Council meeting, which we believe is important to resolve this crisis in an acceptable fashion.

We would like to point out that, although the Staff Association is pleased with the outcome of this meeting of the EMBL Council and believes that the Administration will do everything possible to influence Council to continue in this direction, it is nevertheless taking measures to prevent the loss of Staff rights on this issue, in case the situation does not resolve itself satisfactorily after all.

Finally, we would like to thank the Administration, the Council delegates, and the members of Staff for their active participation in the discussion regarding the ILO case. You all played an important part in making this meeting go as well as could possibly be hoped for.

alumni
@EMBL

Participants at the Alumni Meeting held from Oct. 21-23, 1999, decided to found a formal EMBL Alumni Association. Angus Lamond was elected to chair a committee to draw up a charter for the association, whose purpose will be to promote scientific exchange in the field of molecular biology and related areas throughout Europe. Another goal is establish and maintain a network between members and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL). The Association will organize meetings and promote scientific publications and hopes to find means to support young scientists. It is open to all former employees of EMBL, both scientific and non-scientific, and is expected to begin operations soon.

out-takes from the meeting



Klaus Lingelbach
and Jean Gruenberg



The Rice family



Matthias Lübben
and Dietrich Suck



Directors General -- present and past

photographs by Marietta Schupp
video captures by Doros Panayi, EMBL



EMBL gears up to handle heavier conference and course schedule

EMBL's Conference and Course Office is bustling with activity. The number of events has more than doubled since last year, with a total of 20 conferences and courses scheduled for 2000. To accommodate the increase in workload and to ensure high technical standards for the events, the CCO has been incorporated into the Photolab. Two new colleagues, Andrea Washington and Sylke Helbing, joined the team in 1999. Their presence will also help cover for Lena Reunis who will be on maternity leave until summer's end.

Together, the team is working hard to provide an integrated and modern approach to conference organization. "What we are aiming for is complete conference service -- from initial negotiations with organizers, to administrative practicalities, to conference hosting and audio-visual support," says Doros Panayi, head of the Photolab. "Thanks to the help of the Computer and Networking Group, information and registration for each event are now dealt with entirely online. Participants can learn about meetings, sign up and book their hotel room from their desks in a matter of minutes, and the conference staff can deal with the increased volume more efficiently." Petra

Riedinger (OIPA) is providing additional support by making posters for the events.

The decision to reorganize the service was made in order to ensure the support needed for the extra workload -- not only for the CCO, but also for the technical and service staff called in for duty during events. The Photolab will now oversee the smooth running of each event, in addition to providing their regular services which include imaging solutions for the approximately 1,000 researchers and administrative staff at EMBL's Main Laboratory and its external units.

The staff of the Photolab intend to take full advantage of developments in communications technology to make the process easier for both organizers and participants. "In addition to the obvious benefits that the Internet offers," says Doros, "we can now use any current technology to help speakers get their message across." Researchers can submit the files and visual aids for their presentations from their computers back home. In collaboration with the Computer and Networking Group, the Photolab is keeping a close eye on developments in Internet bandwidth and related technologies, with the eventual aim of broad-

casting talks via the web and archiving transcripts of some presentations and putting them online.

In order to ensure modern and reliable audio-visual service, the conference rooms and facilities are also being whipped into shape. After 20 years, Room 202, the small seminar room, will soon be refitted with modern sound and digital projection equipment. "These upgraded facilities will be permanent fixtures in the room rather than *ad hoc* solutions as before," says Doros. Longer-term plans are also in the works to modernize the facilities in the Operon suite.

"Given the growing success of EMBL/EMBO conferences and courses over the past years, it was definitely time to move forward," says Doros, "The reorganization has put us in a position to offer a complete and state-of-the-art approach to conference organization."

For a full list of events at the EMBL in 2000, visit the Conference and Course website at <http://www-db.embl-heidelberg.de:4321/CoursesConferences.html>

-- Sarah Sherwood

addresses staff and EU financial issues

Members and it is expected that they will take their decision on how to execute Judgement 1887 at their meeting in March."

Cuts in EU funds for the EBI

Last summer, the EBI and other European institutes went through the process of applying for funds under the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme. In the past, the EBI has received nearly half of its funding from the EU. The 1999 applications were rejected, however, on the grounds that EU member countries had instructed the European Commission not to support "core funding and operational costs for infrastructure," with the rationale that individual nations would then have more flexibility to provide funding for worthy projects. Since research activities would continue to be funded, some of the affected institutes did not realize that the fine print of the Programme could have dramatic consequences on their overall budgets.

Many consider the EBI to be underfunded already, and cuts on this scale would have had devastating consequences, so the Council acted swiftly to come up with a solution. The result was a three-part resolution. "Recognizing the crucial importance of bioinformatics for the development of molecular biology, biotechnology and molecular medicine," and also recognizing EMBL's past efforts and the need for "a strong European infrastructure in bioinformatics," the Council stated that it

"Agrees to make best efforts to maintain and develop the EBI alongside other EMBL priorities within the next Indicative Scheme;"

"Agrees in principle for the year 2000 to meet the current deficit in external income by providing additional funding;" and

"Instructs the Director-General to submit a supplementary budget for that year at the earliest opportunity."

Delegates from the United Kingdom affirmed that their country would provide funds in the event of an immediate budget shortfall.

Staff regulations

At the meeting the Laboratory management, in complete agreement with the Staff Association, made suggestions regarding changes in Laboratory poli-

cies vis-a-vis travel, subsistence, hospitality and home leave. Council agreed to the changes; details can be obtained from the Staff Association or the Personnel Section.

Also considered were changes in five areas of EMBL's pension policy: the inward transfer of pension rights; how pensions should be adjusted annually; the adjustment of pensions in respect of

tax; the interest to be paid upon return of employee contributions, and the basis on which holders of open-ended contracts can take a cash sum instead of a deferred pension upon leaving EMBL. The Council also considered the possibility of setting up a fund for the EMBL pension scheme.

-- Russ Hodge

An appeal for support for the EBI

As the implications of a shift in funding policy under the EC's Fifth Framework became clear (see previous article), the EBI and other institutes found themselves suddenly scrambling for support. The urgency of the situation prompted Michael Ashburner, one of the two Heads of the Hinxton Outstation, to sound the alarm in a letter to *Nature* (Vol. 402, Nov. 4, 1999). "A failure of funding now is particularly ironic given that we are on the verge of elucidating the entire human genome sequence," Ashburner writes. "This prospect is a stark contrast with the commitment and vision shown by biology funding agencies in the United States and Japan." What is needed, he continues, is sustained funding for infrastructure. If no solution is found, "European research in the biological sciences, and all that flows from it, will suffer."

The letter was co-signed by 64 researchers from throughout the world; within a few days of its publication, dozens more had added their names.

"It is hard to think of any activity which does more to enhance the reputation of biomedical research in the EU or which can approach the EBI in terms of its pan-European nature and effect," wrote Professor David J Porteous, Head of the Medical Genetics Section in the Department of Medical Sciences at the University of Edinburgh.



Image used with the permission of *Nature*

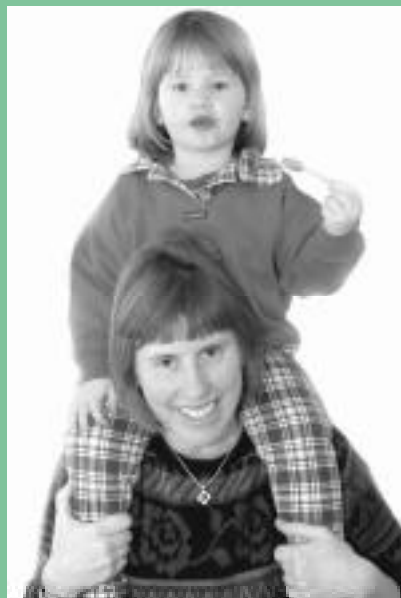
Bernard Jacq, member of the CNRS "Genomes" Commission (France) contributed, "The recent EBI research projects, including the ArrayExpress database and data mining tools for genomes, are of crucial importance for the future of biological research in the world. Excellent collections of data such as SWISS-PROT and FlyBase are also of invaluable help in a scientist's everyday life. It is essential that not only the present financial resources supporting infrastructure at EBI are maintained but that they can rapidly increase so as to compare to that of the American equivalent resource, the NCBI."

-- Russ Hodge

EMBL KINDERHAUS



pictures from the inauguration on November 19, 1999



photos by Marietta Schupp, EMBL



alumni feature

a talk with Patricia Kahn

Patricia Kahn started her career at EMBL as a staff scientist in the Differentiation Programme. Later she joined the still young EMBL Data Library — activities which later developed into the EBI — working on the EMBL Database and playing a major role in establishing SWISS-PROT within EMBL. Upon leaving the Laboratory, she spent several years as a European correspondent to SCIENCE magazine. Now she is Associate Editor of the "IAVI Report", a publication of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, headquartered in New York. She spoke with us during a recent visit to EMBL.



photographs by Doug Young, EMBL

"I became increasingly captivated by all this new sequence data and the very interesting biological questions that could be asked. A new era was coming where this information could be used in tremendously creative ways, and I became interested in helping to make

this was the inevitable outgrowth of the fact that sequencing was becoming so much easier. As the amount of data started increasing, the power of database searches started to become obvious to everybody... Suddenly if you were lucky, you could discover that your gene of unknown function was very similar to one that was better understood. A good example was oncogenes: people had struggled for years to figure out what they were about, and suddenly it became clear that they were very closely related to -- or were even the same as -- genes that people had been studying in developmental biology, genes with well-known functions. A very important early example involved the Nobel Prize-winning work of Bishop and Varmus, was the discovery that tumour-causing viral genes that had been studied for years

this area was going to require an enormous commitment. Graham Cameron had tremendous vision of how this had to come about and Lennart Philipson was very supportive. As the data library group expanded, it became clear that it would need to grow well beyond the size of a typical EMBL group. It eventually developed into the EBI. To some extent

were in fact cellular oncogenes. This would not have happened without the kind of information being available in databases.

Why did you eventually leave the field?

As I got involved in helping to generate support for the EBI from outside EMBL, especially from the European Union, I had more contact with people from research bureaucracies, people who were totally outside biology. Initially I had been something of a go-between for the computer people and the biologists; now the task became one of communicating the importance of this endeavor to people who were not scientists, or at least not biologists. That was very compelling to me.

I decided to attempt to establish myself as a science writer. A few months later I heard that Science magazine was starting a European office. One of their editors, Alun Anderson, thought that it was important to have a Heidelberg-based writer because the city is such an important center for science on the continent. He called Mary Holmes, who was then the EMBL librarian, to ask if she knew of anyone kicking around who was interested in writing; he would be willing to train somebody. I found out about that call through a dear friend at EMBL, Pat Blundell. When I contacted Alun, he suggested I look around in Germany and propose something I'd like to write about. It was 1991, and Germany had just passed a new law regulating experiments using gene technology. It was a far stricter law than any other in force at the time and there was a lot of concern in the biology community about what it would mean for research in Germany.

"...Now the task became one of communicating the importance of this endeavor to people who were not scientists, or at least not biologists. That was very compelling to me."

What was the attraction of bioinformatics for someone working in the Differentiation Programme?

I was doing research on chicken retroviruses and their role in inducing leukemias, studying cancer-causing genes and how they worked together. That led me to use the sequence databases a lot. I became increasingly captivated by all this new sequence data and the very interesting biological questions that could be asked. A new era was coming where this information could be used in tremendously creative ways, and I became interested in helping to make that happen.

There was also clearly a communications problem. In these early days, people interested in sequences came from two non-overlapping camps: the computer database people compiling the information, and the biologists interested in using it. For the most part, they didn't communicate with one another very effectively.

I was not a computer person, but I learned enough about the concepts behind databases to help bridge the gap and excite biologists about some of the possibilities and to raise awareness that

We would like to apologize for the fact that the parking situation has been greatly exacerbated by the preliminary work for the EMBO building, also because we had to place a container "outstation" on one of the parking lots because of our growing population. Apparently, the Stadt Heidelberg plans to restrict access to the car park in the wood, at the side of the building, starting in February. Unfortunately, there is nothing we could do about any of these things, once it became obvious that EMBO could no longer work effectively in the space that EMBL could provide for it.

The growth of EMBO is a consequence of the new activities that the organization is involved in, to be described in future columns; these include reviews of national molecular biology programmes (since 1994), Science & Society activities (since 1996), the EMBO Fellows Network (started 1997), EBNI (European Biotechnology Node for Interaction with China) which is co-ordinated by EMBO (started 1998), the EMBO Sectoral Meetings (started 1999) and the EMBO Young Investigator Award Scheme (due to start in 2000). These and our other

activities could no longer be handled by the old team of two high-powered administrative officers with the efficiency and style for which EMBO is renowned.

In addition, the role of EMBO in publishing is also expanding. The EMBO Journal continues to flourish and plans are for the two editorial offices, here and in London, to be consolidated in our new building in due course. In the middle of 2000, EMBO will launch its second journal called EMBO Reports. This again will aim for the high-quality end of the market and will include a news and comments section, a reviews and literature reports section, and the bulk of the Journal will be dedicated to high-quality shorter papers. This is an exciting new adventure which will again require a major input from all.

The discussion on E-Biomed / Pub Med Central / E-Biosci, which has the aim of providing a single site at which "all" scientific literature and data can be freely searched, grew in importance, not only as a concept, but as something that required action during 1999. The endless rounds of discussions and negotiations related to the European side of this will hopefully end early in the year 2000. Again, it will require specific actions from EMBO, particularly in the provision of an assessment



service for some of the material that will be delivered to E-Biosci (the European server). This service, which will most likely be located at the EBI, will be established when a new source of funding specifically for this project is organized.

So when next you have difficulty in parking your car, I hope you will understand that EMBO had to make a new building which we are promised will be completed next Autumn. We hope that in the interim you will bear with us and see the expansion of EMBO as being a good development for molecular biology in Europe.

-- Frank Gannon

science & society

Faced with the conspicuous advancement of electronic publishing, concerns about the future of the peer review system that has for decades provided quality control within the scientific community are being strongly felt in many quarters. But the world within which scientific practice is now embedded in is one of a fast expanding globalization, a state of affairs based on ever-increasing mobility -- mobility of capital, mobility of labor, mobility of goods, mobility of images, mobility of information.

The technological substrate through which globalization flows, inundating the entire planet is based on electronics: computers, the Internet, mobile phones, etc. The unifying theme behind all the different manifestations of this development seems to boil down to a systematic effort to overcome all forms of resistance to immediacy in exchange and communication. How will the practice of assessing, communicating and publishing science, as we have known it, fare in this world of

Peer review: the future of quality control in science

Thursday, February 10, 2000, at 16.00 in the Large Operon

Panelists: **Frank Gannon** (Executive Director, EMBO), **Philip Campbell** (Editor-in-Chief, Nature), **Iain Mattaj** (Editor-in-Chief, EMBO Journal), **Matti Saraste** (Editor-in-Chief, FEBS Letters), **Matthias Wilm**, (Group Leader, EMBL), **Rainer Stumpe** (Publishing Director of Science, Springer Verlag).

Reception to follow in the Operon foyer.

instantaneous information? How will distinctions be made, and how will excellence be rewarded within the future world of the electronic Commons? Can "a filter" such as the peer review system survive in a post-modern world, where everything is meant to flow so fast and so freely? If scientists decide to largely dispense with quality control, will the unchecked exposure and dissemination of ill-founded biological or biomedical research reports more often result in irrational public response?

--Halldór Stefánsson

Administrative announcement:

As of January 1, 2000, EMBL has a new employee physician ("Betriebsarzt"). A panel of doctors at the "Institut für Arbeits- und Sozialmedizin", in Heidelberg, Hospitalstrasse (near Bismarckplatz) will take over for Dr. R. Bühner, whose contract with EMBL ended in December. Physicians at the Institute will work closely with EMBL's Safety Officer and Management to ensure that all medical aspects of health and safety in the workplace are professionally examined and monitored. *Please note that physicians from the Institute will not act as personal doctors for staff.* Services now offered include overlapping works physician coverage throughout the year a choice of male or female physicians, and increased information for staff regarding tests and procedures. Contact the Safety Office or Personnel Section for more information.

Alun was enthusiastic about the subject and led me by the hand through the writing process. After I submitted it he called back and said, "I don't know if I mentioned this to you, but at Science magazine we say that when you submit an article, you've done about 50% of the work." Thus began a very satisfying editing process which taught me a lot. The article was published as the lead story in Science magazine that week, which was exhilarating -- and I was hooked.

I spent the next six years writing for Science. Some of my work was covering political topics related to Eastern Europe and German reunification, and some scientific ones. My main area was



genome science and German science policy, just as big genome projects were taking off and genome research was becoming a real field unto itself -- in a sense it was a continuation of my interests from the data library.

What are you writing about now?

I work for a non-governmental organization called the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), which is trying to catalyse the development of an AIDS vaccine. We raise money from wealthy individuals -- recently we received a very significant donation from Bill Gates -- and foundations, and most recently have acquired our first government sponsors, the UK and the Netherlands. We use this money to fund work on vaccines that are still in the laboratory but that have shown promise in laboratory animals, and we help speed their progress through the many difficult hurdles to clinical studies. Besides giving funds, we bring in a

lot of expertise that most academic researchers don't have -- for example, in manufacturing vaccines for trials and doing clinical studies, especially in developing countries, which is our emphasis.

Most antigens for HIV and the recombinant DNA-based technologies that are almost always used to produce vaccines are patented by someone. This increases costs and means that vaccines might take years and years to get to the poorer countries; this is unacceptable particularly for HIV, which is wiping out generations of people in these countries. IAVI is attempting to address this problem creatively: in exchange for funding to manufacturers and laboratories, we do something absolutely unique in drug or vaccine development: we ask for an agreement that if the vaccine is successful, it be made available in the poorest countries for only a small increase over cost. The goal is to avoid the time lag that it would otherwise take a vaccine to get to the populations that are most affected.

Back to your question about my work. My main involvement is with a publication called the IAVI Report, which covers the science

and policy issues surrounding AIDS vaccine development. It covers a great breadth of issues, from scientific events, meetings, AIDS vaccine research, politics and ethical issues, to guidelines for AIDS vaccine trials, which are particularly important when vaccines developed in industrialized countries are being tried in developing ones. It's the only publication in the world covering this area, and it's caught on beyond our wildest expectations: we now have nearly 10,000 subscribers in about 120 countries.

Is journalism a viable alternative for scientists who may want to leave the bench?

I am often approached by scientists who are actively interested in a different kind of career -- not only budding journalists but people searching for alternatives to a life at the bench. This is often difficult psychological ground, since it can be tied up with notions of being perceived as a failure. But even in my own area, there are tremendous, exciting opportunities outside the lab. Scientific communication has

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expanded far beyond journalism -- from museums, to public health, funding agencies, in education, ecology groups, biodiversity groups, and so on.

Scientists have a rather mixed reputation as communicators in the world of journalism. They are used to communicating in a very specialist language, and to detailing every argument so extensively that their message can be lost. So science communicators have the task of trying to explain things correctly, but balancing the amount of detail to make a clear point that is uncluttered by distractions without oversimplifying and thus distorting a message. It's a difficult balance, and it has become a vital skill because of the increasing necessity of explaining to the population at large why a certain scientific program or step is important to take.

