



What's it *really* like to come to EMBL as a predoc?

A predoc's first few weeks at EMBL can be a culture shock. It often means coping with a new language, finding a new home, meeting so many people that you can't remember any names and, more often than not, leaving friends behind. But it's also the beginning of a brilliant opportunity. Inside, Mateusz Putyrski, a new PhD in Carsten Schultz's lab at EMBL Heidelberg in August, talks about how to settle in smoothly – and once settled in, how to stay connected to the outside world.

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Future plans from the new Head of Personnel

One of Yann Chabod's first tasks as Head of the Personnel department will be to oversee the implementation of its new SAP HR database early next year, replacing the old PAISY system, which will be, as he says, "a big, big change in the way we do everything. The day-to-day job is being done well already. We've got very good people here but we can still improve the quality of our customer service with the right tools. I'm here to help and support them... and to learn about this new field!"



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Official: Nordic EMBL Partnership for Molecular Medicine

University rectors and ministry and council representatives from Scandinavia came to EMBL Heidelberg on October 3 for the official agreement signing of the Nordic EMBL Partnership for Molecular Medicine. The partnership will combine the recognised, complementary strengths of all four partners to collaborate closely in the area of molecular medicine, tackling some of the most challenging problems in biomedicine. As well as facilitating scientific exchange and support, the partnership will implement aspects of EMBL's administrative model.

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Locally-run ELLS events kick off in Monterotondo

More than 60 teachers from all over Italy applied to take part in the first Monterotondo-run ELLS LearningLAB, "Benefici e rischi delle nuove tecnologie applicate al DNA" on October 3-5. This was the first course to be organised since the European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences (ELLS) gained a dedicated coordinator at the outstation, Rossana de Lorenzi, who completed her PhD there last year. Only 23 teachers could be selected for the course, which included hands-on lab activities, presentations of scientific topics and discussions. "I was pleased about how interested the teachers were – they submerged the speakers in questions and comments!" says Rossana. "I hope the material we gave them will support the transfer of these topics to the classrooms, and that the ultimate ELLS mission – to reach the students – will be fulfilled."

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Retreat season again



All the EMBL sites were able to enjoy a bit of peace and quiet for a change when the faculty disappeared off for their annual retreat in September, this year to Tivoli, near Rome. Oh, and the predocs (above) had a retreat, too. [pages 2 & 7](#)

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6 | A whole page of EBI news!

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EICAT explained – who's involved, and what it's all about

Who's involved? You are! The EMBL International Centre for Advanced Training (EICAT) coordinates integrated training activities for scientists at all levels and from all EMBL sites.

Since first starting to be visible last year, EICAT has evolved to include new elements of EMBL's training activities, which are explained in the diagram below.

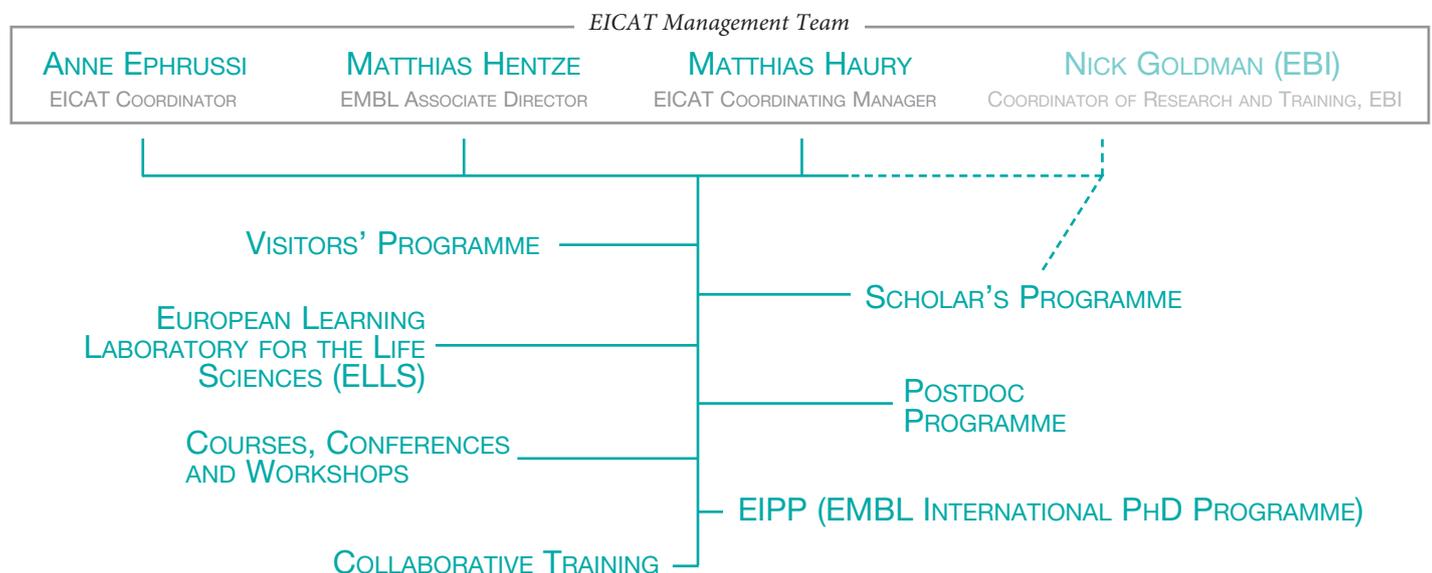
EICAT itself is run by a management team consisting of Anne Ephrussi, Matthias Hentze and Matthias Haury, who is also the EICAT coordinating manager. Nick Goldman is affiliated with the team and coordinates the advanced training activities at the EBI.

Residing under the EICAT "umbrella" are the Postdoc and PhD Programmes, Courses, Conferences and Workshops, the European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences (ELLS) and the Visitors' and Scholars' Programme, as well as the Collaborative Training Programme.

EICAT works closely with other branches of EMBL at all sites, providing training and linking with outreach activities. These include the Office of Information and Public Affairs (OIPA) and the Science and Society Programme, as well as Personnel, the Library, Photolab and IT Services.

In close collaboration with the Non-

Scientific Training and Development Programme, EICAT is organising special training courses for EMBL staff. Recent ones include a Workshop on Searching Patent Databases on October 18, which was jointly organised by EMBLEM; the second Scientific Writing in the Life Sciences course on September 27-28; and the Fellowship Writing Workshop on October 19, as well as several programming courses at the EBI. EICAT aims to video-broadcast most events to the outstations, in order to maximise the benefits for the whole of EMBL. Look out for e-mails about more free course opportunities or visit <http://training.embl.org/registration/>.



Signing of the Nordic EMBL Partnership for Molecular Medicine

Some important university rectors, ministry and council representatives from Scandinavia came to EMBL Heidelberg for German Unification Day (October 3) for the official agreement signing of the Nordic EMBL Partnership for Molecular Medicine.

Pictured left to right are EMBL DG Iain Mattaj and the rectors of the universities of Oslo, Umeå and Helsinki, Geir Ellingsrud, Göran Sandberg and Ilkka Niiniluoto. The three universities will host "nodes" in the partnership, which will combine the recognised, complementary strengths of all four partners to collaborate closely in the area of molecular medicine, tackling some of the most challenging problems in biomedicine.

While EMBL excels in molecular, cellular

and developmental biology, bioinformatics and structural biology, Norway's strength is molecular mechanisms of disease. Sweden's particular expertise is in microbial pathogenicity and molecular infection medicine, and Finland's is in integrated clinical and basic biomedical research, population-wide

genetic epidemiology and well-characterised databases.

As well as facilitating scientific exchange and support, the partnership will implement aspects of EMBL's administrative model, such as international recruitment, staff turnover and external scientific review.



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis



Old faces (no offence, boys) Jan Ellenberg, Rainer Pepperkok, Michael Knop and Ernst Stelzer

Faculty old and new

“Am I at the right meeting? I don’t recognise anybody,” quipped EMBL DG Iain Mattaj at the beginning of this year’s faculty retreat, which took place in the Grand Hotel Duca D’Este in Tivoli, near Rome, on September 19-20. In the last twelve months, ten new group or team leaders have joined across the five EMBL sites. Faculty members old and new mingled in the late summer Italian sunshine to exchange ideas and hear about each others’ research.

Future plans from the new Head of Personnel

Yann Chabod is really making his presence felt at EMBL. Starting in the Budget Office in August 2006, he helped consolidate its way of working with new tools and processes, and now as the new Head of Personnel since September 1 he’s aiming to do the same in that department.

The French national, who grew up in Guadeloupe, La Réunion and Tahiti, to name a few, has more experience of civil service management and running a company than in the field of Human Resources, though. So what attracted him to the job?

“I felt they needed a manager for their own new implementations,” he explains. “What is important is someone who understands what sort of service we want to offer, how to bring people together and support them, and which tools are needed. Together as a team we achieved something that works in the Budget Office, and I think we can do the same here.”

The new organisation of the Budget Office included the development of the new Access database, and the implementation of just such new tools have led, Yann feels, to a smoother and more transparent workflow, not only for those working there but also for the group leaders and other senior staff who need to see and use the budget data (www.embl.org/staffonly/financematters/sap/index.html).

Similarly, one of his first tasks in the personnel department will be to oversee the implementation of its new SAP HR database early next year, replacing the old PAISY system, which will be, as he says, “a big, big change in the way we do everything.”

“New tools are essential to improve our processes,” he says. “The old system was good for calculating payroll but had no options for providing complementing statistics, or information about time management, travel reimbursements and so on. The new database will link everything into a central system.”

Personnel issues at the outstations are also

coordinated centrally from Heidelberg. “Each outstation has different priorities and we need to support them, but it’s important that we make sure that we provide the same level of service and the same rules,” he says. “Common tools help with this, but we also need to make sure the outstations feel involved.”

The changes will necessitate a new way of working – and ultimately a “rebranding” – for the personnel section. “The administrative services we offer already are actually a small part of the whole of Human Resources. We plan to provide a much more interactive and

Grenoble, he studied for a Masters in Diplomacy and Administration of International Organisations, as well as a second Masters in Economics, in Aix-en-Provence and Paris. After working in training and finance in the French Embassies in Berlin and London and founding an IT company, he was determined to put his original training into practise.

“I had had lots of useful experience working with international people and in running a private business, but none working in my specialist field, International Organisations,” he says.



Photos: Christine Panagiotidis

supportive service,” Yann explains. “We’ll offer career advice, help with moving on from EMBL, training for group leaders about how to manage their teams, advice about coming into a new culture, courses in collaboration with the Non-Scientific Training and Development Programme, and much more.

“We want to support staff in their career development. We want them to continue their professional development while they are at EMBL and to stay proactive in the job market, too.”

Yann’s background means that he’s not only a good manager, but he’s in a great position to know what makes EMBL tick. Born in

“It’s interesting to see first-hand how different the ways of working are.”

Even before the changes and improvements, though, Yann is proud of EMBL’s model. “It’s one of our strengths,” he says. “EMBL offers everyone the freedom and structure and support to do research in Europe and not to go to the US. It’s an asset, and we have to keep it that way.

“People forget that EMBL has competitors and that our employment package needs to be kept up-to-date. New strategies are needed to keep attracting the best people – not just with money but with the offer of continued support and career development.”

Huge response for first self-run ELLS event in Monte

More than 60 teachers from all over Italy applied to take part in the LearningLAB “Benefici e rischi delle nuove tecnologie applicate al DNA”, the first course organised since the European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences (ELLS) gained a dedicated staff member at EMBL Monterotondo.

It was decided to do this first course in Italian because the language is one reason a local organiser is necessary in Monterotondo. This won't always be the case, however, because one aim of ELLS is also to give EMBL scientists a chance to practice their teaching and communication skills.

Only 23 teachers could be selected for the course on October 3-5, which started with a presentation by former EMBL PhD student Massimiliano Mazza, who gave an overview of molecular biology techniques. Associated hands-on activities showed how to isolate, modify and express genes. The first day ended with a bioinformatic activity conceived by



Teachers Cristina Vinattieri and Faustina Tondolo get some hands-on experience in the lab

The last day was dedicated to genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Maddalena Querci, Scientific Coordinator in the Biotechnology and GMOs unit of the EC's Institute for Health and Consumer Protection, presented the topic, and then the teachers went to the lab to screen different foods.

The course has been a wonderful debut for ELLS activity in Monterotondo, with huge enthusiasm from both the teachers and the speakers. While the talks were very high quality, they were also accessible to a non-specialist audience, who bombarded the speakers with interested questions and comments.

I have many people to thank for making it all possible: first of all, Head of Outstation Nadia Rosenthal, who strongly believes in the importance of science education; the OIPA and ELLS groups in Heidelberg for their support; and the CNR on campus, for making their teaching lab available for the ELLS courses and for taking part.

For this course in particular I would like to thank ELLS' Alexandra Manaia and Christine Panagiotidis from the Photolab in Heidelberg; and at Monterotondo, Pascale Beudin, Flavio Zizzo, Alexandra Moreira, Mark Carter, Richard Butler, Marco D'Ercole for administrative and IT support; the group leaders for lending lab equipment; Emerald Perlas for preparing one of the practical activities; and Arianna Nenci, Luisa Lo Iacono, Daniela Marazziti and Patrizia Calandra for participating. I hope this is the first in a long series of successful events!

– Rossana De Lorenzi

Honours for MMPU



Photo: Stefan Kreshin

Above: EMBL Associate Director Matthias Hentze and his University of Heidelberg colleague Andreas Kulozik receiving the Lautenschläger Research Prize in the lavish surroundings of the Old University's Great Hall on September 28. The award, Germany's most generous to be bestowed by a private source, is presented every two years to support the realisation of internationally cooperative research projects. Matthias and Prof. Kulozik received it in recognition of their Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit (MMPU). During the ceremony, the project was presented to the public in an ongoing bid to communicate academic research to the press and community.

high school teacher Cristina Gritti with help from EMBL Monterotondo.

Representatives from science communication associations opened the second day to inform the teachers about different initiatives in Italy, while the second scientific seminar was given by former Monterotondo postdoc Ralph Gareus. He explained the basic principles of mouse genetics and the techniques used to introduce mutations to study gene function. The day ended with the virtual microarray activity, an educational game developed by former EMBL PhD Anastasios Koutsos.



Photo: Nina Schlegelmann

Adieu... to you and you and you

There were tears amid the laughter at EMBL Heidelberg's last big party on August 31, as the occasion was to say goodbye to the Sattler and Conti groups, both of which were destined for Munich. Michael Sattler and Elena Conti got

into the spirit of the evening by donning Bavarian dress (inset), while they and their group members were joined by EMBL friends past and present to party till dawn.



Photo: Jean-Baptiste Coufflis

A catalogue of curiosities at Europe's largest science festival



Pictured left is the Bio-Bubble, the world's largest inflatable human cell, designed to allow school children to "shrink" to the size of microscopic bacteria, walk inside and examine giant-sized organelles. It was just one of the weird and wonderful exhibits at this year's BA Festival of Science in York, UK on September 9-15.

Other events at the festival, which was organised by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and included seminars, exhibitions and interactive presentations, included sessions by EMBL's Eleanor Hayes and Julia Willingale-Theune. Eleanor chaired a workshop about *Science in School*, asking teachers about the topics they wanted to see covered in the journal, and EMBL alumnus Anastasios Koutsos and Julia ran the

ELLS virtual DNA microarray game, developed by Anastasios and involving a huge mat simulating a microarray.

"A highlight of the festival for me was the presentation by Professor Peter Hammond of the UCL Institute of Child Health," says Anastasios. "His team has developed a method to diagnose genetic diseases producing facial abnormalities. Software scans the face of a patient, creates a 3D image and compares it to a bank of images of people with known genetic disorders. It's 90% accurate and may reduce the number of genetic tests needed to diagnose genetic abnormalities."

Next September's festival will be hosted in Liverpool. Visit www.the-ba.net if you'd like to know more.

What's it *really* like to come to EMBL as a predoc?

New country, new job, new friends, new food, and a million things to organise – life as a brand new predoc at EMBL can be daunting, to say the least. One recent arrival, Mateusz Putyrski from Poland, tells Yvonne Kaul how he survived his first hundred days

A predoc's first few weeks at EMBL can be a culture shock. It often means coping with a new language, finding a new home, meeting so many people that you can't remember any names and, more often than not, leaving friends behind. But it's also the beginning of a brilliant opportunity and can be a chance to start again with a clean slate. Mateusz Putyrski, a new PhD in Carsten Schultz's lab at EMBL Heidelberg since August, talks about how to settle in smoothly.

Mateusz, what was your initial impression when you visited EMBL for the first time?

My first visit to EMBL was on a nice relaxed occasion – the Burns' Night party at the end of January. I knew that the institute was located in the outskirts rather than in the centre of town, but actually getting there in the dark across the shaky wooden walkway on the MPI campus was quite an adventure. Fortunately, the big EMBL logo guided my way to the main entrance.

How was your first experience working in the lab?

I am currently taking care of an introductory project that will help to investigate cellular signalling processes, and I'm absolutely fascinated by the autonomous working style here. In the end, it's up to you what instruments or techniques you use, as long as you bring the project forward.

On the other hand, such independence can be overwhelming. Sometimes I'm afraid I could squander the chances I'm offered here.

It's been more than three months since you came to EMBL for good. Would you now manage to complete the sign-in sheet in less than an hour?

Of course I feel a bit more familiar with the institute and the people here, although I still have some problems assigning people I see in

the corridor or in the canteen to their specific groups, even within Gene Expression where I belong, let alone the other units.

Nevertheless I'm sure that I met all my compatriots from Poland by now. Luckily, our PhD course helps a lot to get an overview about what's going on in neighbouring labs and to integrate with other predocs.

What struck you the most at the beginning?

Definitely the fantastic atmosphere here, both in everyday working life but also on social occasions, when predocs, postdocs and group leaders go out and celebrate together. Also, having access to so many seminars and lectures by all the scientific pundits visiting EMBL really broadens your horizons.

But I remember being at least as surprised by the lack of space when I first saw people working in the labs. They're almost touching elbows at the tables, and hoping that all the boxes and bottles lying on the shelves don't fall on their heads!

What advice would you give to new predocs – those arriving now and those who may apply in the future?

I'd advise applicants to approach the selection process and the interviews in a more relaxed way than I did. In the end it was a great adventure, and I think one should simply enjoy being invited here.

I'd definitely recommend that new predocs buy a car. Otherwise it might be difficult to maintain a connection to the outside world!



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

The sun rises on EMBL-EBI's new East Wing

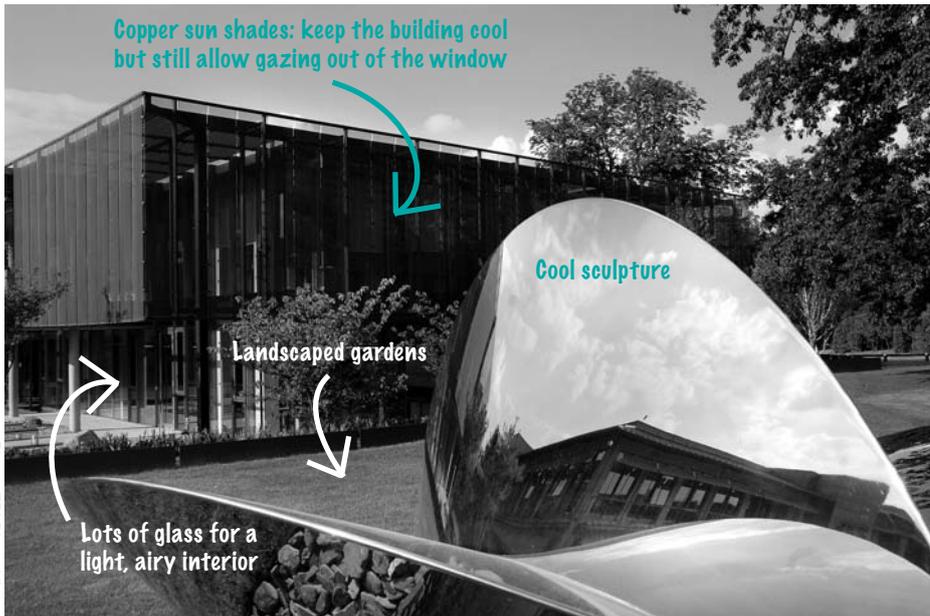


Photo: EBI Photo Library

EMBL-EBI will officially open its new East Wing on October 23. Prominent guests including local MPs, science correspondents from the national press and representatives of the main European and UK research funding bodies will attend the reception.

The new wing will enable the EBI to further enhance its activities in each of its four component areas of research, bioinformatics services, training provision and industry interaction. The extension received €22 million in funding from the Wellcome Trust, the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and EMBL.

“The East Wing represents a new era for the EBI and we look forward to embracing the interactions and opportunities enabled by our new facilities,” says EBI director Janet Thornton.

The opening event will be followed by an EMBL alumni symposium on October 24, offering the opportunity for old friends to visit the new facilities. *– Louisa Wright*

Bringing the mountain to Mohammed

A scientist's life is a busy one, and not everyone can find the time and funds to travel to courses to get the know-how they need. Now the EBI is addressing this problem with the launch of its new e-learning portal.

The portal currently offers four courses based upon the following service areas:

- sequence searching;
- literature searching and mining;
- patent information searching;
- EBI and “EB-eye”, a general introduction about the EBI and its website.

It's planned that the range of courses will be expanded to include each of the EBI's core data resources.

Each course introduction describes the con-

tent, which has been defined by EBI staff, and presents the learning objectives. The interactive and user-friendly platforms were developed by a specialist external consultancy. Designed to be completed within about three hours, they are split into modules each lasting approximately 30 minutes, so users can go at their own speed.

The courses combine a range of learning methods:

- video-based demonstrations of the content, including screenviews;
- printable tutorial material to support the video tutorials;
- self-assessment quizzes that allow students to test their knowledge;
- reflective tasks so students can practice what they've learned.

Additional supporting features for each course include a portal search, glossary and external links to further information.

The courses will be accessible online at www.ebi.ac.uk/training/elearning for beta-testing at the end of October.

– Louisa Wright



Photo: EBI Photo Library

A meeting of minds

A Joint EBI/Cambridge University Research Symposium took place on September 21 in Hinxton Conference Centre, on the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus. Designed to foster research links between the EBI and the university, the day featured speakers from both institutes in three sessions devoted to Chemical and Structural Biology, Systems Biology, and Genomes, SNPs and Disease. The event opened with a welcome by EBI Director Janet Thornton. The organiser from the EBI side was Nick Goldman, with Gos Micklem coordinating the university side, and around 200 people attended.

“The challenge is to move from genes and proteins to systems and then to diseases,” commented Prof. Tom Blundell, one of the Cambridge University chairs of the first session. “This symposium shows how we are starting to do that.” Other visitors expressed an interest in seeing such events extended to their own institutes.

EBI welcomes HGNC into the fold

The EBI has a new tenant in the shape of the HUGO Gene Nomenclature Committee (HGNC), the body which approves a gene name and symbol for each known human gene. It has moved

after being based at University College London for 11 years. Elspeth Bruford will lead the HGNC as co-principal investigator with Ewan Birney. Their new website address is www.genenames.org.

Barcelona és bona!

That Barcelona is nice, as this Catalan saying states, is not the only thing 50 EMBL predocs learned on their retreat to Casteldefels, close to Catalonia's capital. September 7-9 were filled with sightseeing, socialising and, above all, science. Presentations covered research topics including cytoskeletal architecture, fly genetics and metagenomics, related topics like open access publishing, and even politics, including lively debates about Catalonia's wish to be considered an autonomous country. As always, the purpose of the retreat was for the students to exchange ideas, collect feedback on their work, identify overlapping interests and ways to collaborate – and to create community spirit by enjoying Barcelona's nightlife together.



EMBO winner revolutionised understanding of bacterial cytoskeleton

Research that began almost eleven years ago has led to the award of the 2007 EMBO Gold Medal for Jan Löwe of the Medical Research Council's Laboratory of Molecular Biology (MRC-LMB) in Cambridge, UK.

Awarded annually, the EMBO Gold Medal recognises the outstanding contributions of young researchers in the molecular life sciences. Jan was selected for the award for his landmark work elucidating the structure and function of proteins involved in bacterial cell division. As well as highlighting the complexity and sophistication of bacterial cells, his work shows how they make wonderful subjects for studying fundamental biological mechanisms at the molecular level.

Jan's adventure into the inner workings of bacteria began when he joined the MRC-LMB as a postdoc. His work with Linda Amos trying to crystallise tubulin led to studies of a bacterial version of it, FtsZ, the structure of which

Jan solved in 1998. Three years later, his group determined the structure of MreB, a prokaryotic actin-like protein which had been discovered by Jeff Errington. These structural discoveries proved to be key pieces of evidence for the discovery of the bacterial cytoskeleton.

Until that point, having a cytoskeleton was a claim to fame held only by eukaryotic cells. The inner workings of bacterial (prokaryotic)

cells were now showcased against the backdrop of a flexible scaffolding. As a result, essential processes of the bacterial cell, such as cell shape maintenance, DNA segregation and cell division were viewed in a different light.

In addition to the EMBO Gold Medal, Jan has received several other awards and accolades, including the Max-Perutz Prize for his work on the structure of FtsZ and the Philip Leverhulme prize. Jan has also been no stranger to EMBO over the years. His postdoc was funded by an EMBO Long-term fellowship, he was selected in 2000 to participate in EMBO's highly competitive Young Investigator Programme and, in 2004, he was elected as an EMBO Member.

"EMBO has been a tremendous support to me during my career and I'm delighted to have won such a prestigious award," said Jan. "It's not always easy to convince people that studying the inner workings of bacteria is worthwhile, and the EMBO medal will help a great deal. It's fantastic!" – Anne Seller & Suzanne Beveridge



2007 EMBO Gold Medal winner Jan Löwe

Personal details

PNO 00 [redacted] RegularC [redacted]
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Travel: Duty Travel/Only Receipts

Purpose of travel: Meeting "Cloning without Restriction" at MPI, Munich

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| 9/9/2007 | | Ticket DB | N | | | | | | |
| 9/9/2007 | | Subsistence | N | | | | | | |

REMITTANCE

Ever wondered what your group leader REALLY gets up to at all those conferences and meetings he goes to? Well, now you know...

Suzanne Beveridge is the new Chief Communications Officer at EMBO. Suzanne was a lab scientist in her home country, Australia, for 10 years before finding she was more interested in the communication side of science. Choosing this direction allowed her to work in the biotechnology industry, not only in Australia, but also in the US, Latin America and Italy. "The position at EMBO is perfect for me. Here, I get to promote the best of science generated by the EMBO community," she says. As she settles into her new role, which involves editing the newsletter EMBOencounters, Suzanne will concentrate on enhancing the EMBO reputation for excellence and working with EMBL to promote shared programmes between the organisations.



News from the Alumni Association

Past meets present: EMBL staff and alumni in Dresden

Thanks to the efforts of ELSO Secretary General and EMBL Alumni Association Board member Konrad Müller, EMBL staff and alumni enjoyed a get-together at the ELSO meeting in Dresden on September 2, following on from the first such event in 2005. The occasion was very well-attended, attracting alumni from all ranks, including former EMBL DG Lennart Philipson.

Talks included Daniel Louvard's outline of Alumni Association services, Matthias Hentze's latest EMBL news and Kai Simons' portrayal of EMBL alumni culture in Dresden. For most attendees, the three talks were followed by an impromptu dinner date and a chance to catch up informally. EMBL and the Alumni Association would like to thank ELSO for organising and sponsoring

this event, the excellent venue and generous refreshments.

A list of the registered participants can be found on www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/chapters/germany_meeting_sept2007_participants.html. The next ELSO meeting will take place in Nice, France from August 30 to September 2, 2008.

– Mehrnoosh Rayner



CIC bioGUNE hosts third Iberian meeting

On September 7 the EMBL alumni from the Iberic Chapter celebrated their third meeting at the CIC bioGUNE in Bilbao. The day started with a welcome by CIC bioGUNE director José M. Mato, followed by presentations by Angel Nebreda and José Luis de la Pompa. After a visit to the laboratories of the new centre and lunch, the talks continued with Puri Fortes, Peter Askjaer and Rosa Barrio. The seminars were all excellent, on varied and interesting topics, and made for an exciting scientific programme.

Before heading into Bilbao, there was a very productive discussion about alumni issues. Ideas which arose included inviting experienced speakers to present information on funding opportunities in Spain and Europe; using the alumni association web pages to access local blogs; and communicating more information on how alumni can

use the EMBL Core Facilities and EMBLEM services. The day was completed with a wonderful guided visit to the Guggenheim museum and a pleasant walk by the river to the restaurant for drinks and dinner. We all agreed that the meeting was worth it and we should do it again next year in Barcelona. See you all there!

– María del Mar Vivanco

CIC bioGUNE (www.cicbiogune.es) was officially inaugurated on January 2005. The groups there work on molecular, cellular and structural biology, and include five EMBL alumni: Rosa Barrio, Jim Sutherland, Rune Matthiesen, Robert Kypka and María del Mar Vivanco. The Alumni Association would like to thank José M. Mato for all refreshments and the guided visit to the Guggenheim.

– Mehrnoosh Rayner

Please mark your diaries with the following alumni events and opportunities:

- To celebrate the opening of the new East Wing, the EBI invites all EMBL alumni to an **Alumni Day** on 24 October. See www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/news/oct07-2.html for more details.
- Thanks to all **John Kendrew Young Scientist Award** applicants. A vote on the winner will be made at the Alumni Board meeting on October 23, and made available in the next newsletter and on the alumni website.
- **EMBL Alumni Database:** EMBL staff at all sites can access the Alumni members directory at www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/members_directory.html, which includes all alumni who were at EMBL for more than three months and who have registered with the Association. The directory allows you to reduce the list of 1,243 alumni to those residing in a specific country. You can also e-mail alumni in the directory, and refer to their homepage, biography or research interests. Happy browsing!

We want to hear from you! Tell us about your personal or scientific achievements, an interesting event in which you are involved or give us feedback on alumni matters at alumni@embl.de.

Alumni facts...

51% of Spanish alumni and 4.8% of all EMBL alumni are in Spain



Recognise anybody? Participants of the 3rd Iberian Local Chapter meeting

Making waves in Manchester – EMBL Hamburg busy at the BSR meeting

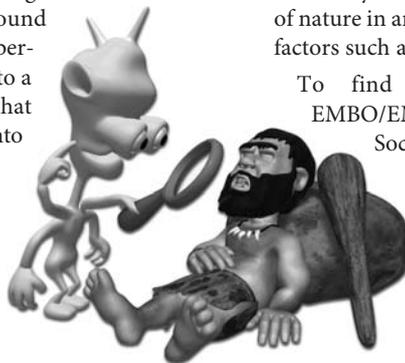


Exhibiting at the 9th International Conference on Biology and Synchrotron Radiation on August 13-17 in Manchester, EMBL had the biggest, busiest stand ever (above left), with extra sections devoted to the EU projects Saxier and BIOXHIT as well as the general display. The EMBL goodies and information materials were as popular as ever, as potential students and staff members came along to ask about the work being done at EMBL. Existing members of the structural biology community from all over the world also dropped by to say hello and update themselves on, among other things, the PETRA-III project at EMBL Hamburg. Despite the crowds, though, team leader Jochen Müller-Dieckmann still found a spare moment to plan his autumn wardrobe (above right).

What might the future hold?

The Earth will theoretically be habitable for another 5 billion years – based on the predicted life-span of the sun – so there is much more time in front of *Homo sapiens* than behind. If we survive 100,000 years as long again, what will we look like? Humans started evolving from early hominids around 4-5 million years ago, and we might have up to 1,000 times as much evolutionary time still at our disposal – plus some interesting genetic tools.

In “The Time Machine”, H.G. Wells described a human race that had diverged into two sub-species, one dependent on the other for menial but vital tasks and both reduced to a level of intelligence verging on idiocy. The theme of divergent evolution never fails to capture our credulity, even though it remains science fiction: just a year ago, newspaper headlines around the world were reverberating with references to a “study” predicting that humans would split into a genetically well-endowed upper class and a dim-witted underclass in around 100,000 years time. In fact, a “think piece” on



human evolution produced for television by Oliver Curry, a research associate at the London School of Economics, had been picked up by the media and reported as fact.

Given the timescale involved, the question as to why we care about our future evolution is interesting in its own right. But care we do, even if phenomena that we are currently experiencing (or hearing about) arguably hold sway over our future in the short term. Our fast-changing environment is a major factor influencing our future, and considerations of sustainability for human survival may not be identical to those needed to sustain every species on the planet. The changing face of humanity depends very much on our social and economic evolution and strategies for sustainability. These in turn mesh with the gears of nature in an intricate interplay of exogenous factors such as climate change and disease.

To find out more, come to the EMBO/EMBL Conference on Science and Society: “The Future of our Species – evolution, disease and sustainable development” at EMBL Heidelberg on November 2-3.

– Andrew Moore

www.embo.org/scisoc/conference07.html

from the Staff Association

- **Upcoming Staff Association** events: Please make a note in your diaries of the 80s Party (November 30) and Burns’ Night (February 16). Both are to be held at EMBL Heidelberg and everyone in the EMBL community is

welcome. Posters and tickets will be available closer to the time.

- **Keep up-to-date** with Staff Association events at www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/.

– Catherine Floyd

newsinbrief

□ **Free courses in the EMBL** Non-Scientific Training and Development Programme for the next few months include Intermediate Excel, Oct 29-30 (in German); Advanced Outlook, Nov 19 (English); Advanced PowerPoint, Nov 19 (German); How to have a career after EMBL, Nov 22: Presentation Skills, Nov 23; Effective Team Leader, Dec 4-5. Visit the website at www.embl.org/staffonly/personnel/training_dev/index.html or e-mail td@embl.de for more details.

□ **Have you ever wondered** what sets your biological clock or how birds know where to fly to during the winter? Biological patterns play a central role in animal behaviour, from the molecular to the macroscopic scale. Though some are well-known, there are others that we are only beginning to understand. Find out more at the 9th International EMBL PhD Student Symposium, “Patterns in Biology: Organisation of Life in Space and Time” on October 25-27 at EMBL Heidelberg.

□ **For the first time, EMBL** and the EBI presented their activities with a stand at this year’s International Conference on Systems Biology (ICSB) on October 1-6. This is the premiere annual meeting for the field, which links all levels of biological organisations to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how different components of a system form higher-order entities. More than 450 attendees gathered in Long Beach, California to hear about new research results, engage in scientific discussions and attend the poster session. Visitors to the EMBL/EBI stand were interested in job opportunities in groups focussing on systems biology and information about the EBI’s database services and user training.

□ **The Gross group** at EMBL Monterotondo, in collaboration with Dr. Nicolas Rose at the BIOS Centre of the London School of Economics (LSE), have been awarded a €600,000 grant by the European Science Foundation (ESF) to run a five-year project of conferences and networking opportunities, the European Neuroscience and Society Network (ENSN). The aim is to promote exchange between neuroscientists and social scientists. “This was the only ESF network grant funded this year from among a large number of applications, and we are thrilled that ESF gave it such a high priority,” says group leader Cornelius Gross. He and postdoc Giovanni Frazzetto, who works jointly in the Gross lab and at BIOS and who was instrumental in formulating the application, will be celebrating the establishment of the ENSN at a kick-off meeting on November 12-13 at LSE.



New Cell Biology group leader **Lars Hufnagel** studied physics at the University of Marburg and maths at the University of Hagen. After finishing his diploma thesis at the Fritz-Haber Institute in Berlin, he did his PhD at the MPI for Dynamics and Self-Organization in Göttingen. Before EMBL he spent three years in Santa Barbara, where he worked on the regulation of growth during development and the spatial spread of epidemics. His lab, which is jointly appointed to the Developmental Biology unit, seeks to characterise and quantify the spatiotemporal effects of mechanical interactions on cell growth.

Li-Jung Hofer-Wu is already a familiar face at EMBL Heidelberg, having arrived first in 2001 and then returning in 2004 after a spell in Munich, but on September 1 she took up the position in charge of the Budget Office from Yann Chabod (see page 3). She'd like to remind budget holders to use the ticketing system for queries to the budget office (http://grants.embl.org/kayako/index.php?_m=tickets&_a=submit&step=1&departmentid=1), and to take advantage of Web Budget View (www.embl.org/staffonly/financematters/sap/index.html), which allows you to keep track of outgoings in an at-a-glance format.



Anna Maria Subosco has joined EMBL's Heidelberg's switchboard, which is now known by the stylish new moniker "Reception" and has been taken over by Italians. Like her colleague Raffaele Totaro, Anna Maria is originally from Naples. She moved to Mannheim at the age of five and has lived there ever since, and after working in administration for private companies she was very pleased to get the chance to work at EMBL. As she says, "It's very important to have the chance meet people from other countries and cultures on a such a daily basis. You can learn a lot from them!"

Another new face at EMBL Heidelberg's Reception is **Christiane Aubert**, who will cover for Raffaele or Anna Maria when the need arises.

Formerly a Staff Scientist in the Ravelli group, **Andrew McCarthy** became a Team Leader at EMBL Grenoble on October 1.

awards&honours

EMBL-EBI Director **Janet Thornton** (bottom right) is the recipient of three honorary degrees from the UK universities of St. Andrews, Leeds and University College London, awarded in June, July and September respectively. While recognising Janet's pioneering research achievements and contributions to science, the events also gave her the chance to mingle with celebrities from other fields, including Leeds' University Chancellor Lord Melvyn Bragg, a well-known writer and broadcaster (sitting to the left of Janet).



Bridging postdoc **Johanna Höög** from the Antony group at EMBL Heidelberg has been awarded the Förderpreis by the Deutschen Gesellschaft für Elektronenmikroskopie (DGE). The prize is awarded every two years for an outstanding dissertation or thesis on the subject of electron microscopy, and is funded by the foundation of Ernst Ruska, Nobel Prize winner, inventor of the electron microscope and first president of the DGE. Johanna was awarded her prize at a ceremony in Saarbrücken on September 5.

25 Oct EMBL Heidelberg

Event: Yeast Transcription Factors. Annabel Todd, EBI. Hosted by the Centre for High-Throughput Functional Genomics

25-27 Oct EMBL Heidelberg

Conference: 9th International PhD Student Symposium. Patterns in Biology: Organisation of Life in Space and Time

26 Oct EMBL Heidelberg

Presentation: Inferring regulatory interactions from time-series expression data. Bartek Wilczynski, Polish Academy of Sciences

31 Oct EMBL Heidelberg

Science and Society: Why evolution is right and creationism is wrong. Steve Jones, University College London

2-3 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

8th EMBL/EMBO Joint Conference 2007 on Science and Society: The Future of our Species – Evolution, Disease and Sustainable Development

5 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Principles of Systems Biology. Denis Noble, University of Oxford

8 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

Event: Combinatorial regulation of gene transcription in *Drosophila* mesoderm. Robert Zinzen, Furlong Lab. Host: Centre for High-Throughput Functional Genomics

12 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

Presentation: Fluorescence studies of HIV nucleocapsid protein: binding and chaperoning nucleic acids. Sergiy Avilon, Université Louis Pasteur, CNRS

24-26 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

Conference: Functional Genomics with Embryonic Stem Cells

21-28 Nov EMBL Hamburg

Course: Training in methods for Macromolecular Crystallography: M2M-7: From Measurement to Model

22 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

Event: RNAi screens data analysis & cellHTS software. Ligia Bras, EBI. Host: Centre for High-Throughput Functional Genomics

29-30 Nov EMBL Grenoble

**Heads of Units Meeting
Senior Scientists Meeting**

30 Nov EMBL Heidelberg

80s Party

For more details about these events and more, visit www.embl.org/events