



## Stamp of approval for future at winter Council meeting

The approval of the budget and the scientific programme for the coming few years was the big news from the EMBL Council meeting, which took place in Grenoble on 21-22 November. After more than a year on the drawing board, the EMBL Programme and the Indicative Scheme 2007-2011 received the go-ahead from delegates. Additionally, there were some organisational changes at EMBL and the announcement of a further new member state, as well as the annual elections for the Council chairs. It was also the final meeting for Head of Council's Meetings Secretariat Frieda Glöckner. [pages 2 and 3](#)

## Predocs return from Prague with their minds on disease

The predocs have been busy lately. After the success of last year's first ever PhD retreat, the second was held in October in Prague, the perfect backdrop to a weekend of discussion for predocs from all EMBL sites. The following month, the 8th International EMBL PhD Student Symposium, 'Biology of Disease: A Molecular Battlefield', attracted over 120 attendees from twenty countries. Eighteen prominent scientists shared their insights on topics ranging from food related diseases to mental disorders in a resoundingly successful event that was a credit to its organising committee (right). [pages 4 and 5](#)



## Check out 'EB-eye', a foolproof new search engine

EMBL-EBI have revamped their website and, as well as an attractive new design, it boasts an exhaustive search engine which allows instant searches of all the EBI's databases from a single query. Navigating links between databases is a lot easier; genomes, genes, proteins, structures and biological functions can all be explored through a single simple interface. It's the result of a recent survey to find out what people really wanted from the EBI website. "The new site aims to provide exactly what the users asked for," says Rodrigo Lopez, Head of External Services at the EBI. [page 7](#)

## Genes spring to mind at brain conference

Research is revealing how genes are differentially expressed in the brain and how behaviour reflects the functioning of different neural networks, and scientists are exploring the relationship between neurophysiology and consciousness. Neuroscience can have beneficial applications, but treating the mind also has important social, legal and bioethical implications. At the seventh Joint EMBL/EMBO Science and Society Conference on 3-4 November, 'Genes, brain/mind and behaviour', more than 300 scientists, students and interested laypeople came from all over the world to discuss this fast-growing area of discovery. Talks covered the genetic basis of depression and the social and ethical implications of these research areas within the life sciences. A lively panel discussion and lots of audience participation and questions were a clear indication that the theme of this year's conference was an excellent choice. [page 7](#)

## Na zdrowie!



There was much to say "cheers" about at EMBL Heidelberg's first-ever Russian Party on 8 December. A slap-up meal of caviar, *bliny* and *borscht* was followed by an energetic Russian dancing lesson and music from EMBL musicians and special guests.

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Grenoble hosted an exciting EMBL Council meeting on 21-22 November, with both the EMBL Programme and the Indicative Scheme for 2007 to 2011 finally being approved.

The new Indicative Scheme (which is really just a fancy name for the budget) will, over the five years of its duration, represent a significant and very gratefully-received increase in member state funding. The majority of this increase is needed for the essential growth of the important data resources at EMBL-EBI. The cost of the ongoing refurbishment of the Heidelberg laboratory is also part of the Indicative Scheme for 2007-2011.

The proposed budget for the coming year, as well as the staff establishment – there's a maximum number of staff who can be in position during any given year – were also approved.

There were several big changes this time in the make-up of Council and its associated committees. Chair Eero Vuorio stepped down after his four year tenure; in addition, vice-chairs Reinhard Lührmann and Glauco Tocchini-Valentini are also retiring from their posts. In their stead, Charalambos (Babis) Savakis (GR) was elected as the new Council chair, while Anne-Marie Frischauf (AT) and Juan Modolell (ES) are taking on the roles of vice-chair.

In the Finance Committee, which assists Council with the financial management and control of EMBL and meets at the same time,

- Significant increase in member state funding
- Christoph Müller new Joint Coordinator of SCB
- Babis Savakis new Chair of EMBL Council
- Luxembourg to join as 20th member state

Chair Isabella Beretta was re-elected for her third and final term. Nigel Watts (UK) was elected as new vice-chair to replace Elisabeth Tischelmayer, who stepped down.

Alan Bradley (UK), Sören Brunak (DK), Dino Moras (FR), Venki Ramakrishnan (UK) and Ginés Morata (ES) will retire from Council's Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) at the end of this year. Though suggestions for five replacement members have been made – coming from the fields of structural biology, bioinformatics and developmental and cell biology – they have to confirm their willingness to serve on the SAC before their names can be announced.

As far as organisational changes within the EMBL community are concerned, Council approved the appointment of current EMBL Grenoble deputy head Christoph Müller as the new Joint Coordinator of the Heidelberg Structural and Computational Biology Unit alongside existing Joint Coordinator Peer Bork. Christoph will replace Luis Serrano, who is leaving to head a unit at the Centre for Genomic Regulation in Barcelona (see page 4),

and will relocate to Heidelberg in summer 2007.

Following the ratification of Croatia as 19th member state only a few months ago, Luxembourg's application to become EMBL's twentieth was welcomed by Council. An official decision still needs to be taken by the Luxembourg parliament and then ratified.

As a result of the approval of the Indicative Scheme, DG Iain Mattaj is planning to visit all EMBL sites at the beginning of 2007 to discuss the plans for the upcoming period and the scientific and financial implications with EMBL faculty and staff.

During their stay in Grenoble, the Council delegates had a chance to have a look around the Outstation and were very enthusiastic about the quality of the research and services going on there, and by the demonstrations provided by local staff. EMBL Hamburg staff will have a chance to impress delegates with their own facilities when the next Council meeting is held there on 2-5 July 2007.

# Budget approved until 2011 by Council



Photo: Marietta Schupp

With the departure of Frieda (see opposite), **Johan Vandevoorde** will be the new head of the Council's Meetings Secretariat. A Flemish-speaking Belgian, Johan studied law at the Catholic University of Leuven and management in HEC Paris, and has worked in Spain, the Netherlands, Munich and most recently for the UN in Brussels. "I have some big shoes to fill, but I'm looking forward to working with such an international community," he says. Contact him on [vandevoorde@embl.de](mailto:vandevoorde@embl.de).



## EMBL signs up to EC researchers' Charter and Code

EMBL and the other EIROforum members have signed a statement supporting two initiatives issued this year by the European Commission: the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

The Charter and Code contain recommendations to researchers, countries, funders and employers to make the most of scientific potential and develop an attractive and sustainable labour market for researchers.

- The **European Charter for Researchers** is a

set of requirements to ensure that the nature of the relationship between researchers, employers and funders leads to the most successful working performances, dissemination of knowledge and technology, and researchers' career development. It covers EU researchers at all stages of their careers and all fields, recognising mobility as a valuable means of enhancing professional development. It also takes into account the multiple roles of researchers, who can also find themselves involved in supervisory, management or administrative tasks.

- The **Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers** is a set of general principles recommended to be followed by employers and funders when recruiting researchers, observing transparency and equal treatment of applicants. For more details about both, visit <http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers>.

In a statement signed at the EIROforum assembly on 15 November, the seven organisations agreed to support the general principles contained in the Charter and the Code.

[www.eiroforum.org](http://www.eiroforum.org)



Frieda in 1973, aged 32

## The end of an era: farewell to Frieda

Employee number 002, Frieda Glöckner, typed the proposal for EMBL and then watched it being built



Photo: Marietta Schupp

As Head of Council's Meetings Secretariat, Frieda Glöckner fulfills a critical role in the lab – she prepares the papers for all Council meetings and records the minutes of these important decision-making events. But in her almost 37 years at EMBL she's been involved in so many other aspects of the lab's life. Upon her retirement at the end of 2006, she took away with her a wealth of knowledge and memories.

Born in the Netherlands at the beginning of World War II, Frieda had trained as a social worker before becoming secretary to Professor J. A. Cohen's Medical Biological Laboratory of the Defence Research Organisation in Rijswijk. He was also vice-chair of EMBO Council, and when he died in 1969, Frieda wrote to the Executive Secretary of EMBO, Dr. Ray Appleyard, to see if she could find another job in the field.

"Professor Cohen encouraged me to go to as many scientific lectures as possible, in between my other duties," she recalls. "I got a very broad, basic knowledge of biology, and I found it very interesting."

EMBO, then based in Brussels, took her on as secretary just as the plans for a European laboratory were being formulated by Project Leader Sir John Kendrew. Frieda typed half the Laboratory Proposal in 1968, the other half being done by Kendrew's secretary. From 1970 on she was involved in the drawing up of the very first indicative scheme and the organisation of the steering committee meetings when EMBL was still just a glint in EMBO's eye. However, the decision to base the new lab in Heidelberg took her by surprise. "I wasn't sure

I would be happy in Germany," she says. "I was born during the war and had seen the German soldiers taking my father away from home. I told Kendrew I would give it a try but if I didn't like it I wouldn't stay."

It was an uncomfortable beginning, too: the office space was divided between DKFZ, in downtown Heidelberg, and some barracks at the MPI next door to the EMBL site. "I had a phone at the MPI and a desk and chair at DKFZ," remembers Frieda. "I had to come up here to phone and go there to do other work – I couldn't do both in the same place!"

From 1974 to 1978 she watched EMBL grow from a cleared area of forest to what we know today. "I remember one of the first scientific groups coming to see the site before the trees were even gone," she says. "We were standing in the dense forest trying to imagine what the lab would look like."

In the beginning Frieda did everything – bookkeeping, correspondence, interviewing, even the cleaning. Gradually, though, as the lab expanded, she was able to concentrate on the parts that interested her the most. It was a while, though, before the first scientific groups actually began to make EMBL Heidelberg their home.

"The first EMBL groups were actually based in Hamburg and Grenoble, where it had been discovered that biologists could also make use of the physicists' X-ray and neutron resources," she explains. "The first science at EMBL was not being done at the Heidelberg site until the administration was well underway, and even then they were using lab space

in DKFZ and Plöck, downtown, where the library also started."

Frieda's involvement in Council over the years has given her many good friends and lots of memories. "The meeting that I'll always remember is the one where Kendrew walked out," she smiles. "I think he felt that he wasn't being listened to and taken seriously any more, so he just disappeared and didn't come back after lunchtime. Of course, we couldn't go on without him."

She's also seen technological changes that have made her job easier. "In the early days I had to go to see Professor Jeffries Wyman, who was Secretary General of EMBO, to organise the very first meeting in Heidelberg. He was living 2,200m up a mountain in a summer house in Switzerland. I had to borrow a portable typewriter, take two trains and a bus and then walk up the mountain with reams of paper, the typewriter and my rucksack in order to send out 112 invitations, all copied seven or eight times by hand using carbon paper, which took days. And I couldn't even sleep because of the altitude."

Her plans for retirement echo her life at EMBL: lots of hard work. "I plan to write my autobiography," she says. "I'm going to be very disciplined and make sure I devote a few hours a day to it."

And after 37 years, the young woman who wasn't sure she even wanted to come to Germany is looking forward to moving again – to a bungalow with a big garden in between Heidelberg and the Black Forest.

## Purchase made simple with new, friendly interface

After a few delays, a brand new online purchase system is now available EMBL-wide, with a new name: 'Shopping cart'. It aims to make purchasing easier both for you, the user, and those behind the scenes processing your orders.

"The new system has lots of potential," explains Anne Hermelin, one of the small team behind the changeover. "It's running at a basic level at the moment, but can still do more

things than the old one; you can add attachments, for example, and the system remembers your previous entries.

"The interface is much more professional-looking and, we hope, user-friendly. Over the coming months we hope to improve it even more and get it running to its full potential."

Your user name and password are unchanged and the new system can be accessed in the same way as the old one (search

under 'Purchase' on the EMBL website). There's a downloadable user manual in the same place in case you get stuck, but if you have any other problems with the new system that don't seem to be in the book, please send an e-mail to [sapsupport@embl.de](mailto:sapsupport@embl.de).

The team, which comprises Anne, Marie Leclercq, Christian Moritz, Sladjana Stanarevic and Ingrid Van Rooyen, would like to thank all users for their patience during the switchover.

## Predocs go East (within the boundaries of Europe!)

After the resounding success of last year's first ever PhD retreat, the second was held in October in Prague. Once the historic centre of Czech Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire, the beautiful capital of the Czech Republic made the perfect backdrop to a weekend of discussion for predocs from all EMBL sites.

After a rather long Saturday of travel and a first evening devoted to 'adaptation to the local environment' in Prague, the retreat really commenced on Sunday with a day dedicated to scientific talks. First was our invited speaker Sandra Caldeira, editor of *EMBO reports*, who highlighted points to consider for successful paper submission, a definite hot topic for us and particularly convincing coming from someone 'on the inside'. The subse-

quent predoc talks covered the whole spectrum of the 'EMBL science universe': from metagenomics to 'All about NMR', text mining to 'Even more about tomography', and proteomics to gene silencing in *Drosophila*. The high quality of the presentations was matched only by the interesting questions and discussions that followed.

An exception to the rule of presenting PhD project work was Claudia Chica, who drew our attention to Adéquation, a non-profit organisation supporting research in developing countries by sending equipment no longer used in EMBL labs (<http://adequation-germany.embl.de/>). Claudia's promotional work brought to light what is a little-known but very worthwhile mission.

The retreat is also a good time to air concerns about general predoc life with our student representatives. Among the subjects covered was the mentoring scheme for first year predocs, a recently implemented initiative that arose from last year's retreat. The newly established long term care insurance was discussed, particularly to clarify the inclusion of Outstation students in the benefits of EMBL's membership. In addition, it was agreed that a relaunch of the PhD programme questionnaire, first conducted last winter, would be greatly appreciated.

Aside from the science there were also opportunities to try the local specialities, namely Czech beer (of course) and *knedlicky*, dumplings made from bread or potato and served with meat. This hearty feast for hungry students was rounded off with an enviable night out at 'the biggest music club in Middle Europe'. Our Monday departure just left time for a guided tour of the city, taking in the exquisite architectural sights of Prague's old town and castle.

After only two events, the EMBL predoc retreat is already an established and important part of the PhD programme. It provides a much needed forum for communication between the EMBL predocs, to discuss the scientific challenges being addressed in their thesis work and also the wider issues affecting predoc life, all in a relaxed and informal environment away from the lab (and group leaders!). We're already looking forward to the next one...

The EMBL PhD retreat is currently made possible thanks to a solidarity fund from EMBL E-Star fellows ([www.embl-heidelberg.de/~harringt/estar/index.html](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~harringt/estar/index.html)).

– Julianna Solomons,  
Fabian Filipp, Lukas Neidhart

"These predoc retreats... thank God it's only once a year." Esther Lenherr, Susanne Till and friend



Photo: Fabian Filipp

## How can we miss you when you won't leave? Luis and lab on the move

After many false alarms, the Serrano lab is finally off to pastures new – a beachfront location in Barcelona, to be exact, as if we need reminding. A fun-filled send-off party on 17 November wasn't quite the end; Luis was still around a week and a half later to break all Pink Seminar attendance records when he addressed the packed Operon about biological systems and then thanked his friends and colleagues for a "fantastic" 14 years at EMBL. In fact, he's *still* lurking around even now, but it won't be long before he's off to take his new position at the Centre for Genomic Regulation. Good luck to him and everybody in the Serrano lab.



Photo: Sean Hooper

The end of a beautiful partnership: SCB Joint Coordinators Peer Bork and Luis say "adios"

## the EMBO corner

ing, professional development and networking to scientific publishing and policy advice. He also runs an active research group at EMBL.

In addition to expanding EMBO's established Fellowship and Courses & Workshops Programmes, Frank has introduced career development initiatives such as the Young Investigator Programme and launched two new journals, *EMBO reports* and *Molecular Systems Biology*. Under his guidance, EMBO now pursues an active Science & Society Programme and plays an increasing advisory role in policy-making arenas, one example being its leadership in promoting the establishment of the European Research Council (ERC). Frank's directorship has also seen EMBO offer special support to member states with less developed scientific infrastructures and opened up the organisation to greater interactions with scientists outside Europe.

All of these activities are supported by a close co-operation with the scientific community, one of Frank's most notable achievements, according to Tim Hunt, chair of EMBO Council. "Frank's most significant legacy to EMBO will be the tremendous ties he has built up with the scientific community. He has brought the EMBO Members into every layer of the organisation's activities, ensuring that a

strong network of scientific excellence lies behind all EMBO actions. Under Frank's energetic and intelligent leadership, EMBO's reputation and influence have never been higher."

Frank commented: "The decision to leave EMBO was a difficult one but comes at the right time in my career, giving me the opportunity to move on to a new challenge before I retire from science. Looking back I can reflect on many changes that were timely for EMBO and I am happy to have had the chance to deliver on them.

"I will leave the organisation with the confidence that it holds a central and relevant position in European research. With a strong EMBO team in Heidelberg and the energetic engagement of the EMBO Members, I'm sure that EMBO will continue to serve the life sciences in Europe for many years to come."

Frank's retirement comes at an appropriate point in EMBO's evolution. In 2006, the EMBO Council agreed on a ten-year strategy for the organisation and in 2007, EMBO's funding body, the EMBC, will start preparations for a new multi-annual budget agreement. The search for a new Executive Director to lead EMBO into this next phase of its development is already underway.

[www.embo.org](http://www.embo.org)



### Frank Gannon announces his retirement from EMBO

*The Executive Director of EMBO, Frank Gannon, has announced that he will retire from his position in mid-2007. At that time, he will have led EMBO for over 13 years, driving a period of significant expansion and development for the organisation.*

Frank's directorship has seen a changing Europe, both scientifically and geographically. As Executive Director, he has worked to steer EMBO in line with these developments, raising the organisation's profile and enabling it to address the evolving needs of the molecular life sciences community. Appointed in 1994, Frank today directs a considerably extended programme of activities ranging from train-

## A molecular battlefield: PhD students strike back

It was a quiet evening in Heidelberg before the 8th International EMBL PhD Student Symposium, 'Biology of Disease: A Molecular Battlefield'. The last preparations were underway and nothing forecast a storm. Then an e-mail appeared from one of the speakers: "I came down with the flu today and can't make it to EMBL tomorrow". The battle began; we were one speaker down before we even started.

Despite this crisis, which was resolved, the symposium was a big success. The eighth in the series organised by EMBL PhD students for other students, it attracted 126 attendees from over 20 countries. In addition, 18 prominent scientists came to share their insights on the biology of a wide spectrum of diseases, ranging from food related diseases to mental disorders.

The symposium started with a public lecture about avian influenza infecting humans and ended with an award ceremony for the joint EMBO/EMBL Science Writing Prize (see box, right). The three days full of cutting edge science saw such diverse topics as Judy Lieberman (Harvard University) talking about RNAi-based gene therapy to Klaus-Peter Lesch (University of Würzburg) on the interaction of environment and genes in mental disorders such as depression. A panel discussion, 'Who sets the limits, us or nature?' raised several questions: how well are we doing in our race against diseases? Where are we heading, and

how will things look in 100 years? Do we really want to 'live long and die fast' as big pharma seem to fancy? At the end, we were left with more questions than answers. A classical concert by music@EMBL and the closing night party were essential complements to the scientific programme.

The symposium was held on 30 November-2 December, nearing the end of the EMBL pre-doc course. A new generation of PhD students were able to take part; next year they will be expected to continue the tradition. EMBL is known to promote independent thinking, and this symposium is an outstanding example of this; young pre-docs at the beginning of their PhD have a chance to choose a topic and develop it into a full-sized conference, bringing research students from diverse backgrounds together with leading scientists.

The symposium was a lot of hard work, but the fun we had working in such a great team and the good feedback from both the participants and speakers on an outstanding symposium made it all worth it. This event was made possible thanks to the generous support of a Marie Curie Actions grant, EMBO, EMBL and several other sponsors, which we hope will continue to support the series in the future. We also would like to thank our group leaders for their understanding and support.

- Aynur Kaya & Boris Bryk

## Winner takes all

As part of the PhD symposium proceedings, the first-ever winner of the new EMBO/EMBL Science Writing Prize read out her winning entry in front of the 150-strong audience.

Jelena Jovanovic, a postdoc at the National Institute for Medical Research in London, wrote 'A bitter peace of mind', a story about Alzheimer's, which covers both the social impact and the molecular origins of the disease. Jelena entered the competition as a result of her interest in scientific journalism, and hopes the recognition will help her develop this side of her career further.

The prize also included a €1,000 cheque, free entry to the symposium and a free subscription to *EMBO reports*. Jelena's winning submission was among 50 entries from all over Europe.

Launched back in spring this year, the competition encourages young life scientists to present a topic within the limit of 1,000 words, using language and style suitable for a non-scientific audience.

If you'd like to enter next year's competition, more details and an online application form can be found at [www.embo.org/scisoc/writing\\_prize.html](http://www.embo.org/scisoc/writing_prize.html).

# A question of caring

Scientists are torturing cute furry animals in their ivory towers, and the general public are powerless to do anything about it. That's a common perception, anyway. Non-scientists often assume that researchers have either a level of disregard for animals or have hardened themselves to animal suffering, but of course it's not true.

"Why do you think we use the smallest animals possible?" says PhD student Michal Karzynski. Postdocs Jan Medenbach and Andreas Jaedicke agree. "I used mice when I was a student and it's very distressing to kill them. You ask yourself every time, is this really necessary?" says Jan. "I've chosen my field so I don't ever have to use anything bigger than worms," says Andreas.

On 17 November Dr Vicky Robinson, chief executive of the UK's National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) gave a talk at EMBL Heidelberg entitled "Improving science and animal welfare". Was she preaching to the converted, or is there still a lot to learn about how we at EMBL can improve methods and standards of animal use?

While scientists don't particularly like having to do experiments with animals, they may be able to think more about the welfare of those they do use. That's where the NC3Rs comes in. "Ours is a scientific centre, not an animal rights organisation," explains Vicky, who trained as a developmental biologist up to postdoc level and used fish, frogs, chicks and mice herself in her research into the development of the brain. "We know scientists have to use animals for some things at the moment, but that



doesn't mean that there's no need to try to find alternatives.

"We work with scientists to set up best practise guidelines and engage them with the issues concerned with animal use – how the lives of the animals can be improved, how researchers can think about whether they really need to use an animal at a certain point, whether an experiment can be stopped before it really impacts on an animal's life.

"It's not just an issue of ethics; the way an animal is housed or handled can have an impact on scientific data too, as stress affects physiology, immunology and behaviour. If you want to do good science, you have to think quite hard about what you do to the animals – to think about their needs to ensure you get the best data."

Finding alternatives can be a scientific challenge in itself. In some areas such as developmental biology, it's hard to see how an animal model could be avoided. "If we could move from using rodents to flies that would be great. We have to ask ourselves, what added value do we get from using vertebrates rather than invertebrates? The real question is, do we need this information now, and is information for information's sake so important? If you can't avoid using them, what do you do to minimise the suffering of the animal involved?"

It's assumed that a fly is less "important" than a mouse, and a mouse less important than

a primate, but how do we judge how much one species suffers in comparison to another? "Most people do have a hierarchy; they object to the use of primates more than rodents, for example, and nobody seems to be bothered about flies," says Vicky. "The truth is, we don't know much about how much a mouse or an invertebrate suffers. Rodents have evolved to conceal signs of suffering so as not to become easy targets. More research is now being done to identify behaviour associated with pain."

The NC3Rs is based in the UK, a country with perhaps the most vocal and reactionary animal rights activists in the whole of Europe, if not the world. Since last year, though, activists there who glorify militant acts against economic targets and laboratories can face prosecution under terror laws, meaning they could be imprisoned for up to seven years and suspects held without charge for up to three months.

"Propaganda and myth have fuelled the extreme reactions of animal rights extremists, who tend to see the issue in black and white: that any use of an animal is immoral," says Vicky. "This is why the NC3Rs can't and won't work with them.

"With the hard line the UK government is taking, their activities are being exported to mainland Europe and elsewhere. Whether it will gather the momentum that it had in the UK, I don't know. I hope not."

Working with animals is, at the moment anyway, a necessary part of being a researcher in biology, but as Vicky points out, "We need to take an ethical stance. If we want to create an environment where it's acceptable to use them, we have to think much more about what we do to them, not just because of animal rights activists but because of the importance of maintaining a positive public perception of science. It's a conflict between the needs of science and the needs of animals, and what we do to animals in the name of science."

"If we want to create an environment where it's acceptable to use animals, we have to think much more about what we do to them ... because of the importance of maintaining a positive public perception of science."

## A labour of love

October saw the publication of an EMBL postdoc's first book – but non-Hungarian speakers will have to wait a bit longer to read the English translation.

Gáspár Jékely, a postdoc in the Arendt lab at EMBL Heidelberg, spent evenings and weekends writing and researching his book, which is entitled "Mester, ébren vagy?" ("Master, are you

awake?"). It looks at the history of genetics, embryology and evolutionary biology in a way that non-scientists can understand. It starts with the Ancient Greeks and ends right at the present day with genomics, and is published by Slovakian publishing house Kalligram.

The book is written in a similar style to Gáspár's winning essay in the 2002 EMBO Writing Prize, which is a dialogue between natural philosopher Democrit (460–370BC)

and his fictitious student Alchimos.

Gáspár has found an English translator for the book, and is now looking for an English-language publisher. If you can help, please contact jekely@embl.de.



## science&society

# A beautiful mind? Vigorous debates at the 7th Joint EMBL/EMBO Science and Society Conference

What is consciousness? Is there anything beyond our brains or minds? Is it possible to change one's identity through alterations in brain function? These were just a few of the questions discussed during the seventh Joint EMBL/EMBO Science and Society Conference on 'Genes, brain/mind and behaviour' on 3-4 November. More than 300 guests, among them scientists, students and interested laypeople, came to EMBL Heidelberg from all over the world to explore these topics. The vast interest and the illustrious list of participants were a clear sign that the selected conference theme hit a nerve.

More than 25 invited speakers explored the current state of behavioural genetics, examined the relationship between genes and minds and assessed the traditional 'nature or nurture'

debate, which at this very conference was "perhaps gasping its last breaths", as Erik Parents from the Hastings Centre in New York put it.

Genetics, neurotechnologies and neuroethics were central to the debate. These relatively young scientific disciplines have undergone fundamental changes in the last decade and are still nowhere close to reach a consensus. "The discrepancy between what our intuition says about how the brain works and the scientific picture is still vast," stated Wolf Singer from the MPI for Brain Research in Frankfurt, adding that for many people it is difficult to accept that there is "no seat of the self, no central observer and no coordinator".

The audience participation and its passion for debate seemed to grow from session to ses-

sion. Even during the closing remarks by Iain Mattaj on Saturday evening the Operon was still full. The audience always asked more questions than could be squeezed into the tight timeline, and the panel discussions had to be stopped too soon. 'We are much more than our brains' was the general agreement after the two-day discussion marathon.

After the conference, the regular guests and the organisers all agreed that this one has been the best one so far. The vigorous discussion during the lectures as well as during the breaks even led to some negative side effects: conference organiser Halldór Stefánsson completely lost his voice after the first day.

—Yvonne Kaul

[www.embl.de/aboutus/sciencesociety](http://www.embl.de/aboutus/sciencesociety)

## Searches exhaustive, not exhausting, on EBI website



As well as looking good, the new site's real forte is the exhaustive search engine, 'EB-eye', allowing instant searches of all the EBI's databases from a single query. In the search box, simply type terms or names; you will come to a summary page that displays the number of results found in various domains. It's idiot-proof. "If you can use Google™ you can use this," says Graham Cameron, Associate Director of EMBL-EBI. Click directly on the domain names to see the results, or expand the tables to display specifically in which database the results were found.

Navigating links between databases is a lot easier; genomes, genes, proteins, structures and biological functions can all be explored through a single simple interface. Jargon and acronyms have been banished wherever possi-

ble, and have been replaced with terminology in common scientific usage. There's a HELP page which can be viewed if you press the '?' icon next to the text input box, where you will find a lot of information on how to use EB-eye's various features, such as the refine box and the advanced search wizard.

Expert users, however, have not been abandoned and can still immerse themselves in the detail of the specialist databases. The site uses fonts and colours to bring it more in line with the rest of the EMBL websites.

"The new site aims to provide exactly what the users asked for," says Rodrigo Lopez, Head of External Services at the EBI. "The team behind it have worked really hard and I think that's obvious in the great new look and functionality." See the results at [www.ebi.ac.uk](http://www.ebi.ac.uk).

This gorgeous interface (above) is EMBL-EBI's new, faster and easier-to-use website which was launched on 11 December. Its creation follows a recent survey to find out what users really wanted from the EBI site.

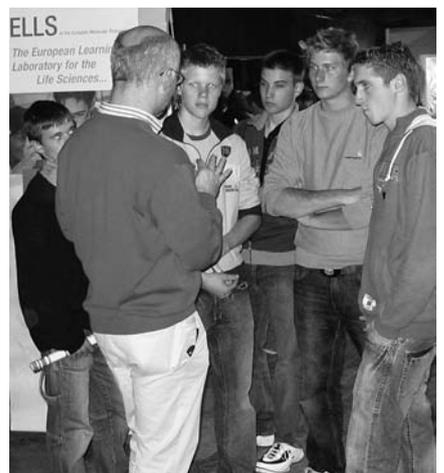
## Spreading knowledge to a young audience

EMBL took part in Germany's biggest science festival on 12-14 October when the European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences (ELLS) team exhibited at 'Science Days 2006' in Rust, near Freiburg.

Aided by pupils and a teacher from the Bertha-von-Suttner-Schule in Ettlingen, ELLS demonstrated its microarray game alongside a display of posters about the movers and shakers in the history of biology. The festival welcomed more than 24,000 visitors over the three days, including children of all ages, teachers and families.

Others of the 100 interactive stands from schools, universities, research institutes and companies covered topics including forensics, information technology, chemistry, food research and robotics. "Everything was aimed at getting kids interested in science," said Julia Willingale-Theune, ELLS Education Officer. Any German speakers who would like to get involved in next year's event can contact her at [willinga@embl.de](mailto:willinga@embl.de).

Right: teacher Hans-Jörg Neff outlines the activities of EMBL and ELLS to visitors



## News from the Alumni Association

### Alumni hit Valencia for 2nd Iberian reunion

A warm, sunny day in late summer on the shores of the Mediterranean. With this kind of setting, it didn't take a lot of arm-twisting to convince EMBL alumni to switch off their computers, hang up their lab coats and head over to the beach for the second gathering of the EMBL Alumni Association's Iberian local chapter. The event, attended by more than 25 alumni currently living on the Iberian peninsula, took place on 29 September at the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

After a short welcome, EMBL alumni took to the podium to discuss their latest research. Speakers included Alfonso Valencia, Maria Mar Vivanco, local chapter head Juan Valcárcel, Domingo Baretino, Jordi Bernués and Alberto Muñoz. Topics ranged from protein interaction networks to vitamin D



"Excuse me, waiter, I think there's been a mistake – I actually ordered a large one."

and colon cancer, and gave participants not only a great opportunity to hear the latest in Spanish science, but also to explore possibilities for collaboration. After the morning session, shop talk carried on over into lunch as the participants regrouped at a seaside restaurant, enjoying a magnificent seafood paella and other Iberian delicacies.

Between courses, alumni took stock of the progress that they have made in setting up their local chapter. Since their last meeting, the chapter website has been improved and now includes a blog, set up by Carlos Luque, to facilitate communication among members (<http://embl-alumni-iberic-chapter.blogspot.com/2006/08/embl-alumni-iberic-chapter.html>). Continuing areas of activity include completing alumni profiles in the online searchable database, which will hopefully help members identify people with particular expertise and career paths. Future projects include organising a laboratory management course and promoting visits of students and postdocs to alumni labs.

Thanks are due to reunion organisers Ramon Serrano and Angel Nebreda who delivered a top-notch programme and a truly pleasant day with friends old and new. Next year's event is scheduled to take place in September or October in Bilbao, and will be hosted by Maria Mar Vivanco at the CICbioGUNE. Current EMBL staff take note: the Iberian alumni want to strengthen ties with current EMBL staff and are planning on inviting some of you to their next reunion. If you're interested, get in touch with Maria at [mdmvivanco@cicbiogune.es](mailto:mdmvivanco@cicbiogune.es).

– Sarah Sherwood

- Keep up to date with Alumni Association news and Local Chapter Meetings in your area at [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni).

### Matti Saraste Fund

The Alumni Association would like to thank all those who have generously donated to the Matti Saraste Fund. Matti, who was a Group Leader and Unit Coordinator of EMBL's SCB Unit (1990-2001), died in 2001. To commemorate him, and in recognition of his commitment both to science and to EMBL, the Matti Saraste Fellowship Fund was established.

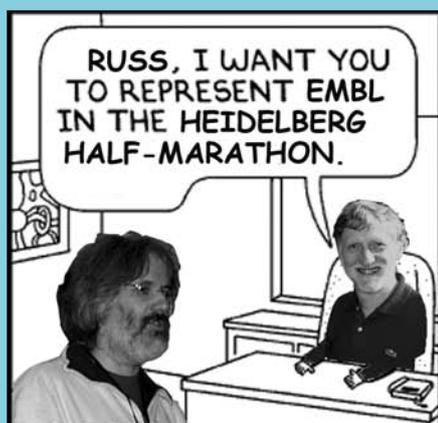
The aim of the fund, which is administered by the Alumni Association, had originally been to support a student in the EMBL International PhD Programme. While a substantial sum of money has been donated, the total is far short of what is required and it is unlikely that it will increase significantly.

Alumni board members, in consultation with Matti's family, have given careful thought to how best to use the money.

- The majority view, and the option favoured by Matti's family, was that a memorial be created in the grounds of the new ATC building, such as a garden.
- A second possibility would be to establish a Matti Saraste Prize or honorary lectureship of €1,000 per annum in perpetuity.
- Lastly, some board members felt that the best use of the money would still be to pay for a studentship, accepting that this would be a 'one off', rather than a regular commemoration, due to the limited sum available.

The board will make a final decision by holding a vote in January 2007. You are therefore invited to send your comments and suggestions on the best use of the fund to Mehrnoosh Rayner at [dg-office@embl.de](mailto:dg-office@embl.de) by 5 January 2007.

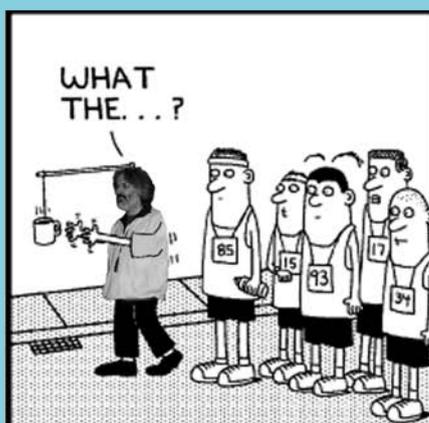
## Goodbye, Russ! Here's to a very happy and successful new career in Berlin



www.dilbert.com scottadams@aol.com



8-10-05 © 2005 Scott Adams, Inc./Dist. by UFS, Inc.



## news&events

❑ **Is your robot suffering from repetitive strain injury?** Is your microarray having trouble expressing itself? Help is at hand in the form of the European Laboratory Robotics Interest Group Deutschland (ELRIG.de), a free exchange platform for all issues in lab automation. Founded at the beginning of 2006, it brings together expertise from industry and academia and has Genecore's Jürgen Zimmermann as head of its scientific advisory committee. Offering support for a wide range of lab-based automated methods, including liquid handling, LIMS, design of experiments and assay development, it is sponsored by industry and free for end users. Recently the first ELRIG.de workshop was held at EMBL Heidelberg, 'Plastics in lab automation'. From January, you will be able to find more information on ELRIG's event schedule and information resources at [www.elrig.de](http://www.elrig.de).

❑ **In an initiative by the Fulbright Commission** for educational exchange, five deans, provosts and chancellors from top US universities were given an introduction to EMBL, its training, outreach and technology transfer activities on 16 October. A similar visit took place on 8 December when biochemists from the US visited EMBL in an event organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

❑ **Want to brush up on your office skills?** EMBL Heidelberg will be organising some training days in Microsoft programs starting at the main lab in the spring. They're open to everyone at all EMBL sites, and if you're interested in finding out more please e-mail [rebecca.west@embl.de](mailto:rebecca.west@embl.de) by 19 January 2007. Courses will be in both English and German and will cover Outlook, Excel, Access, Powerpoint and Word.

❑ **On 7 November EMBL Heidelberg welcomed** the new Italian Minister for University Research, Fabio Mussi, as he familiarised himself with the city's research institutes. One of the minister's first acts when he took office in May this year was to remove Italy's signature from a 'declaration of ethics' objecting to the use of EU funds for human embryonic stem cell research. Minister Mussi enjoyed dinner in the can-



The minister and the chef: Fabio Mussi meets Claus Himburg

Photo: Maj Britt Hansen

teen with Iain Mattaj, EMBL Monterotondo head Nadia Rosenthal and other members of EMBL.

❑ **The 2nd DKFZ-EMBL retreat** took place on 12-13 October in Herxheim (Pfalz) almost a year after the first. Thirteen young group leaders from DKFZ met EMBL Heidelberg and EBI group leaders for four sessions on different aspects of research at both institutes. These were complemented by presentations from *EMBO Journal* editor Isabel Arnold and Susan Kentner, the Head of the Helmholtz Society's Brussels office, who talked about the new EU Framework programme.

❑ **The European Commission has awarded** €1.9m over the next three years to a new consortium for cancer stem cell research, which will be coordinated by Claus Nerlov at EMBL Monterotondo. With partners from the UK (Cancer Research, the MRC, Oxford University and drug development company VASTox), the University of Lund in Sweden and the University of Copenhagen, Claus will investigate CSCs with the ability to cause tumours as targets for directed molecular therapies.

❑ **Keep up-to-date** with how EMBL Heidelberg's new ATC is looking by visiting [www.embl.org/aboutus/atc/pictures](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/atc/pictures).

## A short hop to a professorship for Winfried

EMBL Grenoble's Winfried Weissenhorn will be leaving the Outstation in the new year – but he won't be going far. From January 1, 2007 he will take up a full professorship at the Institut de Virologie Moléculaire et Structurale (IVMS) of the Université Joseph-Fourier, based in the new Carl-Ivar Brändén building next door.

Winfried will be taking his group with him and continuing his work in structural and functional studies on membrane trafficking processes, including membrane fusion and membrane fission related to the life cycle of enveloped viruses. His ties with EMBL will continue with his ongoing collaborations with Heidelberg's Achilleas

Frangakis and Hamburg's Dmitri Svergun – as well as seeing his former EMBL Grenoble colleagues everyday in the campus canteen.

The Carl-Ivar Brändén building, which opened in January 2006 and is also home to the Centre for Integrated Structural Biology, brings together the major structural biology institutes in Grenoble and facilitates the sharing of technology and scientific expertise. Among other things, Winfried will be making use of the complete platform for carrying out high-throughput experiments.

"I'm sorry to be saying goodbye to EMBL, but very glad to be able to take up a position where I can retain such strong links to the institute," Winfried says.

## from the Staff Association

- **Catherine Floyd** will be taking over as administrative officer from Ann Thüringer on a full-time basis when she leaves in January. Good luck to Ann for the future.
- **For an up-to-date list** of clubs, see [www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/clubs.htm](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/clubs.htm).

Join one of the 17 clubs which are currently subsidised by the Staff Association.

- **The next social** event for your calendars will be Burns Night on 27 January. Tom Cord is off to Scotland next week to shoot the haggis.

## A watery encounter



Caitlyn Snyman and Mina Roberts-Baldwin with a froggy friend

Photo: Maj Britt Hansen

A group of 3 to 6-year-olds from the Kinderhaus enjoyed a visit to the main lab to see fish, frogs and other water-dwellers as part of their project, 'Underwater World'.

They examined clawed frogs, zebrafish, starfish, crabs and 'living dinosaurs', axolotls, in the animal house with the assistance of staff and scientists. The kids learnt so much that, on a later visit to Sealife in Speyer, they were able to wow staff with their prior knowledge.

The Kinderhaus would like to thank Klaus Schmitt, Diana Hofmann, Aldona Nowicka, Jan Ellenberg, Darren Gilmour, Petra Haas, Heidi Snyman and Andreea Gruiu for their time.



**Marko Kaksonen** started in November as a Group Leader at EMBL Heidelberg in the Cell Biology and Biophysics Unit. Marko received his PhD from the University of Helsinki, Finland and did his postdoctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley. At EMBL Marko and his group will study cellular membrane trafficking processes, focusing on the molecular mechanisms underlying the formation of endocytic and exocytic vesicles, and on the role of the actin cytoskeleton in these processes.

**John Briggs** joins Heidelberg's Structural and Computational Biology Unit as Group Leader in December. John is originally from London, completed his PhD at the University of Oxford and was most recently a postdoc at the University of Munich. His group will be applying cryo-electron microscopy and tomography to the study of virus and cell structure, with a focus on mechanisms for generating membrane curvature, for example during budding events. Being one of our younger faculty, John is often mistaken for a PhD student.



From January 2007 **Thomas Schneider** returns to his old territory, EMBL Hamburg, as Group Leader and Project Coordinator for structural biology beamlines at PETRA3, the upcoming third generation synchrotron source. Thomas spent time at the Outstation as a predoc, continuing his crystallographic path at the MPI for Molecular Physiology in Dortmund and the University of Göttingen. Most recently he was a group leader at the FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology in Milan.

**Stefan Fiedler**, formerly Technical Coordinator in the Hermes Group at EMBL Hamburg, is now a Team Leader as from September 2006.

## awards&honours

DG **Iain Mattaj** has been awarded an honorary professorship by the University of Heidelberg and will give a scientific talk on 15 December to mark the occasion. His lecture on 'Ran GTPase and the organisation of eukaryotic cells' will take place in the Großen Hörsaal in the Department of Zoology, Im Neuenheimer Feld 230, at 15.15.

Associate Director **Matthias Hentze** has been elected a member of the Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina (German Academy of Sciences). Members, who have distinguished themselves by demonstrating academic excellence, are elected by the Academy's Presidium upon proposals submitted by existing members and on the basis of an assessment. Membership is international and limited to 1,000; Iain Mattaj is also a member. The Academy was founded by physicians in the Free Imperial City of Schweinfurt in 1652 to gain a deeper understanding of natural science results and improve communication, issuing the world's first natural science and medicine journal as early as 1670.

Gene Expression head **Jan Ellenberg** has been elected an EMBO Member in the recent announcement of the 2006 list. This year's 49 newly ratified members join the ranks of Europe's foremost life sciences community, elected on the basis of scientific excellence. The EMBO membership comprises over 1,200 of the world's leading researchers, and this year's new members come from 14 different countries; 44 of them are based in Europe, while five from the USA and China receive associate membership. The complete list of new EMBO Members can be viewed at [www.embo.org/about\\_embo/press/new\\_members06.html](http://www.embo.org/about_embo/press/new_members06.html).

If you're interested in Science and Society, why not apply for a **Branco Weiss Fellowship** from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH)? Aimed at life science researchers who want to incorporate social and cultural aspects into their scientific research, the fellowship has previously been awarded to alumnus Giuseppe Testa and current EMBL scientist Giovanni Frazzetto. For more details or to apply, visit [www.society-in-science.ethz.ch](http://www.society-in-science.ethz.ch). The deadline for applications for the 2007 fellowship is 1 February.

## Who's new?

Lars Bochmann (Rosenthal), Raffaella Bosurgi (Gross), Norman Cobley (Macromolecular Structural Database), David Danesy (Personnel), Mael Desmartin (Furlong), Dominika Farley (Rosenthal), Krisztian Fodor (Wilmanns), Alexander Griekspoor (Rebholz), Burkhard Höckendorf (Wittbrodt), Ni Hong (Wittbrodt), Eva Kowalinski (Cusack), Corinne Kox (Hentze), Sebastian Kühner (Gavin), Alejandra Leo-Macias (Frangakis), Luisa Luciani (Nerlov), Peter Maier (Knop), Luis Mayorga (Griffiths), Gregoire Pau (Huber), Aiyar Raeka (Steinmetz), Michael Reuter (Pillai), Remo Sanges (ENSEMBL), John Weir (Conti), Stephanie Wendlberger (Ladurner), Nachen Yang (Rørth), Alice Young (Spitz), Agnieszka Zdanowicz (Hentze)

## events@EMBL

*14 December EMBL Heidelberg*

**Science and Society:** Arie Rip, University of Twente, Netherlands: Changing science in a changing society: societal aspects of nanotechnology

*18-19 December EMBL Heidelberg*

**Course:** Vladimír Benes: Introduction to biostatistics

*20 December EMBL Heidelberg*

**Presentation:** Jonas Dorn, The Scripps Research Institute La Jolla, California: Analysis of kinetochore-microtubule dynamics in budding yeast

*23 January EMBL Heidelberg*

**EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture:** Denis Duboule, Univ. de Genève: Collinearity and large scale gene regulation in vertebrates

*24 January EMBL Heidelberg*

**Science and Society:** Lewis Wolpert, University College London: Evolution of causal beliefs

*27 January EMBL Heidelberg*

Burns Night

*29 January-2 February EMBL Heidelberg*

PhD Programme interviews

*8-9 February EMBL Grenoble*

Heads of Units Meeting  
Senior Scientists Meeting

*19-21 February DIAMOND, Didcot, UK*

**Conference:** The role of structures in biology – past, present and future / 3rd BIOXHIT Annual Meeting

*23-25 February EMBL Heidelberg*

**Conference:** Marine Genomics Exploratory Workshop: Transcriptomics approaches for the analysis of marine systems

For more events, visit [www.embl.org/events](http://www.embl.org/events)