



## Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit enters new phase

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## What's new in EMBL's IT Services?

Over the past few months, Rupert Lück's team has been taking stock of IT requirements at the Lab. One major challenge will be to provide a flexible IT environment that supports research among different groups, and another is to manage effectively the huge amount of data currently being generated by EMBL researchers.

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## New beamline for EMBL-Hamburg

EMBL-Hamburg has just completed X12, its newest energy-tuneable beamline for macromolecular crystallography. X12 was designed and built by the EMBL-Hamburg instrumentation group (left), with an emphasis on simplicity of operation, fast energy-tuneability and, above all, user-friendliness. It will help reduce the experiment load on BW7A, the most over-booked of the EMBL-Hamburg crystallography beamlines.

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## New editor for EMBL&cetera

EMBL&cetera is approaching its seventh year and thirtieth issue, and a new editor will take the reins of what has become an important means of communication for the EMBL community. Vienna Leigh joined the Office of Information and Public Affairs in June, and she will be working on other EMBL publications as well as taking over the role of editor from Sarah Sherwood. Previously, Vienna worked for publishing companies in London and Edinburgh and spent a couple of years as a journalist.

The newsletter couldn't survive without your input, so keep those story ideas coming, but don't forget to change your EMBL&cetera address book entry to [leigh@embl.de](mailto:leigh@embl.de)!

## Alumni elections

Once again, it's time for EMBL Alumni Association members to elect representatives to the Association's board. The current representatives have been hard at work organising activities and initiatives to help support the network of nearly 1,000 members; they also play a vital role in promoting scientific exchange and collaborations across Europe and the world. Elections for new members to the board will be held online from 7-30 September 2005. Meet the candidates on page 5 and cast your vote at [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html)

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## Renewed agreement clears the way for a robust, growing MMPU

EMBL and the Medical Faculty of the University of Heidelberg have decided to initiate a second phase of the Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit (MMPU), a research unit jointly established by the two institutions in 2002. Since its creation, the MMPU has produced valuable new insights into the mechanisms underlying some of the most common human genetic diseases. The new agreement will put the unit on a firmer basis for the long term, strengthening ties between the institutions, promoting the establishment of links to additional research groups from each organisation and intensifying activities in post-graduate training.

“The ongoing convergence of biology and medicine has created a great opportunity for our institutes to work together in the long-term in the critical area of molecular medicine,” says Iain Mattaj, Director General of EMBL. Scientists and institutions need to find new ways to bridge the knowledge and training gap between these two fields, which have traditionally been separate and organised in quite different ways.

Matthias Hentze from EMBL and Andreas Kulozik, Head of the University's Department of Paediatric Oncology, Haematology and Immunology, initiated the first phase of the partnership. Last year, the work of the MMPU was reviewed by an external panel of international experts and was considered to be “first rate, extremely impressive and clearly internationally competitive”.

The unit has become a focal point for the intersection between the types of research carried out at EMBL and in the clinical setting at the Medical Faculty. Great interest has been shown by other scientists from both institutions, and the unit has started to serve as a springboard for several new projects. The development plan for the second phase of the Unit calls for additional “partnered” groups to join the MMPU, with joint leadership from both institutions. Those will likely include labs studying cystic fibrosis, degenerative diseases due to defects in how the body copes with iron and the identification of tumour markers for cancer diagnosis. Growth means that activities currently going on in “distributed” lab space provided by the

Medical Faculty will need to be clustered into a common space. That will concentrate its critical mass, making it easier for the groups to share expertise and carry out training activities.

Andreas and Matthias plan to continue with a well-organised post-graduate training programme in which medical and basic science graduates will work side by side. In addition, plans are underway to create an opportunity for MD graduates to obtain a joint University of Heidelberg/EMBL PhD degree and hence establish attractive MD/PhD opportunities. Students and MMPU members will be able to actively integrate into EMBL seminars, symposia and journal clubs.

18 July, 2005: representatives of EMBL and the University of Heidelberg shake on a renewed agreement



Photo by Maj Britt Hansen

## Iain Mattaj prepares for the future in first address to EMBL Council

This year's summer Council meeting, held on July 5-6 in Heidelberg, was Iain Mattaj's first presentation to Council as Director General of the Laboratory. Items highlighted in his address included financial and policy matters.

Iain's report included the announcement that there will be some organisational changes within the EMBL community. Several strategic posts have been created, adjusted or handed on:

A new Directorate of EMBL will be created, dividing the workload previously handled by the Director General and the Scientific Director. Heads of Units will play a larger role in planning EMBL's scientific strategy.

- Matthias Hentze will take up the new post of Associate Director to coordinate training, collaborations, fundraising and alumni.
- The position of Coordinator of Core Facilities, held by Christian Boulin, will be integrated into the Directorate.
- Silke Schumacher will take up the post of Coordinator of International Relations and Communication, responsible for relations

with EIROforum, the Member States, EMBL partnerships and the EU.

Anne Ephrussi will become the new Dean of the EMBL International PhD Programme and Coordinator of EICAT, supported in her activities by Matthias Hentze.

Until a new Gene Expression Unit Coordinator is found, Elisa Izaurralde has accepted the post of Interim Coordinator.

In his address to Council, Iain gave a detailed overview of his most important task of the moment, the preparation of a new Scientific Programme and Indicative Scheme to cover 2007-2011. He invited Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) members and Council delegates to attend the faculty retreat in September to discuss the draft programme, the final approval of which is expected in 2006.

Systems biology will be the focus of EMBL's next steps toward building its reputation as Europe's flagship laboratory, but as Iain pointed out, being at the cutting-edge of research requires the latest technology. The majority of EMBL's funding comes from the member states, but increasingly, the EU has provided support. Iain also discussed this and empha-

sised the importance of more stable funding for the future, in particular for the EBI. Council was asked to lobby on behalf of EMBL to ensure that suitable funding opportunities are provided in FP7.

The next Council meeting will take place on 21-24 November 2005, again in Heidelberg.

The Finance Committee also met during the Council meeting, agreeing on the following basic salary scale adjustments to take effect from July 2005:

- France 2.2%
- Germany 1.0%
- UK 1.8%
- Italy 4.3%

EMBL pensions were adjusted by the consumer price index and the following increases were also approved:

- France 2.9%
- Germany 1.7%
- UK 2.5%
- There are no pensioners in Italy

## Art in Science in Art: great minds think alike

Friday, July 15 saw the meeting of two great rivals, art and science, in a Heidelberg mini-symposium designed to look at ways in which these seemingly opposing areas can inspire one another. Organised by EMBL's Science and Society programme, the afternoon began with talks by speakers with links to both disciplines: Suzanne Anker from the School of Visual Arts in New York; Arthur I. Miller, philosopher and author of *Einstein and Picasso*; and Christa Sommerer, of the University of Art and Design

in Linz. Professor Peter Weibel of Karlsruhe's Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie then chaired a panel discussion in which representatives of EMBL and the speakers talked about creativity at the interface between science and art.

During the coffee breaks, attendees could enjoy a colourful exhibition of artworks, created by members of the EMBL community, which decorated the Operon. Exhibits included sculpture,

jewellery, nature photographs, microscope images and videos, demonstrating that scientists can be artists, too, and that research can sometimes produce unexpected and spontaneous artworks.

It wasn't just about the visual arts. Music and theatre helped to end the day, after which attendees made short work of the beer, pizza and DNA cocktails.



Photos by Marietta Schupp and Maj Britt Hansen

## Cor! What great facilities!

A survey of EMBL's core facilities in July generated an overwhelming response, proving before the results were even analysed that these services are highly regarded and of vital importance to the community.

The online survey, covering the seven facilities at EMBL-Heidelberg and the monoclonal antibody core facility in Monterotondo, was sent to 680 scientific and technical staff at all EMBL sites. A whopping 70% responded.

The aim was to find out whether the facilities fulfill the needs of the users at EMBL, whether they provide a good service and what will be needed in the future to accommodate the constantly changing needs of EMBL scientists.

Overall, the facilities were rated as either excellent or very good. In some cases, needs for equipment updates emerged; a new mass spectrometer is needed in the proteomics core facility, for example.

In some cases, access needs to be improved for the Outstations and, in general, more information has to be made available about the types of services that are offered.

The results of the survey will be used to improve services and to plan for future developments as part of the next EMBL Scientific Programme.

Please visit [www.embl.org/services/core\\_facilities](http://www.embl.org/services/core_facilities) to find out more about the results of the survey.

## Grants office cuts through red tape

Networks of Excellence. Financial management. Framework programmes. Audit certificates. Model contract. What in the name of blinkin' flip is it all about?

The grants office came to the aid of struggling fundees with a practically oriented FP6 Information Day on 24 June in Heidelberg, aimed at cutting through the red tape, clarifying the grants process and putting the "fun" back into funding (well, almost).

The audience comprised EMBL scientists, staff and administrators working on various EU-funded projects, as well as external visitors from other institutions. The event was also broadcast to the Outstations via a video-conferencing link.

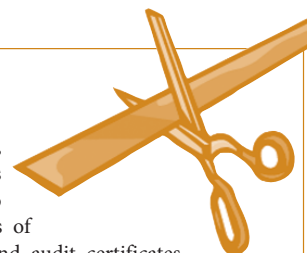
After a general introduction by Geneviève Reinke from the grants office, Dr Andre Schlochtermeier and Shalini Saxena, respectively the Head and Legal Advisor of the EU Office of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, took time to explain the process in detail.

Ms Saxena introduced the model contract, a legal document drawn up between the institution (in this case, EMBL) and the funding body (the EU), and Dr Schlochtermeier explained some of the financial FAQs, such as cost breakdowns and justification, and what kind of expenses can be covered by funding allocations.

After lunch, the speakers turned to the subjects of reporting and audit certificates, the latter a new initiative for FP6 which helps monitor costs involved in a project. Other new instruments, Networks of Excellence and Integrated Projects, were also covered. Recently, EMBL researchers have been very successful at obtaining EU funding under FP6. Currently, EMBL has 76 projects, including each type of FP6 instrument. "The day was very informative, both for newcomers and for those already involved," Geneviève says. "It helped clarify many issues and offered an overview of the entire system."

Another workshop on the subject is planned towards the end of this year, again featuring external speakers but this time focusing more on the real-life funding application experiences of EMBL staff who administer EU grants. Geneviève hopes more scientists will attend.

"This sort of workshop can be useful to everyone, no matter what stage of the funding process they're involved in," she says. "It can also be a useful overview for those who aren't involved in EU-funded projects at the moment but may be in the future."





## A meeting of minds

After a very successful kick-off last year, scientists and technical staff from the Hamburg and Grenoble Outstations met for the second Bilateral Meeting on 22-23 June.

This year's meeting was held in Grenoble and covered a variety of topics. Working groups, headed by representatives from both sites, looked at topics including cryogenic crystal sample changers, high-throughput crystallisation, crystal recognition and centring, data collection strategy, macromolecular crystallo-

graphic software and future plans involving PETRA-III (the upcoming third generation synchrotron source in Hamburg).

Many areas for collaborations were identified and these will bring the Hamburg and Grenoble Units even closer. It is expected that more joint working groups, such as the newly formed Detector Working Group, will emerge. Ideas, plans and proposals were discussed in a concluding round-table meeting.

Jointly organised by Raimond Ravelli, José

Márquez (Grenoble), Jochen Müller-Dieckmann and Andrea Schmidt (Hamburg), the meeting brought together a total of about 30 participants from both Units, all of whom fully enjoyed the open exchange of experience and expertise.

The third Bilateral Meeting is planned for summer 2006 in Hamburg.

– Andrea Schmidt,  
Jochen Müller-Dieckmann,  
José A. Márquez, Raimond Ravelli

## Hamburg gets MADder

Tired of those long lines of crystallographers between you and your favourite MAD beamline? EMBL-Hamburg has just completed X12, its newest energy-tuneable beamline for macromolecular crystallography. It is located on the fan K bending magnet of the DORIS storage ring in HASYLAB hall 5, between the well-known fixed-wavelength beamlines X11 and X13.

X12 was designed and built by the EMBL-Hamburg instrumentation group with an emphasis on simplicity of operation, fast energy-tuneability and, above all, user-friendliness. Even your kids could use it. (Well, maybe not.) Equipment includes a MAR desktop beamline, an automated sample changer and a large MAR Mosaic CCD-detector. X12 is ideally suited for MAD experiments and as such will help reduce the experiment load on BW7A, the most over-booked of the EMBL-Hamburg crystallography beamlines. Another feature is that significant intensity can be obtained at wavelengths near 2.0 Å, making applications based on the anomalous scattering of sulphur and phosphorus atoms possible. For more information see the EMBL-Hamburg web pages or e-mail Manfred Weiss (msweiss@embl-hamburg.de)

– Christoph Hermes & Manfred S. Weiss

## Getting hands-on with students at EMBL-Monterotondo

Despite heavy schedules of lab work, weekly seminars and thesis preparation, EMBL PhD students always manage to make time for extracurricular activities. Daniela Ruffell and Rossana De Lorenzi from EMBL-Monterotondo are no exception. In May of this year, they set their textbooks aside and organised a workshop on cloning for high-school students.

“We had helped out during the course on stem cells that the ELLS team organised for high-school biology teachers here in December 2004, and really enjoyed it,” says Daniela. “We wanted to take things to the next level, and do something for students.” Students are no strangers to the Monterotondo campus: Richard Butler, head of the CNR's computing facilities, for example, organises a yearly visit of elementary school kids. Daniela and Rossana decided to build on his initiative.

On 7 May, 22 high school students from two different cities arrived on the Outstation's doorstep for a day-long, hands-on course. “One class came all the way from Naples, and had to get up at five in the morning to be here on time,” says Rossana. “They were really motivated!”

The students gathered in the CNR teaching lab (thanks, CNR!), where they were given an

overview of the basics of cloning. Proving that homework is not just for school kids, Daniela and Rossana spoke with the teachers beforehand to find out what the students had been learning in the classroom. They prepared a thorough presentation, including illustrative animated cartoons to simplify the concepts; the students found them entertaining and very helpful. Once students had the basics, they put on lab coats and rubber gloves, and learned how to clone a gene.

The initiative was made possible not only by the efforts of Daniela and Rossana, but also by funding provided by the PhD students' “solidarity fund”, donated by EMBL's E-Star fellows to be used by PhD students for special initiatives. Daniela and Rossana proposed their idea to the selection committee, who granted them €1,000 to get started.

“We have always liked the idea of spreading our scientific knowledge to young students or teachers in order to give them a first-hand experience of the exciting things that go on in a molecular biology laboratory,” says Daniela. “The interest is definitely there, and we hope to provide more of these courses in future and invite students from more regions of Italy.”



Back row l-r: Uwe Ristau (Instrumentation), Tim Siambanis (Instrumentation), Christoph Müller-Dieckmann (Weiss Team), Bernd Robrahn (Instrumentation), Thomas Gehrmann (Instrumentation). Front row l-r: Emiliano Piselli (Instrumentation), Brice Kauffmann (Weiss/Lamzin), Christoph Hermes (Head of Instrumentation), Doris Jahn (Instrumentation), Manfred Weiss. Photo: Heinz-Dieter Gentz

## Whatis WHATIF?

Six eager scientists joined Brigitte Altenberg-Greulich on 5 July at EMBL-Heidelberg for a three-day course in WHATIF, a modelling and graphics package that allows users to visualise and calculate protein structures.

The brainchild of Gert Vriend, now Director of Bioinformatics at Radboud University in the Netherlands, WHATIF was mainly developed during his time at EMBL. It can be used for mutant prediction, structure verification and many other applications.

Brigitte has already had inquiries from other scientists wanting to learn WHATIF, and is planning another course in the autumn. If you'd like more information, email her at [altenber@embl.de](mailto:altenber@embl.de)

## EMBL Alumni Association board elections to be held in September: It's time to vote!

Every few years, members of the EMBL Alumni Association are given the opportunity to elect representatives to the Association's board. These alumni have been hard at work organising activities and initiatives to help support the network of nearly 1,000 association members; they also play a vital role in promoting scientific exchange and collaborations across Europe. Elections for new members to the board will be held online during September 2005. Members of the Association are invited to cast their vote.

Currently the Alumni Association has two layers of organisation: the nearly 1,000 members who have joined the association so far, and the board, which was elected in 2003. Present members include Angus Lamond (Chair), Albert Stegmüller (Treasurer), Colin Dingwall, Daniel Louvard, Konrad Müller, Annalisa Pastore, Renata Stripecke and Juan Valcárcel. With these elections, Giovanna Bergamini,

Sabine Hentze, Noreen Murray, Lennart Philipson and Marino Zerial will be stepping down.

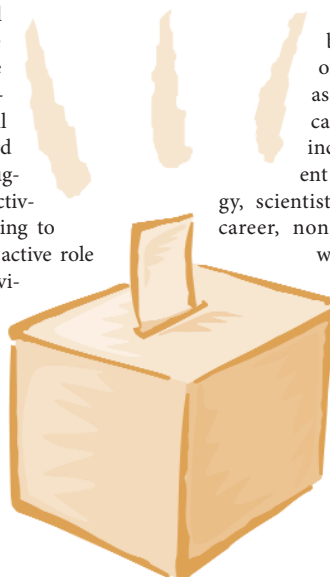
Members of the board will be asked to contribute actively to building the EMBL Alumni Association. Responsibilities will include attending board meetings twice a year, suggesting ideas for alumni activities and events and helping to organise them, taking an active role in promoting alumni activities and networks, and deciding on policies and actions.

Board members will be elected for a term of four years. At each election (to be held at least every

three years), half of the board seats will be renewed to ensure turnover.

The Association aims to form an enthusiastic and resourceful board that will be as representative as possible of gender and nationality, as well as fairly reflecting the different categories of EMBL alumni, including all EMBL Units, different fields within molecular biology, scientists at different levels of their career, non-scientific staff, and alumni working in industry as well as in academia.

Voting will take place online from 7-30 September 2005 at [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html) Registered association members will need their password to access the ballot form.



## And the candidates are...



**Oddmund Bakke**  
Postdoc, Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1988-1990

Currently Professor and Group Leader, Institute of Molecular Biosciences, University of Oslo, Norway. Also at the Department of Biomedicine, University of Bergen.



**Freddy Frischknecht**  
Predoc then postdoc, Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1996-2000

Currently Group Leader, Department of Parasitology, Hygiene Institute at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.



**Richard Morris**  
Predoc, EMBL-Hamburg, 1996-2000, then EBI-Hinxton, 2002-2005

Currently Research Project Leader in Computational Biology, John Innes Centre, Norwich, UK.



**Michael Boutros**  
Predoc, Developmental Biology, 1996-1999

Currently Boveri Group Leader at the German Cancer Research Center in Heidelberg, Germany.



**Bernhard Hoflack**  
Group Leader, Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1987-1996

Currently Professor at BIOTEC, Technical University of Dresden, BioInnovations Zentrum, Dresden, Germany.



**Gianni Morrone**  
Postdoc, Gene Expression, 1985-1989

Currently Managing Director, Lab of Molecular Haematopoiesis, Dept. of Experimental and Clinical Medicine, University of Catanzaro 'Magna Graecia', Catanzaro, Italy.



**Federico De Masi**  
Predoc then postdoc, Biophysical Instrumentation, 2000-2004

Currently Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University Medical School, Boston, MA, USA.



**Tony Hyman**  
Group Leader, Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1994-2001

Currently Group Leader and Director of the MPI for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, Dresden, Germany.



**Giovanni Paoella**  
Staff Scientist, Gene Expression, 1991-1997

Currently Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Molise - CEINGE Naples, Italy.



**Gwyndaf Evans**  
Predoc then postdoc, EMBL-Hamburg, 1989-1996

Currently Principal Beamline Scientist, Diamond Light Source, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Chilton, UK.



**Claudia Koch-Brandt**  
Postdoc then Staff Scientist, Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1980-1985

Currently Professor at the Institut für Biochemie, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, Germany.



**Niovi Santama**  
Postdoc, Gene Expression and Cell Biology and Biophysics, 1994-1997

Currently Assistant Professor, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus.

Find out why these candidates think they should be elected, and cast your vote online from September 7-30, 2005 at [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/elections.html)



## Gateway to Japan opens with collaboration agreement

EMBL played host to a very special guest on 11 July when renowned Japanese scientist and current president of the National Institutes of Natural Sciences (NINS), Professor Yoshimo Shimura, paid a visit to the Heidelberg laboratory.

He came to sign an agreement with Iain Mattaj between EMBL and one of the five member institutions of NINS, the NIBB (National Institute of Basic Biology), to promote collaborations via joint conferences and visits and to facilitate the exchange of scientists between the institutes.

At least one scientific conference every year involving scientists from the NIBB and EMBL is planned, alternating between Europe and Japan. Two minisymposia have taken place already, with Japanese delegates visiting EMBL-Heidelberg in July for a

developmental biology meeting, followed by an imaging technology conference a few days later. The next event is a joint international conference on bioimaging that will take place on 21-24 March, 2006, in Okazaki, Japan.

Another feature of the collaboration agreement is the introduction of Shimura Awards, travel grants for EMBL scientists to visit scientific institutes in Japan.

Iain Mattaj and Yoshimo Shimura seal the collaboration agreement



Photo by Marietta Schrupp

## School's in for summer

Twelve young scientists joined ELLS (European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences) for two days in July for an insight into the workings of the Lab – and perhaps a glimpse into their future.

The students were in Heidelberg as invitees of the tenth International Summer Science School, an initiative set up in 1996 between the city and several of its research institutes, including EMBL. Encompassing several fields of research, the summer school brings together students interested in science from Heidelberg's twin cities in different countries for a month-long taste of what it's like to work in a lab.

After a city tour of Heidelberg and a day of hands-on lab practice at the *Lernlabor* at ExploHeidelberg, EMBL's benches were the next port-of-call for the youngsters, who hailed from France, the UK, the Czech Republic, Israel, Ukraine and Japan. ELLS had put together a busy programme of workshops, seminars, demonstrations and practicals, but alongside the hard work there was still plenty of time for the visitors to sample another important aspect of life at EMBL with a buffet and drinks with PhD students at the end of the second day.

## IT Services meets challenges of biology at EMBL with new infrastructures and services

One afternoon last year, every light and computer at EMBL-Heidelberg went out, bringing modern biology to a halt. Things got up and running again quickly, but the message was clear: without computers, biology isn't going anywhere.

Enter stage left, Rupert Lück, who joined the Lab in April 2005 to head EMBL-Heidelberg's IT services department. He's equally comfortable talking about ADP (adenosine diphosphate) and LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol). That's probably to be expected from someone who holds degrees in Biology and Bioinformatics and most recently led the Global IT Systems department at LION bioscience. Over the past few months, his team has been taking stock of IT needs at the Lab to come up with a plan for the future. That plan will have to take into account the increase in the amount of data researchers deal with at EMBL and the need to provide better IT infrastructures and services.

The move toward systems biology is increasing interdisciplinarity and collaborations. One major challenge for Rupert and his team will be to provide a flexible IT environment that supports research among different groups. "Collaborations are becoming increasingly important in both industrial and academic settings, a trend particularly strong at EMBL," says Rupert. "Currently, most users don't have access to a consistent IT infrastructure that supports this – apart from email and a few

individually developed services. We plan to introduce a platform that will make research in virtual teams much easier." Features will include central calendaring, task management and resource booking. Common workspaces for file sharing will serve as a crystallisation point and document repository for new collaborative teams within or across the EMBL sites, and with external collaborators.

Another challenge is effectively managing the huge amount of data currently being generated by EMBL researchers. "Though physics is often considered to be the field that produces the most data from experiments, biology is quickly catching up," says Rupert. High-throughput imaging experiments, such as those done in Jan Ellenberg's Mitocheck project, can produce up to 30 terabytes of data in just one screen. This requires a huge computing infrastructure – which will ultimately benefit other researchers. "Heidelberg servers now host 70 terabytes of data – that's the equivalent of about 1,750 40-gigabyte laptops. We expect to double the amount of storage we have every year, reaching the petabyte range (that's a lot of laptops) within the next five years."

The increase in data presents several challenges. Data have to be safely hosted and rapidly accessible so that scientists can analyse them. "We will have to identify a new storage structure; this has many steps and will take some time," says Rupert. "Some of the technology that we need does not even exist yet."

A third area of focus for Rupert and his team is to improve communication with the rapidly-growing user community. "Our goal is to be a service-oriented department that supports users and the science in the Lab. Communication about IT issues is fragmented at the moment. We get anywhere from 10 to 50 requests per day. Those end up in several different "buckets", and this doesn't give us an overview of the number and complexity of requests that are coming in. Soon we'll implement a unified request system that will allow us to assign and track requests more easily and help us plan for future needs."

"EMBL has grown over the years from tens of users to now nearly 1,000 at EMBL-Heidelberg alone. There is a lot of legacy involved in IT services at the Lab, and changes have been implemented over the years bit by bit as needs have arisen. It is now time to really take stock and develop a streamlined approach for the future. The goal is not to radically standardise everything at the Lab, as is often done in industry settings – that is not appropriate for a place like EMBL where researchers have the freedom to do science as they like. Nevertheless, there is enough room to avoid complexity and overhead. The goal is to bring in the best industry-standard platforms and software, and balance that with the needs of the EMBL scientific community. If we do our job right, the IT platform that supports the scientists will be one factor behind their success."



### Strength in numbers

June 2005 was a critical time for European research. The EU budget proposal of the Luxembourg Presidency to cut planned research funds by a massive 40% came as a blow to the scientific community. EMBO responded quickly, launching an online petition supported by the European Life Sciences Forum (ELSF). The aim was to give scientists a centralised forum to express their support for increased funding.

The petition met with an unprecedented response, clocking up over 4,000 signatures in the first three days. At the time of going to press, over 18,000 scientists had endorsed the call for political leaders in Europe "to match their words on research, the knowledge-based economy and the Lisbon Agreement". The response was a strong indicator of the effectiveness of the networks surrounding EMBO

and ELSF. The EMBL alumni were also an important multiplier in this process.

In comparison to agriculture or industry, the research world often lacks a common voice. There are few mechanisms for scientists to channel their opinions and make them count at a political level. With the exception of France, researchers rarely take to the streets to demonstrate as Europe's farmers did recently in the light of EU plans to cut agricultural subsidies. As scientists, our voices need to be every bit as strong as the farming community, whose budget is set to represent almost 45% of EU funds. It was therefore encouraging to see such a widespread reaction to the EMBO/ELSF petition.

Amplifying the scientific voice is clearly crucial. This is not self-interest – a strong and engaged research sector is important for the future of Europe. Early communication is also vital as opposed to reacting to decisions that are already irreversible. The EMBO/ELSF petition is one example of what can be done.

Letters highlighting the petition were sent to the EU Heads of Government and the Ministers for Research and Finance. So far, the response has been positive. The Commission and a number of ministers have sent messages

supporting the sentiments of the petition. This points to the potential of this type of constructive input in raising the profile of scientists in key decision-making. It could also make a difference to those people charged with arguing the case of research at a political level.

The ultimate goal is to bring strong scientific input to European policy-making. This is why coalition organisations like ELSF and the multidisciplinary Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) are so important. These groups bring together like-minded organisations, raising their impact in policy-making arenas. As founding members, EMBO and EMBL have a major influence in both organisations.

Independently, EMBO will also continue to keep a watchful eye on new developments – providing a focal point for EMBO scientists and a channel for input from the wider community. At a time when many changes are directly impacting research, this is a new challenge for EMBO and many other organisations, but ultimately it can only be good for the future of Europe.

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

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

[www.initiative-science-europe.org](http://www.initiative-science-europe.org)

– Frank Gannon

## EMBL faces elected to ERC Scientific Council

Former EMBL Director General Fotis C. Kafatos is among seven eminent life scientists to be appointed to the new Scientific Council of the European Research Council (ERC).

The council, inaugurated in July 2005, comprises 22 renowned representatives from all areas of science. Other biologists appointed include EMBL alumna Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard and former SAC chair Carl-Henrick Heldin.

Members will act autonomously and independently to supervise the scientific strategy

of the ERC and determine its policies, remaining uninfluenced by politics or other outside concerns. They will also be responsible for guaranteeing that decision-making and operations within the ERC are carried out according to the highest standards, and that the selection process for the funding of research projects is not only a fair system based on peer review, but also maintains a constant grade of excellence.

Selection of the council members was determined by leading scientists on an independent panel.

## Eurobarometer surveys attitudes towards science and technology

The EU regularly conducts a survey called the "Eurobarometer" among citizens of the member states; the purpose is to collect information about people's positions on important topics.

At the beginning of this year, a major survey including a section on "Social values, science and technology" was conducted in the 25 EU member states and several other countries. The results provide fascinating insights into Europeans' attitudes and will be used to help shape the EU's science, research and funding policies.

89% of EU citizens believe that "we have a duty to protect nature, even if this means limiting human progress" . . . 43% believe that exploiting nature may be "unavoidable if humankind is to progress" . . . 55% do not think that "nature will be able to survive human actions" . . . 53% think science and technology decisions should be made according to "an analysis of the risks and benefits involved" and 33% on "the moral and ethical issues involved" . . . people thought that the work of scientists in universities (88%) and industry (85%) have a "positive effect on society" . . . 87% agree that science has improved the quality of life for their generation . . . 77% believe that it will improve the quality of life of future generations – but only 58% feel that "the next generation will enjoy a better quality of life than we do now" . . . In France, however, only 34% agree with the statement, and several other EU countries are below the 50% mark with this question . . . 94% of Europeans thought that "medicines and new medical technologies" would have a positive effect on our quality of life over the next 20 years, while a much lower proportion – 65% – felt that the effects of biotechnology and genetic engineering would be positive . . . new energy sources for cars gained a 90% positive rating, computers and information technology 87%, air transport 80% and mobile phones 66% . . .

The full report includes an entire section devoted to specific applications of science, including particular uses of gene technology, and can be found on the EU website at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_225\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf)

## The Staff Association summer party 2005 – a good time was had by all (as usual!)



Photos by Marietta Schupp

## What happens if you put five fellows in a room for 24 hours? ...no, not that!

An EMBL PhD student was faced with a remarkable challenge at the 16th annual Forum Engelberg conference recently – but came through smiling when her efforts won first prize.

Cleopatra Kozłowski and four other pre- and postdoc fellows from different countries were given 24 hours to come up with a proposal for “a project that would bring science to society”. The prize for promising ideas was an allocation of funding to make their plans a reality.

The winning proposal from Cleo’s group was to create posters, with the help of doctors, to inform patients about common health issues such as antibiotics or cancer. These would then be distributed in doctors’ waiting rooms in the

group members’ host and home countries. At the end of the project, the group will gather feedback from patients about how helpful they found the information.

Sponsored by the Forum Engelberg Foundation to the tune of 15,000 CHF, the group now has six months to carry out their proposal, beginning in September.

The initiative was part of the Young Scientist Programme, which had invited Marie Curie Fellows from all over Europe to apply for participation. Those chosen to take part were three PhD students (including Cleo) and 13 postdocs from twelve countries, all from different institutes and disciplines including anthropology, biology and geology.

The Programme ran alongside the main Forum, which took place in Lucerne, Switzerland, on 22-25 May. The aim of the Forum is to encourage interdisciplinary communication between scientists, philosophers, politicians and the public. About 50 notable speakers from various disciplines were invited to give lectures and workshops on this year’s theme, “Language and the Future.”

After presenting their individual work in a ten-minute talk to the other participants and conference organisers, the young scientists split into groups and put their thinking caps on for a day. Cleo says, “Putting an effective proposal together was hard work, but the real challenge starts now – to really make it happen.”

### Important news from EMBL’s International PhD Programme:

The deadline for applications for 2006 is now Nov. 1, 2005. Apply online at [www.embl.org/training/phdprogramme/applications](http://www.embl.org/training/phdprogramme/applications)

## Species of -omics: a field guide (a letter from an EMBL*&cetera* reader)

Dear Editor,

During a recent visit to EMBL, while strolling innocently through the hallways, I was alarmed to notice a poster bearing the word “metabonomics”.

Now, generally I am the last person to object to a degree of creativity in the English language, particularly in matters of science. However, in this case, I found the word simply ugly. “Metabonomics”? Utterly unaesthetic. Something must be done, I considered, to halt the proliferation of words with the suffix “-omics”.

My first goal was an attempt to catalogue existing species. After the most familiar varieties, such as “genomics” and “proteomics”, I was astounded to find that the list is quite extensive. The word “economics” caused a quandary:

in an era dominated by biology, would it need to be redefined? In any event, my research into the literature revealed fascinating new varieties too numerous to list here, but I submit a few of the most interesting:

**metabonomics:** everything having to do with metabolism

**colectomics:** all surgical procedures involving removal of part of the colon, not to be confused with

**sammelomics:** (from the German verb, “sammeln”) an obsession with the study of collections

**Ötzomics:** everything having to do with the iceman of the Alps

**pantheomics:** an attempt at a comprehensive list of the world’s deities

**sitcomics:** studies of television programmes with “laugh tracks”

**somnambolomics:** all things having to do with disorders of excessive sleep

**polemomics:** studies of filibusters and other extremely long discourses (which is loosely connected to the previous item; additionally, I understand that some research into this has been done at your institute).

To avoid engaging in sammelomics or polemomics of my own, I will stop here, except to say that the list goes on to encompass such terms as “Starbucksomics” and “McDonaldomics”, which good taste and various trademark restrictions do not permit me to discuss.

– Wilford Terris



## Adéquation Germany's act of charity pays dividends

While most people were still tucked up in bed, devoted athletes were running, cycling and swimming their Sunday morning away on 7 August at the annual Heidelbergman Triathlon. Oh well, they say it takes all sorts to make a world. Anyway, among the energetic early risers were several teams from EMBL and Cellzome, as well as members of Adéquation Germany, the charity set up by postdoctoral fellow Emmanuel Reynaud. They had been collecting sponsorship before the event to raise money for a health campaign in Mauritania, aimed at raising awareness about malaria, AIDS and infectious diseases, and a school for women in Mali.

It was originally hoped that €600 could be raised, but thanks to the generosity of the sponsors, the charity's final sum was €1,130.01. This means that in addition to the existing beneficiaries, Adéquation Germany is able to fund a third project, an initiative to bring agricultural education to rural families in Burkina Faso. Adéquation Germany would like to thank everyone who got involved, either by taking part in the Triathlon or by sponsoring a team.

For more information about the charity's fundraising initiatives, visit

<http://adequationgermany.embl.de>

## EMBLEM exhibits at largest-ever BIO conference

In late June EMBLEM, the commercial subsidiary of EMBL, exhibited for the second consecutive year at the annual international convention of the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO). The largest annual biotechnology event in the world, BIO 2005 attracted a record 18,000 participants and 1,525 exhibitors from more than sixty countries to Philadelphia.

All of the major players in the biotech and pharmaceutical industry were in attendance and many came by to visit the EMBLEM booth. This allowed EMBLEM to promote innovations from the Laboratory to a broad variety of potential customers and opinion

leaders in the field and to negotiate new licensing opportunities. Interest in EMBL technologies goes on unabated and this year's BIO helped EMBLEM build new business relations, foster key accounts and touch base with their strategic partners from science and business.

– Gábor Lamm



## from the Staff Association

**Long-term insurance, what's that?** It's hard to believe, but there still may be a few of you out there who haven't heard about the proposal to introduce long-term care insurance at EMBL (compulsory for staff members, voluntary for ancillaries, fellows and pensioners). If you want to find out more about what it covers and how it would affect you, see the Staff Association website at [www.embl.de/~staff](http://www.embl.de/~staff). From the sidebar go to "Staff Info" and there you will find

several PDF files to download (including information on premiums). The staff association welcomes your input on the proposal.

**Clubs and Events.** The Staff Association is in the process of examining and clarifying procedures for the funding of clubs (including purchasing equipment for their activities) and social events. Look for more information at a later date!

– Ann Thüringer

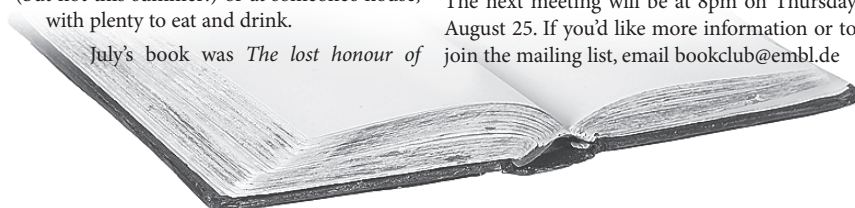
## Who needs a picture when a thousand words will do?

**Reading needn't be a solitary pursuit.** EMBL's bookclub gets together once a month to discuss a book they've chosen to read. Meetings are relaxed and friendly, held either outside (but not this summer!) or at someone's house, with plenty to eat and drink.

July's book was *The lost honour of*

*Katarina Blum* by Heinrich Böll, and August's choice is Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. During September, the group will be reading *1984* by George Orwell.

The next meeting will be at 8pm on Thursday August 25. If you'd like more information or to join the mailing list, email [bookclub@embl.de](mailto:bookclub@embl.de)



## news&events

■ **GeneCore has introduced an online booking service** for easier access to scientific instruments provided to the EMBL community. Guests, visitors and collaborators of GeneCore/ChemCore automatically have access as part of the core facilities exchange groupware solution, and anyone who has already registered with Vladimir Benes or is a current user of the old system should have received an email containing their access codes. Anybody else wishing to register can find all the necessary information at [www.genecore.embl.de/downloads.html](http://www.genecore.embl.de/downloads.html)

■ **The second "Communicating European Research" conference**, hosted by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research, will take place on 14-15 November 2005 in Brussels. The event will focus on all areas of science communication and will provide a forum for scientists, communication professionals and journalists. It will also take a look at the ongoing preparations of FP7. EMBL and EIROForum will be involved in the event, exhibiting a joint booth, a presentation on science in schools, press conferences and a workshop for press officers. See [www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/index\\_en.cfm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/index_en.cfm) for more information.

■ **Hinxton, 4-6 September 2005:** The EBI is co-organising a conference, "Therapeutic Applications of Computational Biology", with *Nature Biotechnology* as part of the EMBL Molecular Medicine series. See [www.ebi.ac.uk/Information/events/therapeutic](http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Information/events/therapeutic) for more information.

## Coffee and conversation

New to EMBL-Heidelberg? Don't worry, we've all been there. Wandering lost around the streets, confused over which type of bread to buy, not knowing a soul, and as for the language barrier... It's pretty easy to get through the week, with work to take your mind off things, but don't the weekends just seem to last forever?

Help is at hand. Come and have your Sunday breakfast with a friendly group of professionals, students and other newcomers from all over the world, all eager to find out what the city has to offer beyond the Hauptstrasse. With coffee, croissants and chat followed by a stroll through the town, it's a great way to swap tips and make new friends. The group meets every Sunday at 11am in the garden at Merianstrasse 2 (next to the church). See [www.fruehstueck-heidelberg.de](http://www.fruehstueck-heidelberg.de) for more information.

## people @ EMBL



**Eleanor Hayes** started at EMBL-Heidelberg in August as editor of the new science teaching journal, the first issue of which will be launched in spring 2006. Originally from London, Eleanor studied zoology at Oxford University and went on to achieve her PhD in insect ecology. "I spent three years raising maggots in rotting liver and dissecting flies' ovaries," she says. If some of you are wondering why she looks familiar, it's because she's no stranger to Heidelberg, having already lived in the area for four years. She worked for nearly three of those writing online help for bioinformatics software, among other things, before moving over to DECHEMA, the Society for Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology in Frankfurt, where she was editor-in-chief of the bibliographical database before coming to EMBL.



**Elke Jagomast** is the latest new face in the personnel section, having joined on July 1 as Senior Personnel Officer for Personnel Management and Recruitment. Born and bred in the Heidelberg area, Elke studied political science and Roman philology, spending some time in France as a student, and has spent the last five years working as Human Resources Manager at LION bioscience. At EMBL, she'd like to extend the services of the personnel section to offer more support to both newcomers and old hands alike.

## awards&honours

**Christof Antz** from EMBL Ventures has been admitted to the renowned Kauffman Fellows Program (KFP). He is the only German and one of four European candidates who have been awarded the prestigious Kauffman Fellowship for Venture Education in the USA. The two-year executive Kauffman Fellows Program was created in 1994 as part of the Kauffman Foundation in the USA and is one of the most recognised educational programs for scientists, bankers and entrepreneurs who enter the venture capital industry. Every year up to twenty candidates are admitted, selected from some hundred applicants, mostly from the USA.

**Daniel Gerlich**, a recent EMBL alumnus, has won the European Young Investigator Award (EURYI Award), which totals approximately €1.2m. The award is developed by the European Heads of Research Councils (EUROHORCS), in collaboration with the European Science Foundation (ESF). Having left Jan Ellenberg's group at the end of June 2005, Daniel has just established an independent research group at the Institute of Biochemistry at ETH Zürich.

**Oliver Schilling**, previously at EMBL-Hamburg, made history by becoming the first EMBL predoc to receive the Award of the Association of the Friends and Sponsors of DESY for an outstanding PhD thesis based on the DESY programme. He was flown in from Vancouver, Canada, where he is currently working at the University of British Columbia to receive his award from DESY director Professor Albrecht Wagner.

**David Gatfield**, previously a member of Elisa Izaurralde's group, has won the ALTANA Pharma Prize of €1,500, awarded annually by the German Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology for the best PhD in the field of molecular biology.

**Cleopatra Kozlowski**, an EMBL PhD student, won first prize for a poster she presented at the 15th Biennial International *C. elegans* conference in Los Angeles on 25-29 June.

### Coordinating Manager, EMBL International Center for Advanced Training (EICAT)

With the opening of EICAT, EMBL enters a new phase of advanced training activity. The main duties of the Coordinating Manager will include:

- developing and managing EICAT
- representing EICAT to the scientific community
- promoting it in coordination with the senior management of EMBL
- coordinating all EICAT activities
- structuring and organising a world-class programme of courses, conferences and workshops
- fundraising from public and private sources, including grant applications
- managing the EICAT budget

For more information, see the jobs link on the EMBL homepage.

## who's new

Rafael Alcantara Martin (Sequence Database), Kanchan Anand (Scheffzek), Matthew Betts (Russell), Sumit Bhattacharyya (Sequence Database), Andrey Bogomolov (Lamzin), Justin Brumbaugh (Schultz), Helcio Burd (Protein Expression and Purification Core Facility), Alban Chesneau (Hart), Marcello Clerici (Cusack), Stephanie Dillmann (Ellenberg), Anne Due (Wilmanns), Bärbel Edelmann (Protein Expression and Purification Core Facility), Julien Gagneur (Furlong), Oren Gordon (Knop), Cathryn Gould (Gibson), Mark Hink (Bastiaens), Carsten Horn (Serrano), Gavin Kelman (EBI Systems), Christa Kornmann (Building Maintenance), Vienna Leigh (OIPA), Martin Loose (Nédélec), Roby Mani (Microarray), Karyn Megy (ENSEMBL), Marija Mihailovic (Hentze), Gabriele Musumeci (Minichiello), Fariborz Nasertorabi (Suck), Evangelia Petsalaki (Russell), Marketa Pfaffova (Personnel), Christian Poulsen (Wilmanns), Emanuele Raineri (Serrano), Helio Roque (Antony), Emilio Salazar Donate (EBI Database Applications), Nicole Schmitt (Social Services), Chris Steinert (Müller-Dieckmann), Barbara Tizzano (Wilmanns), Irina Treede (Griffiths), Eduardo Garcia Urdiales (Russell), Rudolf Walczak (Mattaj), Tina Zavasnik (Griffiths)

## events @ EMBL

23 August–2 September, 2005

EMBL-Heidelberg

EMBO Practical Course on Methods in Cell Biology: From Single Molecule to Complex Systems Analysis

9 September, 2005

EMBL-Heidelberg

Science in a Democratic Society

12 September, 2005

EMBL-Heidelberg

EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Michael Levine: Gene Networks for Fly Gastrulation and Sea Squirt Heart Formation

14–18 September, 2005

EMBL-Heidelberg

EMBO Conference on Protein Synthesis and Translational Control

19–21 September, 2005

EBI-Hinxton

Faculty Retreat, Senior Scientists Meeting, Heads of Units Meeting

28 September–2 October, 2005

EMBL-Heidelberg

6th EMBL Mouse Molecular Genetics Meeting

It is with deep regret that we inform the EMBL community of the sudden death on 21 July, 2005, of Manfred Höfler, former head of the EMBL school group at the IGH.