News about services, staff, science and society

This is the first edition of a newsletter that will be published by the EMBL Office of Information and Public Affairs (OIPA) several times a year. Its production is motivated by the need for an efficient way to spread the word on issues relevant to the entire Laboratory. Over the last quarter of a century, EMBL has grown from an easily-purveyable number of scientists busy at a single Laboratory to a large community spread over five sites in four countries, and at last count the number of our scientific Alumni has reached 1,500. There are now nearly a thousand people working at the five EMBL sites. A newsletter can be of great value in raising awareness of what is going on in EMBL as a whole, particularly in improving communication between the main Laboratory and the Outstations; it can provide an important means of keeping our Alumni linked to the life of the Laboratory, and it will provide a forum for voicing issues which don’t fit easily into EMBL’s other publications. In particular, this will be a place where science and society issues can be explored in depth, in the form of letters or essays. It will also be a venue for publishing announcements from the administration and staff association.

This will be a valuable resource if it receives interesting contributions. Ideally, a significant part of its contents will come from the staff. For the next issue, we are soliciting the following types of contributions:

- news from each Outstation and from Monterotondo;
- news from EMBO and the EMBC;
- announcements from services and the computer group;
- announcements of upcoming talks or seminars of special interest;
- letters or essays relating to themes from science and society events;
- publications that have been accepted;
- major awards or grants;
- anything else of interest to the broader community.

For the moment, there will be no specific publication schedule. An electronic version of the newsletter, updated as items are added, will be available on the WWW soon. Submissions and suggestions should be sent to newsletter@embl-heidelberg.de

EMBL's PhD officially recognized by Baden-Württemberg

The EMBL International PhD Programme has received a letter from the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research, and the Arts announcing that the State is prepared to treat a PhD degree granted by the Laboratory in the same way that other international PhDs are accepted. The ministry has now recommended that the degree be recognized nation-wide, a decision which must be made by a national commission called the Kultusministerkonferenz.

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25th Anniversary EMBL Alumni Meeting

October 21-23, 1999
at the Main Laboratory in Heidelberg

All former predocs, postdocs, scientists, group leaders, sabbatical visitors, Programme Coordinators, and Directors General welcome!

Speakers:
Michael Ashburner, Patrick Baeuerle, Suzanne Eaton, Anne Ephrussi, Jean Grünberg, Juan Carlos Izpisua-Belmonte, Fotis C. Kafatos, Werner Kühlbrandt, Andrea Musacchio, Kai Simons, Irmi Sinning, Hermann Steller, David Tollervey, Isabel Vernos
The EMBL Council of Member States held its summer 1999 meeting in sweltering Rome, hosted by the Italian National Research Council (CNR), with one of the items on the agenda a visit to the new Research Programme in Mouse Biology in Monterotondo. A high point of the meeting was the announcement that the Host Site Agreement had been signed with Italy. Two items of interest at the meeting proper were the Director General’s presentation of an outline of the next five-year Scientific Programme, which will have to be approved by the Member States at the end of 2000, and a salary adjustment which will mean a pay raise for Laboratory employees across all five sites.

The Scientific Programme is being developed with the help of input from the Group and Team Leaders’ retreat at the beginning of this year and two consultations between senior faculty of the Laboratory and external experts, including members of EMBL’s Scientific Advisory Committee. The outline featured a plan to “combine organizational stability with programmatic ferment.” The current Units (Programmes and Outstations) are to be maintained while a number of interdisciplinary initiatives will be developed, contributing to an overall theme of functional genomics. The finished plan and the accompanying “Indicative Scheme” (whose thrust is mainly financial) are critical because they will define the scientific orientation and the budget within which EMBL must operate over the next half-decade. Fotis’ presentation of the broad themes was greeted enthusiastically by the delegates.

The Council also voted to approve recommendations from the Finance Committee regarding a 1999 salary adjustment. Laboratory employees will receive the following increases based on country: for France, an adjustment of 1.5%; for Germany, 1.7%; for Italy, 2.6%, and for the U.K., 4.2%. The increases have already been implemented in the July payroll.

The summer meetings of Council are now usually held at locations permitting the delegates to be acquainted with EMBL’s Units outside Heidelberg. This meeting introduced Council to EMBL’s new Research Programme in Mouse Biology in Monterotondo. At the outset of the meeting, Fotis was happy to announce that the Host Site Agreement had been signed with the Italian government on the previous day. Delays had been necessary to ensure that the agreement with Italy matched those of the other sites as closely as possible. The negotiations had resolved the issues in a satisfactory manner, with the exception of the tax status of Italian nationals employed as Monterotondo staff; until a solution has been found, it will only be possible to hire Italians for positions as fellows there.

On the first of July, delegates toured the Monterotondo campus, including the attractive new EMBL laboratories. They were pleased by the scientific presentations from Walter Witke, Ulrich Kalinke and José de la Pompa, and by an overview of the Monterotondo Programme activities and ambitions by Coordinator Klaus Rajewsky. In a spirited presentation, Glauco Tocchini-Valentini, Director of the CNR’s Institute of Cell Biology, expressed Italy’s appreciation for the EMBL Programme as an important step in the internationalization of the Italian scientific environment. He described the CNR’s efforts to date in supporting and integrating the work of all of the units that have taken up residence on the campus.

At a reception held on the grounds of a Foreign Ministry villa next to the Tiber, in the balmy Roman evening, the EMBL staff from Monterotondo, the Council delegates and the contingent of EMBL personnel from Heidelberg had the opportunity to mix with Italian dignitaries and celebrate this “debut” of the new EMBL Unit in Italy together.
Monterotondo campus opens its doors

On March 8, 1999, the "Adriano Buzzati-Traverso" International Scientific Campus, site of the new EMBL Research Programme in Mouse Biology, was officially opened by the Italian authorities in Monterotondo, Italy. The campus was created by the Italian National Research Council (CNR) with the goal of developing and internationalizing biological and biomedical research. Named for the CNR scientist who introduced modern molecular biology to Italy, the center is intended to serve as a focal point for European science and technology.

The inauguration was attended by the President of the Italian Republic. Representatives from all of the units attended. EMBL was represented by Fotis C. Kafatos and Chairman of Council, Julio Celis; EMBO was represented by Executive Director, Frank Gannon. The keynote speeches were given by Antonio Ruberti, former Minister of Research and Technological Development for the European Union, Lucio Bianco, President of the CNR, and Fotis C. Kafatos, Director General of EMBL.

In addition to the EMBL Research Programme, the campus hosts:

- The CNR Institute of Cell Biology, operating national research activities, which is developing collaborative projects with EMBL on topics in biochemistry and molecular and cellular genetics.
- The European Mouse Mutant Archive (EMMA), funded by the CNR and the European Union. EMMA will store mouse strains, mostly as cryo-preserved embryos, submitted and used by research groups throughout Europe and the rest of the world. EMMA has a number of partner nodes throughout Europe, including the CNRS (France), the MRC (England), the Karolinska Institute (Sweden) and the Goulbenkian Institute (Portugal).
- A unit from the Jackson Laboratories, which performs a similar function in the United States and will lend technical expertise and conduct training.
- The ENI, an international company mainly involved in the oil market.
- The International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), a research organization with headquarters in Trieste and New Delhi, will join the campus in the year 2000. The ICGEB works within the context of the UN in the field of molecular biology and biotechnology, with an emphasis on sustained scientific and technological development and technology transfer in Third World countries.

One of EMBL’s priorities in the future will be the expansion of its Research Programme, which will emphasize themes relevant to molecular medicine and which could play an important service role in developing new strains of mice in partnership with international collaborators.

Klaus Rajewsky and Fotis Kafatos at the inaugural reception

Glauco Tocchini-Valentini

(baseball caps generously provided by Jackson Laboratories)
Much has changed since the early days when Mary Holmes fought fearlessly with teletype machines and rudimentary electronic search instruments to come up with literature for her beloved researchers at EMBL. Mary retired in June of 1998 and takes with her the infinite thanks of the hundreds of scientists she helped. In the summer of 1998, librarians David Westley and Regina Herhoff joined the EMBL staff, bringing with them plans to lead the Szilard Library into the new millennium.

Both David and Regina have years of experience in helping scientists with their information needs: David spent four years in the small library at the German Rheumatology Research Center in Berlin, while Regina joined EMBL after working for three years at the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry in Munich. “I came from an institute of about 60 scientists and I was the one librarian,” says David, “whereas Regina worked in a bigger library. One of the things that attracted us to the library here at EMBL is that there were many developments in the planning and we also saw many things that we would like to change and improve. We have a lot of responsibility here, we have set up ideas for how we want to develop the library and we have had a lot of autonomy to do that.”

High on their agenda for change was the atmosphere of the library. So over the past year the Szilard library has had a facelift. In addition to the rebuilding of the library stores, new carpet has been laid and new lighting, shelves, air-conditioning and more computers have been installed. The result is an inviting setting where EMBL staff and scientists can browse through the library’s 230 journals, work on research papers, or simply read the many newspapers available in seven different languages. David also points out that “in future we would like to be able to offer more working space and more room for people who want to come down to write their dissertations. We’re getting some iMac computers, but if we put them on the desks we’ll lose room. We would like to offer proper work carrels, if we had the space.”
A unique aspect of EMBL and of the library is its 24-hour open-door policy. Unlike libraries at many other institutes which are closed after working hours and at weekends, EMBL’s doors are always open. “DKFZ, for example, isn’t open like we are,” says David. Unfortunately, as in any other library, books and journals do sometimes disappear from the shelves. “We wouldn’t want to stop free access at EMBL,” David says. “The point is that people here work late, at weekends, and they’ve got to be able to do that. We want to be able to ensure this freedom of access. We’ve tried to improve things by putting the magnet lock on the door. We’ve also put a book return box in, and that helps.”

Also high on the list of things to develop is the content of the library itself and the resources and services that it provides. “We have spent some 9,000 DM on new reference books and we’d like to renew the book collection,” Regina says. “Book proposals for the library are always welcome. Additionally, the Science and Society book collection has now been moved to the library.” In terms of services, the emphasis will be on quick and reliable electronic delivery of information. A major project is to develop the services that can be accessed through the library’s website. Researchers at EMBL can now access 65 journals electronically, as well as the library’s catalogues. They can also order articles on-line and request patent and citation searches. “In the long term,” says David, “with everything going much more in the direction of the electronic digital library, we would like to offer more that people can do from their lab or their office, without having to come to the library.”

Other electronic initiatives in the library include CD-ROM databases which provide access to sources including Dorland’s Medical Dictionary and Encyclopedia Britannica. “At the moment we have one PC for CD-ROM use and a new Mac to be used exclusively for catalogue searches, as well as four public Macs, with a further four iMacs to be installed shortly,” Regina says.

Long-term projects also include purchasing a book scanner and digitalizing a large part of the library. “Though this would involve some investment in terms of equipment and staff to scan texts,” David says, “in the long term, it would have huge benefits in terms of accessibility.” Regina adds, “We would also like to introduce an electronic library newsletter to inform scientists about recent changes.”

This increased accessibility will not only benefit researchers in Heidelberg, who will be able to do literature searches from their desks, but will also provide support to researchers at other EMBL sites across Europe. “They are quite reliant on electronic journals, particularly in Rome,” says David. “We have tried to be aware of this. We have tried to find out if the researchers there actually need, what their priorities are and then to make sure that the library here is a support for them as well.”

One of the problems that the library has encountered in expanding its electronic resources is the high price tag attached to such services. While an on-line subscription to a journal is sometimes included in the regular subscription price, in some cases it can cost up to 3,000 or 4,000 dollars more. On-line searching services also come at a hefty price. “I recently did a citation search for a researcher here at EMBL. I was on-line for a couple of hours and ended up spending a few thousand marks,” says Regina. One way to circumvent the high costs involved in access to electronic resources is to go into consortium with other libraries. “There is a lot more we could do if we joined forces with, for example, DKFZ, the University of Heidelberg or Mannheim Clinic,” says David, “and this is definitely on our long-term plan list.”

Who was Leo Szilard?

Leo Szilard was born in Budapest in 1898. He began his career in science in 1922 as a physicist at the Institute of Theoretical Physics at Berlin University, and then moved to the medical college at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London. While there, he collaborated with T.A. Chalmers and was one of the first scientists to envisage the possibilities of nuclear fission and chain reactions. In 1937 he left England to take up a post at Columbia University in New York. During the 1930s he advised scientists not to publish results of chain reaction research, fearing the misuse of its dangerous possibilities. But equally aware of the danger at that time of Nazi Germany developing an atomic bomb first, he pressed the US government to support nuclear research and in 1939 helped persuade Albert Einstein to write to President Roosevelt advocating the immediate development of the atomic bomb. Thus, Leo Szilard became one of the key scientists involved in the Manhattan Project. Although Szilard had succeeded in helping to create the nuclear bomb, he failed in his passionate attempts to restrain its use. After Hiroshima, he worked intensely to advocate the peaceful applications of atomic energy and the international control of nuclear weapons.

In 1946 Szilard’s scientific priorities shifted from physics to biology. Jacques Monod explained the move in this way: “...because of its very complexity and uncertainties, biology needed ideas, many ideas to be discussed, tested, rejected or temporarily accepted, that is, precisely the kind of goods that he knew he could provide in abundance and enjoyed dealing with.” One of these abundant ideas was that a European laboratory for molecular biology should be established.

In the autumn of 1962, Szilard met with Victor Weisskopf and Italian physicist Gilberto Bernardini to discuss the laboratory. They then got in touch with a number of molecular biologists, including Sir John Kendrew, Francis Crick, Sydney Brenner and James Watson, all of whom showed interest. Slowly the idea began to take shape and in August of 1963, a meeting was held in Ravello, Italy, which resulted in three main proposals: that the project should be European and not world-wide; that in addition to a laboratory, fellowships and advanced teaching courses should be provided; and that a formal body known as the European Molecular Biology Organisation should be established.

Szilard died in California in 1964. He was a scientist who was deeply concerned with world peace and with efforts to create what he called “a more livable world.” In 1962 he founded the Council for a Livable World whose symbol is a dolphin; this same dolphin motif is incorporated in the library book-plates as a
EMBL kids get a new stomping ground

Laying the foundation for EMBL’s new Kinderkrippe and Kindergarten

The completed buildings

A look at the Kindergarten from inside...

...and from outside

Photographs by Doug Young
ILO decides on salary adjustment for 1995

**SALARY ADJUSTMENT 1995**

**ILO ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (ILOAT) JUDGEMENT**

In December 1995 a number of staff took a formal complaint to the ILOAT challenging the EMBL Council decision on the 1995 salary adjustment.

In January 1998 the ILOAT issued their Judgement 1682. That Judgement required EMBL Council to take a new decision on the 1995 salary adjustment.

The EMBL Council decision was taken and notified to staff in July 1998. It confirmed that the salary adjustments for 1995 would be 0.3% for Germany and 0% for France and the United Kingdom and gave detailed reasons for the decision.

In July 1998 a number of staff took a further formal complaint to the ILOAT claiming that EMBL Council had not properly executed Judgement 1682.

In their Judgement 1887 issued on 8 July 1999 and received in writing today the ILOAT set aside Council’s decision of July 1998.

The matter is sent back to Council to take a new decision incorporating specified Co-ordinating Organisation increases (which we interpret as further adjustments for France 1.7%, Germany 2.1% and UK 3.4%) in respect of the EMBL salary adjustments for 1995.

Council will be considering this at their next scheduled meeting on 23 November and a further announcement will be made after that meeting has taken place.

Barton Dodd
Administrative Director
21 July 1999
Who’s new?

Jan Ellenberg joined EMBL in May of 1999 as an interdisciplinary Group Leader in the Gene Expression Programme and in the Cell Biology & Biophysics Programme. He did his PhD and postdoctoral research in the lab of Jennifer Lippincott-Schwartz in the Cell Biology and Metabolism Branch of the NICHD, NIH, in Bethesda, Maryland, studying the intracellular trafficking of proteins in living cells with the help of variants of the green fluorescent protein (GFP). His work at EMBL will focus on the dynamic disassembly and reassembly of the nuclear envelope during cell division.

Elena Conti is a new Group Leader in the Structural Biology Programme. After PhD work with Peter Brick at the Imperial College in London in 1996, she moved to John Kuriyan’s lab at the Rockefeller University in New York to investigate the structural basis of recognition between nuclear import carriers and nuclear localization signals. At EMBL, she will continue to study the structural basis of nucleocytoplasmic transport using X-ray crystallography.

Bettina Böttcher joined the Structural Biology Programme in Spring 1999, following an assistant professorship at the University of Freiburg, Germany. After completing her PhD research at the University of Stuttgart, Germany, in 1991, she joined Tony Crowther’s group at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, UK, for a postdoc. Her research at EMBL will explore the structures and dynamics of large macromolecular assemblies (such as HBV virus core shells and H+−ATPases of the F1F0 type) with cryo-electron microscopy and image reconstruction techniques.

José Luis de la Pompa was appointed Group Leader in EMBL’s Programme on Mouse Biology in Monterotondo earlier this year. Trained at the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid, he joined Rolf Zeller’s lab in the former Differentiation Programme. He did his PhD and postdoctoral research in the lab of Jennifer Lippincott-Schwartz in the Cell Biology and Metabolism Branch of the NICHD, NIH, in Bethesda, Maryland, studying the intracellular trafficking of proteins in living cells with the help of variants of the green fluorescent protein (GFP). His work at EMBL will focus on the dynamic disassembly and reassembly of the nuclear envelope during cell division.

in other news...

Peer Bork, visiting Group Leader from the Max Delbrück Centre (MDC) in Berlin, was promoted to Senior Scientist in July.

On May 13, 1999, Iain Mattaj, EMBL’s Scientific Coordinator and Programme Coordinator of Gene Expression, was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of the UK. The Royal Society, founded in 1660, is an independent academy promoting the natural and applied sciences both in the UK and worldwide. Its 1150 Fellows provide authoritative advice, notably to Government, on scientific matters, encourage research and its application through fellowships and grants, and foster general public understanding and awareness of science-related issues.

Medlines of the Month

10203945
8909382
9771412

Look up these PMID numbers the next time you use PubMed. Can you top them?

Send your own reference numbers to info@embl-heidelberg.de. Winners will be announced in the next newsletter. OIPA is now accepting the prize donations. All offers considered.