

New EMBL/CRG partnership in Barcelona

A new EMBL partnership with the Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG) in Barcelona is set to advance the understanding of complex biological systems.

Funded by the Spanish Ministry for Education and Science (MEC) for the next nine years, the joint research unit in Systems Biology will be located on the campus of the Barcelona Biomedical Research Park and will be headed by Luis Serrano, who will leave EMBL Heidelberg soon.

The EMBL/CRG partnership is dedicated to systems biology, an emerging area that

focuses on understanding and engineering complex biological systems. Its research will draw on the expertise of various scientific disciplines and will span the entire range from molecules to cells. The five multidisciplinary groups making up the unit will work with a variety of research techniques, including RNA interference, biochemical networks and mouse development.

"Systems biology is the future of biomedicine and in this new partnership we will combine theoretical and experimental approaches to better understand some of the

key aspects of human health," says Luis.

"Merging EMBL's expertise in computational biology with the CRG's knowhow in specific areas of genomics and proteomics will allow us to tackle some of the most challenging questions of systems biology," said EMBL DG Iain Mattaj at a public presentation of the agreement at the CRG on 7 September. "The EMBL/CRG partnership complements EMBL's network of fruitful institutional collaborations and underlines our commitment to serving all our member states."

Not just a job for the boys

Women scientists at EMBL are invited to become "ambassadors" to visit schools and universities as part of a new EU-funded initiative, SET-Routes, which aims to tackle the problem of the underrepresentation of women in science, challenge old and outdated perceptions about the "typical" scientist and make traditionally male-dominated fields of study more attractive to women.

A consortium between EMBL, EMBO and CERN, SET-Routes is coordinated at EMBL Heidelberg by ELLS' Julia Willingale-Theune and for EMBO by Gerlind Wallon, who's responsible for Women in Science. It aims to send successful women in various stages of their careers in science, engineering and technology (SET) into schools or institutes of higher education to motivate young people, and girls in particular, to pursue further studies in SET.

The project consists of four initiatives: a start-up conference which is scheduled to take place at EMBL Heidelberg on 9-11 May 2007; the School and University Ambassador Programmes; and an Insight Lecture series.

"SET-Routes volunteer ambassadors will be addressing mixed audiences, but will be women," says Julia. "Predocs and postdocs, as well as more established scientists, are welcome to get involved; for school-age students, a younger role model can often be more effective.

"The ambassadors will receive training to develop talks and activities to take with them into schools and universities. The project covers the whole of Europe, so participants may choose to visit their own country to conduct activities in their mother tongue, and perhaps

even go back to the school or university they attended themselves."

The ambassadors will also act as role models to help alter the out-of-date perceptions of science in future generations. A database will be set up so that, even after the end of the programme, schools and universities will have access to a pool of some of Europe's best female scientists.

Some women scientists have already volunteered to become ambassadors. Lili Minichiello of EMBL Monterotondo has already attended the EU Gender Mainstreaming Conference in

"We want to show girls that science is an attractive career option, with lots of opportunities to make a difference"

Vienna in May this year, where the SET-Routes proposal was presented for the first time. Also in attendance there was Lucie Linsen, a researcher in particle physics who has volunteered to be an ambassador from the CERN side, and EMBO Member Renée Schroeder from the Vienna Biocenter.

"The start-up conference in May next year is intended to highlight the way forward," explains Gerlind. "There will be sessions about changing institutional culture and tackling pre-



conceived ideas about scientists and science politics. It will also serve as an arena for the exchange of good practice and ideas, and a number of activities and programmes have been invited to present themselves in a forum called 'the Bazaar' throughout the event."

The Insight Lecture series will kick off in 2007. The ten multimedia events including talks, question-and-answer sessions and demonstrations will be distributed via the web and on DVD to reach a wider European audience.

"As well as being pan-European, the project is fully interdisciplinary, too," says Julia. "We aim to give young women scientists in all fields a positive idea of what is happening in Europe to implement gender mainstreaming. The message is 'you're not alone'."

Rolf Landua, Head of Education at CERN, is the coordinator for the project there. "Women are hugely underrepresented, especially in physics, and we're already dedicated to doing whatever we can about this unnatural state of affairs. In our ambassadors we'll be looking for scientists who can convey excitement and enthusiasm for the subject.

"We want to show girls that science is an exciting, attractive career option, with lots of opportunities to discover new things and to make a difference."

If you're interested in becoming an ambassador, contact Julia at willingale@embl.de.