

Teachers get a taste of their own medicine in Heidelberg at the weekend

Enthusiastic feedback on second EMBO International Workshop for Biology Teachers

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123 teachers from 20 countries met in Heidelberg last weekend for the European Molecular Biology Organization's (EMBO) second international teachers' workshop, and brushed up their knowledge of modern biology. Everyone who participated was very enthusiastic about the event, which covered both the theoretical and practical aspects of science teaching. The programme offered talks by scientists and an exhibition of the latest teaching resources in addition to real experiments that the teachers could try out for themselves. The highlight of the theoretical part was undoubtedly the lecture given by Nobel Prize Laureate, Erwin Neher, while the hands-on experiments offered during the eight practical sessions were greatly appreciated.

"I can use some of the experiments we did here quite easily in my lessons," said one German secondary school teacher. "They involve very little cost or effort. But we'd have to buy the kits to do some of the others, and that's where you run up against the school budget, of course. However, I know my students would be fascinated by experiments like these." A colleague from Romania added: "Practical experiments really help students to grasp what the natural sciences are all about, and that's why it's so important to integrate them into our lessons. Some of the experiments I've been shown here can be done in class quite simply. I certainly won't shy away from doing them with my students."

One teacher from England, who holds further training courses for teachers and is also involved in revising the biology curriculum for English schools at the moment, was convinced that the practically oriented computer analyses used in one practical session could easily be incorporated into school science classes. Over and above the actual workshop programme, many participants also valued the chance to catch a glimpse of the world beyond their own doorsteps through the exchange of ideas with colleagues from other countries attending this international workshop.

Erwin Neher, Director of the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry in Göttingen and one of the 1991 Nobel Prize Laureates for physiology and medicine, stressed how important teachers were when it came to inspiring young people to go into science: "If Europe is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010, as leading politicians promised in Lisbon in March 2000, then we also need more scientists." Andrew Moore, EMBO Science and Society Programme manager, added: "Interesting science lessons at school can help to encourage more young people to take up research as a profession."

EMBO has been supporting scientific research and future generations of scientists for almost 40 years. Recently, however, it has been placing increased emphasis on exchanges with other groups in society. Teachers are important partners in this respect.

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