

Celebrating 40 years of scientific excellence

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The European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) turns 40

The European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) this weekend celebrated its 40th anniversary. Leading scientists from all over Europe – amongst them 5 Nobel Laureates and Senior Vice President of Discovery Research at GlaxoSmithKline – flew in to take part in the celebrations.; all of them honoured EMBO members. Many more sent messages of congratulations. Set high on the hill above Heidelberg, its home since 1973, EMBO has come a long way since its foundation in 1964. Now the leading life sciences organisation in Europe with around 1200 members, EMBO has stayed true to the vision of its early founders. Dedicated to promoting the life sciences in Europe, the organisation supports scientists young and old in their work. An example of EMBO's early impact was its establishment of the well-known European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in 1974.

Many of EMBO's current initiatives were showcased at the anniversary meeting, but the event also gave the opportunity to look back at the early days of EMBO and scientific advances in which many of its members have had a hand. 5 of EMBO's 36 Nobel Laureate members attended the event and gave talks on their research. Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard, Director of Genetics at the Max Planck Institute for Developmental Biology in Tuebingen and 1995 Nobel Laureate in Medicine, spoke of EMBO's role in her career. An EMBO fellowship in 1975 enabled the biologist to pursue her research in Basel, Switzerland. Nüsslein-Volhard described EMBO as "an organisation with enormous impact on the advancement of biological sciences." On a personal note Nüsslein-Volhard added, "EMBO was a great source of support to me, at a time when I was getting little help from elsewhere."

Today, EMBO runs a number of programmes that support scientists both financially and academically. Fellowships, courses and workshops provide training to scientists at all stages of their career. The Young Investigator Programme backs young scientists in the first difficult years after establishing their own research laboratories. The Science & Society Programme promotes a closer link between scientists and the general public, providing various workshops and activities, particularly for teachers, to encourage open communication and exchange. On November 5 – 6 2004, EMBL and EMBO will jointly host their annual public meeting on Science & Society, with this year's discussions centring on time and ageing.

For Frank Gannon, Executive Director of EMBO, the event was particularly satisfying. "The discussions that engaged the founding EMBO members and all subsequent generations of scientists showed that EMBO today has a major impact on European science – and that is a real reason for celebration. Now EMBO looks forward to new challenges and continued success."

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