



Joint Press Release



European Molecular Biology Laboratory
University of Heidelberg

For immediate release

Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit initiates second phase



Photo by Maj Britt Hansen

Heidelberg, July 18, 2005 – The first rate research from the Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit (MMPU) is now set to continue for the long-term. The European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and the Medical Faculty of University of Heidelberg, who formed the joint venture in 2002, have announced their plans to initiate a second phase of the MMPU. The Unit has always combined the strengths of medical science with that of molecular biology. In this second phase, the links between the institutions will be strengthened. There will be an increased focus on recruiting additional research groups from each organisation as well as intensifying activities in post-graduate training.

“This second phase highlights the commitment by both EMBL and the Medical Faculty to use our strengths to continue in a partnership in the critical area of molecular medicine,” says Iain Mattaj, EMBL Director-General. “The on-going convergence of biology and medicine has created a great opportunity for our institutes to work together in the long-term.”

“Our two institutes are now intensifying their first-rate and long-standing cooperation,” says Peter Hommelhoff, Principal of the University of Heidelberg. In his view, the recent excellency initiative from the federal and state governments in Germany serves as a clear indication of the fact that politicians, too, have come to regard the increased clustering of universities and non-university research centres as an indispensable prerequisite for Germany's future in the scientific world.

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 development plan for the second phase of the Unit calls for additional partnered groups with joint leadership from both institutes to join the MMPU and concentrate on molecular medicine topics. Groups studying cystic fibrosis and degenerative diseases due to iron mismanagement have signaled an interest to participate, as well as another group involved in identifying tumor markers for cancer diagnosis.

The new phase also plans for the MMPU to be transformed from a virtual unit into a physical entity. The groups are discussing the possibility of a move into a common space provided by the University of Heidelberg. The new centre will generate true critical mass and the best opportunities for sharing of expertise.

Plans are underway to intensify efforts in post-graduate training where both medical and basic science graduates will work side by side and have the opportunity to obtain a joint Medical Faculty/EMBL PhD degree. Students and MMPU members will be able to actively integrate into EMBL seminars, symposia and journal clubs. ●

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18 EMBL Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.



About EMBL:

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory is a basic research institute funded by public research monies from 18 member states. Research at EMBL is conducted by approximately 80 independent groups covering the spectrum of molecular biology. The Laboratory has five units: the main Laboratory in Heidelberg, and Outstations in Hinxton (the European Bioinformatics Institute), Grenoble, Hamburg, and Monterotondo near Rome. The cornerstones of EMBL's mission are: to perform basic research in molecular biology; to train scientists, students and visitors at all levels; to offer vital services to scientists in the member states; to develop new instruments and methods in the life sciences and to actively engage in technology transfer activities. EMBL's international PhD Programme has a student body of about 170. The Laboratory also sponsors an active Science and Society programme. Visitors from the press and public are welcome.

About the University of Heidelberg:

The University of Heidelberg is the oldest university in Germany, founded in 1386. The university has always been a place of scholarly achievement – whether as a stronghold of humanist studies in the 16th century or as a focus of scientific endeavor in the 19th century (personified by Robert Wilhelm Bunsen, Hermann von Helmholtz, and Gustav Robert Kirchhoff). The university offers a broad range of subjects, spread over twelve faculties, and places a great emphasis on interdisciplinary collaborations. As numerous national ranking surveys show, it holds top positions in many fields. The university has produced eight Nobel laureates to date.

More about the MMPU:

In January 2002, the Medical Faculty of the University of Heidelberg and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory established the Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit that is staffed by both institutions and co-directed by Andreas Kulozik from Heidelberg University and by Matthias Hentze from EMBL. Jointly, they advise a growing team of currently 12 members. The MMPU has an international orientation, with team meetings and an attractive seminar programme in English. It is located on the Medical Campus of Heidelberg University, within walking distance from the German Cancer Research Center and the Center for Molecular Biology of Heidelberg University (ZMBH), and a short drive from EMBL.

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