



# Ensembl Helpdesk & Outreach Officer

**Bert Overduin**

*My job as Ensembl Helpdesk & Outreach Officer involves answering questions from Ensembl users, liaising with other Ensembl teams to resolve technical issues and to work towards improving the Ensembl resource. I also prepare teaching materials, organise and teach at workshops worldwide and occasionally represent the EBI as part of the team manning the exhibition stand at conferences.*

## Length of time in the post

Four and a half years.

## Education and other qualifications

MSc in Biology at Leiden University in the Netherlands, PhD in Molecular Genetics at VU University, Amsterdam.

## An overview of your career path before joining the EBI

After my PhD I undertook a four-year post doctoral post in a laboratory at the University of California Davis. I then decided to move away from science and worked for six years as an IT consultant. In this role I mainly worked on website development, as well as managing information systems so that they best serve the users. As part of this, I acted as a conduit between the users and developers.

## What attracted you to this role?

I applied for this job because after six years I really started to miss science and this seemed like a good opportunity to combine my interest and expertise in both biology and informatics.

## Describe a 'typical' working day

As my job is quite varied there aren't many typical working days. A day can be spent in the office answering helpdesk questions, in a computer room teaching scientists about Ensembl or at a remote airport waiting for the next plane to take me to a conference or workshop.

## What is the best thing about your job?

The best thing about my job is being able to interact with Ensembl's users. I especially enjoy teaching in those parts of the world where the people do not have much access to bioinformatics training and so are keen pupils.

## Why do you enjoy working at the EBI?

I enjoy working at the EBI because it is a very international environment. The fact that we share a campus with the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute is also a big plus, especially since this provides the opportunity to attend lots of seminars by renowned scientists.

## Describe the most challenging tasks that you face in your job?

The most challenging aspect of my job is time management. No matter how many deadlines you have or whether you are on the road, you still need to provide quick replies to the floods of helpdesk questions.

## What advice would you give to someone applying to a similar role?

For this job a solid background in biology, a sound understanding of computers, good communication and teaching skills are essential. For the helpdesk, patience and a friendly manner are also important. Finally, you must be comfortable with travelling a lot, often just by yourself. ●

