



Scientific Programmer

Andy Jenkinson

My role as scientific programmer involves developing and maintaining software systems to enable the integration of many different types of biological data so that it can be displayed on the Ensembl website. This includes writing code, communicating with collaborators, presenting work at conferences and conducting training workshops.

Length of time in the post

Two years.

Education and other qualifications

BSc in Human Genetics at the University of Nottingham; MRes in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology at the University of Leeds.

An overview of your career path before joining the EBI

Before joining EMBL-EBL I worked within the Sanger Institute's Cancer Genome Project as a computer biologist. There I worked on a wide range of computer programming projects using Java and Perl. I was also seconded to work on the Pfam project (a database of protein families) for a while.

What attracted you to this role?

This role offered the opportunity to use my technical experience to work in a fairly independent manner: to set my own agenda whilst still being part of a larger team.

Describe a 'typical' working day

A typical day might begin with answering email queries from users of the Ensembl website, followed by a group meeting - a chance to discuss pending issues and keep abreast of others' activities. Upon returning to my desk I might write code for a short-term project. The rest of my day might be spent updating collaborators on the progress of this project and dealing with any tasks emerging from this. Later, I might lead a technical meeting to establish upcoming tasks.

What is the best thing about your job?

The opportunity to enhance my expertise in this field of work and for my actions to truly shape its course.

Why do you enjoy working at the EBI?

The working environment at EBI is very relaxed, informal and flexible. The beautiful campus offers the opportunity to take a break from work with a walk around the wetlands or a game of football.

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

My job is highly collaborative, working together with many people from within and outside the institute to achieve a common goal, often managing different priorities and complex requirements. My work also requires great focus, attention to detail and a proactive approach to communication.

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

Whilst some grounding in biology is important, the tasks are mainly technical in nature and therefore an affinity and aptitude for writing code is essential. Most jobs in this area require both biological and computational knowledge, as well as specific experience in these fields. The role does not require a PhD, but a Masters degree is a common way to demonstrate knowledge of both biology and computing. ●

