



Scientific Training Officer

James Watson

My role primarily involves contributing to the organisation and design of courses held at the EBI as part of our hands-on training programme and the Bioinformatics Roadshow. I also support our trainers in developing their training techniques and occasionally travel to provide training on EBI resources.

Length of time in the post

Nearly 18 months in this post, but prior to this I joined the EBI as a visitor in 2002 and then became a researcher here in 2005.

Education and other qualifications

BSc in Medical Biochemistry at the University of Glasgow followed by a PhD project investigating small hydrogen-bonding motifs in proteins.

An overview of your career path before joining the EBI

After my PhD I obtained a postdoc research post with Professor Janet Thornton (now Director of the EBI). I was based at University College London but was also able to work at the EBI as a visitor. The project involved predicting protein function from structure as part of a structural genomics project in the US. Eventually I transferred to the EBI to continue this research where I contributed to the development and testing of the ProFunc and Tempura servers at the EBI.

What attracted you to this role?

Throughout my time in the Thornton group I had been involved in a lot of the team's outreach and training (creating presentations, giving talks and workshops) and decided that I would like to become more involved with scientific teaching and training.

Describe a 'typical' working day

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a 'typical day'! Every event is different and no matter how well prepared you are there are always little 'surprises' to keep you on your toes.

What is the best thing about your job?

Constantly having to re-evaluate how we provide training and the materials we use. Each audience is unique and every course we organise has different scientific and logistical needs to be met - it is very hectic at times! In addition, you get to travel to some exciting locations and even occasionally get to do some sightseeing.

Why do you enjoy working at the EBI?

The support we have from our administration and IT/systems teams are outstanding. The campus itself (although slightly remote) is a wonderful environment to work in. There are very good catering and leisure facilities on site, an active sports and social club, and it is a truly international working environment.

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

The biggest shock for me was the rigid (and many!) deadlines, which require vigilant time management (not to mention long term planning) to make sure everything happens on time.

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

Having an approachable nature and a great deal of diplomacy are essential in this job in order to balance the various requirements of hosts, trainers, funders, administration and technical teams. You should be prepared to react quickly to changes and be able to deal with a wide variety of problems associated with organising any event (everything from faulty microphones to absent trainers!). ●

