



Senior Scientific Database Curator

Ruth Akhtar

My role as a curator for EMBL-Bank (the EMBL Nucleotide Sequence Database) involves checking and annotating nucleotide sequence data submitted to us (as members of the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration which includes GenBank and DDBJ) by researchers and sequencing organisations worldwide. I also take part in developing standards for nucleotide sequence annotation and contribute to the development of EMBL-Bank and of software for curation and data submissions.

Length of time in the post

Three and a half years.

Education and other qualifications

BSc in Biochemistry from Warwick University and my PhD research was on genetic susceptibility to chemically-induced liver disease.

An overview of your career path before joining the EBI

After completing my PhD, I worked for several years as a postdoc, which included work on the genetics of the mouse and *Drosophila* model systems, toxicology, circadian rhythm biology, ageing and expression profiling by microarray analysis.

What attracted you to this role?

The role appealed to me because I liked the idea of working outside of a laboratory but in an environment where my scientific background would still be relevant.

Describe a 'typical' working day

My working day is fairly routine, checking that the data are in the correct format and liaising with submitters to deal with any issues with the data. However, there is always something new to learn as we receive sequence data from a variety of species and these show differences in terms of the complexity and arrangement of their genetic sequence.

What is the best thing about your job?

The most enjoyable aspect of the job is communicating with the scientists who produce the sequence data. I have also taken opportunities to get involved in training other curators and participating in the annual meetings with our international collaborators.

Why do you enjoy working at the EBI?

I enjoy the international working environment at the EBI, as well as the beautiful grounds in the Cambridgeshire countryside.

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

One of the biggest challenges for me is working to tight deadlines - submissions usually need to be completed within just two days. It can also be challenging when working with submitters to decide on the best way to represent their complex biological data in the database. Handling several submissions at once which include data from a variety of organisms with very different biology means that you become adept at balancing tasks in order to complete the work to schedule.

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

The key requirements for this role are: attention to detail, ability to work to deadlines, a flair for communicating complex issues and a broad biological knowledge. On the technical side, we work in a UNIX environment and scripting skills are helpful for dealing with the large volumes of data. ●

