



The East Wing and a new dawn for the EMBL-EBI

East Wing will strengthen the EBI's key role in European bioinformatics

Hinxton, 23 October 2007 – The European Molecular Biology Laboratory's European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI) officially opens its new East Wing today with a reception for prominent guests. The East Wing will be jointly opened by Ian Pearson, Minister of State for Science and Innovation, UK, and Robert-Jan Smits, Director of Directorate B (Structuring the European Research Area), DG Research, European Commission. The extension received just under £11 million pounds in funding from the Wellcome Trust, the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the EMBL.

"In addition to functionally meeting our need for more space, the new East Wing facilities offer so much more," says Professor Janet Thornton, the EBI's director, "The blend of modern office space, attractive social areas and a dedicated training suite provide much greater opportunities to interact internally and also with our networks of collaborators, alumni and other visitors. The East Wing thereby represents a new era for the EBI and we look forward to embracing the interactions and opportunities enabled by our stunning new facilities."

The EBI's spatial expansion is representative of the growth the institute has seen in use of its resources since its inception in 1995 with 70 staff and 2 main databases. The EBI now employs over 330 staff who contribute to the EBI's interdependent bioinformatics research areas and service provision. The new wing, which provides 2,015 square metres of space will allow the institute to increase its staff capacity, creating approximately 70 new positions. This will enable the EBI to further enhance its activities in each of its four component areas of research, bioinformatics services, training provision and industry interaction.

The EBI is Europe's main provider of biological data resources, enabling researchers worldwide to access publicly available databases of biological data and analytical tools. The EBI website receives an average of 2 million hits a day. In parallel with the increasing role bioinformatics now plays

in all aspects of biological research, the EBI has also responded to the training needs of today's researchers. The new wing contains a fully equipped training suite which enables hands-on training at the EBI in the range of resources residing there.

The facilities will also strengthen the institute's position as a hub for wider integration of bioinformatics activities in Europe. The expansion of the EBI's facilities are in line with the identification of the institute as playing a key role in the development of science and innovation by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), an independent advisory body to both the European Commission and the Member States.

Professor Iain Mattaj, EMBL's Director General commented: "At EMBL we are proud of the essential support the EBI provides to hundreds of thousands of academic and industrial researchers working in all areas of the life sciences through the development of bioinformatics tools and data resources as well as by providing training. In addition, EBI staff are engaged in world class bioinformatics research. The East Wing facilities will enable further strengthening of these contributions."

The extension was undertaken by the London office of the leading architecture firm NBBJ, who also designed the award-winning extension of the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus facilities in 2005. Continuity in design across campus reflects the scientific complementarity of the campus members and adheres to the principles of sustainability, innovation and connection between the people who work there, the environment and the surroundings.

Science and Innovation Minister Ian Pearson said "This major boost to the facilities at EBI will strengthen the institute's world-leading role in bioinformatics. This is an important area for the UK and Europe. Bioinformatics is expanding rapidly and the data and tools it provides is generating innovative new discoveries and future business opportunities." ●

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Notes for Editors:

Photos of the East Wing, EBI and Wellcome Trust Genome Campus are available. Low-resolution images are available to view at: http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Information/Site_Info/picture_book.html. Please contact Louisa Wright, Scientific Outreach Officer, louisa@ebi.ac.uk or 01223 494665 for high-resolution images.

About EBI

The European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI) is part of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and is located on the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus in Hinxton near Cambridge (UK). The EBI grew out of EMBL's pioneering work in providing public biological databases to the research community. It hosts some of the world's most important collections of biological data, including DNA sequences (EMBL-Bank), protein sequences (UniProt), animal genomes (Ensembl), three-dimensional structures (the Macromolecular Structure Database), data from microarray experiments (ArrayExpress), protein-protein interactions (IntAct) and pathway information (Reactome). The EBI hosts several research groups and its scientists continually develop new tools for the biocomputing community. www.ebi.ac.uk

About EMBL

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory is a basic research institute funded by public research monies from 19 member states (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). 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. www.embl.org

About the Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. www.wellcome.ac.uk

About the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus

The Wellcome Trust Genome Campus was founded in 1992 and is set in the idyllic grounds of the Hinxton Hall estate, south of Cambridge. The original Hinxton Hall, a grade II listed now forms part of the Wellcome Trust Conference Centre. In 1996, new buildings were constructed for the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory's European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI). The Sanger building also houses the Medical Research Council's Rosalind Franklin Centre for Genomics Research. To accommodate new research programmes, the first phase of a major extension (the South Field Project) was completed in April 2005 to provide new facilities include laboratories, a data centre, research support facilities and staff amenities. The new buildings are low rise and have been carefully designed to blend in with the landscaped surroundings. The co-location of biomedical and bioinformatics expertise creates a vibrant research environment and world-leading postgenomic research programme.

About the Wellcome Trust and Research Councils award

The Wellcome Trust and Research Councils agreed to fund an extension of 1500 square metres, committing a budget of £14 million (€21 million). EMBL provided an additional £700,000 (€1 million).

About NBBJ

NBBJ is a leading international architecture and design firm with offices in London, New York, Columbus, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Beijing, Shanghai and Dubai. The firm has designed some of the world's top-performing research, academic, healthcare and corporate facilities for clients such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Salk Institute, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Stanford University. NBBJ's London office, established in 2001, designed the new facilities for the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus Expansion, the Centre for Cellular and Integrative Biology at King's College London, and the Queen Mary Innovation Centre in Whitechapel, London, which will begin construction in October 2007. The London office is currently designing Harvard Medical International's Institute for Postgraduate Education and Research in the Dubai Healthcare City and a 1000-bed hospital in Yemen. More information is available at www.nbbj.com.

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