

# Gaining the competitive edge

Predocs *Simone Li* and *Hernando Martínez*, among the organisers of this year's PhD Symposium, reflect on the event

The 15th EMBL International PhD Symposium – Competition in Biology: the Race for Survival from Molecules to Systems – took place 21–23 November at EMBL Heidelberg. Organised by the predoc class of 2012, the event was conceived to highlight the importance of biological interactions that shape the processes of life.

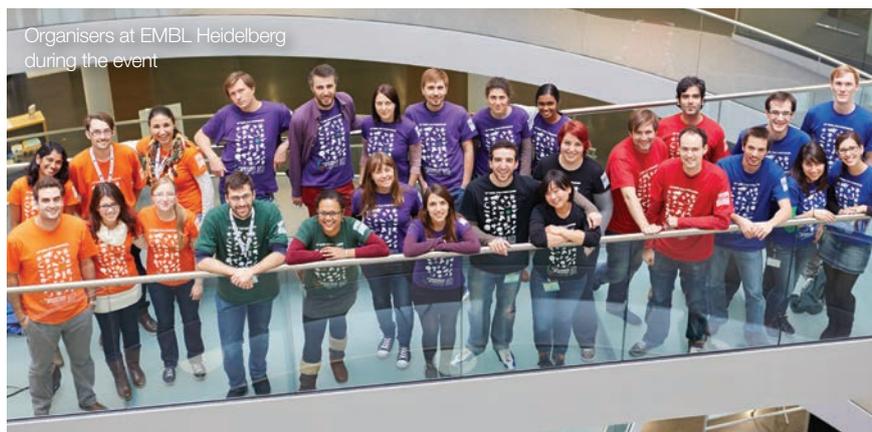
The symposium was a resounding success, with more than 200 registrants from 24 different countries, reaching as far as Singapore and Australia. Featuring talks by prominent senior investigators and PhD students from a range

of disciplines, we explored the constant battle that exists between and amongst molecules, cells, organisms and their environment – from the chemistry behind the origin of life, to the design of therapeutic microbes that kill pathogens, to the social organisation of bacteria and burying beetles. We also learned that viruses can be cruel or kind, depending on their survival strategy.

The broad scope was intended to encourage the sharing of new perspectives and ideas amongst attendees through the poster sessions, classroom-style and panel discussions,

as well as various social events. Judging by the very positive feedback we have received, our goal was most certainly achieved.

We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made the symposium possible: the attendees, speakers, EMBL staff, EIPP team, our sponsors and partners. It has been an invaluable and unforgettable experience. And, most importantly, we would like to thank those truly responsible for making this happen: to our fellow predocs, thank you for your time, your energy and your friendship. It was a pleasure to build this with you!



Organisers at EMBL Heidelberg during the event

## MMPU on a mission

Ever wondered how microbes are involved in colorectal cancer progression or how cellular stress can provoke thrombosis-associated diseases? These and many other medical research-related questions were discussed at the 12th public MMPU (Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit) Research Day in Heidelberg.

This biannual event is dedicated to exchange knowledge between research groups involved in the MMPU, as well as reaching other scientific parties interested in translational research. “Our goal is to strengthen the link between molecular research and medicine,” says MMPU co-director Andreas Kulozik, from the University Hospital Heidelberg. The amount of data presented at the event outlined the partnership's strong efforts to reach this goal.

Research topics covered ranged from aging (group leaders Anthony Ho and Anne-Claude Gavin) to diseases in iron homeostasis (group leaders Martina Muckenthaler and Matthias Hentze), and stress-regulated blood diseases (group leaders Andreas Kulozik and Matthias Hentze) to cellular pathways involved in pain-sensing (group leaders Rohini Kuner, Jan Siemens and Paul Heppenstall). Participants also welcomed external speaker Oliver



MMPU researchers Anita Voigt, Ina Hollerer and Stephan Singer

Plettenburg, head of the chemical biology department of Sanofi, who provided interesting insights into the potential of chemical probes as medical tools.

The 12th MMPU Research Day demonstrated once more how fruitful the collaboration between EMBL and the Medical Faculty of the University of Heidelberg is in terms of bridging the gap between molecular research and medicine. Carsten Schultz, who leads a group together with Marcus Mall, summarised after the meeting: “I am amazed by the progress made in the MMPU regarding the implementation of both clinical and biological data in order to better understand the causes and consequences of common human diseases.” The next public MMPU Research Day will take place on 8 April at EMBL.

– Ina Hollerer

## Medal of honour

EMBL-EBI's Alvis Brazma has been recognised by a Grand Medal from the Latvian Academy of Sciences. The medal is the highest recognition awarded by the academy to Latvian scientists at home and abroad for their outstanding creative contribution.

“I was touched because it is great to be recognised in your home country,” says Alvis. “I am very proud to be in the same company as Juris Hartmanis, who was awarded the medal previously. Science is of course international but my background, my way of thinking, is influenced by my Latvian teachers and professors – I owe a lot to my education in Latvia.”

Juris Viksna, a fellow computational biologist at the University of Latvia, said, “Alvis's contribution to the development of bioinformatics as a science is notable even at the global level and certainly he is a main contributor of establishing a field of bioinformatics in Latvia.”

