

take advantage of the academic expertise have outposts nearby, including Merck, Schering-Plough and Roche Diagnostics.

This means that you are as likely to hear English being spoken in the city as you are to hear German, and more likely in EMBL's labs, corridors and cafeteria. "The reality is that you don't need to speak German to function in Heidelberg," says Iain Mattaj, scientific director of EMBL.

EMBL's own make-up attests to that. Mattaj estimates that its staff of 700 includes 75 nationalities. Because group leaders' contracts run for five years, with an option to renew for four more, the cultural mix changes frequently.

Mattaj is glad that the European Commission is noting EMBL's success, and hopes it will use this as a model for other labs, as he believes the turnover system brings innovation and prevents stagnation. "The way to increase European performance is to have a lab like EMBL," he says.

MIX AND MATCH

As for getting into EMBL as a student, Mattaj recommends not being too focused on one problem or one aspect of biology. "What we are looking for are people who are very motivated to do research and to think broadly," he explains. An ability or willingness to mix maths or physics with biology also helps, he adds.

For example, biologists working closely with mathematicians at EMBL helped to improve their use of microarrays, says Wilhelm Ansorge, programme coordinator for biochemical instrumentation. He adds that EMBL's multidisciplinary turnover model was based on that of his previous employer CERN, the European laboratory for particle physics near Geneva. "The important thing is that everyone has to learn a bit about the fields of the others," he says.

That sort of cooperation is not limited to EMBL, says Renato Paro, director of the ZMBH. For example, microarray techniques developed through a collaboration between the DKFZ and the ZMBH were later passed on to scientists at EMBL working on a different project. "In that sense, it's not competitive," Paro says of the interaction between the Heidelberg academic research institutions.

In some ways, the ZMBH is structured similarly to EMBL. It employs young group leaders on a competitive basis. Although the turnover is not built in to the extent it is at EMBL, there is still plenty of mobility, with several group leaders in recent years being recruited as directors of Max Planck institutes.

One of the biggest differences between the two organizations is that ZMBH group leaders have to teach, which cuts into their research time. But as a result, they are treated more like senior lecturers, with the same vote in academic affairs.

And like EMBL, the ZMBH provides scientific colloquia and seminars in English that are open to anyone. Last year, the two banded together with the DKFZ to sponsor the Heidelberg Forum on the Biosciences and Society, which aims to inform the public about current issues in science.

Although such meetings are good for getting people to talk, Paro would like to see the Heidelberg research institutes sponsor more informal events, where only the food and beverages are planned and

there are no formal scientific presentations. Such activities, he says, would mimic the give-and-take that occurs daily in EMBL's cafeteria and lounges. "EMBL has recognized the importance of exchanging information in a less formal environment. Why not expand that and try it locally?" asks Paro.

With the mix of backgrounds at Heidelberg, such conversations can be linguistically interesting, says Jean Rommelaere, a DKFZ cancer researcher. His mixed background provides a testament to that. The Belgian scientist is jointly funded by the DKFZ and INSERM.

Rommelaere, in his turn, estimates that in his lab's ten years, he has had members from 17 different countries — several from China, where he is fostering relationships by, among other things, hosting students and postdocs in his labs.

"We start a session in French, continue in German, and when we don't understand each other, finish in English," says Rommelaere. It all works out in the end, because in Heidelberg, science is the common language.

Paul Smaglik is editor of *Naturejobs*.



Jean Rommelaere has postdocs and students from 17 different countries.

The Munster match

A fledgling joint research programme in clinical medicine between the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and the University of Heidelberg Medical School was made possible when two MDs who received their training in Munster, Germany, more than 20 years ago were last year reunited in Heidelberg.

Matthias Hentze, the dean of graduate studies at EMBL, had retained his research ties with Andreas Kulozik since their medical-school days. So when Kulozik moved from Berlin to Heidelberg last year, it made good sense to start up a more institutional collaboration. The two make a good team — "a match made in Munster", Hentze says — because EMBL can provide basic

biology and mouse models, and the medical campus offers clinical facilities.

The Molecular Medicine Partnership Unit lets students do 1–3 years of basic research along with conventional medical training. The programme has two junior residents and two postdocs, but Hentze and Kulozik expect to have 25 by the end of 2004 — especially if they set up a formal MD/PhD programme.

P.S.

▶ www.embl-heidelberg.de

Team spirit: Matthias Hentze (left) and Andreas Kulozik.

