



The Seventh Frontier

Welcome to the latest newsletter of the ESF Frontiers of Functional Genomics RNP – FFG.

Following our last call for proposals we have news of five new events in functional genomics for 2010 and 2011 which cover a range of topics from biobanking and cell signalling to sequencing and cancer genomics. A new call for science meetings has subsequently opened – with a deadline in September. This may be the last call for science meetings within this programme – so do take advantage of the opportunity.

If you are not able to attend a particular FFG event, the organisers provide detailed reports of the meeting shortly afterwards which are available on our website at www.functionalgenomics.org.uk/sections/activities/reports.htm.

In this edition of the Frontiers Newsletter, we hear from Damjana Kastelic whose FFG travel grant took her, not only to a city, but to a house steeped in scientific history. Also, we're delighted to share the news that one of our steering committee members has been honoured for his contributions to the understanding of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. And we hear of how our recent Functional Genomics and Disease Conference got off to an explosive start. Finally, there is a brief insight into the life of our Norwegian steering committee member and a lesson for all those undergraduates – always go to your lectures – you never know what might happen!

Apply for science meetings and travel grants

FFG invites proposals from organisers of science meetings to be held in 2010 or before end May 2011 on topics with a clear connection to the programme. Priority is given to events taking place in countries that financially support the programme and especially those who have not yet hosted a meeting: Denmark and Luxembourg. The deadline for submission of science meeting proposals is Friday 24 September 2010.

FFG is also offering a number of **Short Visits** and **Exchange Grants** (up to 6 months). Projects must be within the scope of the programme and start before May 2011. Priority is given to applicants coming from and intending to visit labs in countries that support the programme. Short Visit Grants now also cover support for attending practical courses in the area of functional genomics. The next deadline for grant applications is Friday 24 September 2010.

For further details and to apply online, please visit our website www.esf.org/ffg or for regular updates on events and funding opportunities contact cheryl.smythe@bbsrc.ac.uk or join our email list at www.functionalgenomics.org.uk/sections/contact/join.htm.

Future Events

Next Generation Sequencing, Leiden, Netherlands 29 August – 1 September 2010

High Throughput Biology, Stockholm Sweden, 16-17 September 2010

Frontiers in Biomedical Research, Basel, Switzerland, 20-21 September 2010

BBMRI – Biobanking for Science, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 23-25 September 2010

Spatiotemporal Dynamics of Cell Signalling, Oslo, Norway 30 Sept – 3 Oct 2010

From Science Fiction to Science Fact: what's next? Heidelberg, Germany, 21-23 October 2010

Medical Genome Sequencing, Understanding the Genomes of Disease, Barcelona, Spain 28-29 October 2010

Multilevel Interpretation of Cancer Genome Data, Madrid, Spain, 27-29 March 2011

For scientific reports from our past events, please go to our website www.functionalgenomics.org.uk.

4th Functional Genomics & Disease Conference

Dresden, Germany, 14-17 April 2010



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Our recent conference in Dresden was certainly a memorable event: an outstanding line-up of plenary speakers shared their science with the enthusiastic audience; Vijay Muley, Sven Wichert, Dirk Paul and Phillipp Baaske were all congratulated on their prize-winning posters; participants from 12 EC consortia gave a wonderful overview of the many and varied aspects of genomics across Europe; everyone party-ed the night away to the incredible live band Stars'n'Bars while fireworks lit up the sky over the river Elbe; and there was something else ... oh yes, the volcano! The opening of our conference coincided with the slightly more explosive opening of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano. Incredibly this resulted in only one of our plenary speakers being unable to attend, and we are very grateful to Frank Bucholz who stood in at the last moment and gave a very stimulating talk.

By Friday, when it became clear that it would be impossible to leave Dresden by air, the talk in the coffee sessions changed from re-sequencing and biobanks to a more urgent "how are you getting home?". Stories now abound of repetitive strain injury from trying to secure a seat online on the Eurostar, of 17 hour drives, of hitch-hiking to get onto ferries, and then there were the few who simply waited it out and enjoyed the delights of Dresden. Our conferences have always been memorable – this one was certainly no exception!

Gert-Jan van Ommen knighted

We are delighted to share the news that our Dutch representative on the FFG steering committee recently received a Knighthood in the Order of the Netherlands' Lion for his internationally recognised contribution to genetic diagnostics and therapeutics, notably in the field of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Many congratulations Gert-Jan!



Cantabrigian Tales

Damjana Kastelic

I arrived in Cambridge in January, on a beautiful sunny day. The weather lasted through the month; stereotypes about English weather proved unreliable. Well ... at least for January. When I arrived, traces of Darwin were everywhere, with the celebration of the 150th year since the publication of the "Origin of the Species". Living close to the city centre enables me to attend various interesting lectures, courses and discussions. The town of Cambridge is charged with scientific history, but the cherry on the cake is the place where I live, a mysterious house on Adams Road, that I discovered through a French colleague. The eccentric landlady Rosemary Summers, refers to her house as a "crossroads: a place where one can go around the roundabout and choose a different direction". Meals are communally eaten and cooked by the house dwellers, of various nationalities, professions, political viewpoints and culinary talents! The entire house is impregnated with a century of stories of scientific lives in Cambridge. Voices of past visitors still resonate in the "oak room", where Heisenberg, Crick, Watson, Bragg and Pauling have all sat at some point, sipping port on the fading chaise longues around the open fire.

As an ESF FFG grant holder, I can independently continue my own project in Dr Mike Taussig's Lab at the Babraham Research Campus in Cambridge. This is a continuation of a PhD thesis, in which I worked on a llama antibody library to isolate specific heavy chain antibodies against gastric cancer markers. Becoming familiar with DAPA technology (DNA Arrays to Protein Arrays), which was developed in Dr Taussig's lab, has enabled me to finish the project and learn new skills in the field of recombinant antibody technology. This exchange grant has allowed me to steer my work in new directions and gradually evolve as an independent researcher. From a personal point of view, the house and the lab together have provided an excellent scientific spring-board.



Steering committee spotlight

Kjetil Taskén is the Norwegian representative on the FFG steering committee. The direction of his career was a result of one of life's serendipitous moments - a young researcher just back from the US having learnt molecular biology and gene technology, turned up at a physiology lecture and announced that he was setting up a new lab and wanted students. Kjetil immediately signed up for an MD/PhD working on a project incorporating these, what were then, new and exciting technologies. Now, 20 years on, as director of the Biotechnology Centre of Oslo and of the Centre for Molecular Medicine Norway, Kjetil is putting these and increasingly new and exciting technologies to good use where his group and collaborators have recently demonstrated that COX-2 inhibitors can block cAMP-mediated immuno-suppression in AIDS which, importantly, can boost the vaccine response. Kjetil's group of six PhD students, four MSc/MD students and six post-docs reflects his belief in the importance of supporting the careers of younger people and the importance, in science as in other walks of life, of always being generous with others and sharing – be it time, data or indeed pickled herring. In the few moments when he is not scrutinising cell signalling pathways, Kjetil can be found in his summer house by the fjord or on the winter slopes with his cross-country skis.

Compiled and created by Cheryl Smythe, FFG Coordinator