

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Fostering collaboration across disciplines and generations

Encounters

Welcome!



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the inaugural issue of the ESF Research Conferences Scheme newsletter *Encounters*. Since its inception in 2004,

the Scheme has developed well and we have established a number of exciting partnerships with international/national organisations and universities throughout Europe and beyond. The Scheme underpins three key strategic objectives. Firstly, we will try to improve the scientific balance through actively seeking partnerships in areas that are less well-represented using the advice of our Member Organisations and European-level societies, research organisations and other such existing activities. Secondly, through quality assurance measures we will ensure that all existing and new partnerships produce conferences which fit the profile of the Scheme, and achieve the highest scientific quality and, finally, we will strive to achieve cost-effectiveness in everything that we do in order to provide a high quality product that is affordable. *Encounters* will not only provide the forum for the Conferences team to highlight the key achievements of the Scheme, but also offers you, the reader, the opportunity to contribute with items of news or feedback from our events that you believe will benefit the scientific community as a whole.

Marja Makarow,
ESF Chief Executive

In this issue: *Advancing Biomedicine*

Focus on the partnership with
the University of Barcelona

- Nanomedicine
- Pharmacogenetics/Pharmacogenomics
- Biobanks

Editorial



Encounters is the bi-annual newsletter of this important ESF instrument for creating synergy between scientists across Europe and beyond. In this and future issues, we will focus on ESF's Partners and on the scientists and conferences that contribute so actively to the success of the ESF Research Conferences Scheme. This issue focuses on biomedicine and the partnership with the University of Barcelona supported by the Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprises of the Catalan Autonomous Government, and implemented in close coordination with the European Medical Research Councils (EMRC).

We also hope that you will enjoy this opportunity for dialogue with us so that we can continue to build this coordinated research conference scheme into a highly valuable instrument for promoting European research.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Caroline Hirst
Head of ESF Conferences

The ESF Research Conferences Scheme

The Mission:

The ESF Research Conferences Scheme provides the opportunity for leading scientists and younger researchers to meet for discussions on the most recent developments in their fields of research. It acts as a catalyst for creating new synergistic contacts throughout Europe and the rest of the world. It develops principally through the establishment of long-term partnerships between the ESF and national/international organisations and universities. ESF Research Conferences are open to scientists world-wide, whether from academia or industry. The conferences may be single events, or series, usually with a biennial meeting focusing on specific aspects of the same general topic. They generally last for four or five days and up to 150 participants and invited speakers may attend. Chairs select participants from applications received as a result of publicising the conferences.

The ESF Research Conferences Scheme

This umbrella Scheme provides for bi- or multi-lateral partnerships and each partnership promotes conferences in a specific scientific area and at a unique location. Conference topics are selected either through a call for proposals or through strategic consultation between the ESF and the partner organisations.

Currently, the ESF and its Partners support conferences in:

Basic Science

- with the International Council for Science (ICSU), a group of European Academies & the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC)

Biomedicine

- with the University of Barcelona (UB) and support from the Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprises of the Catalan Autonomous Government (MIUE)

Environmental Sciences

- with the Swedish Research Council (VR) & the Swedish Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (FORMAS)
- with the Foundation of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH) & the Association Entre-Sciences

Life & Natural Sciences

- **Biology+:** with the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO)
- **Physics/Biophysics:** with the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) & Leopold-Franzens-University Innsbruck (LFUI)
- with European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST)

Mathematics

- with the European Mathematical Society (EMS) & the European Research Centres on Mathematics (ERCOM)

Social Sciences and Humanities

- with Linköping University (LiU) and support from the Swedish Research Council (VR) and the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation
- with Bielefeld University and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF)

- A **Frontier Science Conference Series for Young Researchers** is also organised in partnership with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).

► More information:

www.esf.org/conferences/partnerships

Call for Proposals

The ESF invites scientists to submit proposals for high-level research conferences to take place in **2009** and **2010** within the framework of the ESF Research Conferences Scheme.

Scientists whose proposals are successful will be responsible for the scientific excellence of the conferences and will be able to rely on full organisational support provided by the ESF Conferences Unit.

In **2009**, the ESF and its Partners will fund Research Conferences in:

- **Mathematics** (up to 6 conferences)

In **2010**, the ESF and its Partners will fund Research Conferences in:

- **Biology+:** molecular biology at the interface with other disciplines (up to 5 conferences)
- **Energy and Environment** (1 conference)
- **Mathematics** (up to 6 conferences)
- **Physics/Biophysics and Environmental Sciences** (up to 5 conferences)
- **Social Sciences and Humanities** (up to 4 conferences)

Proposals must be submitted online via the ESF Research Conferences website www.esf.org/conferences/call2008 by **15th September 2008**.

The **assessment criteria** are

- Scientific scope and interdisciplinarity of the proposal
- Scientific relevance in terms of novelty, originality and timeliness
- European dimension and added value
- Scientific quality of the draft programme

The **conditions of the award** are:

- Likely number of participants
- Conferences must comply with the profile of ESF Research Conferences as defined under the **framework**.
- Successful applicants must comply with the "[Guidelines for Chairs](#)"

► More information:

www.esf.org/conferences/call2008 or email conferences-proposals@esf.org

The Conference Format

All conferences are chaired by scientists who are experts in their field, and organised in a way which stimulates interaction and free exchange of information. Participation is only possible upon application and the events are deliberately kept to a size which favours informal exchange with numbers varying between 80 and 150. Lectures by invited speakers and short talks by young researchers alternate with discussion periods, poster sessions and social activities. To encourage contact and networking between all participants, there are no parallel sessions. A Forward Look Plenary Session focuses on future developments and ensures long-term impact of the conference outcomes, as well as synergies with other instruments.

Conference Application and Participation

Conference applications are submitted via the **ESF Research Conferences website**. Conference and travel grants are available and can be requested on application. A conference fee is charged to participants. Closing date for applications is 3-4 months prior to the conference.

The 2008/2009 conference programme is available online:

www.esf.org/conferences

ESF-UB Conferences in Biomedicine

The ESF-UB Partnership



Prof. Bertil Andersson and Prof. Josep Samitier sign the ESF-UB partnership, 19 Sept 2006, Spain

The ESF-University of Barcelona (UB) partnership for conferences in biomedicine is dedicated to building pan-European networks and providing a forum for the discussion of high-level topics in biomedicine. Topics include nanomedicine, rare diseases, pharmacogenetics/pharmacogenomics, systems biology and biobanks. Conferences are closely

coordinated with the activities of the EMRC to enable effective implementation of their strategic recommendations.

“UB immediately considered this partnership crucial for its research policy: the format of a relatively small, self-contained conference on a very specific but ‘hot’ topic in biomedicine, promoting young researchers’ attendance, and with plenty of possibilities for interaction, was particularly appealing to us,” stated Prof. Marçal Pastor, Vice-Rector for Research at UB. “Having been a participant myself, I feel this format already makes the ESF-UB Biomedicine Conferences a reference in this field,” he added.

ESF-UB Conferences are supported by the Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprises of the Catalan Autonomous Government (MIUE). This source of local funding not only contributes to the increased stability and continuity of the conferences, it also links the ESF-UB Conferences to the Catalan Bioregion, which strives to foster European competitiveness and cooperation in the area of biomedicine and biotechnology.

“These conferences have helped to position Catalonia in the international arena as the research and innovation reference point for the southern European area,” commented Dr. Ramon Moreno i Amich, MIUE Director General for Research.

“We hope they will continue to foster flexible collaboration between reference networks and research teams from different countries, leading to high quality scientific projects that generate added value,” continued the Director General for Research.

In July 2008, ESF and MIUE will sign a cooperation agreement to extend this collaboration for another three years.

The Nanomedicine Series

The Nanomedicine series forms one part of the ESF-UB Conferences in Biomedicine. The first conference was organised in 2006, with the aim of implementing recommendations of the ESF Forward Look on Nanomedicine¹ published by

the EMRC. It was considered necessary to establish a pan-European series of nanomedicine conferences that was truly interdisciplinary in order to advance research and training, and improve communication in the field. 110 delegates from 25 countries attended from a range of backgrounds and scientific disciplines. Topics included diagnostics to imaging, drug delivery to tissue repair, materials science and nanostructures, as well as ethical and societal issues.

“The meeting proved an excellent example of what can be achieved to create a lively and high-level interdisciplinary exchange”, reported Prof. Ruth Duncan, member of the conference’s Organising Committee.

“A valuable and strong new network was brought together, building on the technical diversity of the delegates. The wide participation of industry leaders and clinicians at the conference brought the wider perspective of the requirements of translational R&D into healthcare practice,” added Prof. Duncan.



Participants at the first 2006 Nanomedicine conference

The active involvement and training of young scientists was another key EMRC recommendation. For the 2006 Nanomedicine conference, 21 grants were awarded to enable early stage career researchers to attend.

“The location was absolutely perfect and gave the senior and young researchers the opportunity to discuss in a very relaxed atmosphere,” said Dr. Elena Martinez, a young researcher at the 2006 conference. “As a result of the ESF-UB conference, we initiated collaboration with a group in Australia, as well as other national groups,” she continued.

The next Nanomedicine conference will take place 19-24 September 2008, under the chairmanship of Prof. Rogerio Gaspar (University of Lisbon, PT). It will build on the foundations laid by the first conference, in an effort to foster cross-fertilisation in this emerging multi-disciplinary field.



Young researchers at the 2006 Nanomedicine conference

In addition, a series of biennial **ESF-UB Summer Schools in Nanomedicine** was set up to facilitate the participation of young researchers. The first school took place in 2007 in Cardiff, a second will take place in Lisbon in 2009.

► More information on the 2008 ESF-UB Nanomedicine Conference: www.esf.org/conferences/08218

The ESF-UB Nanomedicine Conferences take place every other year. The next conference is in 2010.

1. FL Nanomedicine www.esf.org/nanomedicine

Meet our Chair



Prof. Munir Pirmohamed chaired the 2008 ESF-UB Conference on Pharmacogenetics and Pharmacogenomics: Adverse Drug Reactions. He has been Professor of Clinical Pharmacology at the University of Liverpool since 2001 and was awarded the NHS Chair in Pharmacogenetics by the UK Department of Health in 2007. He is currently running a number of multi-centre prospective studies to identify genetic factors responsible for variable drug responses.

Here, Prof. Pirmohamed talks about pharmacogenetics and his experience as the chair of an ESF Research Conference.

What are the implications of pharmacogenetics research?

Drug safety issues remain an enduring problem for health-care, regulators and industry, evidenced by recent high profile drug withdrawals. There is a need to undertake further research in the pharmacogenetics of adverse drug reactions so that we can quantify the contribution of genetic and non-genetic factors in the predisposition. This will help to develop more evidence-based guidelines for drug development and usage, and reduce the harms associated with medicines. The ESF-UB conference addressed these issues, focusing on adverse drug reactions, and more specifically on their genetic aspects.

What did you hope to achieve with this second ESF-UB Conference on Pharmacogenetics and Pharmacogenomics?

Adverse drug reactions are a global problem so there is a need for multi-centre international collaborations. For this conference, we assembled together the best researchers in the area, all coming from different backgrounds and disciplines. We wanted not only to lay out the state-of-the-art in the genetics of adverse drug reactions but also to foster collaborations between the different groups working in this area.

How do you define your role as an ESF-UB Conference Chair?

I had to ensure that the programme was as attractive as possible to researchers worldwide; that the best speakers came to share their latest findings with the audience and

also that we attracted young researchers. My goal was to make sure that all attendees not only learnt about the latest developments in the area but that this was done in a convivial and enjoyable atmosphere. Organising a conference is of course always stressful but the ESF Conferences Unit helped an enormous amount.

What lies ahead for pharmacogenetics research?

I see a very positive future for the topic. At the time of the completion of the human genome project, there was a lot of hype about pharmacogenomics and the fact that it would solve all problems associated with drug therapies. I think this has now been replaced by a realistic approach and expectations. We need to develop pharmacogenomics to benefit patients, and the only way to do this is to develop a robust evidence base that allows easier translation into clinical practice, and is acceptable to both patients and clinicians. We are now seeing international collaborations, more appropriate study designs, the availability of free data on the human genome and the utilisation of new technologies. Taking all these developments together, we can achieve a lot in reducing the burden of adverse drug reactions for patients.

► More information on the ESF-UB Conference on Pharmacogenetics and Pharmacogenomics: Adverse Drug Reactions: www.esf.org/conferences/08269

ESF-UB Conferences on Pharmacogenetics and Pharmacogenomics take place every other year. The next conference is in 2010.

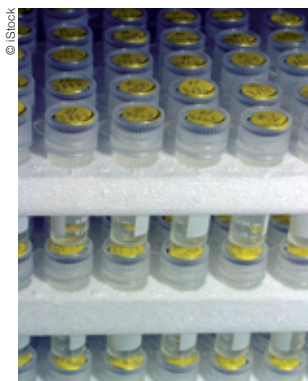
Conference Spotlight: ESF-UB Conference on Biobanks

Biobanks are extensive collections of biological samples with epidemiological, genealogical, lifestyle and clinical data, which can help to drive forward research on drug development, treatment of complex, multi-factorial diseases and personalised medicine. Many national and regional biobanks have been established throughout Europe, but the exchange of data and materials within national legal frameworks is still difficult, eluding international cooperation and harmonisation.

“The ESF-UB Conference on Biobanks is a unique opportunity for the various groups active in the different areas of biobanking to meet and discuss a common strategy and policy on how to develop the field further¹. This is particularly important because of the new European research infrastructure initiative which aims to overcome the existing fragmentation,” says Prof. Kurt Zatloukal, Co-Chair of the conference.

“All aspects of biobanks: their governance and management, ethics, technical, legal and social issues, will be discussed with professionals with extremely solid experience. Talks will also concentrate on the BBMRI European research infrastructure project²,” comments the Conference Chair, Prof. Alberto Orfao. Speakers from Europe, Asia and America will present different biobank models and initiatives, ensuring a global perspective and thorough exchanges. ►►

FOCUS



“It is very important that the development of the European biobanking field is well coordinated with what goes on in the US and Asia”, stresses Prof. Zatloukal.

He also points out that to cope with the rapid pace of developments in this field, there is now an urgent need to recruit new people to specialise in biospecimen research: “Biospecimen

research is so far not considered to be sparkling science but is the very basis for this. It requires a very visionary approach because we now have to collect samples that will be used in research in the future 10 or 20 years. Such a challenging task requires more people trained in biobanking-related activities.” To address this necessity, the conference is also open to young researchers with grants available to support their participation.

“This will be the first practical forum where those starting or undertaking biobanking research can benefit from direct informal contact with representatives of several of the internationally most prominent population-based and clinical biobanks,” explains Prof. Orfao.

The ESF-UB Conference on Biobanks will take place 1-6 November 2008 in Sant Feliu, Spain.

► More information:

www.esf.org/conferences/08265

1. An ESF/EMRC Science Policy Briefing No. 32 on “Population Surveys and Biobanking” was recently published with recommendations on how to stimulate co-ordinated activity in these fields across Europe.

2. For information on the Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure (BBMRI) project, visit www.biobanks.eu

• ESF-ZiF-Bielefeld Conferences

The conferences will span the fields of humanities and social sciences to foster discussions on the changing nature of science, and on the complex relationship between environmental degradation and migration, and their associated economic, social and political effects.

► More information on the first conference in the series on ‘Science and Values: the Politicisation of Science’ will soon be available online.

• ESF-EMS-ERCOM Mathematics Conferences

The conferences will build on the multinational expertise of the European Mathematical Society and a number of high profile European Research Centres in Mathematics. They will address emerging issues and new applications, and develop the next generation of mathematical scientists.

Forum

Encounters is intended as an interactive forum targeted at the scientific community. It is an extension of the Scheme’s commitment to promote scientific synergy and excellence, by ensuring both content and format are flexible, and in line with the latest scientific developments. We therefore seek your active participation in accomplishing this aim: contributions and comments are eagerly awaited. With this first issue we have tried to give you a glimpse of the achievements so far and potential of the Scheme. We now invite you to send us your opinion:

Q: Which of the following do you rate highest in a research conference: topic, speakers, interdisciplinarity, opportunities for interaction and networking, location, grants?

Q: What current topics would benefit from a research conference?

Have your say!

Please send your answers and any other contributions to our [Communications Officer](#).

New Series

• Europe-Africa Frontier Research Conferences

The conferences will profile African excellence in basic science in an effort to put transcontinental scientific collaboration to the task of addressing critical problems facing the African continent.

► More information on the first conference in the series on ‘Infectious Diseases: From Basic to Translational Research’: www.esf.org/conferences/09277

• ESF-FMSH Entre-Sciences Conferences in Interdisciplinary Environmental Sciences

The conferences will bring together scientists from humanities and social sciences and life and natural sciences to consider cross-field paths to deal with contemporary environmental challenges. Current topics include global climate change and energy and environment.

► More information on the first conference in the series on ‘New Methodologies and Interdisciplinary Approaches in Global Change Research’: www.esf.org/conferences/08284

The Conferences team

The ESF Conferences Unit is based in Brussels, co-located with COST, and has one team member based in Strasbourg. Communications and accounting functions are outsourced to the appropriate ESF Units.

Caroline Hirst, Head of ESF Conferences

Benita Lipps, Conference Manager

Anne Guehl, Senior Conference Officer (Strasbourg)

Anne Blondeel-Oman, Conference Officer

Chiara Orefice, Conference Officer

Jean Kelly, Conference Officer

Antje Teegler, Conference Officer, COST

Zuzana Vercinska, Conference Officer, COST

Anthea Richards, On-site Conference Secretary

Judith Sabaton, On-site Conference Secretary

Joana Martinez Flores, On-site Conference Secretary

Corinne Winger/Ivanka Angelova,

Communications Officer (Strasbourg)

Upcoming Events

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

- **IMAGING WAR: INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**
ESF-LiU Conference
3-7 September 2008, Vadstena, Sweden
Closing date for applications: 20 July 2008
- **REFORMING THE EUROPEAN STATE SYSTEM IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**
ESF-LiU Conference
10-14 September 2008, Vadstena, Sweden
Closing date for applications: 31 July 2008
- **BACTERIAL NETWORKS (BACNET/08)**
ESF-EMBO Symposium
13-18 September 2008, Sant Feliu de Guixols, Spain
Closing date for applications: 30 April 2008
- **NANOMEDICINE**
ESF-UB Conference in Biomedicine
19-24 September 2008, Sant Feliu de Guixols, Spain
Closing date for applications: 19 June 2008
- **SYSTEMS CHEMISTRY**
ESF-COST High-Level Research Conference
3-8 October 2008, Acquafredda di Maratea, Italy
Closing date for applications: 9 July 2008
- **THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: NEW CHALLENGES, NEW ISSUES**
ESF-LiU Conference
11-15 October 2008, Vadstena, Sweden
Closing date for applications: 29 June 2008
- **NEW CHALLENGES IN EARTHQUAKE DYNAMICS: OBSERVING AND MODELLING A MULTI-SCALE SYSTEM**
ESF-FWF Conference in Partnership with LFUI
18-23 October 2008, Obergurgl, Austria
Closing date for applications: 22 June 2008
- **PROTEIN DESIGN AND EVOLUTION FOR BIOCATALYSIS**
ESF-EMBO Symposium
25-30 October 2008, Sant Feliu de Guixols, Spain
Closing date for applications: 29 June 2008
- **BIOBANKS**
ESF-UB Conference in Biomedicine
1-6 November 2008, Sant Feliu de Guixols, Spain
Closing date for applications: 8 August 2008

- **NEW METHODOLOGIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES IN GLOBAL CHANGE RESEARCH**
ESF-FMSH Entre-Sciences Conference
5-10 November 2008, Ile de Porquerolles, France
Closing date for applications: 31 August 2008
- **CHEMICAL CONTROL WITH ELECTRONS AND PHOTONS**
ESF-FWF Conference in Partnership with LFUI
22-27 November 2008, Obergurgl, Austria
Closing date for applications: 29 August 2008
- **GRAPHENE WEEK 2009**
ESF-FWF Conference in Partnership with LFUI
2-7 March 2009, Obergurgl, Austria
Closing date for applications: 14 November 2008
- **INFECTIOUS DISEASES: FROM BASIC TO TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**
Europe-Africa Frontier Research Conference
4-9 April 2009, Cape Town, South Africa
Closing date for applications: 24 October 2008

SUMMER/WINTER SCHOOLS

- **THE 26TH JERUSALEM WINTER SCHOOL IN THEORETICAL PHYSICS: STRING THEORY AND LHC**
ESF-IAS Winter School in Physics
29 December 2008-8 January 2009, Jerusalem, Israel

WORLD CONFERENCES

- **SOCIAL COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE**
ESF-JSPS Frontier Science Conference for Young Researchers
27 February - 4 March 2009, Acquafredda di Maratea, Italy
Closing date for applications: 14 October 2008

RESEARCH AREAS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Biology+ | ● Medicine |
| ● Physics, Biophysics and Environmental Sciences | ● Chemistry |
| | ● Humanities and Social Sciences |

Latest information on our full programme is available online: www.esf.org/conferences

ESF Conferences Unit

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The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides a platform for its Member Organisations to advance European research and explore new directions for research at the European level. Established in 1974 as an independent non-governmental organisation, the ESF currently serves 77 Member Organisations across 30 countries.