

# ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

## Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF EMBO
Conference Title:	Molecular Perspectives on Protein-Protein Interactions
Dates:	14-19 November 2010
Chair:	Prof. Jacob Piehler
Rapporteur:	Prof. Dr. Marcellus Ubbink

### General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

This meeting was the third of its kind. Two earlier editions were in Eilat, Israel, in 2005 and Dubrovnik, Croatia, in 2008. The 2010 meeting was the first with the support of ESF-EMBO, giving a strong financial and administrative basis to the meeting. The three meetings were all focussed on protein-protein interactions. They were initiated because of the need for such a gathering as felt by several people in the field. The researchers each participated in meetings focused at the particular techniques that they used, like NMR, kinetics, genetics, etc., but no meeting was available where people met who all worked on this topic. The meetings have been very popular. The 2010 editions was oversubscribed by 30%.

### Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The scientific quality of this conference was truly outstanding. It was balanced, with many areas of the protein-protein interaction field being discussed in dedicated sessions. Most presentations were given by PIs early in their careers, with also contributions from some senior researchers and some students and post-docs. This mix resulted in many reports on recent research with new, fresh ideas and developments.

The presentations were generally of a high quality, with sufficient introduction. Many talks raised discussion and a little more time could have been allotted for questions. Most speakers used all the allocated time for the presentation, leaving the chairs little choice but to cut short the following discussion. However, many discussions went on informally during coffee breaks and meals.

### Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

In total about 150 people participated, making it easy to meet or approach other people and discuss science. The atmosphere was very relaxed and informal. Opportunity for informal exchange of information was available during the breaks, dinner time and the two evening poster sessions, which were very well attended and went on until late in the evening. Many young researchers presented posters leading to ample discussions with PIs and other participants.

### Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

The balance seemed quite appropriate. The speakers were mostly young PIs, making the meeting quite dynamic and, in my opinion, very attractive for young researchers who want to be informed about recent developments and decide on future career directions. A large range of nationalities was represented. Note that the affiliations do not represent the national groups, because many (young) researchers work in foreign laboratories. Thus, the number of nationalities is even greater than the affiliations suggest. As mentioned above, the different subfields were well represented in the various sessions. The diverse scientific organizing committee ensured this diversity.

## **Outlook and Future Developments**

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

I myself have gotten into contact with several researchers, from which collaborations may result. Mostly likely that will be the case for many others as well. The personal contact is an important part of these conferences, not only to start collaborations, but also to exchange ideas and simply know the person behind the name seen on publications. Knowing each other makes it much easier to contact someone later for collaborations, questions, exchange of students, etc. The value of the networking aspect cannot be overestimated, besides the exchange of information about recent scientific developments in the field. These conferences are not to be viewed as political meetings that do or do not need lead to a well-defined goal or agreement. Rather, they are an inherent part in the way science is performed. They act as the oil in the motor of scientific progress, which is why successful meetings like this one can be and should be repeated on a regular basis.

## **Follow-up**

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

There's one clear answer to this question: Continued support for the next editions of this meeting in the future.

## **Organisation and Infrastructure**

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The location of the venue was excellent. The situation near the seashore is an inspiring environment. Catering was of high quality, with plenty of good food. The rooms were spacious, clean and well equipped.

A few points need improvement though. The main screen in the conference room was difficult to see from the back. The room was also not suited for a poster session, with insufficient light and space. Not all posters (about 100) could be up simultaneously, due to lack of boards. Yet, it is important to have the all poster up during the entire meeting, to allow for even more discussions, also outside the poster sessions. Coffee and tea was served outside, which was not a good idea given the chilly weather. I recommend that ESF considers the meeting facilities carefully, along with the location, catering and rooms, in its venue selection procedure.

The support from the ESF staff was excellent. Two staff members were present. They were friendly, helpful and flexible. The ample support that is provided before and during the meeting is a big plus of ESF-EMBO meetings, relieving the organizing committee of many duties.

## **Summary & Overall Assessment**

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

The meeting was a great success. In the final evaluations this was clearly the general feeling of all present. People asked for a repeat of the meeting in 2-3 years. The aims as stated above, networking and information about scientific progress, were clearly achieved.

## About ESF Research Conferences

### **The Scheme**

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

### **Conference Format**

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

### **Division of Tasks**

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: [www.esf.org/conferences](http://www.esf.org/conferences)