

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF/EMBO
Conference Title:	Flies, worms and robots: combining perspectives on minibrains and behaviour.
Dates:	08 November – 13 November 2014
Chair:	Chair: Prof. Matthieu Louis, Centre for Genomic Regulation, Barcelona, ES Co-chair: Prof. Barbara Webb, University of Edinburgh, UK
Rapporteur:	Tanel Tenson

General Comments

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

The meeting covered the research in neurobiology on two widely used invertebrate model systems: *Ceanorhabditis elegans* and *Drosophila*. Recently the biological experimentation has been combined with theoretical modelling and constructing neurobiology inspired robots. There are no other small neurobiology meetings where the *C. elegans* and *Drosophila* people could meet between each other, although these simple model organisms have several common features. In addition, combining neurobiology with robotics is a very inspiring development.

My research field is far from neurobiology and robotics but the meeting was very interesting also for me. An important point was the high quality of the presentations.

Quality of the Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

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

In general, the scientific programme was very good. It was well balanced between different aspects of neurobiology and robotics. The programme was built from 20 and 30 minute talks and poster sessions. Interesting additions were two workshops where the biology people offered an opportunity for the robotics people to have hands on experience with some of the simple neurobiology experiments and the robotics people offered a simple robot building exercise. I found the workshops useful as one of the aims of the meeting was to bring these communities together.

The ESF/EMBO conferences sometimes attempt to bring in some relevant humanities aspects. At this time philosopher Rupert Glasgow gave a very interesting presentation that was appreciated by the audience.

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?

Over the years a more or less standard format for the EMBO/ESF meetings has developed. The current event followed this tradition. The ratio between formal sessions and breaks for discussion was optimal.

At some meetings the younger researchers do not mix well with senior scientists who tend to group between themselves. This was not the case at the current conference where people from different generations grouped at meal times and coffee breaks. I found that the integration of younger researchers was achieved well.

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 between younger and senior participants was appropriate and the different subfields were well represented.

Numbers of participants by country:

EUROPE

Germany 21

Spain 11

UK 10

France 4

Portugal 4

Switzerland 3

Austria 2

Italy 2

Belgium 1

Denmark 1

Sweden 1

NORTH AMERICA

USA 32

OTHER REGIONS

Japan 5

India 1

Singapore 1

Taiwan 1

The conference participants were from a fewer countries than usual for the EMBO/ESF conferences with about half of the participants from USA and Germany. This is reflecting, at least partly, the current activities in the fields covered.

For one of the topics (*Drosophila* neurobiology) Howard Hughes Medical Institute in US has made considerable investment and has established a specialized research unit, Janelia Farm. Therefore it was well substantiated that considerable number of participants was from this institute.

As a common pattern for the ESF/EMBO meetings, Eastern Europe is underrepresented, at the current meeting not represented at all.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference?

(How) could the conference outcomes be utilised further?

I find that the EMBO/ESF conference format has very good balance between official sessions and breaks for discussion. I am sure that many new ideas were discussed between the scientists and interesting research collaborations will follow.

The current event was a second in a series and the participants agreed that the series is original and successful. There will be an attempt to organize a third meeting in four years.

Follow-up

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

Although there was considerable enthusiasm about establishing scientific collaborations no specific large scale follow-up activities were discussed.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference?

Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

In general, venue, catering accommodation and administrative support were great. The conference organizer and hotel staff are already experience with the ESF/EMBO meetings and I am convinced that the forthcoming meetings at the venue will run smoothly.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

I am convinced that the conference was successful and aims were achieved. The organizers put together a very interesting programme and the ESF conference manager did a great job. It seemed to me that this conference was especially successful in facilitating discussions between different generations of researchers.

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