

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-EMBO
Conference Title:	Antiviral Applications of RNA Interference
Dates:	30 May - 4 June 2010
Chair:	Prof. Ben Berkhout
Rapporteur:	Martin Röllinghoff

General Comments

After a very successful first ESF-EMBO Symposium on Antiviral Application of RNA Interference in 2008 a second ESF-EMBO Symposium covering the same topic was directed by Prof. Ben Berkhout, Amsterdam, together with Prof. Jens Kurreck, Berlin and Prof. Juan Antonio Gardia Alvarez, CNB/CSIC Spain.

The Chair and the Co-Chairs must be congratulated as they were able to raise additional sponsor-money that allowed to support several PhD-students to attend, which otherwise would have not been able to do so. Thus the modest ESF-seed money was very well spent.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Prof. Berkhout, together with his dedicated colleagues, and supported by a highly respected international faculty, has come up with an excellent program of lectures and short talks, that covered all mayor areas of antiviral application of RNA interference. The meeting started off with a short presentation of ESF by the rapporteur.

Thereafter, the 5 sessions covered the following topics:

- RNAi Mechanism and Tools
- RNA Silencing and Plant Virus Resistance
- Viruses and the Cellular RNAi Pathway
- Antiviral RNAi from Plants to Mammals
- Towards Therapeutics

All of the sessions had included selected related short talks of younger scientists in addition of presenting their posters in the poster sessions. More than 40 posters were on display.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Of great interest to all scientists were the vivid discussions during the coffee breaks and siestas. The outstanding faculty by their way of discussing the various topics was able to attract and to fascinate the participants. To my surprise I have seen no one in the pool, despite the good weather!

Balance of Participants

More than 80 participants out of 20 countries attended the meeting (60 Post-Docs and senior scientists, and 22 invited speakers). The delegates were mostly from Europe, but also from Australia, USA, Canada, Taiwan, Peru and South Africa.

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?

Follow-up

Organisation and Infrastructure

The Symposium took place at the Eden Roc Hotel set in a lovely bay of Costa Brava in Sant Feliu. Accommodation was very good and catering excellent. Great advantage was that the delegates could use the Internet (Wi-Fi). In the hotel were available equipments for sporting activities (outdoor and indoor swimming pools and a small fitness centre). These facilities were free of charge to the delegates and provided a good opportunity to network as well as relax during evenings.

Altogether, I feel, the Symposium was again a great success, because it was very well organized. The faculty was extremely

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well selected. The abstract booklet of the short talks, which everyone received, were very informative. It became obvious, how well the young people discussed and interacted. At the end of symposium there was distributed a questionnaire to rank the lecturers, the posters, the poster sessions, accommodation, catering, etc. There were also given three awards honouring the best posters.

Summary & Overall Assessment

At the end of the Symposium the clear interest and necessity was aired, that in two years time a 3rd ESF- EMBO Symposium on this very booming topic must take place, as so many questions are still open. Again the combined expertise of researchers studying RNAi in plants, insects and mammals is needed to push the field. It was said, that it is still not fully clear whether mammals have a functional siRNA system. Also the evolutionary aspects of RNAi needs further consideration. It will be of outmost interest to see whether in 2 years siRNA will have reached the clinic.