Career development at EMBL and EMBL-EBI
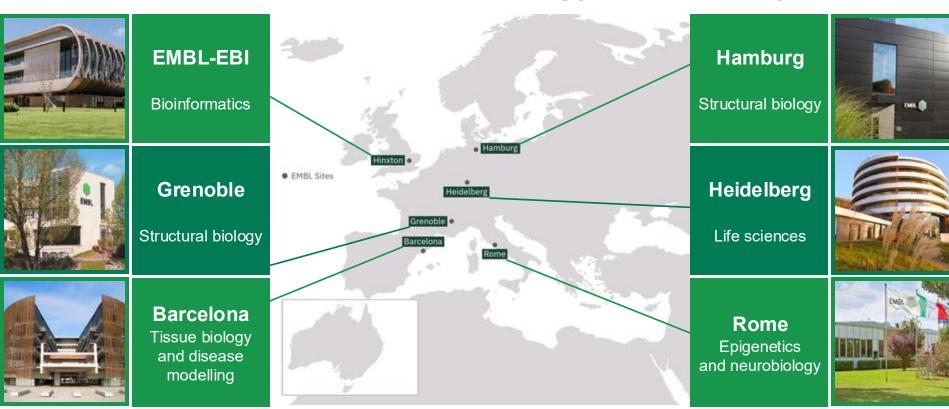
Skills assessment and workforce development at International Research Infrastructures

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EMBL-EBI

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory

What is EMBL-EBI?

- World leading source of public biomolecular data

- Our vision is to benefit humankind by advancing scientific discovery and impact through bioinformatics.

- Part of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), Europe's flagship laboratory for the life sciences.

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Rationale for our framework

- EMBL is an organisation based around the academic track

    - Research model is familiar to many and can define progression

- EMBL-EBI is predominantly a service organisation

    - The majority of staff are based in providing computational biology services/databases

    - We have developers, bioinformaticians, trainers, annotators, curators, admin (not exhaustive)

- Staff leaving interviews over a 3 year period indicated three themes

    - Leaving because of a lack of progression

    - Perceived challenges of moving into senior roles and transparency of process

    - They were unprepared for their next role (EMBL operates a maximum 9 year term)

The solution we looked towards was to adopt a competency and behaviour framework tied into our annual appraisal system

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The framework - fully released 2021

Structured around seven competencies, grouped into three clusters

Sets out behavioural indicators for each of the seven competencies, from level A to level F

Those behaviours apply irrespective of the role being assessed

Best practice is used to articulate how the staff in different roles can demonstrate the required behaviours
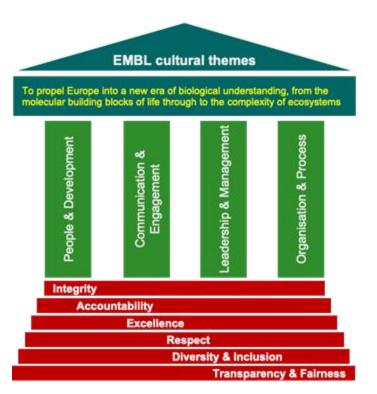
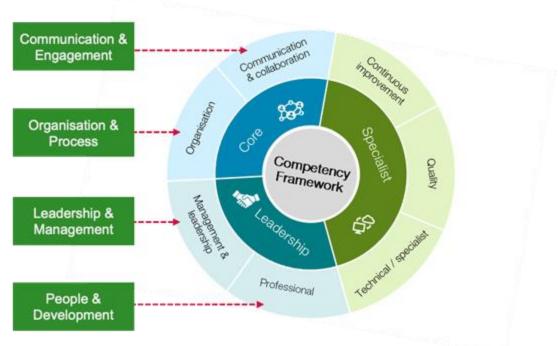Integrated into our yearly annual performance reviews (appraisals)

Available currently for developers, bioinformaticians, annotator/curators, IT operations & infrastructure

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Underpinning EMBL's cultural themes

The seven competencies

Core	▪ Organisation	• organising themselves, their work and the work of those they manage.
	▪ Communication & collaboration	• building and maintaining productive relationships with those they work with and beyond.
Specialist	▪ Continuous improvement	• continually looking for ways to improve personal, departmental and organisational processes.
	▪ Quality	• striving to produce work of the highest quality.
	▪ Technical/ specialist	• looking for ways to develop and build knowledge in their own area of expertise.
Leadership	▪ Professional	• representing themselves and the organisation in a professional manner.
	▪ Management & leadership	• actively managing their own development and where appropriate the development of others.

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How it works in practice

Level B

Level B is typically associated with Officer I job roles

Competency	Behavioural indicator
Organisation	• Effectively plans, manages and delivers individual work within the context of the team and in line with directions given, paying attention to stated specification and priorities.
Communication & collaboration	• Builds positive relationships and communicates openly in a professional way within a team. • Understands the value of shared appropriately. • Identifies and acts when their ow and diversity policy.

The framework outlines the indicators

Level B

Level B is typically associated with Officer I job roles

Competency	Behavioural indicator	Example of good practice
Organisation	• Effectively plans, manages and delivers individual work within the context of the team and in line with directions given, paying attention to stated specification and priorities.	• Participates meaningfully in meetings and invests time to sufficiently prepare • Understand and be able to describe the role of the team in the context of the wider Institute and EMBL • Takes ownership for the organisation and backup of their own files. • Writes documentation and deposits in pre-agreed locations. • Manages their assigned work, considering the priorities set by their manager. • Clearly comments on JIRA tickets, showing that specification has been met. • Completes timesheets and WARs without prompting. • Can break large tasks into appropriate subtasks and document progress.

Good practice details how someone could demonstrate this within a given role

And during the appraisal

Behavioural Competency Framework (skills, knowledge and behaviour)

- Discuss progress and provide a brief summary about which level (A-F) the staff member has demonstrated for each dimension.

Dimension	Comment
Organisational	
Communication & collaboration	
Technical ability	
Quality	
Continuous Improvement	
Professional	
Management & leadership	

Works best when both sides of the appraisal perform their own analysis and highlights differences in assessment levels

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Reception and application

For the most part positive

- Some staff do not want this
- Some staff feel it does not align with their own interpretations of the competencies
- Some staff's personal assessment of their position has not matched their line manager's
- Most staff are happy to see what it means to be a certain level

Examples of successful integration

- Into the appraisal process
- Recruitment processes including job descriptions and candidate assessments
- Promotion packages
- Personal improvement plans

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Gaps and future steps

Penetration across EMBL-EBI is limited

- Group and team leaders (10-25 line reports) can choose to use it or not
- Does not cover all "job families" at EMBL-EBI
- Increases complexity and time of the appraisal process

EMBL will be moving to mandated yearly appraisals

- The BCF is an EMBL-EBI owned process building on the EMBL appraisal

Industry moving away from yearly assessments

- Many moving to continuous assessment with periodic check-ins
- BCF may not scale if our group and team leaders want to move this way

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