

Terms of Reference

EMBL Archive, 2020



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1. Document Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define the vision for and mission of the EMBL Archive, and provide information on its governance, scope and objectives.

2. Vision for and Mission of the EMBL Archive

EMBL exists to “promote co-operation among European States in fundamental research, in the development of advanced instrumentation and in advanced teaching in molecular biology as well as in other areas of research essentially related thereto. [...] The results of the experimental and theoretical work of the Laboratory shall be published or otherwise made generally available.”¹

In alignment with this institutional mission, the EMBL Archive’s vision is to provide a resource that supports and documents EMBL’s research, instrumentation and training in the field of molecular biology. It will do so by capturing, processing and making accessible EMBL’s scientific records and archives, and institutional documentary heritage of enduring historical value created (naturally or necessarily) or received by EMBL as a product of its activities at any of its sites. In so doing, the EMBL Archive supports EMBL in being a transparent and accountable institute.

3. Objectives of the EMBL Archive

To deliver the mission of the EMBL Archive, three main objectives have been identified:

3.1. Capture EMBL’s Documentary Heritage

The EMBL Archive will actively collect relevant documentary heritage that falls within the scope of the EMBL Archive (see below), in particular historical scientific and institutional material, current scientific material, current institutional material and administrative records. The EMBL Archivist works especially in the area of scientific recordkeeping, in collaboration with EMBL’s scientific faculty.

3.2. Manage EMBL’s Archival Holdings

To deliver its vision, the EMBL Archive will manage its holdings in line with professional good practice and in a timely and professional manner. Activities in this area include archival appraisal, cataloguing, conservation and preservation, and managing personal data.

¹ “Agreement establishing the European Molecular Biology Laboratory”, Geneva, CH, 10 May 1973 (EIF 4 July 1974), United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 954, No. 13866 p. 353.

3.3. Make EMBL's Archival Holdings Accessible

The holdings in the EMBL Archive are made accessible to any different users, enabling EMBL to further its core mission of disseminating the relevance of molecular biology and EMBL's achievements in the life sciences. The main tool to facilitate discovery of the archival holdings is the EMBL Archive catalogue (archive.embl.org).

4. Accountability and Transparency

Archives underpin accountable and transparent administrative actions for institutions and societies.² The EMBL Archive is committed to supporting EMBL in being accountable and transparent. It does so by ensuring that EMBL keeps what it needs and wants to keep, and disposes of the rest in a comprehensive and documented manner. To this effect, it is also important that the EMBL Archive maintain a high level of transparency and documents its own activities and decisions.

5. Governance and Relationships

The EMBL Archivist reports to the EMBL Director General, but works closely with relevant parties, including EMBL scientific faculty, the EMBL Directorate, the EMBL Council Secretariat, the EMBL Internal Audit, EMBL Administration, Alumni Relations, IT Services, and the Szilárd Library.

Outside of EMBL, the EMBL Archivist will work and collaborate with relevant local, national and international networks, associations and institutions.

6. Scope of the EMBL Archive Holdings

The EMBL Archive is principally concerned with scientific and cultural heritage associated with EMBL either:

- through origin, i.e. it was created within the context of EMBL activities
- through creator, i.e. it was created by someone working at, or who has worked at, EMBL (member of personnel or alumnus/a)
- through association to EMBL by subject matter and/or by virtue of EMBL's position as Europe's flagship intergovernmental organization in life science research.

² ICA, "Universal Declaration on Archives", 2011, <https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives>.

Material that falls within this scope can be accessioned by the EMBL Archive.

It is important to note that the scientific and cultural heritage of EMBL comes in many shapes and forms, and the EMBL Archive strives to collect a representative of this documentary heritage, in analogue and digital formats. Among other things, the EMBL Archive will collect lab books and notebooks, correspondence and emails, material pertaining to scientific collaborations, drafts of papers and publications, notes and annotated printouts, books and personal libraries, photographs, unpublished original material, interviews and newspaper cuttings, instruments and equipment, models, objects and artefacts, films and recordings, and material from EMBL clubs.

6.1. Selection of Material and Exclusions

A potentially enormous amount of material falls within the scope of the EMBL Archive, and the EMBL Archivist must ensure that EMBL's archival holdings continue to support the missions of EMBL and the EMBL Archive, and reflect the work and activities of the institute. As well as the practical limitations detailed in the following paragraph, accessions will be selected through archival appraisal processes.

Some material, while falling in the scope detailed above, will nonetheless not be accepted by the EMBL Archive. This will in particular be the case if material cannot be stored, preserved and/or made accessible long-term within the archive's infrastructure. This might include biological specimens, large pieces of equipment and material that cannot be satisfactorily preserved. With regard to digital material, the permanent preservation of digital material represents a significant investment of resources. The EMBL Archivist will discuss with potential donors collections which by nature of their quantity, extent or file format(s) represent a particular challenge.

If material cannot be accepted within the EMBL Archive, reasonable effort will be made, working with the material's depositor, to determine the most appropriate way to deal with this material.

6.2. Methods and Conditions of Acquisition

The primary sources of acquisition of scientific and cultural heritage for the EMBL Archive are internal transfers. External material may be acquired through donation, bequest and occasionally purchase. The EMBL Archive do not usually take material on a temporary basis; loans will only be considered under exceptional circumstances.

6.2.1. Internal Policies, Staff Rules and Regulations, and Other Governing Documents

The EMBL Archivist working with colleagues across the organisation has developed procedures to ensure that scientific material, institutional and administrative records of enduring historical value, policies, marketing material and other pertinent items are automatically deposited in the EMBL Archive. It is critical that the Archive reflects the organisation and its activities. As a resource for EMBL material to be



curated, the EMBL Archive enables the scientific and administrative records of the organization to meet the highest standard of good practice, accountability and transparency.

Within these rules, the EMBL Archivist will always work with individuals to manage each deposit appropriately and personally.

7. Access to Holdings

The EMBL Archive seeks to make as much material publicly accessible, all the while appropriately controlling access to private and sensitive material and complying with data protection, copyright and other applicable legislation. However, this approach does not waive EMBL's immunity from jurisdiction and execution of the inviolability of its archives as specified in the "Headquarters Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Molecular Biology."³

8. Co-ordination and Co-operation with Other Collections

The EMBL Archive will seek to co-operate closely with archivists at other relevant institutions, such as other international scientific institutions (e.g. EIROforum organisations) or biological research institutes. It is envisaged that co-ordination and co-operation will take the form of regular exchanges. Such exchanges will enrich the EMBL Archive by providing external, professional guidance, and should therefore be considered a long-term activity of the EMBL Archive.

One fundamental aspect of co-operation with other relevant institutions will be to make reference to relevant, complementary holdings held at these institutions.

Similarly, in due course, the EMBL Archive will communicate its acquisitions to relevant national and international institutions to facilitate the discovery of material held in the EMBL Archive.

9. Special Comments

9.1. Material from all EMBL Sites

For practical, financial and legal reasons, the EMBL Archive is located at EMBL Heidelberg, where the EMBL Archivist can take responsibility for the storage, access and cataloguing of all holdings. However, the EMBL Archivist is committed to ensuring that all material, regardless of its provenance, is made easily

³ See Article 5 of the "Headquarters Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory", accessible in the EMBL Archive catalogue: <https://archive.embl.org/index.php/headquarters-agreement-between-government-of-federal-republic-of-germany-and-european-molecular-biology-laboratory>.

accessible to all EMBL sites, for example by digitizing material on an ad hoc basis, or doing some research on behalf of staff at EMBL sites.

9.2. The Case of EMBO

EMBO and EMBL are separate organisations, but they share some interests, history, a campus and some infrastructures. The EMBL Archivist will work closely with EMBO Management in order to best communicate and share the two institutions' shared history. It is acknowledged that, though EMBO Staff are EMBL employees, EMBL and the EMBL Archive will deal with and discuss EMBO material separately. For the time being, the EMBL Archive does not currently routinely include material from EMBO. Should this change, EMBO and the EMBL Archive will agree to an appropriate workflow to enable this to happen. Therefore, individuals wishing to access material from EMBL should contact EMBO directly.

10. Revision of this Document

This document was approved in February 2016, following discussions throughout 2015 with the EMBL Director General, the EMBL Directorate and relevant EMBL staff. Following the Scientific Strategy and Management Advice Committee (SSMAC, attended by EMBL Senior Scientists) meeting on 19 and 20 January 2016, final changes were incorporated.

10.1. Record of Revisions

This document was reviewed in March 2017 by the EMBL Director General and the EMBL Archivist. No changes to the 2016 version were made.

This document was reviewed in February 2018 by the EMBL Director General and the EMBL Archivist. Its content was updated and reorganized.

This document was reviewed in April 2020 by the EMBL Director General and the EMBL Archivist. Its content was updated and reorganized, and some content was removed.

All previous versions of this document are available from the EMBL Archivist.