

Best Paper Award 2001

We are pleased to announce that the winner of the award for the Best Paper 2001 is Laura McMahon for the paper entitled Assembly of *C. elegans* apical junctions involves positioning and compaction by LET-413 and protein aggregation by the MAGUK protein DLG-1 (McMahon, Legouis, Vonesch and Labouesse. *J. Cell Sci.* **114**, 2265-2277).

The prize, \$1,000, is awarded annually to the first author of the paper that is judged by the Editors and Editorial Board to be the best published in the Journal that year. To be considered for the 2001 prize, the first author must be a student or a postdoc of less than five years standing.

Laura McMahon was born in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, and lived there until she 'escaped' to Edinburgh University where she started studying Geophysics and ended up with a degree in Zoology (not being very good at making up her mind!), specialising in animal behaviour and parasitology. From here, she was lured to the Wellcome Centre of Molecular Parasitology in Glasgow by her fascination for parasites, only to embark on a PhD studying the cuticle and epidermal function of the non-parasitic nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* under the supervision of Dr Iain Johnstone. Luckily, she soon saw the advantages of working with a non-parasitic worm and became interested in the embryonic development of *C. elegans*; she was

especially interested in working with genes essential for the development of the epidermis and production of the cuticle. Laura characterised the phenotypes of several deletions and the pattern of a novel antibody recognising the C-terminus of the cuticle collagen DPY-7. This work has yielded new insights into collagen synthesis and cuticle production in *C. elegans*.



After her PhD in Glasgow, Laura wished to travel further afield and found the perfect way to do this by taking a postdoc position (which was funded by an E.E.C. network grant) in the laboratory of Dr Michel Labouesse at the I.G.B.M.C. in Strasbourg. The project, which was reported in her paper

(McMahon et al., 2001), was motivated by the apparently unique apical junctions seen in *C. elegans* epidermal cells, which were previously named adherens junctions, and by work by Renaud Legouis on LET-413 showing that it is required for the assembly of these junctions (Legouis et al., 2000). She found that these junctions were much more complex than previously thought, consisting of several layers and many different proteins. One of the component proteins of these so-called 'adherens' junctions is the MAGUK protein DLG-1, a homologue of the Dlg/SAP97 proteins found in septate or tight junctions in other organisms. She also found that DLG-1 is required for junction assembly, acting downstream of LET-413. There is still much work to be done on this exciting project.

After her postdoc in France, Laura returned to Scotland, where she is currently working as a technical advisor for Invitrogen Ltd in Paisley.

Fiona Watt
(Editor-in-Chief)

References

- McMahon, L., Legouis, R., Vonesch, J. L. and Labouesse, M. (2001). Assembly of *C. elegans* apical junctions involves positioning and compaction by LET-413 and protein aggregation by the MAGUK protein DLG-1. *J. Cell Sci.* **114**, 2265-2277.
- Legouis, R., Gansmuller, A., Sookhareea, S., Boshier, J. M., Baillie, D. L. and Labouesse M. (2000). LET-413 is a basolateral protein required for the assembly of adherens junctions in *Caenorhabditis elegans*. *Nat. Cell Biol.* **2**, 415-422.

Year 2002 Travelling Fellowships

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