

Penny Coggill Biocurator Sanger Institute

Ever since returning to work in 1999 AWiSE and then Cambridge AWiSE has always been there for me, sometimes in the background, but more often, and recently very much in the foreground. My initial contact with Joan Mason was in helping promote Science to women from a non-science background, on the back of the COPUS initiative, and I realise now that this contact was the spur to fulfilling the need to go back to science after years of 'just being a mother/housewife/taxi-driver'. Joan was inspirational in convincing people of their own self-worth and bringing out their natural communicating talents, abilities that AWiSE has continued to foster ever since.



After a degree in Natural Sciences and a Masters in Animal Nutrition many years ago, I joined the Sanger Centre in 1999 just as it was ramping up the sequencing of the Human Genome - to try and beat Craig Venter at his own game. Exciting times. Stints in a couple of different groups on the bench, and a little programming, has led to my now working with a protein database group as a biocurator, a position that I thoroughly enjoy, in a Sanger that has evolved from a sequencing factory into a fully-fledged Research Institute.

The idea of a Protein Families' database grew naturally out of the Human Genome Sequencing and annotation project as a means of aiding the functional characterization of proteins - a protein family being a group of proteins that are related in their structure and their sequence showing evolutionary conservation from some distant ancestor. The protein space is growing exponentially as more and more genomes are sequenced, so the future challenges for our lab are in finding ways to build families and assign them function from the literature more quickly, and more efficiently. The diversity of the protein world is phenomenal, and trying to understand and classify this is what drives me.



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