Bactabolize: A tool for high-throughput generation of bacterial strain-specific metabolic models

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Abstract

Metabolic capacity can vary substantially within a bacterial species, leading to ecological niche separation, as well as differences in virulence and antimicrobial susceptibility. Genome-scale metabolic models are useful tools for studying the metabolic potential of individuals, and with the rapid expansion of genomic sequencing there is a wealth of data that can be leveraged for comparative analysis. However, there exist few tools to construct strain-specific metabolic models at scale.

Here we describe Bactabolize (github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize), a reference-based tool which rapidly produces strain-specific metabolic models and growth phenotype predictions. We describe a pan reference model for the priority antimicrobial-resistant pathogen, *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (github.com/kelwyres/KpSC-pan-metabolic-model), and a quality control framework for using draft genome assemblies as input for Bactabolize.

The Bactabolize-derived model for *K. pneumoniae* reference strain KPPR1 performed comparatively or better than currently available automated approaches CarveMe and gapseq across 507 substrate and 2317 knockout mutant growth predictions. Novel draft genomes passing our systematically-defined quality control criteria resulted in models with a high degree of completeness (≥99% genes and reactions captured compared to models derived from matched complete genomes) and high accuracy (mean 0.97, n=10).

We anticipate the tools and framework described herein will facilitate large-scale metabolic modelling analyses that broaden our understanding of diversity within bacterial species and inform novel control strategies for priority pathogens.

Introduction

Bacteria exhibit metabolic diversity and can utilise a broad range of substrates for growth. It has become clear amongst pathogens that there is an intertwined relationship between metabolism and nutrient usage with virulence and antimicrobial resistance (1-7). Comparative analyses of metabolic profiles (e.g. substrate usage) are key to fully understanding these relationships. Traditionally, these profiles have been assessed via phenotypic growth on a limited number of substrates, such as those used to delineate between species (8-10) which form the basis of a number of commercial products for species identification. However, these methods are not sufficiently discriminatory for in-depth comparisons within species, and alternative approaches such as the Omnilog Phenotype MicroArray system (Biolog) are too expensive and/or labour intensive for application to large numbers of isolates. Similarly, probing of essential metabolism-associated genes via transposon mutant libraries (e.g. to identify novel virulence factors and therapeutic targets) (4, 11, 12) cannot be easily scaled across diverse bacterial populations.

Genome-scale metabolic models or metabolic reconstructions are a computational approach to analysing the metabolic potential of an organism, within which the entire biochemical network is represented as a stoichiometric matrix (13). Metabolic models are constructed programmatically, but typically informed and at least partially validated using phenotypic growth data (14-16). Once constructed, they can be run through simulations and analysed under various contexts, such as *in silico* growth experiments (Flux Balance Analysis [FBA]) to predict substrate usage profiles (17), evaluate the impact of single gene knockouts on growth (14, 18), and identify metabolic chokepoints for drug targets (19), among others. Traditionally, metabolic models are strain-specific (i.e. each model represents a unique individual http://bigg.ucsd.edu/models) and may not be applicable to other isolates due to unrepresented genetic diversity.

We recently described 37 curated strain-specific models for the *Klebsiella pneumoniae* Species Complex (*Kp*SC) (14) comprised of *K. pneumoniae* and its close relatives (20). These organisms are a common cause of healthcare-associated infections world-wide, and among the World Health Organization's priority antimicrobial resistant pathogens (21). *Kp*SC are highly diverse and gene content can differ substantially between strains (22, 23). Accordingly, our models varied in terms of gene and reaction content, resulting in variable growth substrate usage profiles and metabolic redundancy (14). Similar variation has also been described in other key bacterial pathogens e.g. *Escherichia coli* (24)*, Salmonella enterica* (25), *Staphylococcus aureus* (26) and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (27). This is highly relevant to the use of metabolic models for the exploration of virulence and antimicrobial resistance, and for the identification of novel drug targets. Therefore, such works should seek to include multiple strain-specific models, and in some cases 100s-1000s of models may be required to accurately represent population diversity (22, 28, 29).

There are several open source tools currently available that can rapidly produce strain-specific metabolic models, including CarveMe (30), gapseq (31), ModelSEED (32) and KBase (33) (see the recent review by Mendoza and colleagues for comparative descriptions (34)), as well as a recently published modelling and analysis pipeline, ChiMera, which leverages CarveMe for model construction (35). In their systematic analysis Mendoza *et al.* indicated CarveMe and ModelSEED to be of particular interest for large-scale studies due to their speed and model quality (34) (note that gapseq was published later and therefore not included in this review). KBase implements ModelSEED (32) as a web interface application, limiting its utility for high-throughput analysis of 100s – 1000s of bacterial genomes. CarveMe is a command line application; it is open source but is dependent on commercial solvers such as CPLEX (free for academic use). However, its use of a universal reference model may limit specificity of strain-specific models (36), and result in overestimation of model genes. These limitations can be overcome by manual curation of the output models, but such curation is highly labour intensive and not suitable for high-throughput

analyses. Furthermore, the CarveMe database (BiGG universal_model) appears to be no longer
actively maintained, meaning that there is no opportunity to integrate novel structural and/or
biochemical data as these become available in the literature (as discussed in COBRA community
forums). gapseq is a recently published command line tool which leverages an independent
universal database (31). In their comparative analyses, the gapseq authors demonstrate superior
accuracy to both CarveME and ModelSEED; however the concerns about the specificity of
universal models remain and it has been reported that model construction takes considerable time
(several hours in some cases (37)).

Here, we present Bactabolize (available at https://github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize), an easy-to-
use tool which allows scalable production of strain-specific draft metabolic models and prediction
of growth phenotypes in under three minutes per input genome. Bactabolize builds upon the
reference-based model reconstruction approach described by Norsigian *et al.* (36), leveraging the
COBRApy framework (38) and BiGG nomenclature (39). We present a pan-metabolic reference
model for the *Kp*SC (derived from our 37 curated strain-specific models (14)), and describe an
exemplar quality control framework for the application of Bactabolize to *Kp*SC draft genome
assemblies. We show that Bactabolize can rapidly produce strain-specific models from draft
genomes with a high degree of completeness (as compared to models generated from completed
genome assemblies), resulting in highly accurate growth predictions that match or exceed the
accuracy of models from CarveMe and manual curation efforts.

Results

Description of Bactabolize

Bactabolize is written in Python 3 and utilises the metabolic modelling library COBRApy (38).
Bactabolize has four main commands:

i)   Draft model generation (*draft_model* command), which generates a strain-specific draft
metabolic reconstruction ('model') using the approach outlined previously (36), and
uses gap-filling to identify any missing reactions required to simulate growth in the user-
specified conditions
ii)   Patching incomplete models (*patch_model* command) by the addition of missing
reactions e.g. those identified by the automated gap-filling process
iii) Substrate usage analysis via Flux Balance Analysis (FBA) (*fba* command) to predict
growth outcomes for a specified range of substrates supported by the model(s)
Figure 1).

Additional processing scripts are provided alongside Bactabolize to improve model metadata
annotation (improve_model_annotations.py), convert models generated using KBase and
ModelSEED to Bactabolize/BiGG-compatible format (SEED_to_BiGG_model_convert.sh),
generate network graph files from models (model_to_network_graph.py) and merging output FBA
profiles (merge_fba_profiles_longtable.sh). Full documentation, including example code and test
data are available at the Bactabolize code repository (https://github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize).

For draft model construction, Bactabolize requires users to provide an input assembly (annotated
or unannotated FASTA or Genbank format respectively), a reference model (JSON format) and the
corresponding reference sequence data (gene and protein sequences in two separate multi-fasta
files or a single Genbank annotation in a .gbk file) (**Figure S1**). For optimum results we suggest
using a pan-model that captures as much diversity as possible for the target species or group of
interest, because Bactabolize's reconstruction method is reductive i.e. each output strain-specific
model will include only genes, reactions and metabolites that are present in the reference or a

subset thereof (although novel genes, reactions and metabolites can be added via manual
curation).

If the input assembly is unannotated, Bactabolize will identify coding sequences using Prodigal
(40) but will otherwise honour the existing coding sequence (CDS) notations and optionally use
Prodigal to search for additional CDS. Draft genome-scale metabolic models are output in both
SMBL v3.1 (41) and JSON formats (one pair of files for each independent strain-specific model),
along with an optional MEMOTE quality report (42). Bactabolize will identify orthologs in the input
genome(s) compared to the reference sequence data using Bi-directional BLAST (43) Best Hits
(BBH) (44) using BLAST+ (36). Users can parameterise the ortholog finding settings (coverage
and identity thresholds) for BBH. Alternatively, there is the option of using protein similarity to
identify orthologs instead of identity.

Once a draft model has been constructed, it is validated via a simulated growth experiment on
user-input choice of media and atmosphere (aerobic or anerobic). Predefined media include BG11
(Gibco), M9 + glucose (36), nutrient media (45), Luria-Bertani (LB) (45), Tryptic Soy (TSA) (45),
TSA + sheep blood (45), LB as specified by the CarveMe developers (30), Chemically Defined
Medium (CDM)-like (34), Plantarum Minimal Medium (PMM) PMM5-like (34) and PMM7-like (34).
Users can also define custom media as Bactabolize supports several complex media ingredients,
including peptone (peptic digest of bovine and porcine tissue) (46-48), tryptone (pancreatic digest
of casein) (46, 48, 49), soy peptone/soytone (digest of soymeal) (46, 48, 50, 51), yeast extract (52-
57) and beef extract (46, 48). If the model fails to simulate growth, gap-filling is performed to
indicate missing reactions. Users can add these reactions to a patch JSON file and optionally use
the *patch_model* command to correct the model (**Figure S2**). Bactabolize uses a conservative
gap-filling approach that only adds the minimum number of reactions to enable growth under the
chosen conditions. We recommend testing the models in minimal media and atmosphere expected
to support growth for all isolates of the species of interest, unless the user has access to matched
phenotypic data demonstrating growth for individual isolates in specific conditions. Aggressive
gap-filling will effectively homogenise the models and should be avoided if the goal is to
understand the underlying strain diversity.

Substrate usage analysis (the *fba* command) is performed iteratively for each possible carbon,
nitrogen, sulfur and phosphor substrate supported by the model(s) (**Figure S3**), by replacing the
default substrate in the user specified growth medium (specified in the fba_spec JSON file). For
example, in M9 media the default substrates are glucose (carbon), ammonia (nitrogen), sulphate
(sulfur) and phosphate (phosphor). Each substrate can be tested in aerobic and/or anaerobic
conditions. Growth prediction output is recorded in a tab delimited file (one per strain). The
merge_fba_profiles_longtable.sh helper script will combine the outputs for multiple strains into a
single file for downstream analysis.

The growth impacts of single-gene knockout mutations can be simulated via the *sgk* command
(**Figure S4**). Bactabolize will iterate through every gene in the model, temporarily removing it and
its associated reactions (unless they are also associated with another gene) and running FBA to
simulate growth in the user-specified conditions. The output is comparable to single-gene knockout
studies such as transposon mutagenesis and can be used to probe gene essentiality.

Figure 1: Simplified overview of Bactabolize's main commands. In pink is the *draft_model* command, which builds a draft
strain-specific metabolic model using an input reference model and an input target assembly (approach adapted from
(36)). If the model fails to simulate growth, Bactabolize will attempt automated gap-filling and produce a model patch file.
The *patch_model* command (orange) allows the addition of missing reactions to produce a valid draft model that can
simulate growth in a user-specified growth environment. A functioning model can be passed to the *fba* command
(yellow), which performs Flux Balance Analysis to simulate growth in the user specified conditions, across all carbon,
nitrogen, phosphorus and sulfur metabolite sources supported by the model under aerobic and anaerobic conditions. The
sgk command (blue) shows the Single Gene Knockout analysis, which outputs a predicted phenotype. User inputs and
outputs are shown in white boxes while Bactabolize commands are shown inside the grey box.

*Kp*SC pan-metabolic reference model

We constructed a species complex-specific pan-metabolic reference model by combining a
collection of 37 manually curated models for which we have previously demonstrated high
accuracy (range 88.3%–96.8% for prediction of 94 distinct growth phenotypes (14)). These models
represent a diverse collection of *Kp*SC (14) (including at least one each of the seven major taxa in
the complex; *K. pneumoniae, Klebsiella variicola subsp variicola, Klebsiella variicola subsp tropica,
Klebsiella quasipneumoniae subsp quasipneumoniae, Klebsiella quasipneumoniae subsp
similipneumoniae, Klebsiella quaisivariicola, Klebsiella africana*). The combined pan-model, known
as *Kp*SC-pan v1, comprises a total of 1265 distinct genes, 2319 reactions and 1696 metabolites,
and is available at github.com/kelwyres/KpSC-pan-metabolic-model.

Performance comparison

We compared the output and performance of Bactabolize to the two previously published tools that
can support high-throughput analyses i.e. CarveMe (30) and gapseq (31). To aid interpretation in
the context of community standard approaches, we also include a comparison to the popular web-
based reconstruction tool, KBase (ModelSEED), and a manually curated metabolic reconstruction
of *K. pneumoniae* strain KPPR1 (also known as VK055 and ATCC 43816, metabolic model named
iKp1289) (15). This isolate was chosen as there is a completed genome sequence (Genbank
accession: CP009208), single-source growth phenotype (15) and single-gene knockout growth
essentiality data available (58). *De novo* draft models for strain KPPR1 were built using; i)
Bactabolize with the *Kp*SC pan v1 reference; ii) CarveMe, with its universal reference model
(CarveMe universal); iii) CarveMe, with *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference (CarveMe *Kp*SC pan); iv) gapseq;
and v) KBase (ModelSEED). Importantly, neither *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 nor its genetic lineage (7

gene multi-locus sequence type, ST493), are represented in the *Kp*SC pan-reference model,
meaning these benchmarking comparisons were on equal footing. Subsequently, each model was
used to predict growth phenotypes; i) in M9 minimal media with different sole sources of carbon,
nitrogen, phosphorus and sulfur; and ii) for all possible single gene knockouts in LB under aerobic
conditions. The predicted phenotypes were compared directly to the published phenotype data.

Among the high-throughput approaches, the Bactabolize draft model captured fewer genes and
reactions (n = 1233 and 2307, respectively) than the gapseq (n = 1489 and 3186, respectively)
and CarveMe universal models (n = 1960 and 2857, **Figure 2A**). The Bactabolize and CarveMe
universal models contained similar numbers of metabolites (1696 vs 1737, respectively), while the
gapseq model contained many more (n = 2519). Notably, the initial gapseq model was gap-filled
by simulation of growth in M9 minimal media with glucose (consistent with Bactabolize and
CarveMe media recipes), which resulted in the addition of 31 reactions to the draft model. This is
in contrast to CarveMe and Bactabolize-generated models which produced biomass in M9 minimal
media plus glucose without additional gap-filling. The CarveMe *Kp*SC pan model captured
considerably more genes than any of the other models (n = 2407), but these were associated with
many fewer unique reactions and metabolites (1206 and 825, respectively). Upon further
investigation we determined that this method resulted in the over prescription of gene reaction
rules (GPRs) to multiple reactions (mean 2.2 GPRs per reaction when compared to Bactabolize
using the same pan reference model: 1.94 GPRs per reaction.

Figures S5 and **S6** show the overlaps of metabolites and reactions between the high-throughput
reconstruction methods after processing with MetaNetX (59) to standardise the reaction and
metabolite nomenclatures (excluding CarveMe pan for simplicity and given the likely problems of
reaction oversubscription). The majority of the reactions included in the Bactabolize model were
conserved in either the CarveMe universal model (n = 1225, 53.2%), gapseq model (n = 54, 2.3%)
or both (n = 665, 28.9%). The reaction overlap was skewed to the CarveMe universal model which
shared 1225 reactions that were conserved in the Bactabolize model but absent from the gapseq
model. Notably, the gapseq model contained a large number (2200) of unique reactions (70.4% of
those in the model). Similarly, the vast majority of metabolites in the Bactabolize model were
conserved in one or both of the other models (n = 917, 85.6%). However, it is likely that true
overlaps between methods are underrepresented due to the different reaction identifiers and
chemical synonyms used within the BiGG (Bactabolize, CarveMe) vs ModelSEED nomenclatures
(gapseq), which are difficult to harmonise in an automated manner even after the application of
MetaNetX.

In comparison to the low-throughput reconstruction approaches, the Bactabolize model contained
a similar number of genes, reactions and metabolites to the manually curated model (n = 1289,
2484 and 1827, respectively) and many more than the KBase model (72, 544 and 534,
respectively). This is likely due to the low number of metabolism-associated genes identified by
KBase, which has impacted the associated reaction and metabolite data.

MEMOTE scores, (produced by the MEMOTE report (42)) indicate the quality of the model
metadata annotations, with the scores ranging between 0 – 100%. These provide a measure of
model portability and the level of connected databases available to support the metabolite,
reaction and genetic information represented in the model, but bear no reflection on model
accuracy. Bactabolize performs on the lower end, with CarveMe universal and gapseq performing
the best (**Figure 2B**). The KBase model appears to perform well in this regard, however this is due
to the low number of genes, reactions and metabolites included in the model. Bactabolize using
the *Kp*SC-pan model outperforms the model propagation mode of CarveMe using the same
reference model (**Figure 2B**). Work is ongoing to improve the metadata annotations in the *Kp*SC-
pan reference model, to support large-scale model propagation.

We assessed the performance of each model for *in silico* prediction of growth phenotypes
compared to the previously published experimental data (15). Accuracy, sensitivity, specificity,

precision and F1 scores were calculated (60). Note that the specific set of growth substrates and gene knockouts that can be simulated is determined by the sets of genes and metabolites captured by each model and is therefore model-dependent (**Data S1 and S2**). Among those with matched experimental phenotype data, the Bactabolize and CarveMe universal models were able to predict growth for a greater number of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous and sulfur substrates than gapseq, CarveMe *Kp*SC pan, KBase and iKp1289 models (**Figure 2C**, **Data S1**). While the CarveMe universal model had the highest number of true-positive growth predictions overall (n = 132 of 617 total predictions), it also had a comparably high number of false-positive predictions (n = 39 of 617 total predictions, **Figure 2D**). Similarly, the gapseq and iKp1289 models resulted in 31 (262 total predictions) and 50 (513 total predictions) false-positive predictions, respectively. In contrast, the Bactabolize model had fewer false-positive predictions (n = 21 of 505 total predictions) alongside a high number of true-positive predictions (n = 117 of 505 total predictions), resulting in the highest overall accuracy metrics (**Figure 2E, Data S1**). The KBase model was a notable outlier, associated with a high number of false-negative predictions (n = 31 of 103 total predictions) and low false-positive predictions (n = 3 of 103 total predictions), presumably resulting from the very low number of genes and reactions included in the model, driving low sensitivity and accuracy.

The gene essentiality results showed that gapseq produced the highest absolute number of true-positive gene essentiality predictions (n = 79 of 1403), followed by Bactabolize *Kp*SC pan (n = 44 of 1220 total predictions), then CarveMe universal (n = 39 of 1951 total predictions). CarveMe universal had the largest number of true-negatives by a wide margin (n = 1599 of 1951 total predictions), followed by gapseq (n = 1085 of 1403 total predictions), then Bactabolize *Kp*SC pan (n = 939 of 1220 total predictions), driving their high accuracies (83.96%, 82.96% and 80.57%, respectively). The Bactabolize model was associated with the greatest overall precision and specificity (**Figures 2F & 2G**) while the gapseq model resulted in the highest F1-score and sensitivity.

While model features and accuracy are essential metrics for comparison, computation time is also a key consideration for high-throughput analyses. We recorded the time required for each tool to build draft models for 10 of the completed *Kp*SC genomes used in the quality control framework (see below) on a high-performance computing cluster (Intel Xeon Gold 6150 CPU @ 2.70GHz and 155 GB of requested memory on a CentOS Linux release 7.9.2009 environment. CarveMe *Kp*SC pan was the fastest with a mean of 20.04 (range 19.90 - 20.18) seconds, followed by CarveMe universal at 30.28 (range 29.20 - 31.80) seconds, then Bactabolize *Kp*SC pan at 98.05 (range 92.19 - 100.4) seconds. KBase took 183.50 (range 120.00 - 338.00) seconds per genome via batch analysis, including genome upload time and queuing. gapseq took 5.46 (range 4.55 - 6.28) hours to produce draft models (not including the required gap-filling), consistent with previous reports (37).

Figure 2 (previous page): *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 metabolic model benchmarking comparisons. **A)** Counts of model features; genes, metabolites and reactions captured by each model. Exchanges refers to number of exchange reactions, a subset of reactions involved in substrate uptake, which determine the number of distinct growth substrates for which phenotypes can be predicted with the model. **B)** MEMOTE scores indicating the richness of annotations and metadata for metabolic model features according to database outlinks. SBO refers to score of Systems Biology Ontology (SBO), a controlled vocabulary for systems biology. Consistency refers to the score of stoichiometric consistency and chemical formulae annotation. Total refers to total MEMOTE score, as a combination of all previous scores, and is shown in bold. **C)** Counts of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and sulfur growth substrates that can be simulated by models and for which matched phenotypes were available for comparison (15). Hatched columns indicate the total number of substrates for which phenotypic data for *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 were described (15). **D)** and **E)** Accuracy metrics for predicted to true phenotypes for the growth substrates shown in D and E, respectively False-negatives, true-negatives, false-positives and true-positives are coloured as shown in legend. **F)** and **G)** Accuracy metrics for the KPPR1 single-gene knockout mutant library described in (58) shown in F and G, respectively. Numbers of true positives and false positives are shown to the left of the respective columns.

Quality control framework for input genome assemblies

There are now thousands of bacterial genomes available in public databases, the majority of which are in draft form, comprising 10s to 1000s of assembly contigs. This fragmentation of the genome is caused by repetitive sequences that cannot be resolved by the assembly algorithm and/or sequence drop-out. The latter can result in the loss of genetic information such that some portion of genes present in the underlying genome are lost from the genome assembly (either completely or partially). This in turn, poses a limitation for the reconstruction of metabolic models using these assemblies, since most published approaches use sequence searches to predict the presence/absence of genes and their associated enzymatic reactions. Therefore, if we are to use public genome data for high-throughput metabolic modelling studies, it is essential to evaluate the expected model accuracies and understand the minimum input genome quality requirements.

Here we performed a systematic analysis leveraging our published curated *Kp*SC models (n=37, (14)), which were generated using completed genome sequences and were therefore considered to represent 'complete' models for which the underlying genome sequence contains all genes that are truly present in the genome (note the biological accuracy of these models was reported previously (14) and is not the subject of the current study). We randomly subsampled the corresponding Illumina read sets to various depths (10 – 100x, increments of 10) in triplicate and generated draft assemblies that were passed to Bactabolize for generation of draft metabolic models (**Data S3**). Due to low read depth (≤30x), two isolates were removed from this analysis. Additionally, ten 10x depth read samples failed to produce assemblies, leaving 1040 draft genomes for analysis. The resulting draft metabolic models were compared to the complete models to; i) determine the proportions of complete model genes and reactions captured in the draft models; and ii) compare 846 *in silico* aerobic growth predictions in M9 minimal media, where growth on 266 carbon, 153 nitrogen, 59 phosphorus and 25 sulfur sources were examined. Substrates containing multiple elements were tested as sole sources of each element independently and in combination, e.g. 1,5-Diaminopentane was tested as a sole carbon, sole nitrogen and sole carbon plus nitrogen source.

As expected, assembly quality generally increased with increasing sequencing depth i.e. assemblies generated from higher depth read sets were associated with higher N50 values, fewer contigs and fewer assembly graph dead-ends, although the rate of improvement drastically declined beyond 40-50x depth (**Figure S7, Data S3**). We noted that it was rare for draft models to capture 100% of model genes and reactions (just 420 of all 1040 draft assemblies were associated with models that captured 100% model genes) (**Data S3, Figure S8**), even when using the highest quality draft genomes. However, ≥99% of genes and reactions were commonly captured, which plateaued from 40x depth onwards (**Figure S8**). Therefore, we sought to evaluate whether ≥99% model capture would produce functionally accurate models.

We used FBA to simulate substrate growth profiles for the 40x depth assemblies, representing a
sequencing depth that can be routinely achieved with standard Illumina library preparations. All but
one assembly triplicate set (isolate SB4767 98% gene capture, 99% reaction capture) captured
≥99% but ≤100% model genes and/or reactions. The substrate growth profiles were then
compared to those of the complete models. The vast majority of draft models produced accurate
growth predictions; 102 of 108 models resulted in predictions with 100% concordance to those
from the corresponding complete models. Three models for *K. quasipneumoniae similipneumoniae*
isolate SB164 resulted in predictions with a mean of 99.8% concordance. The remaining three
models were for isolate SB4767 and resulted in mean of 80.4% concordance. Notably, these
models were those representing <99% gene capture. Together, these data suggest that draft
models capturing ≥99% of the complete model genes/reactions generate highly accurate growth
predictions and that these capture rates can be readily achieved from draft genome assemblies.

Figure 3: Scatterplots showing distribution of best performing assembly metrics 'assembly graph dead ends', 'contigs'
and 'N50' against model feature capture (genes and reactions). Each point represents the mean values from a single
genome (technical triplicate) and is coloured by model quality. 'Good' models capture ≥99% of the model metric as
compared to the corresponding complete model (shown at each facet), 'Bad' models capture <99%. Cubic polynomial
line plotted for assembly 'graph dead ends', 'contigs', while a segmented linear model was plotted for 'N50'. R^2 is shown
on each panel.

We investigated the relationships between assembly quality metrics and model gene/reaction
capture in more detail. Variation in assembly graph dead-ends accounted for the greatest amount
of variation in model capture, closely followed by raw contig counts (cubic polynomial fit, R^2 of
≥0.98 for graph dead-ends, R^2 of ≥0.9 for contig count). A segmented linear model was fitted to
N50 length (R^2 ≥ 0.83), producing a breakpoint at 25153 bp (**Figure 3**).

To further explore the optimum thresholds for assembly metrics, we tallied the number of draft
assemblies resulting in ≥99% and <99% gene and reaction capture at increasing graph dead-end

and contig count cut-offs, and decreasing N50 cut-offs. Draft models that captured ≥99% of the
complete model genes/reactions were considered 'good' models, whereas draft models that
captured <99% of complete model genes/reactions were considered 'bad' models. The optimum
threshold for assembly graph dead end was determined to be ≤200. At this value, 94.44% of 'good'
models were captured, and 0% 'bad' models. The optimum threshold for contig counts was
determined as ≤130 contigs at which 67.92% of 'good' and 0% 'bad' models were captured
(**Figure 4**). The optimum threshold for N50 was determined to be ≥65000, at which 94.97% of
'good' and 1.71% of 'bad' models were captured. The assembly graph dead-end threshold results
in comparatively higher sensitivity (i.e. a higher proportion of 'good' models pass the threshold)
than contig count and comparatively better specificity (i.e. lower proportion of 'bad' models pass
the threshold) than N50, but the underlying metric information is not universally available because
many isolate genomes are deposited in public databases only as assemblies without the
associated assembly graph. We therefore recommend a three-tier approach, whereby the
assembly graph dead-end criterion is preferred if available, followed by N50 and then contig
count.

Figure 4: Line graphs showing the impact of assembly metric cut-off thresholds on model feature capture (n = 1040).
'Good' models which captured ≥99% of model features are shown in green, while 'bad' models captured <99% model
features are shown in gold. The blue dotted line shows the metric cut-off thresholds, to minimize the number of models
that capture <99% model features and maximise models that capture ≥99%. Metric cut-off statistics are calculated in
intervals of 10 for assembly graph dead ends and contigs, and every 5000 for N50.

Impact of gap-filling models
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Of the 901 draft genome assemblies which passed our QC criteria (≤200 assembly graph dead ends), 23 of the resulting draft models failed to simulate growth in M9 minimal media with glucose (despite capturing ≥99% of the genes and reactions in the corresponding complete models). It is expected that all *Kp*SC models should be able to simulate growth on M9 media with glucose as a sole carbon source, as this central metabolism is universal amongst *Kp*SC. To replace missing, critical reactions required for growth on M9 with glucose, we investigated model gap-filling using the *patch_model* command of Bactabolize. We then assessed the accuracy of the gap-filled models for prediction of growth on the full range of substrates, as compared to the predictions from the corresponding complete models.

Gap filling added 1 – 3 missing reactions to each model, with a median of one, fully restoring biomass production in M9 media with glucose in all but two of the 23 failed models. The missing reactions appeared to be random genes across these 23 genomes, likely due to missing information in these assemblies.

Substrate usage predictions from the 21 successfully gap-filled models were highly accurate, with 18/21 having a prediction concordance of ≥99% across all 846 growth conditions (12/21 had 100% concordance) (**Figure S9**). We therefore conclude that models generated for genome assemblies passing our QC criteria, which have been gap-filled to successfully simulate growth on minimal media plus glucose, are suitable for the prediction of growth across a range of substrates.

Predictive accuracy of draft models

We assessed the accuracy of Bactabolize for the construction of draft models for 10 novel *Kp*SC clinical isolates, representing five of the major taxa in the complex. We included five isolates for which the associated STs were represented in the *Kp*SC-pan v1 model and five isolates with STs that were not represented. Whole genome sequence data were generated on the Illumina platform and draft assemblies generated *de novo*. The resultant assemblies had 0-4 graph dead-ends, N50s of 151958-388486 bp and 83-187 contigs (**Data S4**), within the tiered threshold values.

FBA was performed, and the predicted growth profiles compared to matched phenotypic growth data for 16 carbon sources derived from Vitek GN ID cards. Though the number of tested carbon sources was limited, all were associated with high accuracy metrics (**Figure 5**, **Data S4**). As expected, models for isolates with STs represented in the *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference performed slightly better (mean accuracy = 0.98) than those for non-represented STs (mean accuracy = 0.95).

429 **Figure 5: A)** Comparisons of predicted to true phenotypes for 16 carbon source substrates. False-negatives, true-
430 negatives, false-positives and true-positives are coloured as shown in legend. Each column represents a different
431 isolate, separated by ST representation in the *Kp*SC-pan model. **B)** Accuracy metrics for predicted vs phenotypic growth
432 comparisons shown in A. Each column represents a different isolate, coloured by taxa and separated by ST
433 representation in the *Kp*SC-pan v1 model.

Discussion

In this work we described Bactabolize, a pipeline for rapid and scalable production of accurate
bacterial strain-specific metabolic models and growth phenotype predictions. We describe a pan-
reference model for the *Kp*SC and demonstrate that a draft strain-specific model generated *de*
novo via Bactabolize using the *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference was highly accurate for growth phenotype
prediction (85.79% accuracy for substrate usage across 190 substrates, and 80.57% for gene
essentiality across 1220 genes). Importantly, we also described a quality control framework for the
use of draft genome assemblies as input for metabolic reconstructions. We used a systematic
analysis to; i) evaluate the proportion of gene and reaction capture compared to the corresponding
'completed' models; ii) define quality control thresholds for input assemblies (three tier approach
for *Kp*SC; ≤200 assembly graph dead ends, followed by ≥65000 N50, followed by ≤130 contigs);
and iii) estimate the accuracy of the resultant growth predictions. While the quality control
thresholds and accuracy estimates are specific to *Kp*SC, the conceptual framework can be applied
to any organism and is essential to support the confident application of metabolic modelling for
large-scale genome datasets. We appreciate that assembly graphs may not be available for dead
end count, e.g. for draft genome assemblies accessed via public repositories, however we
encourage users to include this information in their quality control procedures wherever possible
(e.g. using the recently published counter tool available at https://github.com/rrwick/GFA-dead-
end-counter), because these counts represent a direct reflection of the completeness of the
genome assembly. In contrast, contig counts and N50 are influenced by biological features such
as repeat copy numbers as well as the underlying sequence data quality e.g. a bacterial genome
harbouring many insertion sequence insertions will result in a draft assembly with a high number of
contigs regardless of the sequence data quality and completeness.

Traditionally, genome-scale metabolic reconstruction approaches have relied upon significant manual curation efforts. While there will always remain a need for high quality curated models, such resource intensive approaches preclude their application at scale, and have therefore limited analyses to small numbers of individual strains (15, 16). However, automated reconstruction approaches can support the generation and comparison of multiple strain-specific draft models from which meaningful biological insights can be derived (61). Additionally, the quality of curated models is likely to vary depending on their age, level and type of curation, as well as the approach used for preliminary drafting. Indeed it is possible for automated approaches to outperform manually curated models; a draft model for *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 generated using Bactabolize with the KpSC pan-v1 reference model outperformed the manually curated iKp1289 model representing the same strain (15). iKp1289 was published in 2017 (6 years prior to this study) and was initially drafted via the KBase pipeline (33), which uses RAST to annotate the sequences with Enzyme Commission numbers. It has been demonstrated several times that the Enzyme Commission scheme has systematic errors (62, 63), leading to a loss in accuracy when compared to the ortholog identification methods used by automated approaches. Consistent with this assertion, our draft KPPR1 model constructed with KBase (without manual curation) was an outlier in terms of the very low number of genes, reactions and metabolites that were included.

CarveMe with universal model (30) and gapseq (31) are the current gold standard automated approaches for model reconstruction, and we show that a draft *Kp*SC model generated by Bactabolize with the *Kp*SC pan v1 reference resulted in similar or better accuracy for phenotype prediction (**Figure 2**). Both the CarveMe universal and gapseq models resulted in high numbers of true-positive and true-negative growth predictions. However, these were also accompanied by comparatively higher numbers of false-positive predictions that resulted in a lower overall accuracy for substrate usage analysis compared to Bactabolize with the *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference (**Figure 2**), and comparatively lower precision and specificity for the gene essentiality analysis. False-positive predictions may indicate that the relevant metabolic machinery are present in the cell but were not active during the growth experiments (e.g. due to lack of gene expression). In this regard, false-positives are not always a sign of model inaccuracy. However, false-positive predictions can also occur from incorrect gene annotations e.g. due to reduced specificity of ortholog assignment resulting from the use of the universal model without manual curation. Given a key objective here is to facilitate high-throughput analysis for large numbers of genomes, it is not feasible to expect that all models will be manually curated, and therefore we believe that identifying fewer genes with lower overall error rates provides greater confidence in the resulting draft models. We also note that the BiGG universal reference model which CarveMe leverages is no longer being actively maintained. In contrast, user defined reference models can be iteratively curated and updated to incorporate new knowledge and data as they become available.

Bactabolize's reference-based reconstruction approach is reductive, meaning the resultant draft models will comprise only the genes, reactions and metabolites present in the reference, or a subset thereof, and will not include novel reactions unless they are manually identified and curated by the user. This is an important caveat that should be considered carefully for application of Bactabolize to large genome data sets, particularly for genetically diverse organisms such as those in the *Kp*SC. For optimum results we suggest using a curated pan-model that captures as much diversity as possible for the target species or group of interest. While we acknowledge that a reasonable resource investment is required to generate a high-quality reference, we have shown that a pan-model derived from just 37 representative strains can be sufficient to support the generation of highly-accurate draft models (**Figure 2** and **5**). Additionally, we note that it is possible to use a single strain reference model, which should ideally represent the same or closely related species to that of the input genome assemblies, in order to facilitate accurate identification of gene orthologs. It is technically possible to use an unrelated reference model, but this is expected to result in inaccurate and/or incomplete outputs and has not been tested in this study. In

circumstances were no high quality closely-related reference model is available, we recommend
alternative reconstruction approaches that leverage universal databases e.g. CarveMe (30) or
gapseq (31). However, gapseq's long compute time makes it inappropriate for application to
datasets comprising 100s-1000s of genomes (such as have become increasingly common in the
bacterial population biology literature) (64, 65).

Bactabolize and the *Kp*SC pan v1 model are freely available under open source licenses and
satisfy the four features of the FAIR research principles (findability, accessibility, interoperability
and reusability) (66). In addition to the *Kp*SC pan-reference described here, a pan-reference model
has been described previously for *Salmonella enterica* (representing 410 strains) (25), *Bacillus*
subtilis (67) (representing 183 strains) and *Escherichia coli* (68) (representing 222 strains). We are
actively working to expand and improve the *Kp*SC pan reference model and welcome similar
efforts to generate high quality references for other organisms. Together these resources will
facilitate population wide metabolic analyses for global priority pathogens, which can be used to
understand how they transmit, cause disease and evolve drug-resistance, and to identify novel
therapeutic targets.

Methods

Bactabolize pipeline

525 Bactabolize utilises the existing metabolic modelling library COBRApy (38) and Python 3 (69). All
526 code is freely available and open source at GitHub (www.github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize) under
527 a GNU General Public License v3.0. Users should additionally cite COBRApy (38) if Bactabolize is
528 used.

Klebsiella pneumoniae Species Complex-pan metabolic model

The 37 metabolic models from a previous study (14) were combined with the iY1228 model using
the create_master_model.py script (available at 10.6084/m9.figshare.21728717). Briefly, all GPRs
from the iYL1228 model and the associated sequences were included, as well as new GPRs
identified from the 36 additional strains by manual curation following comparison to the matched
phenotype data (as described in (14)). Additionally, orthologous sequence variants with <75%
nucleotide identity to gene sequences associated with these gene reaction rules (GPRs) were
added if there was phenotype data supporting the reaction. The biomass reaction was updated,
removing the metabolites udpgalur_c and udpgal_c as their production was strain-specific.

Metadata annotations were improved using the improve_model_annotations.py script (also
available in the Bactabolize code repository) resulting in the *Kp*SC_pan v1 used in this study,
available at www.github.com/kelwyres/KpSC-pan-metabolic-model.

Draft model generation

The annotated and unannotated genome of *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 were obtained from Genbank
accession number: CP009208.

Bactabolize draft models were generated using the *draft_model* command in Bactabolize v1 with
the *Kp*SC-pan v1 model as a reference, the annotated *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 as input and the
following options:

--min_coverage 25 --min_pident 80 --media M9 --atmosphere aerobic

A draft model for *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 was also generated via CarveMe version 1.5.1 using the
universal reference, the annotated *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 as input, with the following commands:

'-g M9 -i M9'. Subsequently, the --universe-file mode was also used, so the *Kp*SC-pan model could
be used as a reference, with the previously described command.

A draft model was generated using gapseq version 1.2 with the 'doall' command using the
unannotated genome (as gapseq does not take annotated input files). Gap-filling was
subsequently performed using the 'fill' command and a custom M9 media file to match the nutrient
list found in Bactabolize
(https://github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize/blob/main/data/media_definitions/m9_media.json).
Finally, a draft model was constructed using the annotated genbank *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 file
and the KBase narrative (15) (https://narrative.kbase.us/narrative/ws.14145.obj.1).

Speed calculations

560 Modelling methods were timed via a script using the date +%s.%N command run before and after
561 command on the MASSIVE computing cluster (Intel Xeon Gold 6150 CPU @ 2.70GHz and 155
562 GB of memory, CentOS Linux release 7.9.2009 environment). 10 individual complete *Kp*SC
563 genomes used in the quality control framework were tested for each method and the mean and
564 range reported using R version 4.0.3 (70).

Performance comparisons

The annotated and unannotated genome of *K. pneumoniae* KPPR1 were obtained from Genbank
under the accession: CP009208, and draft metabolic models were generated using Bactabolize,
CarveMe, ModelSEED and gapseq as described above. The previously described, manually
curated model for KPPR1 (iKp1289) was also included for comparison (15). MEMOTE version
0.13.0 was used to collate basic model statistics. The following KPPR1 phenotype data were
retrieved from published studies: BIOLOG Phenotypic Microarray data (15) and single gene
knockout data inferred from the outputs of a TraDIS transposon mutagenesis library (58).

A list of BIOLOG growth substrates for plates PM1, PM2A, PM3B, and PM4A (71) were converted
where possible to BiGG and SEED IDs by manual search of the BiGG (bigg.ucsd.edu) and SEED
websites (https://modelseed.org/biochem/compounds). An updated BiGG to SEED dictionary can
be found in **Data S1**. A total of 143 of 190 carbon, 82 of 95 nitrogen, 46 of 59 phosphor and 26 of
35 sulfur substrates were successfully matched to BiGG and SEED IDs (**Data S1**). These growth
data were compared to *in silico* predictions generated via FBA using the *fba* command from
Bactabolize to optimise the biomass objective function with the following options:

--fba_spec_name m9 --fba_open_value -20

Gene essentiality was inferred from single gene knockout growth predictions using the *sgk*
command from Bactabolize with the following options to mirror the growth conditions of the TraDIS
library (LB media grown aerobically):

--media_type lb --atmosphere aerobic

In all cases, an objective value cut-off of $\geq 10^{-4}$ was used to indicate binarised growth as per
previous studies (14, 72).

In silico predictions were compared to matched phenotype data and the following accuracy metrics
were calculated:

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP + FP}$$

$$Sensitivity/recall = \frac{TP}{TP + FN}$$

$$Specificity = \frac{TN}{TN + FP}$$

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + FP + TN + FN}$$

$$F1 - score = 2 \times \frac{Precision \times Sensitivity}{Precision + Sensitivity}$$

589 Model metabolite and reaction IDs were harmonized for overlap comparisons using the 'Import
590 model' function from MetaNetX.org (59) after import and export via the write_sbml_model function
591 from COBRApy.

Quality control framework

Illumina read sets (250 bp paired end) and completed genome sequences for 37 *Kp*SC isolates
were described previously (14). Here we randomly subsampled the Illumina reads at various
depths (10 – 100, by increments of 10) using rasusa version 0.3.0 (73) in technical triplicate.
Reads were then trimmed using TrimGalore version 0.5.0 (74) and assembled *de novo* with
Unicycler version 0.4.7 (75), default parameters. Assembly statistics and assembly graph dead
ends were calculated using the GFA-dead-end-counter version 1.0.0
(https://github.com/rrwick/GFA-dead-end-counter) (76). Draft metabolic models were generated
with Bactabolize using the *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference, and growth substrate profiles were predicted
as described above. We compared the outputs from models generated for draft genome
assemblies to those generated for the corresponding completed genomes. Where necessary
models were gap-filled via the *patch_model* command.

Predictive accuracy of draft models

Novel growth phenotype data were generated for 10 *Kp*SC clinical isolates from our in house
collection using the VITEK 2 GN ID card system as described previously (14). Briefly, isolates
were grown on Tryptic Soy (OXOID) agar plates overnight at 37°C, then analysed using VITEK 2
GN ID cards (bioMérieux) and read on the VITEK 2 Compact (bioMérieux) as per manufacturer's
instructions using software version 8.0. DNA was extracted for whole-genome sequencing via
Genfind v3 extraction kit, library preparation performed using Nextera Flex (Illumina) using ¼
reagents. Paired-end read data (300 bp) were generated on an Illumina NovaSeq6000 SP v1.0
and have been deposited in the European Nucleotide Archive under Bioproject PRJNA777643
(individual read accession numbers are given in **Data S4**). Draft genome assemblies were
generated with Unicycler, and draft metabolic models and growth predictions were generated with
Bactabolize as described above.

Statistics and visualisation

Statistical analysis and graphical visualisation were performed using R version 4.0.3 (70), RStudio
version 1.3.1093 (77), with the following software packages: tidyverse version 1.3.1 (78), viridis
version 0.5.1 (79), RColorBrewer version 1.1-2 (80), ggpubr version 0.4.0 (81) ggpmisc version
0.4.4 (82), aplot version 0.1.6 (83), colorspace version 2.0-2 (84), ggpattern version 0.4.3-3 (85),
ggtext version 0.1.1 (86) and glue version 1.4.2 (87).

Linear regression analysis was performed in R using the lm function and a third degree polynomial
model was fitted to plots with the following equation: y ~ poly(x, 3, raw = TRUE). The segmented
linear model was fitted using segmented version 1.6-2 (88).

All code used to generate results can be found as supplemental material,
https://github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize, https://github.com/kelwyres/KpSC-pan-metabolic-model
and on Figshare (10.6084/m9.figshare.21728717).

Logo

629 The Bactabolize logo was constructed in Inkscape version 1.0.1 (89). The font used is Proportional
630 TFB (90) and Element (91).

Author contributions

Conceptualization: BV, JH, JMM, KEH, KLW

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Software: SCW, BV

Validation: BV, HBC, KLW

Formal analysis: BV, KLW

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Writing - Review & Editing: All authors

Visualization: BV, KLW

Supervision: JMM, KEH, KLW

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Funding acquisition: JMM, KEH, KLW

All authors contributed to and approve of the manuscript in its current form.

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Data availability

654 All genomes used are publicly available and generated by referenced studies. All Bactabolize code
655 and data generated for this study can be found at https://github.com/kelwyres/Bactabolize. The
656 *Kp*SC-pan v1 reference model is freely available at https://github.com/kelwyres/KpSC-pan-
657 metabolic-model.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing or conflicts of interest.

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Supplementary figures

Figure S1

Flow diagram showing the overview of the draft_model module from Bactabolize, which produces draft metabolic models. Input and output files are shown in light pink while Bactabolize processes are shown in dark pink. Third-party dependencies are indicated within the white boxes.

Figure S2

Flow diagram showing the overview of the patch_model module from Bactabolize, which patches metabolic models that do not simulate growth. Input and output files are shown in light orange while Bactabolize processes are shown in dark orange. Third-party dependencies are indicated within the white boxes.

Figure S3

Flow diagram showing the overview of the fba module from Bactabolize, which performs growth simulations using Flux Balance Analysis. Input and output files are shown in light yellow while Bactabolize processes are shown in dark yellow. Third-party dependencies are indicated within white boxes. C, carbon; N, nitrogen; P, phosphorus; S, sulphur; O_2, oxygen.

Figure S4

 Flow diagram showing the overview of the sgk module from Bactabolize, which performs Single
 Gene Knockout analysis. Input and output files are shown in light blue while Bactabolize processes
 are shown in dark blue. Third-party dependencies are indicated within white boxes.

Figure S5

Venn diagram comparing the metabolite output of the best-performing tools for *K. pneumoniae*

KPPR1.

Figure S6

Venn diagram comparing the reactions output of the best-performing tools for *K. pneumoniae*

KPPR1.

Figure S7

Raincloud plot showing distributions of assembly metrics across various read subsampling depths (10x increments).

Figure S8

Line graph showing the capture of model features of draft assemblies (short read only) at various depths, compared to the corresponding completed genome (long-read + short read assemblies).

Figure S9

Faceted graphs showing the number of substrate usage (fba module) discrepancies of gap-filled
models (patch_model module) which initially did not produce biomass (models which failed to
simulate growth). The dots indicate percentage concordance with the completed genome model,
while the columns indicate number of substrates with discrepancies (no simulated growth in
patched model, but growth in completed genome model).

A) Comparison of predicted to true growth phenotypes

B) Accuracy metrics for predicted growth phenotypes