

Obituary: In memory of Jack Leunissen

Jingchu Luo, Harm Nijveen, Teresa Attwood, David Judge, Sandor Pongor, David Landsman and Martin Bishop

It has already been a year since Jack Leunissen, a former member of the editorial board of *Briefings in Bioinformatics*, passed away on 14 May 2012. Professor Dr Jack A.M. Leunissen was one of the pioneers of bioinformatics in the Netherlands, in Europe and around the world. Together with senior members of the European Molecular Biology Network (EMBNET), Jack worked with Henry Stewart Publications to launch this journal in 2000, aiming to publish review articles in bioinformatics to benefit the ever-growing community of bioinformatics researchers. He served as a member of the editorial board for >10 years, devoting much of his time to reviewing manuscripts and providing constructive feedback.

Born on 1 August 1954 and educated as a biochemist in the 1980s, Jack showed an interest in bioinformatics early in his scientific career. He created the Biocomputing Environment at the University of Nijmegen in 1982, and his PhD thesis, ‘*Computer Applications in Protein and Nucleic Acid Sequence Analysis*’ in 1989 was one of the earliest in the biocomputing community. During his PhD studies, Jack started the biocomputing section of the Dutch National academic facility for computer-assisted organic synthesis and modelling and worked there for >10 years. In that period, Jack was also strongly involved in the establishment of EMBNET. He was manager of his country’s node and served as Chairman of the Executive Board of EMBNET from 1999 to 2003. In 2000, he was appointed as senior lecturer in bioinformatics at the Centre for Molecular and Biomolecular Informatics at Nijmegen University.

At the end of 2002, he accepted the position of Chair in Bioinformatics at the Department of Plant Sciences of the Wageningen University and Research Center. At the same time, he was involved in the newly formed Netherlands Bioinformatics Centre as project leader, member of the National Advisory Committee and member of the Management Team.

Jack had a broad interest in bioinformatics related topics, which he was able to pass on to his PhD and MSc students, working on diverse subjects such as text mining, protein orthology, comparative anatomy, web services and Bayesian networks. His curiosity put him in touch with experts from various related disciplines like computer science, mathematics, statistics and linguistics. Even during the tenure of his professorship, he enjoyed exploring new programming languages and technologies to evaluate their usefulness for bioinformatics. Despite his illness, he continued to be actively involved in the work of his students until the end, including reviewing the article ‘Understanding and Identification of Amino Acid Repeats’ published in this issue by his students.

It is hard to overstate the contribution that Jack made to bioinformatics education and training, especially to end users coming from biological backgrounds. From the mid 80s, he taught on numerous courses, workshops and conferences within and outside Europe. Together with other colleagues, he taught on the Bioinformatics summer school at the International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Trieste almost every year from 1993. He was also invited to teach several courses

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Harm Nijveen is a scientific programmer at Wageningen University and Research Center, the Netherlands. He had been working with Jack Leunissen for several years.

Teresa Attwood is a Professor of Bioinformatics in the Faculty of Life Sciences and School of Computer Science at the University of Manchester, UK. She is the current Chair of the EMBNET Executive Board.

David Judge is a bioinformatics trainer in Cambridge University and a long-term friend of Jack Leunissen.

Sandor Pongor is a Group Leader of Protein Structure and Bioinformatics, the International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), Italy. He organized bioinformatics courses every June in ICGEB.

David Landsman is Chief of the Computational Biology Branch, National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

Martin Bishop is the Managing Editor of *Briefings in Bioinformatics*.

in Peking University, where the Chinese EMBnet node is located. Those he taught will never forget his enthusiasm and inspirational style in the class room. In May 2012, he received a prestigious award from the Dutch industry platform for his

activities towards making education and training software and databases more accessible for everybody.

Jack, we miss you greatly.