
EBI consolidates management of sequence data

Thursday 7 June 2007 – Today the European Bioinformatics Institute announces a major reorganisation of its processing of biomolecular sequence information. This will affect EMBL-Bank, UniProt and the EBI team working on Ensembl (which is a joint project with the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute).

The long-standing sequence database group led by Rolf Apweiler, which is responsible for EMBL-Bank (nucleotide sequences) and UniProt (protein sequences), will be merged with Ewan Birney's group, which includes the EBI's part of the Ensembl team. Ensembl, which annotates vertebrate reference genomes, is managed by Ewan Birney in collaboration with Tim Hubbard at the Sanger Institute.

The new team structure reflects the need to integrate DNA data from an increasing diversity of high-throughput methods, and will be jointly led by Apweiler and Birney, with Apweiler taking responsibility for proteins and functional information and Birney for nucleotides.

Although the merge will result in enhanced information and better integration, the existing Ensembl collaboration with the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute will continue to be crucial and will be pursued with undiminished vigour. The well-established global collaborations to collect and exchange nucleotide and protein sequence data will also remain an essential part of the future operation.

The sequence database group also produces secondary resources that aim to provide users with all the information they need to analyse completely sequenced genomes. 'We were already sharing expertise and data structures, but the consolidation allows us to take this collaborative spirit a step further, which will ultimately lead to a unified user interface for all our completed-genome data', says Rolf Apweiler.

'Rolf and I are very excited about working more closely together with the EBI's sequence information,' says Ewan Birney. 'We both put our users at the centre of the universe, and this restructuring will allow us to capitalise on the strengths of both teams to allow them to do more with the data, more efficiently.'

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About EMBL:

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory is a basic research institute funded by public research monies from 19 member states (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). Research at EMBL is conducted by approximately 80 independent groups covering the spectrum of molecular biology. The Laboratory has five units: the main Laboratory in Heidelberg, and Outstations in Hinxton (the European Bioinformatics Institute), Grenoble, Hamburg, and Monterotondo near Rome. The cornerstones of EMBL's mission are: to perform basic research in molecular biology; to train scientists, students and visitors at all levels; to offer vital services to scientists in the member states; to develop new instruments and methods in the life sciences and to actively engage in technology transfer activities. EMBL's International PhD Programme has a student body of about 170. The Laboratory also sponsors an active Science and Society programme. Visitors from the press and public are welcome.

About EBI:

The European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI) is part of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and is located on the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus in Hinxton near Cambridge (UK). The EBI grew out of EMBL's pioneering work in providing public biological databases to the research community. It hosts some of the world's most important collections of biological data, including DNA sequences (EMBL-Bank), protein sequences (UniProt), animal genomes (Ensembl), three-dimensional structures (the Macromolecular Structure Database), data from microarray experiments (ArrayExpress), protein-protein interactions (IntAct) and pathway information (Reactome). The EBI hosts several research groups and its scientists continually develop new tools for the biocomputing community.

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