EU-NMR newsletter
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EUNMR - An EU Program (I3)

Involving the following institutions: Biozentrum, Frankfurt; Bijovet, Utrecht; CERM, Florence; ENS, Lyon; CR UK, Birmingham

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One year has passed since the commencement of the I3 initiative. We all hope that this initiative becomes a vital part of the NMR scientific community because:

1) it provides European researchers with access to the most advanced equipment and expertise in the field, and

2) it allows scientists in good labs doing top-quality NMR research to go to infrastructures with highly specialized equipment (e.g. prototype cryoprobes) to further their research.

The available instrumentation ranges from 800 and 900 MHz spectrometers with cryoprobes to 900 MHz with HR-MAS and 700 wide bore MAS, as well as, at the other extreme, relaxometers operating between 0.01 and 50 MHz.

During this year, the infrastructures have provided machine time and expertise, when needed, as planned in the contract with the EC. This is an unprecedented level of access with respect to what had been provided in the past, i.e. since 1994. This access probably meets most of the "conscious" needs of the community, but we hope also to uncover the "unconscious" needs, which may be many, given the importance of NMR in describing protein-biomolecule interactions in solution and understanding, at the atomic level, the biochemical processes occurring within cells.

In this context, we have witnessed with pleasure the establishment of a user community, at present coordinated by Henriette Molinari (Univ. of Verona), who is watching over the quality of access and trying to channel top-level projects to the NMR research infrastructures. From her report, which followed a discussion with NMR users, it was identified that efforts should be made by NMR infrastructures to i) provide clear descriptions of the "unique" features of each infrastructure, ii) keep the community informed about new scientific and technological developments undertaken by each infrastructure, iii) provide laboratory facilities for basic sample handling, iv) allow for a higher level of flexibility, i.e. in allowing users to change appointment times, in case of adversity, v) provide technical support from an NMR expert in experimental set up, and vi) maintain the excellent resource provided by the annual NMR-RI meetings. User suggestions have been given to ensure transparency and information sharing as it relates to user access, in order to promote good practices. The closest interaction between the I3 and the scientific community took place in Florence from January 16 to 18, 2007, where Dr. Molinari proposed a program to monitor and foster access from the users' side. At the same meeting a large section of the evaluators had the opportunity to meet, as coordinated by Katalina Kover (University of Debrecen). They decided to be proactive in improving the evaluated applications to tighten the selection process.

It is interesting to know that there is a EC activity called FESP, the Forum for European Structural Proteomics, which monitors the needs of the scientific community in terms of infrastructures in

Structural Genomics and Proteomics, and develops strategic plans for European policy in this field. A recent survey among the NMR community performed by FESP reports that 36% of respondents believe there is not enough access to infrastructures to meet their present needs, while 72% stated that their needs for NMR infrastructures would increase over the next three years. These figures suggest that issues related to infrastructure access must continue to be focused upon, especially if we are to meet increased demands for NMR in the future, which will be added to by technological improvements and requirements of partner fields that wish to complement their methods with NMR when tackling cutting-edge studies.

We hope that this newsletter contributes to the understanding of the importance of accessing NMR to advance our comprehension of biology... possibly through publications in journals with high impact factor.

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