



Special BioSB member assembly meeting about future and sustainability of BioSB - minutes

Jaarbeurs Utrecht, November 30, 2017

Present:

Jaap Heringa (chair), Lodewyk Wessels (board), Patrick Kemmeren (board), Barbara Bakker (board), Celia van Gelder, Femke Francissen, Ruben Kok (DTL), plus 15 BioSB members

Opening by Jaap Heringa

Model for BioSB sustainability

Patrick introduces the proposed membership model, based on the following principles:

1. Membership fees drop to 25 euro per year
2. Members have a say in the direction of BioSB
3. Conference fees are increased with approx. 50 euro
4. Five-day course fees set to 400, 600 and 900 for PhD students, academics and industry

Furthermore, DTL and BioSB will form a partnership in which DTL commits to support BioSB in conference organization, communication with community, courses - link with ELIXIR educational program, financial support (simplified webshop), and BioSB financial admin in 'Yuki'. The profits and losses on BioSB activities will be shared.

Q&A BioSB membership model

- Hans Westerhoff proposes a to link to ISBE; Celia van Gelder explains that there is a connection to ISBE-NL training
- Hans Westerhoff: How can we share the finances if we are not voting for DTL and vice versa. Patrick van Kemmeren: BioSB is responsible for the content of the research school, decision with financial consequences need to be agreed with DTL. Lodewyk Wessels: DTL also provides infrastructural support in kind, plus support for the course programme. Patrick: The new model is aimed at financial stability.
- Ruben Kok emphasizes that collaboration is not only financial but also a the level of content: aligning DTL and BioSB agenda's, joint positioning, acquisition, and relations to

NWO. The partnership has benefits for both DTL and BioSB. Jaap is part of the DTL board.

- Chris Evelo: who will make the newsletter? Lodewyk: BioSB is responsible for the content, DTL sends it out.
- Chris Evelo: Are courses open to anybody, irrespective of whether they are part of DTL? Yes, the courses are open internationally, everybody pays the course fee. Ruben: the whole Dutch academic community is already member of DTL.
- Bas Dutilh: what is the complementarity of DTL and BioSB? DTL has big infrastructure component; BioSB educational and scientific content. Celia van Gelder bridges training activities between Elixir (DTL) and BioSB. Moreover, DTL covers a larger field than bioinformatics and systems biology.
- Sasha Gorbalenya: Why is BioSB not part of DTL (merging instead of being partner)? Jaap Heringa: we are a research school. Currently the Netherlands do not support research schools, but this may change and then we can be recognized as such. Rub Kok explains that DTL brings together different research communities; BioSB is one of them. Ruben suggests that we may reconsider the relation between DTL and BioSB when the field changes. BioSB and DTL now commit for 2 years.
- Sasha Gorbalenya: Why collect the membership fees via the conference fees? Lodewyk Wessels, this is practical, since we you do not need to go after membership fees separately.
- Comment: the courses need to be self-sustainable. This is indeed the case.
- Lodewyk Wessels: DTL support is not just financial, but also content. DTL will help to get more sponsors for the conference; DTL can help with the content of the educational program.
- Marcel Reinders: how optimistic is the estimated income from the courses? Lodewyk / Celia: It is based on current participant numbers. Indeed the challenge is to keep the programme attractive enough now that people will pay per course.
- Chris Evelo: does the course income pay for the conference? No, both course and conference use office support and generate income to cover this.
- Will there be money for course development? No, PIs have to invest in this in kind.

We voted for the proposal of partnership with DTL and the membership model. All members present voted in favor.

Future of BioSB course portfolio

Bas Dutilh started off by asking what the incentive is to teach courses. We are all very busy and already do a lot of teaching: what is the incentive for persons organizing the courses. Lodewyk Wessels: most PIs want to send their PhD students to a good course, and therefore also share their knowledge with the students of other groups. Dick de Ridder added that he teaches course as it is fun, and he uses the material of an MSc course in the BioSB courses.

Natal van Riel noted that he teaches a course together with Jaap Molenaar, but that they have only a small number (< 10) of students. It could be that the course needs some time to become



known in the community, but that it is discouraging if one invests a large amount of time in a course and it is poorly attended.

Alex Schoenhuth wanted to know if it is possible to also include BioSB (external) students in master courses he teaches anyway. Ilya Aerts added that they gave good experience with such an approach.

We started making an inventory of new courses that need to be added to the portfolio:

1. Marcel Reinders and Barbara Bakker: metabolomics and proteomics. Peter-Bram 't Hoen added that it is wise to coordinate with BBMRI as they might have such a course already. He will advise to label a course with as many labels as possible.
2. Barbara Bakker: time dependent modeling related to a specific domain of biology, e.g. signaling pathways, metabolism, i.e. also add the specific measurements required for the modeling to the course.
3. Bas Dutilh added metabolic modeling will attract many biologist to the course. Then we started a discussion on whether we should focus on biologists.
 - a. Dick de Ridder was very clear that we should cater for PhD students with an exact background and not design courses specifically tailored to biologists as this is not our mission.
 - b. Hans Westerhoff believes that it is our task to educate the biologists, even though it might not be the mission of BioSB.
 - c. Ilya Aerts pointed out that there is a need to patch up biology deficiencies of PhD students from an exact background or deficiencies in exact topics of PhD students with a biology background in order to make the step to systems biology.
 - d. So if someone organizes an introductory course for biologists, BioSB will not block it, but it will not encourage members to set up these courses.
4. Marcel Reinders: pan-genome analyses (building pan-genomes)
5. Hans Westerhoff: Systems medicine
6. Lodewyk Wessels and Peter-Bram 't Hoen: high dimensional statistics course with emphasis on mixed models.
7. Jeroen de Ridder: courses to help PhD students transition to industry or their own business. It was mentioned that the Lorenz course (Life science with Industry) also relates to this topic.

General points.

1. Huib Hoefsloot asked whether we should be teaching online courses. We had a platform but it is too expensive to maintain. Within Elixir there is also the possibility to have e-learning via the platform provided by Slovenia.
2. Ruben Kok suggested that we issue an official BioSB certificate for those who have completed their BioSB training, e.g. by following a minimum number of courses successfully.
3. if a course has been successfully completed.



4. Hans Westerhoff suggested that we send a questionnaire to all PhD students and PIs asking what they need in terms of courses.

BioSB conference

Patrick Kemmeren leads the discussion on how to make conference more attractive, for the BioSB community as well as for sponsoring companies. Members agree that the keynotes are excellent. There is a discussion on whether the quality of the parallel sessions should be increased by having more PI talks or less slots available, so that we can select more strictly. The argument against this would be that there should be ample opportunity for PhD students to present, since we are a research school. The current organizers will take care of the balance between quality and opportunity for PhD students to present. There is also a discussion on whether the location is attractive for companies. It seems that the location is not clearly an issue, rather we should position BioSB better to the companies. Here the DTL network will help. An advantage of Lunteren is that it is cheap. It will be difficult to find such a cheap place elsewhere. On the other hand, it might be more attractive for companies to interview candidates for positions and to actively attend the conference if it were more centrally located. Bas Dutilh comments that poster sessions should be longer, with more space for posters. This is taken into account by the organizers. Finally, the international review committee is cited, saying that the participation by young scientists was extremely high, which was seen as very positive. It is suggested to organize meetings between young scientists and keynote speakers or other senior scientists, along the lines of 'meet the expert' sessions. YoungCB is already organizing this during their retreat prior to the conference.

Lunch and departure