

Jean-Jacques Loeffel – Short Biography

Jean-Jacques Loeffel was born in Bienne on 15 October 1932. He studied physics at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETHZ). He obtained his diploma in 1957 (with a diploma thesis under Wolfgang Pauli) and was assistant in mathematics to Ferdinand Gonseth from 1956 to 1961. During this period, he prepared a doctoral thesis in relativistic quantum field theory under Res Jost and was awarded the doctor's degree in natural sciences by the ETHZ in 1962.

His career started with a postdoctoral fellowship at the CERN Theory Division, from 1962 to 1964, followed by three years in the USA, first as an associate research scientist at the Courant Institute for Mathematical Sciences, New York, then as a visiting member at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Back in Europe, he was a Joliot-Curie fellow at the Theoretical Physics Laboratory of Orsay Science Faculty, in 1967-1968.

He came to Lausanne in 1968 to teach theoretical physics for the "Troisième Cycle de la Physique en Suisse romande". This doctoral program grouped the Universities of Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel (the Ecole Polytechnique of Lausanne being still part of the University).

He was appointed "Professeur extraordinaire" of Theoretical Physics at the Science Faculty of the University of Lausanne on 6 July 1970 and "Professeur ordinaire" in 1978. He was a member of the Institute of Theoretical Physics, which was founded in 1964 following the appointment of Professor Gérard Wanders in 1961. Jean-Jacques Loeffel was Head of the Institute at regular intervals. Upon retiring in 1999, he became Honorary Professor of the University of Lausanne, prior to the transfer of its physics department to the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in 2003.

Jean-Jacques Loeffel died in Lausanne on 22 April 2013.

Towards the end of his career, his research interests turned to statistical mechanics, but a major part of his research was dedicated to the relativistic quantum field theory, which describes and explains the properties of elementary particles. He focused mainly on the mathematical aspects of the problems he addressed. The 1960s saw the emergence of a new discipline, mathematical physics, and Jean-Jacques Loeffel became a recognised member of the community of mathematical physicists.

The students in physics at the University of Lausanne and the Ecole Polytechnique have greatly benefited from Jean-Jacques Loeffel's teaching, which combined clarity, rigour and elegance.