



## Securing the future of Europe's biological data resources

New EC-funded effort to create a sustainable infrastructure for biological data launched

**Hinxton, 28 May 2008** – In a contract signed today, the European Commission has awarded €4.5 million to a pan-European consortium to decide upon the best way to unite Europe's biological data resources into a sustainable, integrative bioinformatics network for the life sciences. The European Life-science Infrastructure for Biological Information (ELIXIR) project is led by the European Molecular Biology Laboratory's European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI) and involves 32 partners from 13 countries. The consortium ultimately aims to establish a sustainably funded infrastructure for biological information in Europe, to support innovation in life science research, knowledge generation and its translation to medicine, the environment, the bio-industries and society.

Since the 1980s, the storage mechanism for biological information has gone from being an individual's notebook and published academic papers to open source databases of integrated information exchanged worldwide on a daily basis. This information and the databases that make it available to scientists around the world are an indispensable resource for modern biology. Yet commonly these resources are dependent on insecure or short term funding, meaning that the valuable data they contain and provide access to, are jeopardised when funding ends.

ELIXIR aims to protect the existing and future data held in biological data resources. The project will work to provide a European infrastructure for optimal

information storage, access and integration supported by a secure funding mechanism. "Under the Framework Programme for Research, the European Commission provides support to the preparatory phase for the construction of new research infrastructures," commented Mr Robert-Jan Smits, Director of Directorate B (European Research Area: Research Programmes and Capacity) at DG Research of the European Commission. "This will help catalyse the efforts and resources needed to build and ensure the sustainability of large-scale, world-class infrastructures needed by Europe's research communities." In this way, the longevity of Europe's central molecular data resources will be guaranteed.

The development of such a network is a strategic step in maintaining the global position of Europe as a leader in scientific research. "The biological sciences, are delivering benefits that contribute to advances in our society," says EMBL-EBI director and ELIXIR coordinator Janet Thornton. "Developing a securely funded, integrative infrastructure will give Europe one voice in the global community, meaning that we can make connections and realise those benefits more quickly by working together" she concludes.

More information on ELIXIR and details on future stakeholder meetings can be found at [www.elixir-europe.org](http://www.elixir-europe.org) ●

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## Notes for Editors

### About ELIXIR:

The ELIXIR acronym represents the full project title 'European Life-science Infrastructure for Biological Information'. ELIXIR is funded under the Framework 7 Capacities Programme for Research Infrastructures.

The preparatory phase of the project involves 32 participants: EMBL-European Bioinformatics Institute (project coordinator), UK, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, UK, Federal Ministry of Education & Research, Germany, Barcelona Supercomputing Centre, Spain, Spanish National Cancer Research Centre, Spain, Council for National Research, Italy, Centre for Advanced Studies, Research and Development in Sardinia, Italy, Scientific Computing Ltd, Finnish Supercomputing Centre, Finland, German Research Foundation, Germany, Danish Technical University, Denmark, Erasmus Medical Centre, The Netherlands, Institute of Enzymology, Hungary, Genome España, Spain, Helmholtz Association, Germany, National Institute for Research in Computer Science & Control, France, Linköping University, Sweden, Ministry Of Science & Technology, Israel, Medical Research Council, UK, Natural Environment Research Council, UK, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, The Netherlands, Icelandic Centre for Research, Iceland, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, UK, Sardegna Ricerche, Italy, Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Switzerland, Syngenta Ltd., UK, Technical University of Braunschweig, Germany, University of Bordeaux 2, France, Swedish Research Council, Sweden, Wellcome Trust, UK, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, France, Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale, France

[www.elixir-europe.org](http://www.elixir-europe.org)

### Background to ELIXIR:

The European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) published a roadmap in 2005 which identified 35 large-scale European infrastructure projects. One of these projects was the creation of a 'Shared platform for Data Resources in the Life Sciences', based upon a major upgrade of the facilities, data resources and services provided by EMBL-EBI.

The European Commission issued a restricted call to the identified projects to submit a proposal for funding for a preparatory planning period. ELIXIR is the proposal submitted by EMBL-EBI in response to this call and subsequently funded under Framework 7.

The activities of ELIXIR are separated into two phases over three years; the preparatory phase, which involves consultation with the stewards and users of Europe's current biological resources to define the requirements, attributes and structure of the network, and the implementation phase, where the results of the preparatory phase will be reported and sustainable financial support will be sought from national funding bodies.

Key issues that need to be defined by the community consultation phase are:

- how best to ensure integration and interoperability between core and specialist data resources, including the development of standards to facilitate data collection in newly emerging fields;
- how the network can most effectively connect with other interdisciplinary areas to yield the most progress in medicine, agriculture and the environment;
- how to meet the needs of related European industries; and
- provision of training for Europe's life science researchers so that they can effectively exploit the information made available through the infrastructure and its component resources.

### 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 bio-computing community.

### About EMBL:

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory is a basic research institute funded by public research monies from 20 member states (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) and associate member state Australia. 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. [www.embl.org](http://www.embl.org)

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