
Finland invests €1.85 million in pan-European infrastructure for biomedical research

Hinxton and Helsinki, 3 February 2010 - Finland has made its first specific commitment to the development of European biomedical research infrastructures (BMS ESRIs) by supporting a joint pilot infrastructure project in bioinformatics (ELIXIR), biobanking (BBMRI) and translational research (EATRIS). The initial commitment of 1.85 M€ is to support preparation and pilot studies in 2010.

The purpose of the funding is to ensure Finland's commitment to the building of these European infrastructures. The level of funding in future years was left open as this depends on the outcome and structures that will be developed in the pilot phase.

The approach that Finland has selected is based on the realisation that significant potential synergies may arise from infrastructures developed for biobanking, bioinformatics and translational medical research. Funding of 1 M€ is provided by the Ministry of Education through the Academy of Finland, with 0.85 M€ co-financing from a consortium consisting of the Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland (FIMM), CSC – IT Center for Science and the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

This project will ensure that Finnish scientists and institutions continue to be active in the planning and implementation of the first wave of European BMS ESRIs infrastructures. There is particular interest to form links and synergies between the infrastructures, such as by linking sustainable infrastructure for biological information (ELIXIR) with biomedical samples and clinical, life-style and environmental data (BBMRI) as well as an opportunity to translate results to diagnostic and biomarker purposes (EATRIS).

Professor Olli Kallioniemi, the director of FIMM and coordinator of the collaboration between the three

infrastructure efforts, says "A small country should concentrate its investments in the European dimension to those areas that are of critical importance and where synergies may arise. Finland has a long tradition of collecting biobank samples and associated clinical as well as molecular profile information".

Professor Rudi Balling, director of the Luxembourg Centre for Systems Biomedicine and the coordinator of EATRIS, says "We are delighted with Finland taking the lead for a significant national commitment towards a European translational research infrastructure. This reflects the excellence of biomedical research in Finland and the recognition that infrastructure is key for Europe to stay competitive".

EMBL-EBI Director and ELIXIR coordinator Professor Janet Thornton, adds "Finland's active participation in developing ELIXIR is excellent news. The close interaction between the biomedical research infrastructures in Finland will help Europe to develop a fully integrated approach to handling heterogeneous data and exploiting it for translational research".

Professor Kurt Zatloukal from Medical University of Graz and coordinator of BBMRI who has actively worked towards coordination of BMS ESRIs at EU level further comments "We are delighted to see that coordination of BMS infrastructures also takes place at the national level".

Ms Eeva Ikonen, senior science advisor at the Academy of Finland, comments "Finland has made substantial contributions towards construction and upgrading of national infrastructures through Biocenter Finland. This current funding decision aims at establishing a firm Finnish role on in the development and implementation of BBMRI, EATRIS and ELIXIR. Our approach could hopefully also serve as a model for tighter integration between other European research infrastructures". ●

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About EMBL-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 Protein Databank in Europe), data from gene expression 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.

www.ebi.ac.uk

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

About FIMM

FIMM is an international research institute established in 2006. It was founded as part of the Nordic Molecular Medicine Partnership with EMBL. FIMM aims to advance research and training in molecular medicine and the translation of molecular discoveries into practical clinical applications in collaboration with the industry. At the national level, FIMM brings together several strategic national resources and scientific expertise and is operated by the University of Helsinki in collaboration with sector research institutes (National Institute for Health and Welfare, and the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland) as well as the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa. FIMM is the Finnish partner in European Advanced Translational Research Infrastructure (EATRIS).

About CSC

CSC - IT Center for Science Ltd. is a non-profit limited company administered by the Ministry of Education. Having core competences in modelling, computing and information services, CSC provides versatile IT services, support and resources for academia, research institutes and companies. The Funet communication links provide research workers with Finland's widest selection of scientific software and databases and Finland's most powerful supercomputers. CSC is the Finnish representative in European Life Science Infrastructure for Biological Information (ELIXIR).

About THL

The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) is a research and development institute under the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. THL works to promote the well-being and health of the population, prevent diseases and social problems, and develop social and health services. THL is the statutory statistical authority in health and welfare and maintains a strong knowledge base within its own field of operations. THL carries out its responsibilities through a wide range of activities: research, follow-up and evaluation, development, expert influence, official tasks as well as international co-operation. THL is the Finnish partner in Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure (BBMRI).

About ELIXIR

The purpose of ELIXIR is to develop the plan for a sustainable infrastructure for biological information in Europe. This plan focuses on generating stable funding for Europe's most important publicly accessible databases of molecular biological information, and the development of a compute infrastructure that can cope with the biological data deluge. ELIXIR is one of 44 research infrastructures recommended by the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI, <http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri/>) as being of key strategic importance to Europe's future. ELIXIR holds a special place among these because it will provide infrastructure for the other biological, medical and environmental research infrastructures being developed. ELIXIR will provide: data resources; bio-compute centres; an infrastructure for integration of biological data, software tools and services throughout and beyond Europe; support for other European infrastructures in biomedical and environmental research; and services for the research community, including training and standards development. This will enable ELIXIR's users to meet the European Grand Challenges, which are almost all biological, namely: healthcare for an aging population, a sustainable food supply, competitive pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries and protection of the environment.

About BBMRI

The Biobanking and BioMolecular Resources Research Infrastructure (BBMRI) addresses the increasing demands of accessing human biological samples and data, and biomolecular resources that are identified as limiting key resources for the advancement of medical research and related industries. BBMRI generates an advanced framework for systematic investigation of biological samples such as blood or tissues from diseased or healthy people as well as the careful analysis of disease outcomes and effects of therapies. By providing sustainable biological sample collections BBMRI will provide the basis for better understanding of the interaction of genetic, environmental, life style, nutritional and other factors causing variables of individual diseases and provide thereby a foundation for

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effective treatment and prevention measures. This will require, in addition to the innovative technical solutions as foreseen in BBMRI, a Europe-wide harmonised policy, regulatory and ethical framework for biobanking and related data management and access.

About EATRIS

To improve human health, scientific discoveries at the level of basic biomedical research have to be “translated” into practical, clinical applications. At the same time, novel observations about the nature or progression of a disease made by clinical researchers can be passed back to inspire new approaches in basic research. This two-way process of developing new tools or treatments for use in patients is called “translational research” or “translational medicine”. The translation of discoveries from the lab to commercially viable clinical applications is a complex and lengthy process. Basic biomedical research in Europe has traditionally been strong. However, Europe lags behind when it comes to bringing clinical innovation into clinical practice. It is against this background that European governments and centres of excellence in translational biomedical research have come together to create EATRIS, the European Advanced Translational Research Infrastructure in Medicine. EATRIS aims to be a European, globally competitive infrastructure for biomedical translational research which provides researchers across Europe broad access to state-of-the-art facilities, training and supporting services to optimise the outputs of both basic and clinical research.

About the Academy of Finland

The Academy of Finland is the prime funding agency for basic research in Finland. The Academy operates within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education. The Academy funds research annually with 314 million euros (year 2010), which accounts for 16 per cent of government R&D spending. Each year the Academy receives funding applications worth 1.1 billion euros. The Academy of Finland’s mission is to finance high-quality scientific research, act as a science and science policy expert, and strengthen the position of science and research.

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