

Hasselt University

How to choose an ELN?

-UBIB and DOC-

March 2021



How to choose an ELN?	3
At your institution	3
Other experiences (at your institution, other institutions)	3
General or discipline-specific features	3
General features	3
Specific features	4
General matrix of comparison of the different features	4

How to choose an ELN?

Consider the following:

At your institution

- ✓ Are there already current licences?;
- ✓ Which IT Support is possible at your institution?
Are you going for support from your institution or the ELN company?

Other experiences (at your institution, other institutions)

What are the other user experiences, usage in the different institutions?

In your institution, other institutions and on a European level

What are the user experiences on the level of:

- ✓ Installation/Activation;
- ✓ User friendly (Intuitive);
- ✓ Collaboration and Access control;
- ✓ Training, Support.

General or discipline-specific features

- ✓ Are you going for a generic or discipline-specific ELN?

General features

- ✓ Do you prefer a free ELN, or can it be a paying version?
- ✓ What is included in the ELN? (Is data storage and hosting included?)
- ✓ Does it need to be open source?
- ✓ How does the ELN meet the FAIR-principle? (Integration of PID, Metadata, etc.)
- ✓ Which level of security does the ELN match?

Think of:

- Access control;
- Timestamps (Important for intellectual property and valorisation);
- 2 factor authentication;
- Data storage location and sort of databases used (Who has access to these storage locations and databases?)
- Does it work with a single sign-on, or do you need to create user accounts? (Who has access to the user accounts?)
- Is it conform with GDPR and Good clinical practice, what happens with personal data of patients)
- Analysing data. Make sure the data can't be accessed or analysed if you don't want it to.
- What happens if a researcher leaves the organisation. Is taking over an account by the institution possible?

Free ELNs can also be very good and sufficient, but you need to do some extra checks on security. Another piece of advice we can give here is that you let the ELN screen for a security review by the informatics department and protection of sensitive data by the DPO.

Specific features

✓ What extra specific features does the ELN have?

Researchers prefer to use it as a working tool, so not only as a repository. So they can open documents and change documents in that tool. The researchers also prefer it has nice extra disciplinic features. For example, Chemistry/ Physics can use Signals Notebook where a tool is included to draw chemical structures. Another example is Benchling mainly used by life sciences, where a DNA, Protein simulator is integrated.

General matrix of comparison of the different features

Look at the features of specific ELN if it fits the needs

- These are the links to matrixes comparison of around 45 ELNs of [Harvard](#) and [Cambridge](#)
- This [JISC/ Glasgow university list](#) is created to consider the must-haves, should have and could have.