

Contacts

Publisher: Fabien Savenay
Editor: Paul Smaglik
Sales Director: Ben Crowe

European Head Office, London

The Macmillan Building
4 Crinan Street
London N1 9XW, UK
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: classified@nature.com

Group European Manager:

Leonie Wells (4954)

European Manager:

Nevin Bayoumi (4978)

UK/ RoW/ Ireland:

Matt Powell (4953), Ben Corp (4974),
Andy Douglas (4975)

Holland/ Italy: Nevin Bayoumi (4978)

Scandinavia: Silje Opstrup (4994)

Spain/ Portugal: Leonie Wells (4954)

Production Manager:

Billie Franklin
To send films and materials use
London address above.
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4814
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: classified@nature.com

International

Advertising Coordinator:

Laura Pearson (4977)

Naturejobs web development:

Tom Hancock

Naturejobs online production:

Ben Lund

European Satellite Offices

France/ Belgium:

Christine Niox-Chateau
Tel + 33 (0) 1 43 20 16 51
Fax + 33 (0) 1 43 20 51 52
e-mail: c.nioxchateau@nature.com

Germany/ Austria/ Switzerland:

Patrick Phelan/ Kate Turner
Tel + 49 89 54 90 57 11/-2
Fax + 49 89 54 90 57 20
e-mails: p.phelan@nature.com
k.turner@nature.com

US Head Office, New York

345 Park Avenue South,
10th Floor, New York, NY 10010-1707
Tel +1 800 989 7718
Fax +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: classified@natureny.com

US Sales Director:

Ben Crowe

US Sales Manager:

Peyton Mason

US Advertising Coordinator:

Corrisa Salzman

Japan Head Office, Tokyo

MG Ichigaya Building (6F),
19-1 Harakatomachi,
Shinjuku-ku,
Tokyo 162-0841
Tel +81 3 3267 8751
Fax +81 3 3267 8746
e-mail: k.cowan@naturejpn.com

Japan Manager:

Kate Cowan

A rich diversity

Warren Bush always tells young scientists that their future career paths will bear little resemblance to the route that his own took. Bush, a volunteer career consultant for the American Chemical Society (ACS), worked for 40 years at just one large company — young chemists of today will probably work for several smaller firms during their working lives, he says. Bush's employer, Shell, focused on inorganic chemistry, but organic chemists are now much more in demand, Bush says. And he notes that Shell emphasized manufacturing — whereas, today, one of the biggest growth areas for chemists is likely to be in services.

But the changing jobs market-place doesn't mean that prospects are bleak, Bush told a group of job-seeking chemists at a careers workshop during the annual meeting of the ACS in Chicago last month. Quite the contrary. Unemployment among US chemists is only about 1.5%, and average salaries have risen steadily over the past 10 years at a rate well above inflation. "The job market is as good as it gets," Bush said.

But to take advantage of this positive climate, chemists will need to shop for jobs differently. Rather than hope to land a lifetime position at a large company, they may need to target many smaller firms, ideally landing several offers so that they can choose the one that most suits them at the time.

Bush noted that weighing these odds can be difficult. A company boasting a future 20% boost in recruitment may actually offer only one or two jobs to chemists because only a fraction of its workforce is actively engaged in science. And that fraction is increasingly divided among different disciplines and specialities.

This new market-place may mean more diverse opportunities. But it may also require more flexibility.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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