

# Correspondence

## Swiss science set to stay international

Curbs on immigration resulting from last month's Swiss referendum (see *Nature* **506**, 265; 2014) have led to Switzerland's exclusion from the competition for European Research Council (ERC) grants. This is a devastating blow, given that the country has the highest share of international researchers on ERC grants. Thanks to the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) stepping in to run a temporary parallel programme, however, Swiss science can remain international and competitive.

The SNSF has supported basic science through single-investigator grants for more than 60 years. The new temporary SNSF schemes will help researchers who are working in Switzerland or negotiating with Swiss institutions and who were planning to participate in the ERC competition. The schemes will have similar deadlines, procedures and success rates to the ERC's, and the evaluation panels will comprise distinguished scientists from Switzerland and abroad.

ERC grants represent a sort of 'Champions League' for researchers in Europe, and so it will not be easy to run a local programme of the same calibre. However, Switzerland will now be able to maintain its strong international track record: 49% of our professorial bodies are international, 33% of our researchers are abroad, and 28% of our students are foreigners.

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## Publish results from volunteer computing

In your discussion of waning participation in volunteer computing projects (*Nature* **506**, 16–17; 2014), you omit to mention the most important

motivator of all — contribution to scientific progress.

For instance, a review of completed projects on IBM's World Community Grid for biomedical research uncovers a lacklustre track record in scientist's output (see [go.nature.com/fkheej](http://go.nature.com/fkheej)). Four out of 16 of these projects have yet to produce any publications, even though the earliest project was completed more than 5 years ago. Others have generated only non-peer-reviewed output, such as book chapters or conference proceedings. Of the peer-reviewed publications, several focused solely on the technical aspect of distributed computing, with no analysis of the computed results.

To maintain the viability of volunteer computing projects, researchers should be reminded that public support and confidence are gained through professional and timely communication of results. Otherwise, online titles or badges amount to no more than virtual candy.

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## Thwart fatal infant gut parasite

Vaccination against cryptosporidiosis, a devastating disease for children in the developing world caused by a protozoan parasite, has met with limited success (P. Hotez *Health Affairs* **30**, 1080–1087; 2011). A better way to prevent this and other enteric diseases in such settings is to address shortcomings in hygiene.

When funding is in short supply, more investment in basic research is not the only solution (see B. Striepen *Nature* **503**, 189–191; 2013). Increasing efforts to extend interventions that are known to work already are more likely to bring immediate, tangible and cost-effective benefits.

The most significant gains will be achieved through education and the design, deployment and uptake of suitable sanitation and potable-water systems within the affected communities.

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## Steering plans for neglected diseases

Mary Moran criticizes plans by the World Health Organization (WHO) for tackling neglected diseases in the developing world (*Nature* **506**, 267; 2014). Her arguments are misleading and trivialize global efforts to fix the research and development (R&D) system that is failing to address the health needs of people in these countries.

After 10 years' effort by WHO member states, the WHO Consultative Expert Working Group on R&D Financing and Coordination has proposed a framework to tackle these R&D shortcomings. This aims to promote and coordinate needs-driven innovation, sustainable funding mechanisms and patient access to health technologies.

Moran contends that the current drug pipeline for neglected diseases is "successful". In the past ten years, however, only 4% of all new drugs and vaccines and 1% of all new chemical entities were for neglected diseases — and none was suitable for the 17 neglected tropical diseases (B. Pedrique *et al. Lancet Glob. Health* **1**, e371–e379; 2013). Increased funding and better coordination will help, but what is really needed is a greater global incentive for needs-driven R&D.

To fulfil the working group's criteria, the WHO pilot projects need better coordination, optimization of research and accelerated delivery of health tools. This will be achieved

only by strengthening capacity, testing innovative or pooled financing, developing an open-knowledge approach, and unlinking R&D costs from the end price of products.

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## Research problems in Portugal run deep

As founders of the Portuguese National Association of Researchers in Science and Technology (ANICT), we believe that research problems in the country run deeper than just funding (see *Nature* **507**, 306; 2014).

Evaluation procedures for recruitment, career progression and funding allocation are in need of fundamental reform. They must become more transparent and be based solely on merit.

Selection for nationally funded PhD and postdoc scholarships, for example, is beset by conflicting interests and insufficient transparency (see [www.anict.pt](http://www.anict.pt)). The recent cuts in scholarship numbers have exacerbated these factors.

Currently, merit has little influence on career stability or advancement. Many researchers, even team leaders with students and ongoing grants, are being driven to leave the country because of their non-renewable, short-term contracts.

Instead of bickering and passing the buck, Portugal's politicians need to agree on long-term plans to foster and retain the country's talented young researchers.

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