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New Year evolutions

Predicting the future is never easy, but the past can often offer some clues to the way events will unfold. Several employment trends made their mark in 2001, and it is reasonable to assume that these will continue to shape the labour market over the coming year. With many fields moving from reductionist to integrationist approaches, the key for 2002 is probably a multidisciplinary approach.

As if to emphasize this trend, vast amounts of money are being poured into multi-site projects such as structural genomics. Scientists in overlapping fields would be wise to latch on to related areas or to be smart in carving out their own niche.

For several years, bioinformatics led the rising demand for mathematicians and computer scientists. The need for such skills will continue to grow as other areas — such as systems biology, ecology and geosciences — make increasing use of computer modelling. And across the pharmaceuticals and biotech sectors, there is evidence of a major shortage of biochemists.

The start of the twenty-first century has also been characterized by increased global mobility. Scientists are attracted to enabling facilities and repelled when those facilities are down. The temporary reduction in staff at CERN, the European laboratory for particle physics near Geneva, has already created an exodus to Fermilab in Illinois, which is likely to continue. And Japan's temporary closure of the Super Kamiokande neutrino experiment will almost certainly send researchers scrambling to find other facilities.

In addition, there are indications that some European countries face a shortage of candidates to replace ageing academics. If that bears out, these countries will have to fight to attract scientists who left Europe when opportunities were less ample.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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