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Sweet dreams...

Last month *Man of La Mancha* landed on Broadway, just a few days after a report on creating a European Research Area hit the Internet (www.euroscience.org). These seemingly unrelated events in fact have the same central element — *The Impossible Dream*. The song is the dramatic fulcrum on which the musical, based on Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*, revolves. But the song's title could also be seen as the premise or promise of the European Research Area (ERA).

The ERA aims to provide easy access to well-funded scientific jobs across Europe for every European scientist, regardless of national affiliation. In some respects, the mobility of scientific employment in Europe hinges on the ERA's success in much the same way that the musical depends on its showcase song.

But right now, the ERA remains a dream because it is just "an empty shell", according to the Euroscience report, which was based on a November conference sponsored by the European Commission. The two biggest obstacles preventing the ERA from becoming a reality are low funding for science and technology, and widely varying employment policies among the European nations, the report says.

The report acknowledges that it can't do anything about the funding. But it does present a model for doing something about mobility. It recommends setting up a European Research Contract Managing Office, which would look after issues such as personnel grants awarded within Europe for integrated projects or network of excellence.

Only time will tell if such an office warrants Quixote's noble optimism expressed in *The Impossible Dream*, or whether it will ultimately deserve our cynical scorn for tilting at unyielding bureaucratic windmills.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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