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Balancing the books

A report evaluating how to attract more Europeans into scientific careers couldn't have come at a better time. Jose Mariano Gago, Portugal's former science minister, delivered the strategy document to European research commissioner Philippe Busquin this month — just weeks after leading senior French scientists voted to strike over the limited prospects for their younger colleagues (see *Nature* 428, 241; 2004).

The report and the strike both point to a missing ingredient in European research: money. Cuts to the French system and a need for reform triggered a call to arms from senior researchers expressing solidarity for their junior colleagues, who face relatively bleak prospects. And Gago's report served as a reminder that Europe won't become the leader in the knowledge economy that Busquin envisages without an accompanying increase in research investment to 3% of gross domestic product by 2010.

The report speaks of a shortage of scientists in Europe, particularly young ones. But it is likely that postgraduates are not aware of this shortfall — after all, the difference between facing 199 competitors for a job rather than 200 isn't much of a shift in odds. Gago's report calls for more awareness of posts outside academia as one way to address this problem. But without funds to support academia, young people won't be drawn to either conventional or alternative scientific careers — at least in Europe.

But the French protest could offer hope to all of Europe. Following the strikes, the opposition party made significant gains in the French regional election (see *Nature* 428, 454; 2004) — perhaps a message that the public has voted in favour of science. Ultimately, if the European Union wants to meet its research goals, the public will probably need to send similar messages in other European countries.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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