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Guiding hands

Imagine what would happen if scientists' professional advancement was based not on the number of papers they had published but on how many people's careers they had helped. This might actually be a better measure of success than authorship alone, because good mentoring means that a scientist could indirectly have a hand in a paper, or at least influence an investigator's approach, a generation after he or she had retired.

But back to reality. Demand for quality guidance is huge. A forum facilitated by the US National Academy of Sciences suggested that good mentoring — not stipends — was the most important factor influencing the careers of US postdocs. And last month, meetings by the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers and the US National Postdoctoral Association both highlighted the need for more guidance.

To encourage more and better guidance, *Nature* and the UK National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts this year launched an award scheme for scientific mentoring. The first two winners, Tom Kibble of Imperial College London and Innes Cuthill of the University of Bristol (see page 802), have set an example that other scientists would do well to follow. And, by doing so, the pair have advanced their own careers. By offering fair guidance rather than fostering ruthless competition, Kibble and Cuthill have maintained working relationships with their students long after their protégés have left their labs.

Kibble and Cuthill may be exceptional, but they are doubtless not alone. Other great mentors are out there, and many institutions have schemes to laud them. But few outside the university hear about these awards, and few administrators use them as the basis for tenure or promotion. In the coming months, *Naturejobs* will promote other mentoring awards, so e-mail naturejobseditor@naturedc.com to suggest any such awards that we should highlight.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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