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## A question of age

European universities and research agencies are increasingly looking beyond the continent for postdocs. This is, overall, a positive development. It makes European science more international and creates a pathway for researchers on the move. But some schemes, intended to promote mobility, unintentionally manage to restrict it.

For example, one listing for a non-German postdoc at a German university put an age limit of 29 years on the prospective fellow. On the face of it, this seems pretty innocuous, as Germans traditionally finish their PhDs at a relatively young age. But by placing an age restriction on candidates from other countries with different career paths and timelines, it may exclude the very people it is trying to attract.

The criterion almost automatically rules out a large pool of US postdocs, because life scientists there tend to earn their degrees much later than in Germany. And what about the candidate who took time out between graduating and doing a PhD to pursue other interests — perhaps an industrial stint? Or MD/PhDs, who are especially in demand for institutions wishing to enhance translational research? These individuals earn their degrees even later. Or what about European postdocs in the United States who would take a fellowship in Europe to get closer to home? One would think that a European postdoc who did a stint at, say, the National Institutes of Health would be quite desirable. But the age restriction would largely exclude such people.

One can try to understand the rationale for such restrictions. Perhaps the institutions consider scientists who get their PhD by a certain age more 'serious'? But by the same token, institutions that are serious about recruiting internationally need to lift such restrictions in order to get the quality of candidate they really want — regardless of age.

**Paul Smaglik**  
Naturejobs editor



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