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French lessons

It is relatively common for a young French PhD to do a fellowship in the United States — but it is pretty rare for a US-born PhD to undertake a postdoc in France. This unequal balance could soon be evened out thanks to a scheme dreamt up and organized by BioTeam Paris (www.bioteam-parisregion.org).

BioTeam has set up a fellowship aimed at teaming an institution or company in North America with another in Paris. The winning entry will receive funding to place a North American postdoc with a Paris-based company — thus cementing the fledgling partnership.

The selection process for this year's inaugural award bridged the geographical and cultural divides by convening a committee with members from academia, industry and media hailing from both sides of the Atlantic (a group that this year included myself). Like all study sections, the first criterion the applicants were judged on was the strength of their science. But the remit also asked for a strong partnership, based on complementary expertise, intellectual property and marketing strengths.

Although all five short-listed applicants met those

criteria, an entry by US-based technology company Agilent and Paris-based ExonHit Therapeutics stood out. Agilent's expertise in developing gene- and protein-based chips seemed to complement ExonHit's interest in alternative RNA splicing — perhaps an alliance between the two could help develop an alternative splice chip? And, especially important to me, the potential partners defined a clear R&D role for their possible postdoc — not just as another pair of hands.

This award, presented last week in Paris, could do more than bring one North American postdoc across the Atlantic for fine wine and excellent cuisine. It could serve as an example of how to develop international partnerships where every entity benefits. And give North American researchers a reason to work abroad.



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