

naturejobs

**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

What is the most productive way to fund science and scientists? In our scrutiny of government-funded laboratories last week, we looked at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. This week's feature (see page 382) examines the successes of the institutes of the UK Medical Research Council (MRC) and the challenges they face.

The two organizations have some similarities: relatively secure funding, a tradition of good science, many top experts to collaborate with and freedom from teaching and other university duties. One stand-out feature of the MRC institutes, however, is their funding structure: every five years scientists (even senior scientists) must prove they are worth another round of funding — or they're out.

Hugh Pelham, director of the Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, UK, says that some do not get tenured and a few senior scientists are eased out because they are not performing — although the institutes can redeploy staff to different roles or projects. Pelham estimates that at least 90% of tenured group leaders will get through a five-year review without problems.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute's new Janelia Farm campus in Ashburn, Virginia, is the latest to try this funding model. Researchers have ample resources and are immersed both in their projects and a close-knit research community — but with no grant-writing or teaching responsibilities. Janelia director Gerald Rubin is frank about his desire to bring in top talent who don't mind routinely being judged (see *Nature* **443**, 128–129; 2006). Rubin wants innovative, interdisciplinary, unconventional high-risk projects; he says researchers who demonstrate progress on them will be renewed, even if they don't publish in *Nature*, *Cell* or *Science*.

This style of funding may prevent researchers from resting on their laurels, but it could also threaten morale. Is this good for science? It certainly forces the hand and makes cutting-edge research the top priority. As for the scientist, it's good for a certain type — a confident researcher who is ready to forgo the security of university tenure and who is open to starting anew if deemed not quite cutting-edge enough.

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