

# MOVERS

**Stephen Simpson, director of life sciences, Science Foundation Ireland, Dublin, Ireland**



**2000-08:** Senior immunology editor, *Science*, Cambridge, UK  
**1998-2000:** Senior research scientist, Edward Jenner Institute for Vaccine Research, Compton, UK  
**1997-98:** Research fellow, St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland

As an undergraduate, Stephen Simpson read a *Scientific American* article on the immune system that captivated his imagination. He was intrigued, not only with the facts, but with the craft of communicating them to a broader audience. His curiosity would lead to a career in both science and editing. As the new director of life sciences at Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Simpson is eager to help shape the research landscape of a country.

Simpson took his first degree in zoology at the University of Nottingham, UK. He moved to London to do his PhD at the National Institute for Medical Research, in part because of its pioneering use of transgenic expression in mice to probe immunology responses. Named a runner-up in *The Daily Telegraph's* annual science-writing award, Simpson continued to develop his communication skills while breaking new ground in immunology.

Next came a postdoc with Cox Terhorst at Harvard Medical School, where Simpson explored the newly discovered immune system of the gut. As a result he developed productive mouse models of colitis and Crohn's disease. With Terhorst's encouragement, Simpson became a faculty instructor at Harvard for two more years.

In 1997, he crossed the Atlantic again, to St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin. Despite Ireland's harsh funding climate at the time, he found an enthusiastic collaborator in Cliona O'Farrelly, who shared his interest in intestinal immunology. He next moved to the newly started Edward Jenner Institute for Vaccine Research in Newbury, UK, where he set up a small mucosal-immunology group to explore oral vaccines. But the shortage of independent positions concerned him. Then he spotted an advertisement for his dream job: immunology manuscript editor at *Science*.

"I didn't know if I would be competitive, but I had to put in an application," says Simpson. He got the job, and spent eight years there. Fellow *Science* editor Katrina Kelner says Simpson's extraordinary ability to engage others made him stand out. "His interest in science communication was apparent, as he helped develop podcasts as a new way to interact with the scientific community," says Kelner.

Simpson says his new role at SFI will allow him to use his editorial skills to shape the early-idea stage of the scientific process, by scrutinizing grant proposals rather than simply the final product. "We can't be too prescriptive, but we will surely encourage emerging areas of research, such as how gene regulation affects health and disease," he says. ■

**Virginia Gewin**

## NETWORKS & SUPPORT

### Two-body solution

Academic couples take heart. Your numbers, and your bargaining power, are rising, according to a report from the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University. Dual academic couples now make up more than a third of the US professoriate. Universities should use them as a recruitment tool, the report concludes.

*Dual-Career Academic Couples: What Universities Need to Know* advises academic institutions that still practise secretive, inconsistent employment negotiations to join the growing number of universities with written policies or guidelines for partner hiring. Eighty-eight per cent of survey respondents who were hired as part of a couple said they would have gone elsewhere if their partner had not also been taken on, says Londa Schiebinger, director of the Clayman Institute. She led the survey, which included 9,000 full-time faculty members from 13 leading US research institutions.

Couple hiring could help institutes attract female faculty members, as 83% of women scientists in academic couples are partnered with another scientist. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor is one of many that can demonstrate the recruitment benefits: in a recent study of its dual-career programme, 72% of respondents said

the programme had made a critical difference in decisions to accept a position. "Our programme is tied to the heart of the institution — it is about recruiting and retaining faculty," says Glenda Haskell, assistant vice-provost of academic affairs.

Many candidates are concerned about when in the interview process they should bring up a partner's career, and often wait until they have a written offer, Schiebinger says. Beth Mitchneck, associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Arizona in Tucson, says: "Some interviewees fear that requesting a partner hire during the interview would preclude an offer." But she disagrees with that strategy. "Here we want to know as early as possible in order to best find satisfactory employment options," she says.

So how can a couple negotiate one offer into two positions? Schiebinger says the first step is for couples to discuss their individual career expectations by asking 'Whose career will we follow?'. They should then find out which universities are couple-friendly by looking for specific guidelines, typically found on the university provost's website. And, Schiebinger suggests, talk to couples who already work there. ■

**Virginia Gewin**

#### POSTDOC JOURNAL

### Professional encounters

I guess it was time for some of my illusions to be shattered. I've had seven months of post-PhD life, in which I got the job I'd applied for, started fieldwork on a strange new species and continued the life of a happy researcher. While living in Ethiopia, I am exactly what I picture myself to be: a confident, intelligent, problem-solving field biologist. In America, however, a big surprise hit me — I am terrible at mingling with other academics.

I was completely unprepared for the vast difference between dealing with strangers in Ethiopia and strangers in academia. Frightening though the cultural and language gap may be, in Ethiopia any positive action or word on my part meets with approval. Mistakes are happily overlooked. A completely different fear grips me when I meet new people in academia. I'm expected to know the people I'm meeting, know what I'm talking about and know how my research intersects with that of the stranger in front of me. Or so it feels. I become completely flustered and feel far removed from the professional, successful scientist I want to be.

I am realizing that fieldwork is not preparing me for interacting with my scientific peers. That scares me a little. As I head back to the field, I wish I could have brought a self-help manual back to Ethiopia — something that could advise me on survival in the scientific rat race, without a single gelada to hide behind. ■

**Aliza le Roux is a postdoctoral fellow in animal behaviour at the University of Michigan.**