GLOBAL CITIZENRY

Expat advice

- When you're caught up in the scrum and chaos of your move, keep your long-term goals in mind.
- Accept that it will take six months or longer before you start to feel settled in a new place.
- Seek out international-student houses and other resources that support incoming students and researchers at your new institution.
- If you move to another country, learn the language.
- Travel around your area, talk to strangers and try foods that are unfamiliar to you.
- Accept every social invitation that you receive from colleagues and co-workers, no matter how shy or tired you are — especially in the beginning. You can skip gatherings later once you have a broad social network. **E.S.**

family nearby, he was left to mourn on his own and with friends, and he threw himself into work until he could return home at Christmas to be with family and honour her.

To combat isolation at a new destination, experienced nomads suggest accepting every social invitation (see 'Expat advice'). Seymour was not much of a cyclist before she moved to Germany, but she joined long-distance rides of up to 50 kilometres simply because she was asked. It is important not to neglect your social life, even while putting in the extra time that it takes to get started at a new job, so that you can connect with others in the community and learn your way around. "When you've moved somewhere and you don't know anyone, it's easy to work around the clock," she says. "That's not the best way to be in the end."

Finding room-mates who work outside of science can also help you to expand your social network, suggests Merrifield. When he moved to Toronto for his first postdoc, he used a local real-estate agent to find an apartment in a converted house with an eclectic mix of neighbours in the building, including one who worked in finance and several musicians. "That helped broaden my circle of friends beyond the people in my department," he says. "We had the coolest parties."

PLANTING ROOTS

Another downside: the time that it takes to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings can negatively affect work performance, says physicist Philip Moriarty, who completed his undergraduate degree and PhD at Dublin City University before moving for a postdoc to Nottingham, where he is now. As a principal investigator, Moriarty values postdocs who stay around long enough to give his research group a sense of continuity. From a stable position, he adds, scientists can still expand their horizons with extended lab visits, workshops and conferences.

"It's not a particularly conducive environment for a postdoc to do their best work if they're worrying all the time about where the next position will be and having to drag their families across the world," he says. "If you stay in the same place, you can build on your previous work and establish yourself as a truly independent researcher in a more sustained way than you can if you're moving from post to post."

Indeed, some find that the right decision may well be to stay put. While Strate was working on her research fellowship in Boston, her physician–scientist husband accepted a job offer in Seattle. She was working to launch her career, had research funding and wasn't ready to leave. So for several years, the couple lived 4,000 kilometres apart from each other, even as they cared for their two young children.

Once Strate felt that she had a foot in the door to an established research career, and that she could carry on her work in Seattle, she felt comfortable joining her husband and reuniting her family, while continuing to collaborate with colleagues in Boston. The separation was hard, she says, but she thinks that it was the right decision. "You don't want to be regretful," she says. "It can lead to resentment."

Given all the pros, cons and unknowns, it can be hard to make decisions about if, when and where to move, says Henry Sauermann, an economist who specializes in studies of science and innovation and relocated from Germany to North Carolina before landing his current position at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. Before each of his moves, he listed and ranked his priorities, both professional and personal. He suggests considering factors such as lab sociability, access to data, tenure guidelines, proximity to friends and family, and gut feelings.

At the end of the day, there is no escaping the fact that major life decisions are always going to be hard. "I do remember vividly, the night before I had to make the decisions, I felt like I had no idea," Fleitmann says. "But it still came together somehow."

It helps to remember that eventually, there will be a new normal, impossible though it might seem. "You have these difficult moments when you are sitting at your desk, and your brain is so full of the things you still have to do," Sauermann says. At times like this, he found inspiration in a famous Winston Churchill quote: "If you're going through hell, keep going." ■

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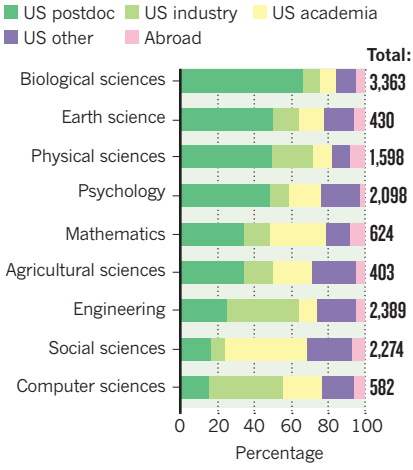
POSTDOCTORAL PLANS

PhD — now what?

Two-thirds of US citizens and permanent residents looking towards their first post after a biology PhD in 2014 said that they planned to do postdoctoral research — the highest proportion in any scientific discipline, a report from the US National Science Foundation has found (see 'Next step on the ladder'). The survey, 'Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering', also found that biology PhDs outnumbered those in other scientific disciplines. Overall, 42% of science and engineering graduates who had plans said that they intended to do a postdoc, down from 44% in 2012, although the number of PhD recipients rose slightly. In 2001, 39% of graduates with definite plans were heading to a postdoc.

NEXT STEP ON THE LADDER

Overall, 42% of new US PhDs in science and engineering accept postdocs, but specialities vary.



SOURCE: U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

GRANT AWARDS

Age is no advantage

Contrary to common perceptions, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) awards grants to younger applicants at about the same rate as it does to older ones (M. L. Heggeness *et al. Cell Stem Cell* **19,** 15–18; 2016). Older researchers do win more grants, the study found, but that is because more applicants are older. This could be because scientists receive tenure-track positions later in life, or because younger scientists are taking jobs outside academia, the authors say. For typical 'R01' type grants, applications from people under 40 have declined since the 1980s, but the number of applicants aged 60–64 grew by 40% between 2005 and 2014. In 2014, funding rates were 23% for this group, compared with 25% for researchers aged 35–40 and 19% for researchers under 35.