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A youthful field

Switching from academia to industry automatically ensures a higher wage, right? Not according to a recent survey conducted by *Nature Biotechnology*. The journal's online survey of readers across academia and industry in Europe and the United States revealed lower-than-anticipated salaries, and a younger-than-expected average age. The 1,700 or so respondents reported an average annual salary of under \$50,000 — and about half of them were 34 years old or less.

Deeper analysis of the data reveals a gulf between two broad groups of scientists. The larger set is younger, paid less and more mobile within the job market. Members of the smaller group, on the other hand, are older, better paid and are more likely to split their time between multiple sectors.

It is likely that this gulf exists not just in industry, but in academia as well, according to similar studies published this year by the US National Science Foundation and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Both of those studies revealed a higher average salary than was found by *Nature Biotechnology's* survey — but they also included a higher percentage of more senior scientists.

The results of all three studies illustrate a major problem with salary surveys — it is difficult to get a definitive average for a given field. And breaking the results down by age gives a less reliable total because of the inevitable sampling problems.

But even with such caveats, one can still draw some useful conclusions. Young scientists do not seem to be in it for the money — at least not immediately. Perhaps the lure of tenure or the uncertain promise of stock options keeps them striving. But maybe slightly higher salaries would be a better way to attract, and then sustain, young scientists, regardless of sector.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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