The aftermath of the recent global recession is having a significant impact on the public sector in Europe. Although supporting research and innovation remains a priority for most governments, public sector scientists have not emerged unscathed. The funding outlook across Europe remains mixed; many individual countries are reducing public spending on science, while the EU plans to significantly increase funding to the tune of an additional €25bn for the 2014-20 period.1 During such a volatile recruitment period, having expert knowledge of the market and workforce becomes more important than ever. Here we discuss some recruitment trends emerging from the Naturejobs database, plus characteristics of the government scientist workforce revealed by a recent Nature survey.

Recruitment trends
As the world’s largest dedicated science jobs board, Naturejobs has comprehensive coverage of public sector science employers in Europe. Data from our records suggest that, despite the fragile economy, several key public institutes and organisations have been recruiting at a higher level in 2011 than in 2010. The UK’s Medical Research Council, which supports around 5,700 researchers2, advertised 55% more vacancies with Naturejobs in Q1 and Q2 of 2011 compared with the same period in 2010. Oxford University, which has close to 10,000 staff and students involved in research3, has increased recruitment across the board and advertised 25% more science jobs with Naturejobs in the first half of 2011 compared with 2010. In France, while our figures show a slight drop in advertised vacancies for research agency CNRS, there was an 11% increase for the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM).

Matthew Ward, Naturejobs team leader for the UK and Ireland, said that while UK universities were facing a period of extreme uncertainty over funding, the outlook for civil servants was improving. “Most government departments now know their budgets and confidence in the recruitment market seems to be returning,” he says.

Government scientists: employee characteristics
In 2010 Nature surveyed more than 10,000 scientists from across the globe about their careers. The responses from scientists in Europe reveal some interesting characteristics of employment in the government sector, particularly in the areas of duration of employment, salary, mobility and age.

Scientists working for the government have generally been working for the same employer for longer than non-government scientists – around 20% have been with their current organisation for more than 20 years, compared with just 12% of those outside the sector. Government scientists also report lower salaries, with 57% earning less than US$50,000 a year, compared with just over 40% of those in other sectors.

Those working in the government sector are more likely to be working in the same country as they grew up in – almost 80% compared with 64%. And the average age of survey respondents is skewed towards the older end in government, with more scientists in the 45-54 age bracket and fewer in the 25-34 age bracket than in other sectors.

The value of insight
At Naturejobs, our experienced representatives have in-depth knowledge of the UK and European job markets. To discuss how we can help support your science recruitment needs, please get in touch.

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1 Nature 475, 14-15 (5th July 2011)
2 www.mrc.ac.uk/about/factsfigures
3 www.ox.ac.uk/about_the_university/facts_and_figures

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