

IN brief

Canadian visas woo entrepreneurs

On April 1 Canada launched a new visa program aimed at attracting entrepreneurs into the country by offering something no other countries with similar programs provide: immediate permanent residence status for successful applicants and their families. The Start-Up Visa Program has a group of individuals in its sights—skilled, entrepreneurial people already located in the US but of uncertain long-term legal status there. At a news conference announcing the program in January, Canadian citizen and immigration minister Jason Kenney told journalists, “When this thing gets launched I plan to go down to Silicon Valley with some of the industry associations here and fly the Canadian flag and say to those bright young prospective immigrants, some of whom are going to create massively successful companies in their lifetimes, that they can come to Canada through this program and they can get permanent residency here.” Another unique feature of the program, which can grant 2,750 visas a year, is that applicants will be judged by their ability to attract funding from a Canadian business incubator, an angel investor group or a venture capital fund. In their applications, entrepreneurs must provide proof of significant funding commitment. At that point the traditional immigration process will start to be applied by the Canadian government. Canada requires Start-Up Visa recipients to have. *Stephen Strauss*

Spain nudges biotech from nest

The Spanish government has folded a nationwide tech transfer body into the central science foundation, ending a decade of special treatment for the biotech community. The Foundation for Genomic and Proteomic Development and Investigation, better known as Genoma España, was set up in 2002 in Madrid by the Spanish Science Ministry to incubate biotech businesses. Now its €4.5 (\$6.2)-million budget is unlikely to go with it, Spanish science news outlet *Materia* reports. The tech transfer body spent about €1 (\$1.3) million on operating expenses and salaries, and the rest on financing and support for R&D programs. Although employees and the existing portfolio of projects have moved to the Center for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI), biotech enterprises will compete with other sectors for patent support, early-stage subsidies and other services. Genoma España depended on public funding, but governmental R&D budgets have been cut for the last four fiscal years. CDTI will maintain InnoCash, a Genoma España program to support existing businesses, alongside its current \$720 (\$936) million a year in tech transfer financing. “Genoma España has been fundamental for the development of biotechnology in Spain in recent years,” says industry spokesperson Lucía Cecilia on behalf of the Spanish Association of Biocompanies (ASEBIO). “Its demise need not presuppose the disappearance of its activities. We think [CDTI] will be able to assume those functions...we want to give a vote of confidence to the new model, but we will follow closely the evolution of its activities.” *Lucas Laursen*

Japan punts on regenerative medicine

In a supplementary budget announced in January, the Japanese government bankrolled Y300 (\$3.2) billion into programs pushing for technology translation and, in particular, induced pluripotent stem cells.

The investment is part of the effort by the Liberal Democratic Party, which regained power in December, to stimulate the economy. So far, the new government has weakened the yen and created a bull run on the stock exchange. Economists are wondering if Japan might be emerging from a long recession. But many scientists say the emphasis on induced pluripotent stems (iPS) cells and technology transfer is too narrow and short sighted.

The largest chunk of money will be Y120 (\$1.25) billion in loans to spur matching fund programs between universities and industry. Details aren't yet clear, but a science ministry official says that a committee headed by Tokyo-based Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation CEO Teisuke Kitayama will pick around four universities “that have a proven system for establishing ties with industry in place.” The universities will be able to use the loans at their discretion. Another Y60 billion (\$624 million) will be given out by the Japan Science and Technology Agency to fund individual tech-

nology transfer projects.

The industry ministry will likewise be adding Y104 billion to the Y2 trillion government-funded, Tokyo-based Innovation Network Corporation of Japan. Launched in July 2009, it has already invested tens of billions of yen in companies, including the recently announced establishment of Tokyo-based Orphan Disease Treatment Institute, which is developing a Duchenne muscular dystrophy treatment based on ethylene-bridged nucleic acids.

Expectations are especially high for regenerative medicine. The science ministry is putting in Y21.4 billion (\$222 million) to fund a new building at Shinya Yamanaka's center dedicated to clinical applications of iPS cells, a cell processing center at the Foundation for Biomedical Research and Innovation in Kobe, and other stem cell research infrastructure. The science ministry is also finalizing a plan to create a stable 10-year program that will invest an annual Y9 billion (\$93 million) in stem cells. The industry ministry will throw in Y600 (\$6.2) million to validate high-throughput iPS cell production technology made by Osaka-based NIPRO. The health ministry will use Y2.2 billion (\$22.9 million) to build iPS cell derivation and cultivation training centers.



Japan's biotech drive owes much to Shinya Yamanaka's Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 2012.