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French disconnection

At an informal meeting with students at the Paul Sabatier University in Toulouse last month, I asked who among them wanted to gain a PhD in science. The majority put up their hands. Then I asked which of them wanted to work in academia, and most of the hands stayed in the air. Finally, I asked who wanted to stay in France — the show of hands remained largely unchanged.

Unfortunately for those students, sticking to these goals could greatly limit their long-term career prospects. In France, as in much of Europe, there is a dearth of permanent positions, and the young scientists competing for these posts are becoming increasingly frustrated (see *Nature* **414**, 145; 2001).

One of the main problems in France is that the government offers little in the way of graduate or postdoctoral funding. Many of the scientists I met in Toulouse told me that they relied on the Human Frontier Science Program and Europe's Marie Curie fellowships for their postdocs. But neither of these programmes offers much solace to French students seeking academic posts within their own country — both stipulate that the postdocs they fund must come from abroad.

So how can French students improve their prospects? The first step might be to broaden their search to include industrial postdocs. They could also consider widening their options by seeking postdoc positions in other European countries. Then, having increased their skills and experience, they might be able to return home thanks to one of a variety of available repatriation schemes (see *Naturejobs* 5; 28 March 2002).

It might seem bizarre to French students that the way to secure work at home is to leave the country. But such a path may well be the best bet for them — and for many other Europeans.

Paul Smaglik

Naturejobs editor

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