Contacts

Publisher: Fabien Savenay
Editor: Paul Smaglik
Sales Director: Ben Crowe

European Head Office, London

The Macmillan Building
4 Chancery Street
London N1 9XW, UK
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

European Manager:

Nevin Bayoumi (4978)

UK/ RoW/ Ireland:

Matt Powell (4953)
Ben Corp (4974)
Andy Douglas (4975)
Laura Pearson (4977)
Netherlands/ Italy/ Iberia:
Evelina Rubio Hakansson (4973)
Scandinavia: Silje Opstrup (4994)

Production Manager:

Billie Franklin
To send materials use London
address above.
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4814
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

International

Advertising Coordinator:

Hind Barrada (4935)

Naturejobs web development:

Tom Hancock

Naturejobs online production:

Ben Lund

European Satellite Offices

France/ Belgium:

Christine Niox-Chateau
Tel +33 (0) 1 43 20 16 51
Fax +33 (0) 1 43 20 51 52
e-mail: c.nioxchateau@nature.com

Germany/ Austria/ Switzerland:

Patrick Phelan/ Kate Turner
Tel +49 89 54 90 57 11/-2
Fax +49 89 54 90 57 20
e-mails: p.phelan@nature.com
k.turner@nature.com

US Head Office, New York

345 Park Avenue South,
10th Floor, New York, NY 10010-1707
Tel +1 800 989 7718
Fax +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: naturejobs@natureny.com

US Sales Director:

Ben Crowe

US Sales Manager:

Peyton Mason

US Advertising Coordinator:

Ashly de Leon

Japan Head Office, Tokyo

MG Ichigaya Building (5F),
19-1 Haraikatanachi,
Shinjuku-ku,
Tokyo 162-0841
Tel +81 3 3267 8751
Fax +81 3 3267 8746
e-mail: k.cowan@naturejpn.com
Japan Manager: Kate Cowan

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Reinventing careers

Two centres instrumental in sequencing the human genome are reinventing themselves. In doing so, they are creating new kinds of jobs and, perhaps, different career paths. The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute (formerly the Sanger Centre) and the Whitehead Institute are vying for talent by structuring advancement and creating scientific work beyond traditional investigator posts. And both offer renewable contracts, rather than exclusively tenure-track positions.

The Sanger is investing £300 million (US\$431 million) to support research in proteomics and functional genomics, while continuing its sequencing work. The Wellcome Trust, which funds the institute in Hinxton, Cambridgeshire, is providing an additional £65 million for information technology infrastructure.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Whitehead Institute is in the early stages of planning a similar switch, perhaps splitting into two units — one that will continue to conduct sequencing and another that will work on post-genomic projects.

The Sanger Institute is competing with industry by offering payment above the Medical Research Council scale. This is similar to the strategy some US foundations have used to attract quality postdocs — and put pressure on the government to make its own stipends more competitive (see *Naturejobs* 3–5; 10 January 2002). As for contracts, Susan Lindquist, director of the Whitehead, believes that more research institutions will move towards using both kinds, giving investigators a choice of flexibility or security.

Finally, both centres anticipate bringing on board PhD biologists to run new facilities, such as microarray centres — like an astronomer running a telescope. Those people will be much more than “high-priced technicians”, Lindquist says. And, if more institutes adopt this model, they will be much in demand.

Paul Smaglik

Naturejobs editor

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