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Talent tug-of-war

The past few years have seen the United States increase its reliance on scientists and engineers from abroad, while at the same time, these workers' home countries have made a more determined effort to reclaim lost talent. This set of events could mean trouble for the United States, says the National Science Foundation's *Science and Engineering Indicators 2002* report, released this month (www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/seind02).

According to the report, the percentage of foreign-born scientists and engineers in the United States is growing across all disciplines and at all degree levels. The proportions are at their highest for engineering (45%), computer sciences (43%) and mathematics (30%), all of which are fields that are currently showing little or no growth in the production of domestic PhDs.

If the ageing — and in some cases declining — pools of well-trained scientists in many industrialized nations are added to the equation, it is clear that there will be increased opportunities for young scientists outside the United States. A fact compounded by the efforts being made by many nations to build up their science and technology infrastructure and so recruit back their lost talent — a recurring theme in *Naturejobs'* Regions reports (see *Naturejobs* 4–5; 14 February 2002 and 4–5; 21 March 2002).

If this trend continues, the relative attractiveness of the United States as a destination for foreign-born scientists will decrease. "Although such a decline would be difficult to quantify," says the new report, "anecdotes suggest that experienced scientists and engineers, particularly those originally from Asia, are even now returning to their native countries."

So what does that mean for working scientists? More opportunities — especially if they work in maths, physics or chemistry and are willing to be flexible about where they live.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor

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