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Visions of Europe's future

What would it take to reverse the brain drain that has drawn so many Europeans to work in the United States? Here's a possible scenario. First, the budget for the US National Institutes of Health abruptly ends its five-year doubling trend, leaving research funding more or less flat. The National Science Foundation continues to make modest budgetary gains. But the main result is that few new grants are funded — unless they are related to biodefence.

Meanwhile, European countries raise their commitment to research funding. Foundations and societies launch schemes to lure top talent back home. And governments, businesses and universities combine to create institutions that are funded by, but relatively free from the control of, all three.

Far-fetched? Not really. The US factors are close to reality. And the European components are starting to materialize. In this week's instalment of Movers (moved from the back of the journal to a new slot at the front of the *Naturejobs* section), hints of each factor have contributed to some examples of repatriation.

Signs of an increased commitment to science in Britain, a new chemistry facility by Oxford and start-up money from the Royal Society and Wolfson Foundation lured Hagan Bayley from Texas A&M University back to the University of Oxford, where he studied as an undergraduate.

But for a true reversal of fortunes, a few more factors must be addressed. European countries need to raise their overall levels of research and development. They also need to offer packages that allow investigators to fund postdocs, graduate students and technicians. And they should promote autonomy — whether it be freedom to work with industry, or to avoid it. Without those things, repatriation will remain the exception rather than the rule.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor

Contents

MOVERS

Oxford professor comes home;
physicist heads for Harvard;
linguistic challenges at Aventis;
and more p558

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