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## Moving targets

Countries often say that to enhance their science base they need to produce more PhDs. But can you end up with too many qualified people? The danger in boosting graduate-school enrolment now is that it could lead to unemployment — or at least longer stints as postdocs — later. That was certainly the situation for US life scientists in the 1990s.

But so far, that seems not to be the case in Finland, according to a survey published by the Academy of Finland last month. The country produced 402 PhDs in 1989, but as part of a concerted effort it has tripled this to 1,224 in 2002. Despite such a dramatic rise, unemployment has not increased. The jobless rate for PhDs in Finland remained below 3% throughout the 1990s, with even lower rates being found in the natural sciences, engineering and medicine.

So is Finland an example or an anomaly? On one hand, it shows how a commitment to building a research-based economy can pay off. In the European Union, Finland is second only to Sweden in terms of PhD density. It is no coincidence that Sweden and Finland also lead the European Union in terms of devoting the highest percentages of their economies to research and development (R&D). On the other hand, Finland is an anomaly in that it, like Sweden, is a relatively small country, with a fairly indigenous R&D population.

But other countries may soon need to consider Finland's approach. For example, in Britain, fewer students are taking chemistry. And the United States may need to boost its own internal science production as it is putting up barriers to foreign scientists, who traditionally make up the country's R&D needs. The only danger in setting targets is that, by the time a need is identified, it is likely that the need has already changed.

**Paul Smaglik**  
*Naturejobs* editor



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