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On the road

According to the Chinese calendar, 2004 is the year of the monkey, but for Europe it looks more likely to be the year of mobility. That, at least, was one of the key points in a talk given by Raffaele Liberali last month at the New York Academy of Sciences. Liberali, who heads the division for mobility and Marie Curie fellowships at the European Commission's research directorate, said that he wants to fix two major problems that have left Europe trailing in the wake of the United States as a destination of choice for researchers (see www.nyas.org).

First, Liberali said that he will try to make the commission's grants more portable between countries so that researchers can carry funding from, say, a university in Spain to one in the United Kingdom. In the United States, it is common for researchers to take National Institutes of Health or National Science Foundation grants with them when they change jobs. Second, Liberali said that he would try to establish a code of conduct for the recruitment of researchers. Some European universities, he noted, are not transparent in their hiring process, which results in patronage and can hamper researchers who are 'outside' the local system.

The European Commission plans to use a series of grants to help it accomplish its goals. Some of its grants, such as the Marie Curie postdoc fellowships, only fund researchers from one country to work in another, thus encouraging mobility. The commission is also increasing the number of 'reintegration' grants to help researchers who work for a time in the United States to return to Europe — although it can't guarantee that these will automatically allow researchers to return to their home country.

Such schemes mean that, if you are a young European researcher who is having trouble getting a grant in your home country, you might be better off riding the European mobility funding stream, rather than trying to stay put.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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