

BRICKS & MORTAR

GRADUATE JOURNAL

The lab environment

My current lab is a great place to work. The people here are very proficient in their fields, and everyone is friendly, open and helpful — which means that I enjoy the time during (and after) work. People were also very open at a lab where I worked some years ago, but I didn't enjoy its competitive environment and the responsibility that imposed.

I believe that a working environment that matches my character makes a big difference to my performance in the long run. I think that when you are considering starting a project in a lab you have not been to before, you should imagine spending a much longer time there. How would you feel after a few years there?

But how can you get a feel for whether you would enjoy working somewhere? One simple strategy is to talk to as many people as you can when you visit for an interview. And maybe you have a friend of a friend who knows someone who works there who will be able to give you an inside view.

The working climate and culture are just as important if you are choosing a job in industry. I actually consider it to be as important as the salary, even though most people give this the most attention after spending time in academia. ■

Philipp Angerer is a second-year PhD student in biotechnology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, Switzerland.

Building Copenhagen's BioCentre

Work will begin this year on the Copenhagen BioCentre, which will cost 640 million kroner (US\$105 million) and be funded by the Danish government. This facility, which is due to open its doors in 2006, will provide lab and office space for 500 employees from three research institutions focusing on molecular biology and biomedical research.

One of these three institutions is the recently established Biotech Research and Innovation Centre (BRIC). The Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation established BRIC to form an international centre of excellence in molecular biology and biotechnology, strengthening the research environment in the Scandinavian Medicin Valley area (see *Naturejobs*



Claus Bræstrup (left) and Kristian Helin bring research and industry together.

10–11; 21 June 2001). Until it moves to the Copenhagen BioCentre in 2006, BRIC is based at the Symbion science park in Copenhagen.

BRIC is a consortium of leading Danish research institutions and is associated with the University of Copenhagen. Its aim is to establish collaborations between public research institutions and industry, and to promote the exchange of ideas within the Danish biotech research community. To achieve this end, it is managed by an independent board

of directors from academic institutions and industry.

BRIC's first research group, established in 2003, focuses on developing functional screens to identify novel genes involved in cancer, and on using mouse genetics to understand protein function and the development of cancer.

BRIC is still growing, and will have some 30 employees by the end of this year and about 200 when it moves into the Copenhagen BioCentre in 2006. ■

Kristian Helin is director of BRIC and Claus Bræstrup is its chairman.

MOVERS Enric Banda, director-general, Catalonian Foundation for Research, Barcelona, Spain

Like many scientists-turned-administrators, Enric Banda became a manager almost by accident. He gave up a well-funded research post in Switzerland early in his career, partly because he felt homesick for his native Spain. The price he paid for the ticket home was that he had to build a research programme in Catalonia from scratch. Over the years, he has learned to relish taking on such challenges.

That's not to say that these

challenges don't come without frustrations, Banda says. As director of the European Science Foundation in Strasbourg, France, for the past five years, he has learned to cultivate patience, as changes at the European level can only be made "at a speed that it is difficult for me to swallow", he says.

But even that had its rewards, says Banda. He learned that the reason for the lack of alacrity was that each European country has its own individual approach to science and culture. "You realize the diversity we have and how rich we are in approaches," he says. "But sometimes that makes life difficult."

Banda says that he grew to enjoy management — once he was resigned to the time it takes to bring about changes. "As a scientist, I used to say 'this is politics. I'm not interested'," he recalls. But he adds that it is gratifying to be able to give colleagues extra resources.

By the time his fixed term at the European Science Foundation ran out, he had had what he considers to be some success in finding funding for projects in some of the member countries. He also made the institution slightly faster at making decisions. "But it could be faster still," Banda says.

His new post as director-general of the Catalonian Foundation for Research in Barcelona, Spain, is just as challenging, but for different reasons. In a situation reminiscent of his earlier return to Spain, Banda must once again build a new body from the ground up. He would like to turn the Catalonian Foundation for Research into a think-tank for science policy and use it to create links between the public and private sector.

But he is glad to be home again, even though he enjoyed his spells in Zurich and Strasbourg. "I'm still a Mediterranean," Banda says. ■

CV **1998–03:** Secretary-general, European Science Foundation, Strasbourg
1988–91: Director, Institute of Earth Sciences, Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), Barcelona
1987–: Research professor, CSIC
1983–87: Head of geophysics, Geological Survey of Catalonia, Barcelona
1980–83: Research scientist, Institute of Geophysics, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich