GRADUATE JOURNAL

Tunnel vision

It's the last train home and I'm scribbling corrections on my particle-physics paper. Out of the corner of my eye I notice the man next to me looking over my shoulder at my work. It's late, he's probably bored, I tell myself. But does he really care what I do? Should he care? Do I care whether he cares?

Yes! If nothing else, his taxes contribute to the millions needed to build the high-tech detectors used in my area of physics. They pay for me to go to conferences, for my computer and for the hours I sit at the screen fixing broken code.

Scientists have a duty to put something back into the system that brought us this far. On a more practical level, if we don't sell our work to the politicians who hand out the taxes, there will be no more research.

But what's the best way to reach out? Expounding the merits of electroweak symmetry breaking at the supermarket checkout is probably not the best approach. You need something people can relate to — keep it simple and tell a story.

The curious stranger was a reminder not to become too blinkered. Scientists can't operate in a bubble. We need to share our excitement for what we do with different audiences. The rest of the world is eager to listen, we just have to speak to it in the right way. ■

Amber Jenkins is a graduate student in particle physics at Imperial College, London.

RECRUITERS & INDUSTRY

Building an intern programme

IBM may be viewed by many as a giant in information technology, but it hasn't always been the first choice for jobseekers. As the Internet boomed in the 1990s, young people who wanted to work at the frontiers of computer science saw IBM as irrelevant, says Jane Harper, who runs the company's programme for talent-scouting at universities. Instead, the brightest and best joined Internet start-ups, where they felt they would have more direct involvement in developing new technologies.

To arrest this trend, IBM set up a US intern programme in 1996 called Extreme Blue (derived from the firm's nickname 'Big Blue'). Aimed at undergraduates, master's and PhD students one year away from finishing their degree, Extreme Blue puts

the interns at the cutting edge by assigning them to projects that have a genuine chance of reaching the market-place.

Under the scheme, three scientific and technical interns are teamed with an MBA student for the commercial angle, and the group is then guided by an IBM mentor. The 12-week internships have proved so popular, says Harper, that this year nearly 4,500 students applied for the 200 available places.

Extreme Blue is part of a broad strategy at IBM, which this year will see the company take on some 2,000 interns in the United States alone. Other schemes include ProjectView, which targets women, under-represented minorities and people with disabilities.

Internships make for a good trial period for both employer and prospective employees, notes Harper. Indeed, IBM sees its various intern programmes as a good way to help it fill

its employment pipeline. At the beginning of this year, the company announced plans to expand its workforce by some 15,000 people. Many of these new jobs are likely to be based in China or India, so it is no surprise that Extreme Blue has now been implemented in both Beijing and Bangalore — as well as in Toronto, Canada. The programme is also being run year-round rather than only during the summer.

But perhaps the true measure of Extreme Blue's success, says Harper, is how many of the programme's interns stay on to become full-time employees. Even though the dotcom bubble has well and truly burst, "it's just as hard to get the top talent", she says. Nevertheless, she adds, Extreme Blue is attracting — and retaining — a lot more top talent than IBM was seeing ten years ago. ■

Paul Smaglik is editor of Naturejobs.

MOVERS

Tim Morley, vice-president, preclinical sciences, Ardana, Edinburgh, Scotland

Tim Morley was still an undergraduate when he got his first taste of industry — but his brief spell in a commercial lab set the direction of his future career.

Morley was doing a 'sandwich' degree in biochemistry at the University of Liverpool, UK, which meant that he got to spend some of his course doing an internship. At the suggestion of one of his tutors, he did his placement

in southeast England at the drug company Beecham.

The experience was a real eye-opener, says Morley, as he had never seen chemistry done on such a large scale, with the latest equipment and instrumentation. "As an undergraduate, you have limited exposure to state-of-the-art kit," he says.

His time at Beecham helped him to refine the direction of his studies, and he went on to focus on pharmacology, toxicology, drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics. The strategy paid off, landing him a job at Wellcome Research Laboratories in Beckenham before he did his PhD. After nine years there he moved briefly to Agrevo before joining Vernalis Research in Wokingham.

Morley still believes that drug metabolism and toxicology are good areas for a scientific career. In the course of his professional life, he notes, he has

seen a consistent shortage of people with the right skills for this kind of work — particularly scientists who can create and evaluate drugs.

In his latest move, Morley has accepted the post of vice-president, preclinical sciences, at Ardana, a small drug company in Edinburgh. The firm was spun off in 2000 from the Human Reproductive Sciences Unit run by the UK Medical Research Council (MRC). Morley will coordinate the preclinical evaluation of the company's drugs, and will liaise with MRC staff in Edinburgh and at St Mary's Hospital for Women and Children in Manchester. He is currently searching for other centres of excellence in human reproductive health for potential collaborations.

Morley says that he is looking forward to his new role. "If you have a wealth of experiences," he says, "you can make a bigger impact in a smaller company." ■

CV

1997–2004: Senior director of biological research, Vernalis Research, Wokingham, UK

1996–97: Senior scientist in toxicology, Agrevo (now Aventis), Chesterford Park, UK

1988–96: Senior scientist in drug-safety evaluation, Wellcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, UK

1993–97: PhD in mechanistic toxicology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

1990–91: MSc in biopharmacy, King's College Chelsea, London, UK