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Making a move on mobility

The European Union (EU) uses its Marie Curie Fellowship programme actively to promote mobility among young scientists. It does this by providing funding for graduate students and postdocs as long as they train in an EU country other than their own. Mobility seems like a good goal. In the best cases, it fosters the flow of ideas, builds collaborations, and sends money and talent into under-funded regions.

But mobility has its down sides, too. Phrases such as "brain drain" and "off-shoring" have significant negative connotations. At this stage, it is hard to know whether in the long term the EU's scheme will have a positive or negative outcome for the young researchers it has been funding. There are very few centralized data on the matter. Indeed, both the US National Postdoctoral Association and the National Academy of Sciences this year issued a plea for more international data.

That situation could be about to change thanks to the Young European Biotech Network (YEBN). Last month, at the World Life Sciences Forum BioVision 2005 in Lyon, France, the network launched a survey. This aims to identify

the key problems encountered by Europe's young researchers, scientists and technicians. The data collected will help European policy-makers to review and refine their strategies, by giving them a clearer picture of what effects their policies have had. And it will benefit young researchers, because they will know whether their own problems are personal or universal.

The success of this project comes down to numbers. The YEBN is aiming for 1,000 responses, but more would be better. Young European researchers who take the time to fill out the survey and ask friends and colleagues to do the same will go a long way towards answering the questions about the benefits and pitfalls of mobility, and bring to light other issues of concern for young researchers. The survey is online now at www.yebn.org.



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