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naturejobs

A transparent process

The city of Trieste is bucking the trend for scientific expansion in Italy. Its success is encapsulated neatly in a telling statistic. In Trieste there are 37 scientists per 1,000 members of its population compared with a level of just five for Italy as a whole, and six in the European Union (see page 124).

What accounts for such a disparity? One of the major factors is that few of the science jobs in Trieste arise from Italy's state-funded university system. The state system has two significant problems. First, funding is linked to the state budget, which for science has been relatively flat for several years. Second, unlike Trieste's international research institutes, state universities run slow *concorsi* recruitment competitions to fill their positions. The *concorsi* system has the added disadvantage of lacking transparency and, as a result, invites cronyism.

Trieste's success highlights a problem that stretches beyond Italy into the rest of Europe, where many state-run university systems have similar issues. In Germany, under the *Habilitation* system, which is slowly being phased out, young researchers are disproportionately

beholden to their mentors. In France, major research agencies often appoint young scientists to permanent positions fresh from PhD programmes, leaving others who are equally skilled bewildered — and pursuing jobs outside the country. And in Spain, new regional programmes are trying to establish systems that give PhDs from outside Spain an opportunity for employment (see *Nature* **428**, 448–449; 2004).

Recruiters in Europe would be wise to emulate transparent systems that give candidates from all over the world a fair shot. And job-seekers would do well to seek out opportunities in such systems and be wary of universities that lack a transparent recruiting practice. Maybe then Trieste's high proportion of scientists would become less of an anomaly and more of a norm.



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