

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
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Who would have thought that a government body would be encouraging researchers to ask it for extra money? It sounds unusual, but that is exactly what Research Councils UK, the body that represents the combined grant-giving agencies in Britain, is doing. In a report issued this month, the organization laments that its scheme for topping up stipends to help keep scientists in research has been hugely underused.

The report, available at www.rcuk.ac.uk/rcd/enhanced.asp, notes that although money isn't the primary motivator for many young scientists, real-world financial concerns are influencing the direction of their careers. These pressures become greater as young scientists move through their training. A survey conducted for the report found that the minimum contract-research salary of £20,000 (US\$38,000) is "increasingly uncompetitive", especially when compared with PhD stipends. The survey results suggest that a stipend of £30,000 would make the positions more attractive.

This information is not new, and the research councils have already implemented 'enhancements' that can be used to boost salaries and stipends in sectors that find it particularly difficult to retain or recruit staff. But in a survey conducted for the report, only 16% of 275 principal investigators questioned were aware that the scheme existed.

The report also suggests that the rising incidence of student debt, resulting from the payment of tuition fees, might be deterring students from staying in academia. Although this mainly affects undergraduate intake, the report warns that graduate students saddled with debts may prove more reluctant to pursue an academic career.

In addition to stipend enhancements, the report recommends subsidizing housing and forgiving debt in some cases. Stipend top-ups, housing help and loan waivers all seem like sound ideas to recruit and retain young scientists — as long as principal investigators are made aware of them, and are encouraged to apply for the extra money.

Paul Smaglik, Naturejobs editor

Publisher: Ben Crowe
Editor: Paul Smaglik
Assistant Editor: Gene Russo

European Head Office, London
The Macmillan Building,
4 Crinan Street, London N1 9XW, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

European Sales Manager:
Andy Douglas (4975)
e-mail: a.douglas@nature.com
Business Development Manager:
Amelie Pequignot (4974)
e-mail: a.pequignot@nature.com

Natureevents:
Claudia Paulsen Young (+44 (0) 20 7014 4015)
e-mail: c.paulsenyoung@nature.com
France/Switzerland/Belgium:
Muriel Lestringuez (4994)

UK/Ireland/Italy/RoW:
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Scandinavia/Spain/Portugal:
Evelina Rubio-Morgan (4973)
Germany/Austria/The Netherlands:
Reya Silao (4970)
Online Job Postings:
Matthew Ward (+44 (0) 20 7014 4059)

European Satellite Office
Germany: Patrick Phelan
Tel: +49 89 54 90 57 11
Fax: +49 89 54 90 57 20
e-mail: p.phelan@nature.com

Advertising Production Manager:
Stephen Russell
To send materials use London address above.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4816
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

Naturejobs web development: Tom Hancock
Naturejobs online production:
Catherine Alexander

US Head Office, New York
75 Varick Street, 9th Floor,
New York, NY 10013-1917
Tel: +1 800 989 7718
Fax: +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: naturejobs@natureny.com

US Sales Manager: Peter Bless

Japan Head Office, Tokyo
Chiyoda Building, 2-37 Ichigayatamachi,
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0843
Tel: +81 3 3267 8751
Fax: +81 3 3267 8746

Asia-Pacific Sales Manager:
Ayako Watanabe
e-mail: a.watanabe@natureasia.com