

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
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Picture a subtropical island in southeast Asia trying to cultivate science amid its palm trees. It hopes to send its young scientists abroad to train and then lure them back to labs at home, with the ultimate aim of fostering technology that could benefit its industry. It also seeks aggressive funding growth for its top institutions.

This approach could describe Singapore, but it also applies to Taiwan — although there are some key differences between the two. Singapore's research and development (R&D) infrastructure is closely controlled from the top, by an agency called A*STAR. Taiwan's approach is less centralized, with scores of universities scrambling for new funds. The difference in each country's approach is akin to comparing classical music to jazz, with Singapore's R&D orchestra led by a disciplined conductor, and Taiwan's jazz bands tending towards more free-form improvisation.

Taiwan's bands have a lot to play for — and the stakes warrant international attention. Its programme, appropriately enough, is referred to by a cavalcade of names, including 'M-top' or 'Aim Top' (for 'Aiming for the top'), 'T-12' (a reference to the multimillion-dollar, five-year government grants going to 12 universities) and '5/500' (a reference to the number of billions of Taiwanese dollars being spent over the five years).

Whatever it is called, the funding scheme has set out its goals very clearly. It aims to bring at least one Taiwanese university into the list of the world's top 100 universities within 10 years, and into the top 50 in 15–20 years. It also plans to assume a leading position in Asia for at least 10 major disciplines or research fields in 5 years, and to be able to compete with the top 50 institutions in the same fields in 10 years.

Both Singapore and Taiwan's approaches are worth watching to see how different models of science and technology can make different, but equally beautiful music — akin to listening to both Mozart and Miles Davis.

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