

naturejobs

**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

Every year, the announcement of who has won a Nobel prize provokes debate as scientists reappraise the discoveries, and the significance of the work is reaffirmed to the general public. But one aspect of the awards tends to garner less media coverage: the geography of the prizes — in particular, the nationalities and geographical locations of the winners.

In fact, this year's physics prize is something of an anomaly. It is the first time in eight years that none of the winners has been either American or based in the United States. A glance at the winners of the three scientific Nobel prizes of the past 10 years shows just how unusual that result is. For the years 1998–2007, nearly 60% of the winners were working in the United States at the time they received their prize, although roughly 30% of them were not American. Other winners were working in Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Japan, Russia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The statistics are similar if Nobel success is gauged by institution across the history of the prize. In the top ten universities, ranked by the number of laureates, only two are outside the United States —and both of those are in Britain. Pole position goes to Harvard, which has 21 laureates to its name.

Of course, such a cursory analysis can highlight only where leading scientists end up —and the statistics reflect, in part, the locations of large, well-funded universities, as well as political strife and the quest for the best education.

The big question is whether the increasing globalization of science will see a change in geographical distribution of Nobels. Japan, for example, stated in 2000 that it aims to secure 30 Nobel prizes by 2050 (see *Nature* **413**, 560–564; 2001). At the same time, talented young researchers are not now automatically heading for the United States to further their education and career. True, recent competitiveness legislation in the United States is aimed at reasserting the nation's scientific dominance, but nevertheless, maybe we will soon be seeing Nobel prizes being won by American expatriates — rather than the other way round.

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