

# naturejobs

**JOBS OF  
THE WEEK**

**G**lobal competition for talent in science and engineering is increasing, according to the 2008 Science and Education Indicators released by the US National Science Foundation last week ([www.nsf.gov/publications](http://www.nsf.gov/publications)). And visas are a significant weapon in the battle to secure top researchers. "Many countries are actively reducing barriers to high-skilled immigrants entering their labour markets," the report says, while noting that "at the same time entry into the United States is becoming somewhat more difficult".

Canada and Japan, for example, have dramatically increased the number of visas they offer to skilled workers. In 2005, Canada issued 44,000 temporary visas, a 63% increase since 1995. Japan has been even more aggressive, with 268,000 workers entering on temporary visas in 2003, a 93% increase from 1992. Meanwhile, in the United States, similar visas have become harder to come by. In October 2003, the maximum number of available H-1B visas, often given to research and development (R&D) workers in information technology and other R&D fields, fell from 195,000 to 65,000. Apart from making it harder for US-based companies to hire foreign workers, this also discourages foreign students from staying in the United States to job hunt after they have finished their degrees; both Canada and Japan allow for more open-ended, longer-term residency on their temporary visas.

The visa situation sheds light on more than just immigration issues. The trend in countries such as Canada and Japan in part reflects investment in both infrastructure and R&D. For jobseekers, improvements in visa availability indicate where new opportunities are arising. In Japan, for example, much of the increase in immigration is from other Asian countries. Before the Japanese visa boost, those workers would probably have gone to the United States or Europe.

Jobseekers can view the visas available as lights illuminating doors, or jobs, in a country and the actual visa as the key to get in. Competing countries might find that one way to make gains in the battle for talent is to start deploying welcome mats.

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