

PublisherInfo		
PublisherName	:	BioMed Central
PublisherLocation	:	London
PublisherImprintName	:	BioMed Central

France failing young scientists

ArticleInfo		
ArticleID	:	4854
ArticleDOI	:	10.1186/gb-spotlight-20031008-01
ArticleCitationID	:	spotlight-20031008-01
ArticleSequenceNumber	:	206
ArticleCategory	:	Research news
ArticleFirstPage	:	1
ArticleLastPage	:	3
ArticleHistory	:	RegistrationDate : 2003-10-8 OnlineDate : 2003-10-8
ArticleCopyright	:	BioMed Central Ltd2003
ArticleGrants	:	
ArticleContext	:	130594411

Jane Burgermeister

Email: janeburgermeister@yahoo.co.uk

The French government has made much of its determination to turn France into one of the most [attractive biotechnology locations](#) in Europe within the next 5 years, but not everyone is sure the right approach is being taken to reverse the brain drain of young researchers.

Part of the package of measures designed to stimulate the biotech industry includes new legislation that will give special fiscal incentives to biotechnology start-up companies, called *jeunes entreprises innovantes*, or young innovation corporations. These companies will be exempted from having to pay the nonwage costs of young researchers, including health and pension insurance, in a move that should significantly cut the costs of employing young researchers and so boost job openings in the field.

"With these measures, France is taking an important step towards making itself more attractive for biotechnology companies and researchers", Angelita de Fransisco, secretary general of [France Biotech](#), a national association formed in 1997 to lobby the government for incentives needed by the biotech industry, told *The Scientist*.

However, the government's plans have also met with fierce criticism from some of the most important government-funded research bodies. In the past month, the board of the prestigious [National Center for Scientific Research](#) (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique; CNRS) attacked the government for failing to offer young researchers better working conditions. In particular, the CNRS criticized the government for axing 1600 research jobs in government research institutions in 2003 only to replace many of them with researchers on temporary contracts.

"It is not by replacing permanent researchers with temporary or intermediate ones that France can catch up again. It is only within the framework of a policy of permanent employment, both in the public and private sector, that the temporary employment of young doctoral candidates can be justified," said the CNRS presidents in an [open letter](#) posted on the CNRS Web site.

"The government said it would spend 3% of the GDP [gross domestic product] on research; instead of that, it is spending only 2.2%", Jean Pailhous, the CNRS president, told *The Scientist*.

"Because the money is not enough, the government is trying to cut back on permanent posts for researchers and replace them with temporary posts", he said. "We are not against temporary posts as long as young researchers have a chance of moving into permanent posts. But without this perspective, and in view of the poor pay of young researchers, especially postdocs, get in France, I'm afraid that the job of researcher is going to become less and less attractive in the future."

He noted that there were only six researchers for every 1000 inhabitants in France compared with eight for every 1000 inhabitants in Germany, Japan, and the United States.

Annie Kahn in [Le Monde](#) also noted in the past week (September 29) that France has a long way to go before it achieves its goal of becoming the top biotech spot in Europe.

"With 270 biotech companies employing an average of 30 people, France is currently in third place in Europe behind Germany and the UK, and far behind the US and Canada. In comparison, just the cluster

around Boston [Mass.] consists of 2500 biotechnology companies, employing 30,000 people," she wrote.

She also criticized the government for being unclear about the amount of the research budget that will be spent on biotechnology. [Last year](#), reactions were decidedly mixed when the budget was cut.

References

1. Kittredge C: French move to invigorate biotech *The Scientist*, December 18, 2002. , [<http://www.the-scientist.com/news/20021218/01/>]
2. France Biotech, [<http://www.france-biotech.org>]
3. Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), [<http://www.cnrs.fr>]
4. "Pour un emploi scientifique a la hauteur des enjeux economique, social et culturel de la France" open letter from CNRS, September 11, 2003., [<http://www.cnrs.fr/sgcn/confpres/cpcn0903.pdf>]
5. Le Monde, [<http://www.lemonde.fr>]
6. Merti MM: Mixed reactions to French budget cut *The Scientist*, September 26, 2002., [<http://www.the-scientist.com/news/20020926/08/>]