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## Spain to create 3000 jobs

### National research plan promises \_20 billion and scads of new posts for researchers | By Xavier Bosch

Spain will create 3000 positions for young scientists at public research centers as part of a new national research plan approved last week (November 7) by the government.

The National Research and Development (R&D) Plan 2004–2007 will give a significant boost to nation's science so that R&D spending reaches 1.7% of the economy by the end of 2007, from a current level of 0.96%. To achieve this goal, the government has committed itself to spending \_9.6 billion for 2004 and 2005. The budget for 2003 was \_4 billion.

“Via sustained and affordable annual increases, we aim to spend up to \_20 billion for the full 4-year period,” Gonzalo León, secretary general of science policy at the Ministry of Science told *The Scientist*.

Central to the move is the creation of 3000 new posts for scientists at public research centers. The plan, says León, is to increase the number of scientists up to a ratio of 5 per 1000 workers—similar to the average across the European Union. He says that in all cases, these will be posts for scientists with a PhD.

While many posts will be given to young scientists, some will go to senior researchers with previous solid research experience. León says the ministry will decide the number of posts granted to each category later this month.

The first category is, in fact, a continuation of the prestigious Ramón y Cajal Program, named after the 1906 Spanish Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, to attract top junior scientists back home. This program, in which every applicant must prove he or she has spent at least 18 months

working as a postdoc abroad, has been awarded to 2000 researchers between 2000 to 2003. The program for senior scientists—Severo Ochoa, after the 1959 Spanish Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine—will provide contracts for scientists who got their PhD degree at least 10 years earlier and has been created to lure home talented leading scientists.

León says that the new plan will pay special attention to basic life sciences. Research in life sciences will be structured around three main areas: biomedicine, biotechnology, and fundamental biology. Moreover, a separated “strategic action” to boost genomics, proteomics, and metabolomics will be launched next year.

Pere Puigdoménech, director of Barcelona's Institute of Molecular Biology, said he welcomed the move to continue increasing the number of researchers, but added, “It remains to be seen if and how many scientists will become permanent [employees] after finishing their temporary contracts.”

Nuria Malats, a researcher at the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Medical Research, who has a contract from the Health Ministry research body Instituto de Salud Carlos III, agreed: “Young scientists need to be reassured that they will not become unemployed after ending their contracts.”

Malats, who is coordinating a national network on bladder cancer research, argues that it is essential for the new plan to have a short- or medium-term review of results. Unlike the existing plan, the new strategy indeed contemplates a revision in 2005 to “update and boost the initial objectives.”

Links for this article

Ramón y Cajal Program

<http://www.mcyt.es/cajal/>

Institute of Molecular Biology of Barcelona

<http://www.ibmb.csic.es/index.php?pIdioma=ENG>

Municipal Institute of Medical Research

<http://www.imim.es>

Instituto de Salud Carlos III

<http://www.isciii.es>