

# naturejobs

**JOBS OF  
THE WEEK**

**T**he US National Postdoctoral Association is not pleased with salary trends for postdocs funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) — and, in an unprecedented move for the association, is taking its case to Congress.

In 2000, the National Academy of Sciences recommended that NIH postdoc salaries, through the NIH's postdoc support mechanism known as the National Research Service Award (NRSA), should rise by 10–12% per year until they reach a target salary of US\$45,000 for entry-level postdocs. The NIH agreed with this recommendation and added that once postdoc stipends had reached the target, they should continue to rise to keep pace with inflation and cost-of-living adjustments.

But the promised rises have not materialized. Salaries have risen by as much as 10% in some years since fiscal year 2002, but remained the same in 2007 and 2008. For fiscal year 2009, the US president has requested a 1% rise. The first-year salary for NIH postdocs is currently just \$36,996. The National Postdoctoral Association went to the NIH, but the agency referred it to Congress. Now, the association is encouraging its members to write letters to their Representatives and Senators. The association has a case, especially as so many institutions base their postdoc salaries on the NRSA's stipends.

But increased salaries are not necessarily the best way to improve job satisfaction. Results from a survey carried out by the science society Sigma Xi suggest that workplace satisfaction is linked only weakly to compensation levels. This, according to the society, is in line with the view that postdocs are driven more by future employment prospects than by their current salary. More important for job satisfaction are factors such as training opportunities and the amount of forward planning that new postdocs engage in with their advisers. Postdocs deserve good pay. But perhaps the more rewarding — and possibly tougher — battles would be for better training, better advising and better future job opportunities.

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