

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
MAGAZINE FOR
SCIENTISTS**

At this year's Euroscience Open Forum meeting, held last week in Barcelona, Spain, a couple of the careers sessions saw panellists discuss unconventional career paths in science. The speakers included a patent lawyer, an entrepreneur, a scientist now working at a foundation and another at a government-led science initiative. Despite their divergent career tracks, they had quite a lot in common. Several spoke of the hard choices they faced when they committed to career changes both inside and outside the lab, and others emphasized the need for 'translators' to bridge the divide between fields or vocations.

The increasingly interdisciplinary approach to research has made scientists who can act as a bridge between two fields a hot commodity. But, as the Feature on page 662 reveals, forging a link between vocations can throw up some additional, complicating factors. Scientists who enter the political arena, in whatever capacity, must find ways to be effective science communicators while also realizing that science is only one of many elements that policy-makers need to take into account.

Interdisciplinary funding mechanisms — or in the case of politics and science, fellowships that spark in-depth dialogue between the two spheres — can help. But no funding mechanism can soften the culture shock that can come with joining and assimilating a different discipline.

The issue of hard choices was thrown into stark relief when one audience member asked the inevitable questions about balancing family and work life. Is it possible? How have the panellists accomplished this? Some less conventional science paths are more family friendly, noted one panellist, such as science publishing, which can offer regular hours and a manageable travel schedule. But a few panellists, female in particular, offered a rather bleak point of view. To excel in science, they said, the vast majority will have to choose to put their career before their family for at least some of their career. It's an excruciating choice to make, no matter what the discipline.

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