

Correspondence

French vote for river barriers defies biodiversity strategy

Europe's rivers are disrupted by more than one million artificial barriers, including small dams, weirs and fords (see, for example, B. Bellefi *et al. Nature* 588, 436–441; 2020). There is strong scientific evidence that such obstructions can harm both hydrological and ecological systems, yet the French parliament has voted to leave them in place (see go.nature.com/3ck9mxq).

By limiting the transfer of sediments and movement of organisms, these small barriers create a succession of reaches of warming, stagnant water that threatens freshwater biodiversity (M. R. Fuller *et al. Ann. NY Acad. Sci.* 1335, 31–51; 2015). Dismantling such small barriers is the most effective way to restore river connectivity and is now a worldwide objective (J. E. O'Connor *et al. Science* 348, 496–497; 2015).

The French parliament's decision flies in the face of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. It also has no economic justification. Most small barriers cannot generate hydroelectricity and those that can contribute less than 1% to France's electricity (see go.nature.com/2rphjch).

In our view, the fate of each barrier should be decided by balancing its ecological benefits and socioeconomic costs.

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Academic bullying: mediators help both sides

I have come across many examples of bullying in my academic career and have had to complain about colleagues' treatment of students on occasions (see V. Gewin *Nature* 593, 299–301; 2021). At my institution, we have set up a mediation process for such cases that is designed to help both parties.

Mediators must be impartial. We do not know the individuals or anything about the situation until we start the process. The individuals involved take the lead and talk frankly about how the other's actions have affected them. This is often a surprise to the other party. Airing the issues is helpful, although it can be painful for the accused. We aim for an agreement between them, which they draw up themselves, on how they should interact in future.

However challenging an environment, there is no excuse for bullying. Those who feel bullied should be encouraged to seek mediation before their health is affected or they decide they have no choice but to leave their institution.

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Boost US federal funding for international trainees

Almost half of all US graduate and postdoctoral trainees in science and engineering hold temporary visas (see go.nature.com/3fjj8qw). However, this group is being disenfranchised by archaic funding structures, immigration policies, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing problems of re-entering the country. We urge the US government to send a timely signal of openness to the international scientific community by increasing its efforts to recruit, fund and retain international trainees.

Almost all federal funding programmes are currently available only to US citizens and residents. These include key training grants such as the National Institutes of Health's F30/F31/F32, and the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program. Alternative funding is waning: for example, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's International Student Research Fellowships programme made its final awards in 2016.

More than one-third of the Nobel prizes awarded to people in the United States have been won by immigrants. And immigrants file the majority of patents awarded to top US universities.

A proposed increase in science investment by the administration of President Joe Biden (*Nature* 592, 498–499; 2021) must help in ensuring that this indispensable part of the research workforce is not forgotten.

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COVID: treatment trials are still urgent

It is obviously difficult to initiate and rapidly enrol people in prospective double-blinded randomized clinical trials of treatments during a rapidly evolving pandemic (see *Nature* 593, 182–185; 2021) – particularly when extremely effective vaccines are available. But we still need therapeutics. Vaccinations do not give immediate or 100% protection and could be undermined by resistant strains.

The United States is fast losing treatment and control groups as more and more of the population are vaccinated. But not all countries are so fortunate. In India, where the disease is still exploding, treatments could save countless lives.

Worldwide, this is a fundamental scientific and social issue. We must find ways to rapidly set up rigorous prospective clinical trials in places where the vaccine could arrive too late – and to run such trials in health-care systems that are already pushed to the brink.

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