Correspondence

Postdoc unions can help secure a brighter future

Postdoctoral researchers bring billions of dollars to universities, yet almost 95% of those who responded to a US survey reported that low pay affects their personal and professional lives (*Nature* https://doi.org/j4wp; 2023). As a founding member and now president of UAW Local 5810, a union of almost 12,000 postdocs and academic researchers at the University of California, I have learnt at first hand that forming unions is the most effective way to win improvements in postdoc pay, benefits and working conditions.

Proof of this collective power is evident from the pay rises won by postdocs in our most recent contract negotiations, in 2022. After four weeks on the picket lines, postdocs will see their starting salary reach US$71,490 by 2026 (a 31% increase) and will receive a 7.2% annual bump to account for increases in the cost of living and to reward their experience. The union also secured better protection against bullying and harassment, longer appointments, more paid parental leave and childcare subsidies, and new rights for international scholars.

The return on this extra investment by universities and the federal government will be a more sustainable, productive and inclusive career path for early-career researchers.

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NIH funding: hone efforts to tackle structural racism

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) uses a computerized process known as Research, Condition and Disease Categorization (RCDC) to report annual estimates of the number of projects funded in each of its 300 or so research categories. However, there is currently no effective category for studies on adverse effects of structural racism on people's health (go.nature.com/3khcrqa).

Structural racism arises from discrimination experienced in mutually reinforcing systems such as those that provide health care, housing, education and employment. In 2021, the NIH established the UNITE initiative to prioritize funding for investigating the basis of structural racism and developing effective interventions (go.nature.com/42h74eu).

In our view, the RCDC's existing categories of 'health disparities', 'minority health' and 'social determinants of health' are too broad to track the impact of this initiative effectively. Whereas almost 13,000 projects were listed in the health disparities category in 2021 (go.nature.com/3lwzxsc), for example, the UNITE progress report included just 24 on structural racism that were funded over the same period (go.nature.com/3jtxyh2).

A more specific RCDC category designated 'structural racism' would enable proper evaluation of the UNITE initiative's success.

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See go.nature.com/4ojenhb

A boost for south–south collaboration

A model training initiative to offset the shortage of practical laboratory skills among young scientists from South and Central America could be used to help strengthen scientific capacity in the global south. This training was provided by a summer school last month at the Higher University of San Andrés in Bolivia, set up by members of the Young Affiliates Network of the World Academy of Sciences (see go.nature.com/3zxnaxg).

This network consists of around 400 young scientists from more than 80 developing countries (https://tyan.twas.org), of whom 100 attended the school's first courses. The five instructors — I was one — came from Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica and Argentina, and passed on skills they had themselves acquired in top international labs.

We provided hands-on training in key areas of the chemical and biological sciences. For example, participants learnt about spectroscopy for studying biological molecules, the potential of using model organisms in research on developmental biology, and genetic analysis to investigate plant reproduction. They also explored photochemical reactions and learnt how to set up statistically rigorous assays of biochemical activity.

Our south–south initiative equipped trainees with the tools to further their research. Now more investment in research is needed so that they can apply these tools effectively.

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eLife: community support for a new publishing model

Your report on the reception of the open-access journal *eLife*'s new 'no-reject' publishing model by its stakeholders is incomplete (see *Nature* **615**, 780–781; 2023). It did not mention a private letter from *eLife*'s influential Early-Career Advisory Group, which expressed strong community support for the model.

This letter, organized in November 2022, had 153 signatories, including 74 senior or reviewing editors from 34 countries. It was sent to the journal's board of directors in response to letters of opposition the board had received from a much smaller group of *eLife* editors. The existence of this supportive letter was regrettably not conveyed to your reporter. This omission would not have occurred had early-career representatives been included as a matter of protocol in consultations with journalists.

eLife's new model directly addresses inequities and inefficiencies in the publishing system and accords with global movements by research funders and institutions to reform research assessment (see https://sfdora.org; https://coara.eu). The disgruntled *eLife* editors had opportunities to make their views known during the model's design phase. We fear that objections to the no-reject model could mask concerns about a changing publishing landscape among the small minority of scientists that benefited most from an inequitable system.

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The authors declare competing interests; see go.nature.com/417xudr