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Upgrade the science and technology policy system the US already has

We disagree that the United States needs a cabinet-level Department of Technology and Science Policy (H. Varmus and E. Zerhouni *Nature* **600**, 30–32; 2021). Instead, it should strengthen the existing — and highly effective — institution of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).

The department the authors are proposing could become a high-profile target for cancellation by critics of science and technology policy, whereas the OSTP is a low-profile, nimble and successful enterprise. As assistants to the president, its directors have better access than most cabinet members. They have enjoyed the independence to address complex challenges such as pandemics and climate change.

To strengthen the OSTP, we recommend markedly increasing its resources and those of entities that support its mission (the US Science and Technology Policy Institute in Washington DC, for example). Seconding employees from other government agencies to work at the OSTP might make sense, but asking universities and corporations to pay the salaries of experts they loan out is not healthy.

The policy-analysis capabilities of research agencies must be expanded, and greater use should be made of ad hoc and interagency committees that address issues of science and technology policy under OSTP direction.

Valerie J. Karplus, **M. Granger Morgan** Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.
vkarplus@andrew.cmu.edu

Early-career researchers help Wellcome funding panel

We are among the first early-career researchers who were recruited by Wellcome, one of the world's biggest bioscience funding bodies, to sit on a grant panel this year. We provided a voice that represented trainees in the clinical academic community. In our view, this improved the programme experience and raised standards. We urge other funders to follow Wellcome's lead in helping to transform research culture.

We helped to select the institutions that would benefit from Wellcome's PhD Programmes for Health Professionals. We pre-scored applications for fundability and feasibility; our input was ranked equally with that of ten senior international researchers on the panel. We learnt to think on our feet, home in on the meat of a proposal and distil applications' strengths and weaknesses. We then led online interviews, accompanied by two senior reviewers. When we disagreed with panel members, we were encouraged to speak our minds.

As vanguard recruits for Wellcome's bold initiative, we learnt that there are many routes to academic leadership. We would encourage other early-career researchers to jump at similar opportunities.

Rachel V. Guest University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK.
rguest@ed.ac.uk

Laura Benjamin University College London, UK.

Daniel R. Morales University of Dundee, Dundee, UK.

Half measures in One Health fail people and the environment

We applaud this month's joint statement on a shared definition of One Health from the United Nations Environment Programme and the Tripartite collaboration of agencies (see go.nature.com/3dnnpb5). It aims for integrated recognition of the interdependence of human, animal and environmental health. Too many international, regional and national bodies still persist in compartmentalizing their responses to public-health crises in ways that run counter to the One Health goal.

Under the new definition, it is no longer acceptable to practise 'one half' of One Health — that is, to omit environmental considerations when balancing and optimizing human, animal and plant health. Encroachment of human activity into wildlife habitats contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Preserving biodiversity and ecosystems is key to limiting zoonotic disease — and is already a condition of sustainable forestry and approval of genetically modified crops. Other factors must also be taken into account, including greenhouse-gas emissions from intensive livestock farming, and depletion of fresh water for crops.

According to the statement, the new approach is best achieved by mobilizing "multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together".

Andrew Peters Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia.
apeters@csu.edu.au

Carlos das Neves Norwegian Veterinary Institute, Oslo, Norway.

Secret of Hellenic Foundation's success? Its staff

The Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) was established five years ago to fund the best research proposals from Greek universities and research centres (*Nature* **535**, 333; 2016). In its relatively short existence, its contribution to advancing blue-skies research in Greece has been remarkable — particularly given the country's persistent economic challenges and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of our society.

The HFRI has funded an impressive 2,000 published works since its first call for proposals, in December 2017. As its director until this year, I consider that the secret of the foundation's present and future success lies with its staff. Most are former researchers who are now dedicated to optimizing Greek research — a crucial contribution in these difficult times.

The Greek academic community firmly believes that the financial support necessary for the HFRI to thrive in the years to come will be fully justified (see *Nature* **572**, 153; 2019).

Nektarios K. Nasikas Hellenic Army Academy, Attica, Greece.
nasikas@sse.gr

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