

## Brain drain or brain circulation?

Recent developments in the global scientific pool have added a new dimension to the brain drain debate. With 30,000 Chinese PhDs [returning to Beijing](#) last year alone and European biological scientists [relocating to Brazil](#), is brain drain being replaced by brain circulation?

Science has historically offered a path to the West for Highly Skilled Migration (HSM), sparking the brain drain phenomenon. But there are those who argue that brain drain is actually beginning to produce [net gain](#) in source countries. [India and China](#) have been identified as key beneficiaries of HSM with domestic investment in education, financial relationships with migrants, and the sharing of ideas.

These are proving to be strong pull factors for highly skilled migrants to return to their source. It's no longer only retirees returning home, but young talent as well, to attractive working environments in what *The Economist* has called ["circular migration"](#).

On the other hand, evidence suggests that within traditional centres of innovation (US and Europe), science is under threat from polarised media coverage of issues (e.g. [GM foods](#)); extremist [religion](#), military prioritisation of research, and ethically challenging issues like stem cell research for which there is no consensual moral or international regulatory framework.

The result: the talent pool, particularly scientists, pushed to a wider range of countries in search of funding and freedom.

What does this mean for the future of innovation?

Developments like multinationals opening research centres in China and the UK seeking Brazilian support for cloning may signal the beginning of [cosmopolitan innovation](#) - international collaboration and exchange encouraging regions to find specialist niches for research with global networks.

Or countries may seek to hoard talent and ideas to develop [techno-nationalism](#), competing on prestigious projects like space and defence. Already there are signs that innovation is becoming an increasingly important and divisive force in international relations - what Harvard Professor Calestous Juma has called [biodiplomacy](#).

These changes undoubtedly affect both source and centre – the developing world is no longer just a font of expertise and may become a true competitor and global power in the talent network. The extent to which it can boost the power of the developing world is what will prove to be crucial.

This article is based on ["Brain circulation"](#) - Issue 298 in the UK Government's Sigma Scan written by Outsights-Ipsos MORI.