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## Rental disagreements

Assuming that postdoc stipends are relatively equal (or, at least, equally low), housing allowances or rent subsidies can make a huge difference to a postdoc's quality of life — especially if they're doing their fellowship in an expensive urban area (see *Nature* **421**, 766–767; 2003). So discussions of proposals in two corners of the world to scale back or even eliminate housing subsidies is provoking concern among postdocs and faculty members alike.

At New York's Rockefeller University, the administration is considering plans to slowly reduce the rent subsidy it pays out until the grant is eliminated in 2007, and to subject postdocs living in university housing to an annual rent increase of up to 3%. These moves would, in effect, put the wages of Rockefeller's postdocs below the national average. Already, more than a third of its postdocs have complained to their representatives about the plans. Meanwhile, across the globe in Singapore, the government is reviewing the current policy of subsidizing postdoc housing by as much as 90% because rents have slipped during the recent recession.

One can be sympathetic, to a certain extent, to the economic pressures driving these deliberations. The stock market is down, deficits are up and money is tight. But scaling back subsidies now could have repercussions later. Rockefeller should still be able to attract postdocs, but it could find itself losing the cream of the crop to rival institutions. And the mere talk of reducing funds in Singapore might make it harder to attract world-class fellows to the island, at a time when the country is stepping up its recruiting efforts to match its infrastructure investments.

Should other institutions follow these leads, then the consequences for postdocs would be dire. But that is unlikely in a market that seeks the best talent — more likely, these few cuts will open the way to a more mixed postdoc pay system.

### Paul Smaglik *Naturejobs* editor



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