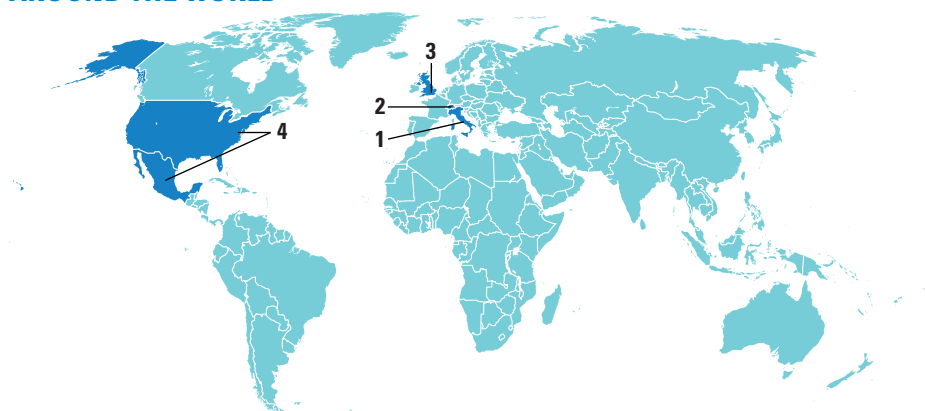


## AROUND THE WORLD



## Italy 1

**All in the Academic Family**

Nepotism is rampant in Italian academia—and medicine and industrial engineering are among the most inbred disciplines, according to a statistical study published 4 August in *PLoS ONE*.

Study author Stefano Allesina, an Italian researcher in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago in Illinois, used a public database of Italian researchers to ground-truth abundant anecdotes of nepotism in Italian academia.

The database listed the first and last names of about 61,340 tenured professors along with their institutions, departments, and disciplines. Allesina compared the actual number of last names in the database with the number of last names likely to crop up in a particular discipline by chance.

He found “a severe paucity of names,” primarily in engineering, law, medicine, geography, and pedagogy. Linguistics, demography, and psychology had the lowest probability of nepotism. Allesina notes that his analysis is also an underestimate, because it does not take into account cases in which female professors hire close male relatives, as Italian academic women typically keep their maiden names.

<http://scim.ag/Italynepotism>

## Geneva 2

**Particle Physics Lab Launches Arts Board**

The European particle physics laboratory, CERN, near Geneva, Switzerland, has formed a five-member Cultural Board for the Arts to evaluate proposals from artists interested in working with or at CERN.

The lab already receives more artistic

proposals than it can handle, says Michael Doser, a physicist at CERN and the lone scientist on the board. “Some of these are great and some of them are not so great, and it will be really helpful to have a board that can pick the best ones.” Each year one or two projects will receive a letter from the board expressing CERN’s interest; the artists must scrape up their own funding.

The board will also weigh in on architectural issues at the lab and will help



CERN’s “Cosmic Song” is a work of art and a cosmic ray detector.

select artists in residence for a program that CERN will soon start. Other board members include the directors of Switzerland’s Kunsthalle Zurich museum and France’s Lyon opera house.

## London 3

**U.K. Needs to Stop ‘Muddling’ on Gene Patents, Says Report**

In a report on intellectual property and DNA diagnostics, the Human Genetics Commission, an independent group that advises the U.K. government, urged health and research institutions to “stop muddling” on gene patent laws and develop a coherent policy—and soon. The report found that doctors and researchers in U.K. public institutions have mostly ignored biotech companies’ patents

on numerous genetic tests, often developing their own “homebrew” tests to avoid paying royalties. It might be only a matter of time, said policy expert Michael Hopkins of the University of Sussex, before a company tries suing the U.K. National Health Service for years of back royalties. At the report’s launch, however, others defended the evasion of gene patents: Gail Norbury, governance director of genetics laboratories at Guy’s Hospital in London, called them “unacceptable, unenforceable, and detrimental.”

<http://scim.ag/UKgenepatents>

## Mexico City and Washington, D.C. 4

**FDA Approves First Scorpion Antivenom**

Campers in scorpion country can sleep a little easier. A new drug this week became the first scorpion venom treatment to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The drug, called Anascorp, was developed by researchers at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City and has proven to be enormously effective in treating scorpion stings in clinical trials conducted in the United States since 2004. According to FDA, about 8000 people in Arizona are stung by scorpions each year; in Mexico, the number is nearer 250,000. Stings from the most deadly species, if left untreated, can cause convulsions and even death.

The clinical study, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 2009, found that Anascorp quickly reversed the effects of scorpion stings in young children, who are especially susceptible to breathing difficulties caused by the scorpion’s paralyzing neurotoxin.



## NOTED

>As part of the continuing financial fallout from the Fukushima disaster, on 3 August the U.K. Nuclear Decommissioning Authority announced the closure of the 15-year-old **nuclear reprocessing plant in Sellafield**. The plant, which recycled used plutonium and uranium into mixed oxide fuel, could no longer afford to operate without the demand for MOX fuel from Japan, its largest customer.