

# Letters: Coming and going

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Once again it seems that the Science and Engineering Policy Studies Unit (SEPSU) statistical survey on the brain drain has served only to muddy the waters.

Andy Coghlan concludes that 'Roughly equal numbers of researchers left the country and arrived between 1984 and 1992' (This Week, 20 November 1993), Jon Turney claims that 'The latest results . . . appear to indicate a net inflow' (Forum, 11 December 1993) and William Waldegrave draws comfort from his view that 'The study shows that the UK is benefiting from a two-way flow of high-quality scientists and engineers' (This Week, 20 November 1993).

I have just received my own copy of the 1993 report, however, and the figures tell me a somewhat different story:

a) Britons entering: 144 b) Foreigners entering: 318 c) Britons leaving: 447 d) Foreigners leaving : ?

Yes, that's right, the 75-page report remains silent on the number of foreign scientists leaving Britain, without which any conclusion about a 'net inflow' is a complete non sequitur.

Exactly the same omission appeared in the 1987 SEPSU survey, allowing similar conclusions to be drawn: 'The data show that there is a net inflow to Britain, from, for example, India and the Middle East' (Alan Smithers , Letters, 25 January 1992); '. . . a general survey in 1987 found almost as many researchers arriving in Britain as leaving' (Forum, 11 December 1993).

I can well understand why government ministers might wish to be economical with the truth by adding (a) to (b) and subtracting only (c), but it beats me why British scientists should want to go along with the deception.

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