**One of the objectives of the IAEA is the provision of technical assistance to its Member States to carry out their peaceful nuclear activities more efficiently and safely. This involves looking for and supplying experts, equipment and fellowships. Since 1958 the Agency has provided the services of more than 1800 experts valued at $11.5 million, 4300 fellowships valued at $14.3 million, and equipment worth $10.8 million.**

**The efficiency of the programme can only be increased by a more prompt consideration of proposals forwarded by the Agency, and the continuing co-operation from national Governments and private institutions.**

**In the following two articles we have highlighted some of the day-to-day problems which arise in trying to fulfil the technical assistance requirements of Member States.**

# Recruiting Experts for Technical Assistance Programme

**The IAEA recruits an average of 200 experts a year to implement its Regular Technical Assistance Programme. These projects are financed by voluntary contributions from Member States, and by the United Nations Development Programme for those projects for which the IAEA is the executing agency.**

In theory, to find these experts the Agency relies on its contacts round the world: Atomic Energy Commissions, research institutions and laboratories, universities and national sources of recruitment for multi-lateral co-operation, contained in a mailing list of about 700 names and addresses. These contacts receive job descriptions as soon as they are published, as well as a monthly "status of recruitment" report indicating the posts still to be filled.

In fact, however, this recruitment method does not provide enough candidates to implement the programme at a reasonable pace. Only 20% of the posts are filled by candidates nominated by Governments as a result of the world-wide distribution of job descriptions. A further 20% of the specialists required are aware of the vacancies as a by-product of this distribution or through advertisements in the IAEA Bulletin, but they usually apply too late to be considered.

In very few instances, because of previous scientific contacts, previous bi-lateral agreements, or previous knowledge of scientists by counterparts, the recipient countries indicate, when submitting a request, the names of specialists on whom they would like to rely for advice and assistance, or the names of institutions with which they are already associated and which, in their opinion, would be able to provide the expertise needed. This represents only 10% of the cases.

Information provided by the technical officers of the Agency who back-stop the projects in their fields of specialization, linked to the use of an active recruitment roster (consisting of about 2,000 names) does, in fact, represent the only reliable way of locating candidates.

It is quite usual to contact an average of 8 to 10 potential candidates in order to determine their interest and availability for vacant posts, before being able to retain one or two names for submission to the requesting Government. However, there are certain cases where it is necessary to approach more than 20 candidates and in some rare cases, even after contacting 40 to 50 candidates a positive result has not been achieved.

There is no need to point out that this is a time-consuming operation, as frequently the scientists or institutions contacted do not answer the Agency's letters immediately, either positively or negatively, which calls for a follow-up system to send reminder letters after approximately six weeks in order to determine if further recruitment action is necessary.

This calls, therefore, for very positive action to locate, on a day-to-day basis, suitable candidates to enable the Agency to fulfil its commitments. This means directly approaching specialists or specific sources of recruitment to urge them to co-operate either by applying for specific posts or by recommending other scientists to apply.

The location of suitable candidates represents only the first phase of the operation.

The second phase consists of the clearance of the candidatures by the Governments concerned. For this purpose, curricula vitae of the candidates are usually sent to the Resident Representative of the UNDP in the recipient countries, to be forwarded through the appropriate office in various Ministries or Atomic Energy Commissions, to the scientific counterparts concerned. Then the decision taken is conveyed back through the same channels before the UNDP office is notified. Consequently it takes quite some time before the Technical Assistance Department is informed of the acceptance or refusal of the candidate; in half of the cases this takes 2 or 3 months, and 4 to 6 months or longer for the other half.

Reminders also have to be sent periodically to the relevant UNDP office.

In the case of a negative answer, the Agency has to start from scratch as described above. In the case of a positive answer, it initiates th third phase of the recruitment operation, which is twofold:

On the one hand, determination of a suitable date for commencement of duty, which requires the exchange of an average of 15 letters and cables between the Agency, the candidate and the counterparts, as the period of availability of the specialist (university vacation, release from the laboratory or research centre) does not always correspond to the original timing requested by the counterpart. Very often it is necessary to rephase the mission or to split a mission of long duration into two or three parts.

A second factor complicating the timing of the mission is linked, in most cases, to the provision and delivery of another major component in the technical assistance programme, i.e. the equipment. In spite of daily co-ordination there are often delays in the manufacture of the equipment as well as in its delivery; sometimes damage is caused during shipment, as the instruments are usually very delicate.

A further important step is the negotiations between the Agency and the candidate with regard to his contract and his release from his employer or Government. Without going into too many details, each case has, in fact, to be accurately treated on an individual basis, taking into account internal co-ordination as well as co-ordination with the authorities in the recipient countries before, finally, an appointed expert reports to IAEA Headquarters for briefing.

These unavoidable delays cause many problems. As can be imagined, such a lengthy and complex procedure sometimes results in the loss of candidates. Then there are times when, for one or another reason, the project is postponed or cancelled at the last moment after commitments have already been made to the candidates.

Statistics show that it takes an average of one year to fill a post, though there are some difficult cases when 2 or 3 years have not been sufficient.

Usually, and in spite of the difficulties mentioned above, it can be said that posts of short duration (less than 3 months) do not present insurmountable difficulties to fill – and this represents 50% of the Agency's projects. It is not so easy to find candidates for assignments of a longer duration but still under one year – 35% of the total projects. With regard to assignments of one year or more – 15% or the projects – the task becomes very difficult.

The scientists which the Agency wishes to recruit are usually very well-known in their fields, and fully employed; they can often afford to make themselves available for short-term missions but their employers do not encourage them to leave for a longer period except in the case of sabbatical leave.

Further, it must be because of a particular interest in the subject that the experts willingly agree to leave their homes and families even for a limited period. Generally candidates are reluctant to have their names put forward when faced with the problem of moving with their families, considering the problem of children's education (in the case of an assignment of one year or more) and the difficulties of obtaining a release from their employers for that period.

In a few cases the Agency is making use of its own staff to implement some technical assistance projects for a very short duration, but it can be seen it has to rely almost entirely on the co-operation and help of its Member States and their scientists to fulfil its technical assistance commitments. This co-operation and help exists to a certain extent, but efforts must continue to be made by all concerned if the IAEA is to implement its programmes efficiently.