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Mobility funding catches up to Spanish researchers abroad

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Astronomer Diego de la Fuente's bet on Spanish science funding has paid off. Last week *Nature* reported that the graduate student from the National Aerospace Technical Institute in Madrid, along with many other provisional winners of mobility grants, was using his own money to fund his research abroad while he waited to hear whether or not Spain's Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness would come through with the grants.

In previous years final decisions on this class of grant were announced in late December, but for the past two and a half months researchers have received little information about the funding from the ministry. Today the Ministry put de la Fuente and about 1,200 other young researchers at ease by approving all the provisional grants (PDF). "It makes me very happy," de la Fuente says, "I think now I'll be able to concentrate better on my work."



The announcement arrives one day before a 15 March deadline enshrined in the original law governing this type of funding. That is the day which someone from the ministry told at least two inquiring students to expect a decision. However, last week the ministry told *Nature* that a more recent law allowed them to wait until mid-June of 2012 to decide. Spain's ruling party is delaying its 2012 budget announcement, sure to be painful, until after regional elections later this month, the Financial Times reported today.

Faced with that uncertainty, De la Fuente had told his supervisor Francisco Najarro in Madrid that until he heard from the ministry, he could only commit to the first of two planned work trips abroad. Now that he can count on the funding, he says, he'll go ahead with the second trip, to Germany.

"He took a big risk in coming here," says de la Fuente's American host, Donald F. Figer at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. While Figer and Najarro have collaborated for years, this is the first time they have exchanged a student for such a long time. Figer says, "there are beneficial aspects to being here this long...[such as] a deeper connection when the student goes back to Spain".

Figer says that "in the future we do want to take more students from Spain." But De la Fuente says that if he applies for the same grant in the future, he'll make sure to plan his travel for later in the year: "I don't want to go through this again."