

Nobel laureate hopes to snare a million expat Aussie brains in the web

London: If there has to be a brain drain of Australians to other countries you might as well pick their brains while they are over there.

This is the philosophy behind ExpatriateConnect, a new website database aimed at enlisting some of the nearly one million Australians overseas.

The database, opened officially in London this week by the Australian Nobel laureate and former expatriate Peter Doherty, was developed by expatriate organisations seeking to move beyond the "bring them home" approach.

Professor Doherty, who lived and worked in the US for more than a decade before returning

to Melbourne in 2002, said it was foolish to tackle the brain drain by offering incentives to return.

"Often, there's just no way of making it financially attractive for people to return," he said.

"And once you've lived in a country and your kids have gone to high school there and maybe university, then it's extremely

unlikely you'll move back. You can bring some people home, but the opportunities are always limited, and what's happened in the past is that people came home and took jobs that were beneath them."

Professor Doherty said the internet offered a new and expanding opportunity to keep

track of and use the expertise of Australians abroad.

"We've got almost a million expats living outside Australia. Even if we could get 10 per cent of them, it would create enormous possibilities."

The website, which is at www.ExpatriateConnect.com, asks Australians to list their skills

and location, for potential use by Australian researchers, professionals and small businesses looking for advice about expanding into a foreign country.

It says it will respect privacy and will not post names and addresses, or details of the listed expatriates' businesses.

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