Museums

Expenditure cut to the bone

As EVERY London schoolchild knows, dinosaurs, whales and even computer games are to be sampled for free at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. But if BM(NH) — the British Museum (Natural History), which comprises the Natural History Museum, the Geological Museum also in South Kensington and the Zoological Museum in Tring — cannot gain considerably more funds from government or by patronage, free admission to its museums is likely to be abolished, scientific services charged for and scientific staff reduced by at least 10 per cent. Such is the conclusion of BM(NH)'s first corporate plan, announced this week.

In formulating its corporate plan, BM(NH) has estimated that the gap between its predicted expenditure and income is likely to rise from £1.2 million next year to £2.7 million by the end of the decade. Cutting running expenses and operating a policy of not replacing all retiring staff will meet a quarter of this. By spending more on marketing, a net gain is forecast in income from publications, catering and sponsorship. And a little further income will come from introducing charges for scientific advice, loans and the use of the museum's collections. Even so, there remains a considerable gap which will need to be met by staff cuts, admission charges or both.

In one budget-balancing forecast, in which admission charges are introduced in 1987–88 and yield £1.6 million by 1990–91, the staff of the museum are reduced by 35 to 805 in the same period, with the brunt of the cuts falling on the scientific staff. They numbered 361 in 1983–84, will be 335 this year and are forecast to be 300 in 1990–91." The redundancy of expert staff ... will be implemented only if totally unavoidable", states the plan.

Asked why it should be the scientific staff that suffer disproportionately, R. Saunders, secretary of BM(NH), said that is is only the exhibition side of the museum that can expect to attract sponsorship so its staff must be maintained. Only the government and its agencies can maintain the level of scientific staff.

If admission charges are introduced, it is not clear whether they will be compulsory or voluntary, as at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The latter is already finding a considerable decrease in visitors despite the non-compulsory charges; how London's schoolchildren and the Natural History Museum will come to terms with charges and their effects is unclear.

Peter Newmark

US universities

New medical school planned

Washington

THE Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) and Yale School of Medicine last week announced plans to build a joint centre for molecular medicine worth at least $25 million on the medical school's campus. The facility may provide a model for future medical schools by crossing departmental boundaries, which many researchers find increasingly cumbersome and artificial. Its select research contingent may also have to grapple with the jealously and elitism that have plagued some of Hughes's 22 academic collaborations in the past. But such shadows are not dimming the expectations of the centre's planners, or of the few investigators who have already won places in the facility in 1989, when its doors will be opened.

The partnership venture is an extension of a relationship with Hughes that Yale has enjoyed since 1977, and follows close on the heels of the $5,000 million sale of Hughes Aircraft Company that made HHMI the wealthiest philanthropy in the United States (*Nature* **315**, 531; 1985).

Construction of the 110,000-sq. ft building will commence within 17 months with $15 million from Hughes and with Yale making up the difference. Each of the centre's four floors will be devoted to a particular programme of study and three have already been chosen. Hughes will underwrite the molecular neurosciences and molecular genetics divisions, while Yale will manage a molecular oncology programme and the fourth programme, for which neurobiology, immunology and receptor biology are among the main contenders.

The centre will also house four or five "core facility" laboratories that will provide services such as protein sequencing, peptide and oligonucleiotide synthesis and monoclonal antibody production for the centre staff and all the medical school's laboratories.

Joint Yale/HHMI search committees will recruit between 25 and 30 investigators to fill the facility. Yale hopes the centre will draw expertise in areas such as oncology in which its own faculty is a little lean. But some Yale researchers are concerned that collaboration might rank among the "monopolies of excellence" which have been accused of draining talent and recognition from less conspicuous, but equally deserving, universities. And while the scenario of Hughes investigators and Yale faculty working side by side seems at first idyllic, some anticipate personal friction of the kind that frequently attends cooperation between more and less generously endowed teams. The geneticists and neuroscientists working on Hughes floors will be afforded the luxury of long-term goals and spending flexibility, while Yale researchers will continue to toil in traditional competition for funds.

Finally, the notion of interdisciplinary programmes, however appealing, may create havoc in the planning stages. What Dean Leon Rosenberg calls "a melting pot of faculty" could turn into a pressure cooker if departmental loyalties prove not so superfluous.

None of these reservations, however, are likely to prompt rejection letters from those invited to join the centre's group. For biomedical research, says one Yale professor, the bottom line on the centre for molecular medicine is "wonderful".

Karen Wright

Biotechnology

Will Pharmacia

Washington

SURPRISING revelations about Refaat El-Sayed, president of Swedish biotechnology company Fermenta AB, have slashed the company's share prices and put on ice its plans to buy into two pharmaceutical concerns. The man who increased Fermenta's earnings by SKr 1,500 million in three years resigned last week following his confession on 13 February to having lied about his academic credentials. Then El-Sayed capped the controversy with a disclosure that he had bought 4 million Fermenta shares shortly before releasing 1985 profit and loss figures, a move that may violate laws set down by the Stockholm stock exchange.

El-Sayed claims he bought the shares in connection with a tentative agreement with Volvo announced early in January, by which Fermenta would acquire the Swedish conglomerate Sonessons and Volvo's 40 per cent stake in Pharmacia, the second largest pharmaceuticals company in Sweden.

A tender offer was set stipulating a Fermenta share price of SKr 220. Shares soared over SKr 300 after the announcement, but plunged to about SKr 150 when El-Sayed's credibility was called into question. Now Volvo and Fermenta are renegotiating the deal; meanwhile, Volvo is denying any involvement in El-Sayed's purchase.

Pharmacia, the coveted object of the transaction, is preserving a "business as usual" attitude until a bargain is finally struck — or dissolved — between the two companies. Although Pharmacia will be listed independently on the Stockholm stock exchange regardless of the outcome of the negotiations, analysts say its executives were facing the acquisition with some