

French research faces shake-up in reform plans

The board of France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) formally approved controversial reforms (see *Nature* 453, 573; 2008) on 27 November that would split the agency into nine semi-autonomous institutes, with a recommendation for a tenth in computing. The meeting required police protection from protesting researchers.

A draft of government proposals for a reform of French life sciences was also revealed last week by the newspaper *Libération* (see <http://tinyurl.com/6ov4e8>). It proposes the creation within two years of an overarching research council — the National Institute of Life Sciences — which would coordinate policy at the national biomedical agency INSERM, and health-related life sciences within the CNRS and other research agencies.

The report also suggests regrouping all life sciences within a single research agency, along the lines of a recent recommendation made by an invited foreign panel led by Elias Zerhouni, former head of the US National Institutes of Health.

Mars mission delayed by concerns over reliability

The launch of the Mars Science Laboratory, a one-tonne rover, has been delayed from October 2009 until late 2011.

NASA officials were concerned by the reliability of the motor units that drive both the rover's wheels and the joints of its robotic arm. The mission to look for signs of past life on Mars was slated to cost \$1.6 billion when it was authorized in 2006, but now it is predicted to need between \$2.2 billion and \$2.3 billion to enable it to run until 2014. NASA expects to have to delay other missions to help cover the cost.

The increasing expense of Mars exploration prompted Ed Weiler, NASA's associate administrator for science, to

Hadron collider faces long wait for repairs

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the world's most powerful particle accelerator, will not restart its beams before July 2009, according to a post-mortem report on an accident that shut it down on 19 September.

Repairs to the machine, located at CERN, the European particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland, will cost up to 35 million Swiss francs (US\$29 million) and will require 53 magnets to be removed from the tunnel for inspection and repair.

The accident, which happened just nine days after the collider circulated its first beams, sent thousands of amps of electricity coursing through the machine's refrigeration system, creating a hole (main picture) that released several tonnes of helium coolant, leading to further damage (inset). Technicians will install new diagnostics and additional safety systems around the machine's 27-kilometre ring to prevent a similar blowout happening.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/4zp97a>



CERN

announce that the agency will partner with the European Space Agency on future major missions.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/57tahj>

Obama makes green choice for commerce department

US president-elect Barack Obama selected New Mexico governor Bill Richardson to head the commerce department on 3 December. The appointment highlights the importance of green jobs, energy and climate-change science within the agency.

The commerce department oversees economic policy as well as climate science, satellite operations and ocean fisheries regulation at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), with a budget of \$3.9-billion for fiscal year 2008. The National Institute of Standards and Technology also comes under the jurisdiction of the department.

Richardson was elected governor in 2002, and has made a broad push for the development of clean energy in New Mexico.

UK scientists promised £250 million for training

The UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is set to spend £250 million (US\$370 million) on creating 44 centres to train 2,000 PhD students over the next five years. Expanding a small pilot scheme, the

interdisciplinary centres for doctoral training will accept their first batch of students next October. Spread across 22 UK universities, they will focus on areas including climate change, sustainable energy, health-care technologies and nanotechnology. Seventeen of them will have strong ties to business: students will spend up to 75% of their time training with industrial partners.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/6xmedw>

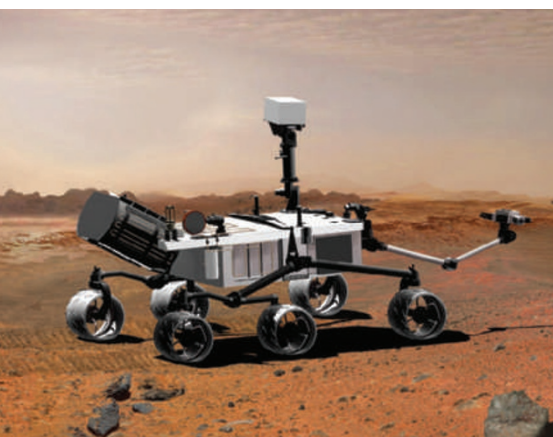
Institutions to disclose more commercial ties

An eminent US academic medical centre last week began publicly disclosing the financial interests of its 1,800 doctors and scientists. The website of the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio will list the collaborations with industry of every staff physician and scientist, including consulting relationships that pay \$5,000 or more per year.

The medical school and health system of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia plans to launch a similar disclosure system in spring 2009.

Other medical institutions are under growing pressure to follow suit. Senator Charles Grassley (Republican, Iowa) is aggressively investigating under-reporting of financial relationships by scientists funded by the National Institutes of Health. He has also introduced legislation that would oblige drug and device makers to make public all physician payments of \$500 or more in cash or kind.

NASA/JPL-CALTECH



Unreliable? The Mars Science Laboratory.