STAMP OUT VIRUS TO BEAT BRAIN CANCER

New strategy could help beat tenacious brain tumours.

www.nature.com/news

France's research agency splits up

France's CNRS, the largest fundamental science agency in Europe, is to be reorganized into six quasi-autonomous national institutes by the end of the year. In essence, the move amounts to a dismantling of the CNRS, commentators say, replacing it with a UK-style system, which is organized by major discipline.

The current CNRS-controlled departments will be hived off into a federation of six new semi-autonomous national institutes for mathematics, physics, chemistry, engineering sciences, humanities and social sciences, and ecology and biodiversity. These will be similar in nature to its two existing institutes, the National Institute of Nuclear and Particle

Physics and the National Institute of Earth Sciences and Astronomy.

Life sciences — which currently accounts for around one-quarter of the CNRS's budget — is strikingly absent from the list. National coordination of life-sciences research will

transfer to the national biomedical agency Inserm, although the CNRS will still have a say, as will the agricultural research agency INRA and the atomic energy commission (the CEA). The national strategy for information-technology research will be shared between the CNRS and the national computer science agency INRIA. Both disciplines will be relegated to departments within the CNRS.

Another radical change is

that the CNRS will not appoint the directors of the new institutes. Instead, it will be able to propose names, but the government will appoint the heads after an international search. According to Valérie Pécresse, the minister for higher education and research, this move will improve transparency and “attract the best scientists”.

The CNRS was due to announce its reform plans on 19 June after negotiations with the science ministry and other agencies. However, in a deliberate *fait accompli* on 20 May, Pécresse laid out the reforms in *Le Monde* newspaper.

That tactic has been slammed by the science and higher-education trade unions and the ‘Save Research’ movement, who denounced the reforms as “asset-stripping” and a bid by the government to seize research control from the CNRS. As *Nature* went to press, opponents of the reform were organizing ‘academic pride’ demonstrations across the country. ■

Declan Butler