

UK slammed for weak support of science in poor countries

London The Royal Society this week criticized Britain's support for science in developing nations as uncoordinated and lacking long-term vision.

In a report to the House of Commons' Science and Technology Select Committee, the society described the government department that funds such initiatives as short on in-house scientific expertise and isolated from other parts of government. As a result, the report says, the Department for International Development is poorly placed to identify and support the science in poorer countries most relevant to their needs.

The department tends to focus on projects with direct benefits, such as boosting vitamin A levels in sweet potatoes in Uganda. This means it misses other projects that could aid several countries at once — such as satellite-based monitoring of rainfall in Africa, which would assist famine warnings and crop-yield assessments, the report says. It calls for a chief scientist, backed by a science team, to be appointed at the department.

Plan to rebury skeletons meets with grave response

London The director of the Museum of London has sent shockwaves through Britain's archaeological community by suggesting that much of his museum's collection of 17,000 human skeletons be given a Christian burial.

Jack Lohman told *The Times* newspaper last week that about 70% of the human remains excavated from sites in London appeared to have originally had Christian burials. He proposed that these bones should be studied and then reburied.

Museum officials say that Lohman's opinions do not reflect museum policy, but admit that they are considering the future of the collection and that reburial is an option.

Lohman's comments frustrate others who are fighting to retain control of their collections of human remains. "There are great medical benefits to humanity from skeletal collections," says Neil Chalmers, director of the Natural History Museum in London. "These must be weighed against the ethical issues."

Academy set up to boost Texan science

Washington Texas has founded its own Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine in a bid to promote science and technology there. It also hopes to attract more research money and prestige to the

Sweet taste of success for honeybee research

Washington Genomicists have something new to buzz about: the honeybee genome, the first draft of which was deposited in public databases last week. The honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) is a major pollinator of crops, and is also a social insect, making the genome important for both agriculture and basic research, according to the sequencing team from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.



second-most-populous US state, which ranks only fifth in federal research funding.

The academy was launched at a two-day conference in San Antonio, organized by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (Republican, Texas). Membership consists of the state's 11 Nobel prizewinners and all 200 Texas-based members of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine. Local industry chiefs from high-tech companies such as Texas Instruments will act as advisory members.

Nobel laureates Richard Smalley, at Rice University, Houston, and Michael Brown of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas will co-chair the academy's scientific advisory committee.



Richard Smalley: co-chair of Texas's Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

University bids for chance to host nuclear waste

Tokyo Academics at Seoul National University in South Korea are hoping to bring a much-shunned nuclear-waste site to their workplace. A proposal, signed by 63 of the university's professors, advocates setting up the waste site in Gwanak, a mountainous area at the southern end of the campus.

The location of the waste site — South Korea's first — has been under discussion for 18 years. But in December 2003, the government opened the project up to bids

from around the country. It plans to decide on a site this year to begin construction of the facility in 2007.

The academics, led by physicist Chang-Sun Kang, say that they want to demonstrate their confidence in the safety of nuclear energy, but the plan has already met with protests from students and residents of Gwanak district. University officials are set to decide whether to go ahead with the proposal this week.

Germany aims high to create elite university

Munich Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced plans last week to create at least one elite university to compete with top institutions in the United States and Britain.

Speaking at the Social Democrat's New Year retreat in Weimar, Schröder highlighted research and education as key areas of government expenditure, and revealed plans to give funding priority to one or a few selected universities.

Germany's hundred or so research universities are underperforming compared with the world elite. According to a recent ranking by the University of Shanghai's Institute of Higher Education, the best German institution, the University of Munich, is ranked only 48th in the world.

Reaction to the plan has been mixed. Members of the Green coalition expressed concern that the rest of Germany's already underfinanced higher-education system would suffer. But the heads of Germany's top universities have welcomed the scheme.

Correction

A News item erroneously implied that Michele Cargill of Celera Diagnostics in Alameda, California, and her colleagues used the draft chimp genome sequence generated by a public consortium to compare more than 7,500 chimp, human and mouse genes (*Nature* 426, 746; 2003). In fact, the team used its own chimp sequence data.