



Revolving doors: Life & Brain's home could act as a gateway between academia and industry.

revolving door between academia and business, arguing that universities cannot usually hold positions open for professors wishing to spend a few years in commerce. "The way the German system is now, it will not work except for maybe a few very excellent people," he says.

But Markus Nöthen, head of genomics at the medical school, says his work as an unpaid research manager at Life & Brain has made him a better professor. "You think more about how scientific research can be exploited commercially," he says. "That is not the way a scientist is typically trained in Germany."

Brüstle insists that academics involved in Life & Brain are not short-changing the university. "People who work at Life & Brain have to put in additional time, and no one can do it all by working 40 hours a week."

But, says Winiger, it is already apparent that Life & Brain will take longer to become self-supporting than envisaged, meaning that the university will have to provide "quite a significant amount of money" to keep it afloat.

In that light, university and medical-school officials are debating whether to increase their 40% stake — effectively taking control of Life & Brain from Brüstle and his co-founders.

"Given the strong public support that Life & Brain currently receives, we have to be open to such an option," says Brüstle. New ownership or not, he holds to his vision: "I am convinced this thing is going in the right direction." ■

IN BRIEF

DYNAMIC DUO A new pairing of old drugs showed promising results in reducing a key marker of inflammation, a Boston biotechnology company has reported. CombinatoRx said that in a phase II trial, the steroid prednisolone combined with dipyridamole, an anti-clotting drug, significantly reduced levels of C-reactive protein in patients with chronic gum disease — although it did not reduce the size of gum lesions. The company is developing the drug combination, dubbed CRx-102, against a range of inflammatory diseases triggered by the immune system (see *Nature* 439, 390–391; 2006).

PIRATES' SLOW RETREAT The prevalence of pirated personal-computer software in China is slowly receding as the government there takes more steps to enforce intellectual property laws, says a global survey. The Business Software Alliance, an industry group representing software developers worldwide, reported that the percentage of computer software in China from pirated sources fell from 92% in 2003 to 90% in 2004 to 86% last year. It estimated that the value of the software pirated in China, if it had been paid for, would have been US\$3.9 billion. Estimated losses in the United States were \$6.9 billion, but only one fifth of software there was pirated.

OUT OF COTTON Syngenta, one of the world's main suppliers of genetically modified crop seed, is getting out of the cotton-seed business. On 23 May, the Swiss group announced that it will sell its interests in cotton to Delta and Pine Land, a seed company based in Scott, Mississippi, for an undisclosed sum. In April, Syngenta announced a collaborative agreement with DuPont subsidiary Pioneer Hi-Bred (see *Nature* 441, 149; 2006) and is expected to concentrate on corn and other food crops.

MARKET WATCH



This week Wood Mackenzie, an Edinburgh-based research and consulting firm, reviews recent trends in biotechnology stocks.

The Nasdaq biotechnology index has fallen steadily since the end of February, losing 13% of its value over the past eight weeks, and 8% since the start of the year. Early in the period charted above, general stock indices were rising, indicating that events specific to the biotech sector were behind the declines. However, all industries and market indices suffered in May, when fears over US inflation caused a steep drop across the board.

Paradoxically, the downward slide of the biotechnology index coincided with strong 2005 results by leading biotechnology companies. The past eight weeks have seen declines in the share values of most of them —

including big hitters such as Amgen, and Gilead whose stock fell by 7% and 11%, respectively, and Genzyme, which saw a 12% drop. Each company is heavily weighted in the index, so falls in their share value drag the whole index down.

The steady and uniform decline of the biotech index indicates a market correction, rather than a panic. After a 12-month rise, investors seem to have judged many biotechnology companies over-valued, and have cashed out to lock-in their gains.

The least affected of the major biotechnology stocks was Biogen Idec. The company's 2% drop over the past eight weeks follows an involuntary 'correction' of 40% in February 2005, when safety fears caused its candidate drug for multiple sclerosis, Tysabri, to be withdrawn.