

**MIND-ALTERING URINE**

Alpha-male pheromones cause females to make brain cells.

www.nature.com/news



Parallel lines: the Blue Gene/P computer (left) will be up to ten times faster than the current record-holder Blue Gene/L.

Such challenges, say experts, will expose serious weaknesses in the capacities of the scientific computation community. “The scientific community is not very good at software development,” says Simon. He reckons his 20-year-old son, who writes gaming software for fun, is way ahead of most scientists in addressing the challenge of parallel programming.

“I’m amazed at what he can do just using open-source libraries,” he says. Although there are exceptions, such as high-energy physics and bioinformatics, many labs keep their software development close to their chests, for fear that their competitors will put it to better use and get the credit for the academic application of the program. There is little incentive to get the software out there, says Simon, and such attitudes plague development.

One underlying reason is that in academia, software professionals are not given due recognition. “Why would you work at a low salary at a university, where the academic hotshot gets all the credit,” asks Simon, “when you could work at a gaming company, be the hotshot and get stock options?”

Declan Butler

UK science reshuffled

In the wide-ranging shake-up of government that accompanied Gordon Brown’s arrival as Britain’s new prime minister, science got both a new home and a new minister in charge. Although the move had not been announced at the time *Nature* went to press, the new minister will be Ian Pearson, previously Minister of State for Climate Change and Environment.

In a complex game of departmental division and recombination, Pearson will take office not in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which used to be home to the science brief, but in the newly formed Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). This department marks a fusion between parts of the old DTI and part of the old Department for Education, and will also contain a new Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser. The trade part of the DTI’s brief will now be shared by the Department for International Development and a new Department for Enterprise, Business and Regulatory Reform.

Pearson comes to the science brief having worked recently on launching a consultation process on the introduction of a cap-and-trade carbon-reduction scheme for up to 5,000 UK businesses. Welcoming the appointment, a spokesperson for the Royal Society said: “The government’s track record in climate change has been good recently and Ian Pearson has obviously played his part in that. If he brings that track record to science we’d be very much encouraged.” A strong emphasis on the environment at high levels in government seems assured by the appointment of David Miliband as foreign secretary; as Secretary of State for the Environment, Miliband was a strong voice on climate change.

Yet Phil Willis, chairman of the parliamentary science and technology select committee, expressed

concerns that environmental science is about to hijack science as a whole. “A danger of the environment becoming so dominant,” he told *Nature*, “is that other branches of science will be playing second fiddle.” To do justice to science as a whole, Willis said, Pearson will have to “get to grips with a portfolio that is absolutely massive”.

The creation of the DIUS, which in institutional terms will treat science as more closely linked to education than to enterprise, has received mixed reviews. “It makes sense to put science and higher education together,” says Colin Blakemore, shortly to step down as chief executive of the Medical Research Council.

But David Brown, chief executive of the Institution of Chemical Engineers, warns that “Innovation and science should be located in the same ministry as enterprise and skills. I fear we will continue to be held back by the traditional interdepartmental boundaries.”

Katharine Sanderson



Climate for change: Ian Pearson will take on the science brief.

M. LIMA/AFP/GETTY