

Taking stock of dogs



Life after Saddam Hussein



Misconduct melee



budget, has helped some campuses grow despite declines in other income streams.

Even with cutbacks, notes Cech, who spent 22 years at the University of Colorado, Boulder, before joining HHMI in 2000, many academic research programs will end up ahead of where they were just a few years ago. "It just may take a little longer to fill those buildings," he says.

—DAVID MALAKOFF

U.K. RESEARCH

Courting Universities Break Off Engagement

LONDON—To some observers, it was shaping up as a marriage of necessity: London's two leading research universities uniting to pose a more potent challenge to the United Kingdom's academic powerhouses, Cambridge and Oxford. But mounting resistance to a plan to merge Imperial College and University College London (UCL) forced administrators earlier this week to call off the wedding.

The decision is a stunning retreat for Imperial rector Richard Sykes and UCL interim provost Derek Roberts, who when announcing the engagement on 14 October had argued that joining forces was the only way to compete in the knowledge economy. Despite needing parliamentary approval, Sykes had predicted last month that the two universities would "start sharing resources by December."

That vision is shattered. In a terse, unsigned statement on 18 November, UCL said that "the best interests of the two institutions are not served by a formal merger." Roberts told *Science* that "there were very strong opinions both for and against ... but overall there were not enough people giving strong support." Sykes did not respond to requests for comment. Although the architects of the failed plan were circumspect, many faculty members—particularly at UCL, where opposition ran high—aren't hiding their glee. "I'm completely delighted," says UCL biologist Steve Jones, a comment echoed by several others contacted by *Science*.

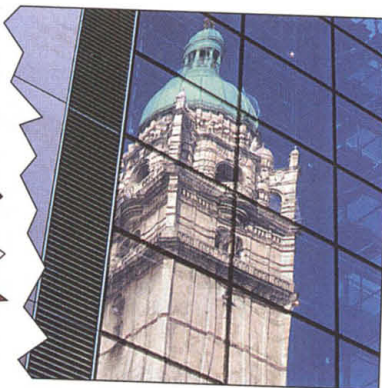
The climb-down is all the more remarkable considering that Sykes, before coming to Imperial, had orchestrated the mega-

merger of GlaxoSmithKline, now the world's largest pharmaceutical company (*Science*, 16 November 2001, p. 1443). He and Roberts, formerly managing director of General Electric Co., found common ground and agreed on a merger in a private meeting last month. They created a committee to report to their councils on 19 December about how a merger would affect operations.

The committee's initial "vision" statement portrayed the combined university as a world-beater that would attract more funding for research in part by eliminating some competition for grants. Existing funds would also be spent more efficiently by not duplicating purchases of expensive equipment, and amalgamating departments would forge new col-



Irreconcilable differences. UCL (left) and Imperial have abandoned their merger plans.



laborations and attract new blood. The new institution would have had a research budget of \$600 million a year.

But within days of the proposal, many academics started balking. Some argued that the merger was far too slanted toward business interests. UCL immunopharmacologist John Foreman, dean of students and leader of the Committee for UCL, a group that voiced doubts about the merger, speculated that Sykes and Roberts might have been "blinkered by their extensive industrial experience." His concern was that the new university would be governed by market forces, not educational needs. There was also a feeling that the merger was being "pushed through," says UCL neurochemist John Clark. Adds UCL biologist Adrian Lister: "We'd been asked to subscribe to a great vision without being given any of the details." Dissent also emerged at Imperial, where 160 staff members had signed a petition requesting an all-staff referendum on whether the merger should pro-

ceed. The petition was presented to the university senate at a 6 November meeting that Sykes chaired. According to Tom Pike of Imperial's electrical engineering department, Sykes subsequently denied the request.

Many scientists expressed fears that the merger would narrow the range of subjects taught and studied, triggering staff cuts and a reduced scope of research. And the Committee for UCL claimed that some departments might have to relocate. Roberts insists that no such relocation was in the works and lashed out at the committee, which he claims was "behaving in a malignant way and deliberately stirring up fears."

Stung by the criticism nevertheless, Roberts and Sykes offered in an 8 November statement to UCL and Imperial staff members to "clarify the process" and assured them that a final decision would not be reached at the next month's meeting. But following what the UCL statement described as "intense deliberation," the universities shelved the plans altogether. UCL has resumed its search for Roberts' replacement, who will take the helm in October 2003.

All the soul-searching triggered by the merger hasn't been for naught, researchers say. The discussions "highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the current system," says Jones. "We can now take these deficiencies on board and deal with them."

—KERI PAGE

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RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

German Inquiry Finds Flaws, Not Fraud

BERLIN—A paper claiming a spectacular remission of tumors is marred by shoddy scientific practices, but investigators aren't saying whether the results are also too good to be true. Last week the University of Göttingen said that its investigative committee had found evidence of sloppiness that constitutes misconduct, but not fraud, in a disputed paper about an experimental cancer vaccine. But with only a brief statement to go on, scientists following up on the work still don't know