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NMR technology may help surgeons to make the kindest cut.
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Royal Institution faces cash crisis

The Royal Institution of Great Britain, once home to historical figures such as Michael Faraday and Lawrence Bragg, has survived since 1799 and is the world's oldest scientific research organization. But it now faces a financial crisis that could bring its 200-year reign to an end.

The institute offers a rare blend of research and outreach, says Richard Catlow, who headed its Davy Faraday Research Laboratory from 1998 to 2007. In the United Kingdom, it is well known for its annual Christmas lectures, a series of high-profile lectures aimed at the general public that are televised nationwide.

But it depends on fundraising and membership for money, and has faced financial difficulties in the past. In 2004 the institution ran up a deficit of £400,000 (US\$650,000), according to a 2005 financial statement filed with the Charities Commission, which regulates charities in England and Wales. In 2006, its director,

Susan Greenfield, a University of Oxford neuroscientist known for her high media profile, began a £22-million refurbishment of its headquarters in central London, intended to make it a more attractive venue to hire out for conferences and public events. To help pay for the work, the research staff was cut from 60 to just 15, drawing criticism from some scientists (see *Nature* 453, 568–569; 2008).

The project also ran behind schedule and over budget. Fundraising was hampered by the recession, and the institution was forced to dip into its endowment and other 'restricted funds'. By September 2008, it had spent £3.2 million designated for other activities, including the Christmas lecture programme, according to the latest financial statement to the Charities Commission, dated 29 September 2009.

Last week, *The Guardian* newspaper

reported that Greenfield was being asked to take a pay cut — and reduce the scope of her role — to help make up for the shortfall. The institution declined to comment to *Nature*, saying only that "discussions about the role of the director of the Royal Institution are currently taking place between the board of trustees and the current director".

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Chris Rofe, a former administrator at London's Science Museum and the Millennium Dome, was brought in this April to oversee fundraising and financial accountability. The Charities Commission audit

acknowledged that a plan was in place to see the organization through to late 2011 and gradually repay the money spent from restricted funds. But it added: "By their very nature, there is a significant uncertainty as to whether these projections will be achieved." ■
Geoff Brumfiel

SNAPSHOT China celebrates panda genome

With just 1,600 giant pandas estimated to remain in the wild, Chinese scientists have led the task of immortalizing the charismatic critter's 2.25 billion base pairs of DNA, reporting their findings online in *Nature* last week. Although it is unlikely to have a significant effect on conservation, the work is a proof-of-principle for next-generation sequencing technologies, and allows China to trumpet work involving a national animal. Indeed, one tactic for researchers hoping to win funding may be to sequence similarly patriotic symbols. "Australia has the most interesting animals in the world," says Jenny Graves, a geneticist at the Australian National University in Canberra and deputy director of the Australian Research Council's Centre for Kangaroo Genomics, who analysed sequences from the first marsupial (a South American opossum, ironically) and the duck-billed platypus. Graves says that such efforts are not just gimmicks; the kangaroo genomics project has helped researchers to work out that the *SRY* gene determines sex in humans and other mammals (J. W. Foster *et al.* *Nature* 359, 531–533; 1992). Other patriotic sequencing projects are detailed in the table.

Brendan Borrell



| Country | Organism | Status |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| China | Giant panda | Draft assembly in 2009 |
| Australia | Tammar wallaby | Whole-genome map in 2008 |
| United States (Hawaii) | Transgenic papaya | Draft assembly in 2008 |
| France and Italy | Wine grape (Pinot Noir strain) | Draft assembly in 2007 |
| China and United States | Rice | Draft assembly in 2002 |
| Sweden | Norway (European) spruce | Recently announced |

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