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EDITORIAL

Awakening at the Academy

Indian science academies have generally steered clear of any major involvement in influencing science policy in the country. Viewed from the outside, the Academies appear to be cosy clubs whose primary purpose is to perpetuate their Fellowship, with elections of new Fellows dominating the activities of each passing year. The organization of annual (and biannual) meetings and the publication of journals allow the academies a limited interaction with the rest of the scientific community and others interested in science. This limited portfolio of activities has often bothered many and the academies have been internally urged to take a more activist role in shaping the development of science in India.

Now in the sixtieth year of its existence the Indian Academy of Sciences has turned its attention to the problem of declining standards of science education in the country. The Academy's major concern is 'to promote progress in science to attain excellence'; the absence of a proper educational base would of course, be a major barrier in nurturing high quality scientific research. The Academy's interest in higher education in science has found expression in the first of the 'Academy Papers' reproduced in this issue of *Current Science*, with the intention of providing a wide readership for a document which touches upon many important issues.

There have been earlier reports that have had the sanction of Government, but the Academy exercise is a voluntary effort which will hopefully merit attention

both in colleges and universities and in the bodies charged with countrywide responsibility for higher education. The issues confronted in the report are complex and wide ranging. The Academy panel has apparently addressed in its deliberation the thorny issue of 'equity and excellence', coming to the unsurprising conclusion that a debate on this issue 'should not be left merely to the politicians and judiciary'. The recommendations are clear and indeed the Academy proposes its own initiatives. However, many specific recommendations are unlikely to be easily implemented or even agreed upon. At times the report appears to have a touch of the ivory tower, but this is inescapable given the fact that many of our research institutions, which contribute heavily to the Fellowship of the Academy, have only a peripheral connection with the real-life problems of colleges and universities. The danger in such reports is that they may appear patronising to those directly charged with the responsibility of communicating science and its excitement to young minds. The Academy has nevertheless taken the plunge into the arena of public policy. Coming closely on the heels of the many public pronouncements by many of its more prominent Fellows on governmental indifference to science, the report signals the Academy's desire to be heard. Advice, both solicited and unsolicited, can often be ignored. The Academy will surely take this hazard in its stride.

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