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A real forum for scientists

THE election of a new President of the Royal Society for a five-year term is an appropriate occasion on which to ask what part Britain's academy of science should play in the scientific life of the nation. The society has been evolving, not only under pressure from outside—it has never lacked vociferous critics—but also under the influence of successive presidents, and it is certainly not beyond its capacity to change even more. But in what direction? Here is one small suggestion.

Rank-and-file Fellows frequently complain that its operations are centred too much on London and are under the control of its Council to an excessive extent. (Those who dispute this latter statement have only to look at the process by which the President is 'elected'.) Fortunately, however, British science as a whole has never seriously suffered from the general tendency to accumulate power and influence in the nation's capital. The strength of the universities has guaranteed that, and however much the bureaucracy might accrete in one

place, the intellectual power has been widely scattered.

But universities are not what they were even a few years ago, and the importance of the central bureaucracy is undoubtedly growing. What more imaginative gesture could the Royal Society make in these circumstances than to move some of its activities outside London? These could well include parts of its committee work, but much more generally valuable would be the organisation in the provinces of regular discussion meetings—which need not be major gatherings such as the ones the society has successfully encouraged in the past few years.

There is a need for some forum in which scientists could discuss, at a local level and away from the public gaze, the problems of practising science. Not all of these problems are narrow technical ones; many concern funding, policy, science and society, education and so on. Were the Royal Society to organise regular meetings out of London to discuss these matters, it would be doing a great service in bringing scientists closer together.

Fearless, blunt message to our readers

OUR ultimate objective is to continuously assess and ultimately hopefully optimise the degree of clarification inherent in the information-conveying procedure currently selected by scientific practitioners.

At this present time we envision subjecting all written communication to a rigorous and ongoing scrutiny process. The management sees as its mission a systematic evaluation of, or at least an evaluative role in, the determinative processes by which overly extended documentation is submitted to a continuous questioning of its appropriate modalities. Where these do not parallel, or even sub-parallel, currently acceptable norms, the documentation will be the subject of an operationally proven interactive process in which the submitter and a qualified representative of this communication channel group will have as their function the production of a sanitised, re-evaluated word-stream.

To this end, attendees at such encounters should familiarise themselves with the logistics and algorithms currently utilised and should show an awareness of the

editorial systems that as of now we have identified as of most central relevance and impact.

The problem-oriented environment to which we address ourselves does not permit us to essentially guarantee continuous relative stabilisation with respect to our operating procedure paradigms. Future changes may be effectuated when anomalistic situations arise and have undergone assessment; the re-evaluation phase will characteristically be followed subsequently by an implementation of revised and updated procedures and/or systems. Our ultimate objective must always be the optimisation of the two-way information flow, if necessary by innovative support techniques.

We underscore our conviction that the utilisation of word-processing equipment for manuscript generation has to be viewed as a major, not to say a prime, necessity.

At this time the personnel associated with this information-dissemination mode convey to its recipients appropriate greetings for the festive period upcoming momentarily.