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Suspensions intensify over elusive European Academy of Sciences

David Adam, London

It may be flattering to be asked to join what the organizers claim is the "most distinguished group of scientists of this century". But if you get an invitation, then beware. Researchers across the world have received letters in recent months congratulating them on being elected to the European Academy of Sciences, and asking for US\$115 registration fees. But an investigation by *Nature* has established that the organization may not be all that it seems.

According to the letters, election to the academy is "one of the highest honours that can be accorded a scientist or engineer". Researchers will be able to take part in academy-funded projects and submit papers to its publications. The academy's website says the organization "promotes the establishment of new scientific laboratories and institutions" and collaborates with "national academies, universities and research centres of various European countries".

But *Nature* has been unable to find any record of the academy's publications, projects or meetings, and cannot confirm the scientific credentials of those behind it. The academy, which is not related to the Vienna-based European Academy of Sciences and Arts, claims to be represented in almost every European country, but could only be traced to a rented office in Brussels. It also claims to have recruited some 600 members, including 40 Nobel laureates, yet other scientific organizations in Europe say that they are not aware of it.

"The existence of this body is news to us," says Peter Collins, director of science policy at Britain's Royal Society and executive secretary of the European Academies' Science Advisory Council. "The Royal Society cannot vouch for the credibility of this body and we would advise any scientists who are approached to exercise due caution before making any financial commitment to it."

Of the people behind the academy, *Nature* was able to speak directly only with Philip Carrion, a geophysicist who claims to be a visiting researcher at the University of Liege. Carrion says that he plays only a "small coordinating role" in the academy and explains that it grew from a collaborative project he was involved

Based in a rented office in Brussels, is the European Academy of Sciences (left) all it seems?

in under the European Commission's Fifth Framework funding programme. When asked to be more specific about which department of the University of Liege he works in, Carrion referred questions to his lawyer.

Nicola Andreano, whom Carrion named as president of the academy, could not be reached for comment directly. Several e-mails to the academy received replies that were signed with his name and position, but his son Michele Andreano, a lawyer in Ancona, told *Nature* that his father does not read or write English, so it was "impossible" that he sent them.

Carrion declined to provide a full list of the academy's members, saying that more details would be revealed after the academy's annual meeting on 29 November. But the academy's website lists several Nobel prizewinning scientists as fellows and honorary members. One of these, Eric Kandel, a neuroscientist at Columbia University, says he was unaware

that his name was being used and asked the academy to remove it, which it did. Another, Edmond Fischer, a biochemist at the University of Washington, Seattle, says: "I know absolutely nothing about this academy. I received a letter from them a couple of months ago indicating that I had been elected an honorary life member and said thanks a lot."

Other researchers have paid for the privilege. Two computer scientists, Carl Chang of Iowa State University in Ames and Cary Laxer of the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Indiana, sent their subscriptions after receiving letters from the academy earlier this year. Both got membership certificates but have heard nothing since. Neither was invited to an international conference on computer science that the academy says it held in Krakow, Poland, in early October.

Laxer admits that he was delighted, if surprised, to learn that he had been elected. "I mentioned it to my school president and he was thrilled," Laxer says. "He's worked with several of the leading scientists in Europe and said that none of them had been elected to this organization."