



This letter to members contains a personal reflection from our Chairman, Tom Kennedy, followed by **notice of our Zoom AGM on 18th May.**

Cautious Optimism

Dear Members

I started to draft this letter on the day that the second phase began of the “unlocking” of economic activity in England from the measures put in place to restrict the spread of the Coronavirus. Queues were forming outside “non-essential” retail shops with people waiting to buy stuff that they didn’t need. Pubs and restaurants blessed with sufficient outdoor space filled with customers joyous at being able to have a pint or share a meal in groups of up to six or two households. This was happening against a backdrop of calm, crisp and sunny Spring weather with cherry blossom emerging and daffodils both in our garden and in parks and hedgerows giving the best display that I can remember.

When that upbeat atmosphere is added to the successful implementation of the vaccination programme (we should all have had at least our first jab by now) there is clearly justifiable optimism that we have turned the corner in the struggle against the pandemic and its effects. Nonetheless, that optimism must be tempered by the realisation that infection rates in the UK, although dramatically reduced from their peak in February are still high and are thought likely to increase as a result of the relaxation of the social restrictions referred to above. The calculation is that the increasingly widespread administration of vaccines and the incredible hard work of dedicated NHS staff will enable any increase to be managed. There is also the potent threat of seriously increased infection levels in several European countries, Brazil and India and the risk that travellers from those lands may introduce new and virulent variants of the virus.

For all of those reasons it is necessary to remain vigilant and to approach the new relaxations with prudence. Even with the added protection of vaccination, that caution is all the more important to the demographic of our membership.

With those issues in mind, the National Committee met via the Zoom platform last week and our meeting included an **exchange of views with our regional convenors**, most of whom had been able to organise virtual meetings and/or had kept contact with members by telephone.

We also fixed the date and time of **the AGM which will take place on Tuesday 18 May at 16h30**, again via Zoom. At the AGM the membership will **elect a new committee** to serve for the period until the next AGM. Four members of the present committee have decided to stand down while the remaining eight are willing to be re-elected. Proposals for candidates are therefore invited. See further information on the last page of this letter.

The discussion of the committee elections also gave rise to a wider discussion of **continuity planning**. As you know, one of the most important activities of the branch is to provide advice and support to members in matters relating to their pensions and medical insurance (JSIS). That task is mainly carried out by our redoubtable “Ambassadors”, Martin Clegg for pensions matters with able support of Nick Heenan and Michael Hocken for JSIS issues, supported by Susie Evershed and Brian Porro.

Nick is one of the Committee members standing down at this AGM so to replace him as well as to relieve the burden of work on Martin and Michael while looking to a future when either or both of them may wish to stand down, we are **seeking volunteers to support them**. More than 90% of requests for help are not particularly technical and require only a basic knowledge of the pensions and insurance schemes in order to be able to reassure members and point them in the right direction in their dealings with PMO or the settlements office or simply let them know where to find relevant documents. No specific technical expertise is required (although if you do have it, perhaps through having managed your own case through the system, so much the better) as we will provide training. What is more important is a willingness to help and an ability to explain matters clearly (usually by telephone or e-mail) to a person who may be baffled by the rules or have taken too firm a hold on the wrong end of the stick. A significant number of queries come from members who are unable to use JSIS on-line or to access our website and need help to get hard copies of forms or instruction notes.

Another departure from the Committee will be that of Tony Robinson, **our Webmaster**. The Webmaster may be, but is not necessarily, a member of the Committee so if there is a member with experience in managing websites and who would be willing to take on that role but who does not wish to stand for election to the Committee please let me and Alan Huyton know.

Michael Hocken provided an update on **JSIS issues**. First, after protracted discussions with AIACE representatives and a decision by the College of Heads of Administration, PMO will shortly publish new **equality coefficients** applicable to treatments provided in the UK. At present the Candover Clinic in Basingstoke is the only one willing to carry out the **screening tests** in accordance with JSIS requirements. They have also indicated their willingness to accept direct billing to the JSIS, although this needs to be administratively validated. Members can choose to go to other clinics such as BUPA and Nuffield and have their standard screening tests carried out, by derogation,, but patients must pay for them directly, then claim re-imburement from the JSIS. Moreover, if they are recommended by a doctor to have any of the optional additional tests carried out (and are eligible for these on the grounds of age & frequency of the test in question, will need to apply for prior authorisation, and wait to submit all bills together).

In mid-March the **Executive Board (EB) of AIACE International** also met via Zoom. The main business of the meeting was to elect a new President and Vice-President to succeed Joaquin Diaz Pardo and Heinz Zourek respectively who were standing down at the end of their mandates. Dominique Deshayes, President of the French Branch and a former Secretary General of the International Association was elected President, the first woman to hold the post. Panos Carvounis of Greece was elected as her Vice-President. Ms Deshayes immediately announced that Didier Hespel would continue to serve as Secretary General and that the composition of the Bureau would be largely unchanged, with, in particular, UK members Michael Hocken and Martin Clegg continuing to serve. We were particularly pleased that Heinz Zourek agreed to stay on, and that Monique Théâtre and Christian Waerterloos from the AIACE Belgium Section agreed to join the current team. Monique will be known to many from her long administrative involvement with AIACE whilst in service.

It was also confirmed that the **2021 Congress** (*Assises*) would take place on a virtual conference platform, similar to Zoom, on 2 and 3 June 2021. Planning had begun to hold the **2022 Congress** in Loutraki, Greece, between 14 and 22 May 2022.

Best regards and stay safe,

Tom Kennedy
Chairman AIACE-UK

AIACE-UK AGM, Tuesday 18 May 16h30

Due to ongoing Covid restrictions we will hold the AGM by Zoom video-conference. The Zoom link and meeting documents will be distributed in due course, prior to the meeting.

Agenda

The meeting will be in two parts.

First, starting at 16h30, our usual annual business, including the election of the new National Committee. There will be the opportunity for members to pose questions or make interventions.

Secondly, I am delighted to announce our speaker who will join us at 18h00, João Vale de Almeida, the EEAS ambassador to the UK. We have asked him to speak on whatever subjects that seem to him of interest and I am sure this will include the state of affairs on Brexit.

Nominations for the new National Committee

The Committee consists of 12 elected members. This year, we are sorry to report that four of the existing members are standing down (Karen Griffith, Nick Heenan, John Nolan and Tony Robinson) and thank them for their many years of excellent service to our Branch. The other members are, in principle, willing to continue should that be the wish of the membership.

You are invited to submit nominations for the Committee, for both existing and new members. To do so, please check that the nominee is willing to stand and, if elected, to serve for the period until the next AGM (Spring 2022), then send an email to the AIACE-UK secretary, Alan Huyton at contact@aiace.uk. Please do so by 3rd May.

Should you be interested in joining the Committee and would like to know more do not hesitate to contact any of us.

Members without access to Zoom

We realise that not everybody has easy access to Zoom (in the same way that not everybody has the possibility to travel to traditional meetings), and should you be in that situation we welcome any written remarks or observations. We will send a full report of the meeting to all by email or letter.