

AIACE-UK Annual General Meeting, 27th April 2022

Note of the Proceedings

The meeting was presided by Tom Kennedy. Some 103 members were present and the meeting was thus quorate throughout.

Presentation

Our scheduled speaker, Michael Clarke, unfortunately had urgent and unavoidable matters to attend to so could not be present. Our own David Harley, formerly deputy Secretary General of the European Parliament, stepped in at the last moment and gave a riveting presentation on the theme of defending liberal democracy in the face of existential threats and the rise of autocracy. David emphasised:

- The pernicious effects of economic and social inequality, which were a breeding ground for autocracy and totalitarianism;
- The likely decline or end of a rules-based international order;
- Economic crises, energy shortages and their social impact;
- The ever-present threat of climate change.

David emphasised that we lived in a period of profound change, where the worst fears, such as nuclear war in the Ukraine, were suddenly a real possibility. He noted both the positive reaction by the current Commission and the positive stance taken by Poland on the Ukraine-Russia war, notably on immigration. Nevertheless, authoritarianism remained a spectre in several Member States.

David asked us to consider the role of the West over the last 30 years, the impact of a US-style free market and the poor record of many in power, for example in the UK where we witness disdain in Government for the constitution.

A lively discussion followed and this can all be seen in the recording of the meeting.

The Chairman thanked David for his excellent talk, delivered with little notice.

AGM Business

Apologies for absence were shared, including from Colin Maynard, Frances Wain and Louise Overbury.

The Chairman thanked outgoing Committee members, David Harley and Melanie Leivers for their important contributions to AIACE-UK.

The meeting noted with sadness the recent death of Lord Plumb and several colleagues paid tribute to his contribution to the European project.

Outgoing Committee Report

The Chairman outlined the main features of the report, which had been circulated to all members. The report was unanimously approved.

JSIS Matters

Michael Hocken explained the emerging solution to the long-running problem of health screening for pensioners in the UK (an issue due primarily to the structures and attitudes of the private healthcare sector in this country). He made particular mention of the positive approach emerging from the new PMO management.

It was now proposed that, using a possibility first foreseen back in 2015 by Richard Hay, pensioners and their spouses in the UK could sign up an 'off the shelf' package from BUPA, Rood Lane, Nuffield, BMI, HCA or other provider of health screenings, which should correspond as closely as possible to the relevant JSIS screening programme (3 or 6).

This package, if not covering the entirety of the JSIS list of tests, could then be supplemented by additional tests from the same or another provider to cover the full range of tests in the JSIS protocols. It was even possible to include screening (as opposed to diagnostic) tests beyond the JSIS list where justifiable for individual circumstances with appropriate prior authorisation (an example of this was blood testing for BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations that increase the risk of certain cancers where there was a family history of these mutations).

Colleagues would have to pay for the tests directly and then could claim reimbursement for them all together from PMO (there is no longer any direct billing in the UK) using a specific new paper claims form, unless submitting the claim via JSIS ONLINE.

Pensioners could put such a combination together, and they had the option to request prior approval from PMO, especially if there was not a direct correlation between the proposed set of tests and the JSIS screening test definition. David Broster had successfully followed this approach with BMI and generously offered to write-up his experiences so that members could take advantage of his example.

Michael also reported success in ensuring the continuing application of JSIS equality coefficients in the UK, at least for the majority of items, despite hostility from the PMO last year, prior to the changes in PMO management and a supportive intervention of the Heads of Administration.

The General Implementing Provisions (GIP) of the JSIS were under review and Michael Hocken was a member of the Working Group. He was strongly representing our interests on the issues of complementarity (aka "top-up cover") for spouses. While there was some openness from PMO, elective surgery on top-up cover in the UK remained problematic. Michael, however, suggested that where a patient's Doctor was willing to provide a letter showing unreasonable waiting lists for an operation it might occasionally be possible to get an exemption, if a sufficiently well-evidenced case was made.

The meeting thanked Michael Hocken and the other JSIS ambassadors, Brian Porro and John Claxton, for their efforts and commitment.

Pension Matters

The meeting noted the success of the Committee in maintaining pensions, notably the coefficient, despite Brexit.

Martin Clegg reported that a review of 'the Method' was underway. The Commission had submitted a report to the Institutions proposing to carry on with the present system, with just a few technical improvements. It was now for Council and Parliament to examine the proposal and to decide.

Martin also reported that due to high inflation, the Method's provisions for an intermediate revision of remuneration and pensions would be triggered and this would lead to a modest increase, likely to be in the order of 2.5%, backdated to January 2022.

The meeting was appreciative of Martin's expertise and contribution.

New Committee

The Chairman thanked outgoing Committee members, David Harley and Melanie Leivers for their important contributions to AIACE-UK. He then outlined the situation, whereby:

- The Constitution made provision for election by secret ballot of those present at the AGM of a Committee of not more than 12 members;
- 13 candidates had been nominated;
- Zoom, while able to host simple polls, could not be used securely for an election.

The Chairman noted that of the 13 candidates, ten were already full Committee members and a further two were co-opted members with important roles on the Committee. As all 13 candidates maintained their nomination, the best solution would be for the meeting to grant a mandate allowing the outgoing Committee and the two co-opted members to continue until an election could be held at a future General Meeting in the Autumn.

In a show of hands, the meeting agreed to this by 60 votes to 1.

AH, 23 May 2022