



Association of Former Staff of the European Union
UK Branch (AIACE-UK)
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Annual General Meeting 27 April 2022

Dear AIACE-UK Member,

Please find below and attached the Committee's report to the AGM and the Treasurer's Report. Because of continuing uncertainty around the rates of covid infections, the Committee decided in January that it was prudent to hold the AGM by Zoom electronic conference. You have elected to receive communications from us by post, but it may be that you have the possibility to join the Zoom conference either on your own computer or tablet or on that of a friend or relative. Here are the joining details.

Topic: AIACE UK AGM

Time: Apr 27, 2022 10:30 AM London

Meeting ID: 865 9993 4878

Passcode: 624961

Yours faithfully,
Alan Huyton, Secretary

Committee Report on the Activities of the UK Branch of AIACE in 2021-22 (Article 10 AIACE-UK Constitution)

For the third time in succession the AIACE-UK year has been bookended by the negotiations for UK withdrawal from the EU on the one hand and the COVID -19 pandemic on the other. Those two scourges, each in its different way, have continued to afflict the UK in the past year and have accordingly impacted on the work of the UK branch of AIACE.

With effect from 1 January 2021 the UK ceased to belong to either the EU's Customs Union or its Single Market and on 31 January 2021 the *European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020* entered force. The later months of the year were marked by a sharp increase in Covid infections as a result of the emergence of a new strain of the virus dubbed "*omicron*" which although apparently more infectious than other strains was, mercifully, less virulent. That, combined with an effective vaccination programme meant that hospital admissions and deaths were fewer than might have been expected.

On 24 February 2022 the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, ordered the beginning of an unspeakable and unnecessary act of armed aggression against its peaceful and independent neighbour Ukraine. With the conflict still in progress it is too soon to quantify the scale of death and destruction that this war has brought about but there has already been a massive movement of refugees (estimates range up to four million people) out of Ukraine and mainly into neighbouring EU Member States with large numbers also displaced internally within Ukraine. As well as bearing the cost in military casualties and lost materiel the Russian economy is being strangled by the effects of sanctions which will impact on the lives of

ordinary Russian citizens. Apart from concern about the risk of escalation of the conflict, it cannot fail to have consequences for the whole of Europe and further afield, in particular because of the disruption of commodity markets (oil, gas, wheat and sunflower oil).

Many of us will be taking individual actions such as charitable donations or offers to accommodate refugees and the AIACE, both at international and national branch level is considering what measures it may be able to take in a collective manner. Our response so far is summarized in the most recent issue of our newsletter “Connect”

I) **The UK Branch of AIACE**

a) **Membership.** AIACE is the International Association of Former Staff of the EU (AIACE-Int). Our branch, which is one of fifteen national branches (and the only one in a non-Member State), currently has 811 members (a small increase since last year) out of a total AIACE-Int membership of approximately 13 000 (just below half of the total number of EU pensioners). We estimate that about 15% of our members are nationals of EU Member States (EU-27) and nearly 90 members live outside the UK, all but three of them in EU Member States. Two members of the AIACE-UK Committee are members of the AIACE International Bureau, and two members represent the UK Branch on the Executive Board of AIACE-Int, which meets three times per year and determines overall policy. All members of the UK Branch may attend the annual AIACE-Int Congress (*Assises*) which includes the AIACE-Int AGM, training sessions, cultural visits and fellowship. Most recently the Congress was held in Lisbon in May 2019. The 2020 and 2021 Congresses and AGMs planned for Loutraki (Greece) were cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 edition took place over a virtual meeting platform (similar to Zoom) last June. Subject to any further developments in the pandemic the 2022 congress will take place as a live event in Loutraki from 14 to 20 May.

In mid-2021 Committee member Martin Clegg examined the numbers of UK officials remaining in the institutions post UK withdrawal from the EU. He concluded that:

“It is probable that the total number of active UK staff in all of the EU institutions/agencies at the beginning of 2021 lies within the range 1100 – 1250. Based on past trends, this number could be expected to fall by a further 12% annually over the coming years, equivalent to annual departures from the services of around 130-150 in the short to medium term. A certain proportion of these could be expected to retire to the UK – perhaps up to 70 each year, of whom 70% (around 50) could seek to join the UK Section of AIACE¹. The impact of such new members on the overall membership level would be offset, at least in part, by annual deaths or other departures from the Section.

At some point in the future, the timing of which depends on the demographic structure of existing UK staff and their post-retirement destinations, the potential for new recruits to AIACE-UK will become negligible, with departures from the Section due to deaths etc. progressively exceeding the declining number of new entrants.”

The Committee will continue to monitor the evolution of the membership with a view to ensuring that our services to members are appropriately maintained and developed. We welcome suggestions for developing and improving the service that we provide.

b) **Governance.** The committee of 12 members (Art. 14 of the AIACE-UK constitution) is chosen by the Branch AGM each year, and then appoints the officers and co-opts as needed. Committee members come from across the country. The Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Secretary are appointed by the Committee from amongst their number (Art. 16 Constitution). In 2021 the AGM was held via a Zoom meeting and, as the number of candidates was the same as the number of posts on the Committee, all

¹ A small number of non-UK nationals might also relocate to the UK after retirement, mainly for family reasons.

were deemed elected. The following members were elected to the Committee and officers appointed as indicated: John Claxton, Martin Clegg, Jane Cornelius, David Harley, Michael Hocken, Bob Hull (Vice-Chairman), Alan Huyton (Secretary), Tom Kennedy (Chairman) Melanie Leivers, Brian Porro, Belinda Pyke and John Wiggins (Treasurer).

Helen Harris-Burland, the survivors' representative and a co-opted member of the Committee stood down after several years of valuable service in that role. She was succeeded by Louise Overbury who we welcomed as a co-opted member of the Committee. Emanuela Savoia was also co-opted to the Committee in March as part of the Membership Administration Team.

We are sorry to report that at this year's AGM Melanie and David will stand down from the Committee. We thank them for their dedication, hard work and good company and wish them all the best for the future.

Prior to the pandemic the Committee met in London between four and six times a year (travel expenses are reimbursed). Since January 2020 all Committee meetings have been held via the Zoom platform. The 2021 AGM was held via Zoom as will the 2022 meeting on 27 April. The Committee keeps the public health conditions in the country under permanent review, taking account of the specific risks to our membership. While Zoom is likely to remain a permanent part of our toolbox for reasons of convenience and cost, we would hope to return to at least a certain number of in person meetings when it is appropriate to do so. We note that several of the regional groups have held in person meetings since the reduction in protective measures imposed by the Government. The Management Board of AIACE-International held its first in person meeting since the onset of the pandemic on 7 and 8 April 2022.

We have no paid staff. While we have been allocated some office space in Europe House in London, most contact is with, and work is done by, volunteer members from their homes (or elsewhere), with occasional visits to Europe House to deal with postal correspondence. Since the UK withdrawal from the EU our "landlord" is no longer the Commission but the European External Action Service (EEAS). We are very grateful for the support of Ambassador João Vale de Almeida and Beatrice Neven, Head of Administration and their team for their support, particularly during the difficult period of the pandemic.

c) Our funds are managed by our Treasurer, John Wiggins, with the help of the membership team in ensuring the collection of subscriptions. The accounts are also checked by an independent examiner. He is Colin Maynard, a former Director of the European Court of Auditors and a member of AIACE-Ireland. Of the annual subscription of £22 that we pay, €18 per member is passed to AIACE-Int as our members' subscription to the overall Association and its activities, which include the publication of the quarterly magazine *VOX*. It should be noted that our branch subscription is among the lowest of any branch and has not been increased for several years. The Treasurer's report and accounts for 2021 are circulated as a separate document.

d) Other important tasks were carried out by members of the Committee, often with the help of Branch members as follows:

- Membership management and support: Melanie Leivers, Jane Cornelius and Emanuela Savoia;
- JSIS 'ambassadors': Michael Hocken now joined by John Claxton, Brian Porro and Paul Smeulders;
- Pension 'ambassadors': Martin Clegg now joined by Alan Huyton and Pernille Andersen;
- Help desk for EU Login: Michael Hocken and Brian Porro;
- AIACE Int group on revising JSIS rules: Michael Hocken and Brian Porro;
- *Connect* editors David Harley and John Claxton;
- *VOX* editorial board: Belinda Pyke;

- Speakers at general meetings: Bob Hull;
- Our indefatigable Secretary, Alan Huyton, in addition to the normal duties of that office, is our Webmaster and e-mail manager. He also holds our corporate “Zoom” membership and hosts both General and Committee meetings on the platform;
- Survivors’ issues: Louise Overbury;
- AIACE Int: Michael Hocken (Bureau, Staff Regulations Committee, JSIS Management Committee); Martin Clegg (Bureau, Remunerations Technical Group); Executive Board delegates: any two from David Harley, Bob Hull, Tom Kennedy and Belinda Pyke (who also sits on the Editorial Board of VOX magazine);
- Regional group convenors: *East Anglia*: Arthur Pooley; *Kent*: Andrew Headey; *London and Sussex*: Pamela Mayorcas; *North*: David Baxter; *Northern Ireland*: Howard McNally and Robert Ramsay; *Oxford*: John Farnell; *Scotland*: Alan Huyton; *South-West*: Anthony Smallwood; *Surrey*: Richard Hay and Martin Clegg; *Wales and the Marches*: Helen Harris-Burland; *Wessex*: Frances Smith-Wain and Pat Phillips.

II) **Our Aims**

We aim to support all EU pensioners (including those on invalidity or survivors’ pensions) whether or not they are AIACE-UK members, in their dealings with the administrative services of the EU institutions. This is chiefly through our ‘ambassadors’ (volunteers with very good knowledge of their areas, see point I) e), above) for the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme, and for pension issues. We also help people to establish their own system connections with the EU’s on-line services for pensioners (we receive some funds from the institutions to reflect this partnership with AIACE for the support of pensioners).

III) **Support for our Members**

This takes several different forms:

- a) Information to all members, newsletters sent out by e-mail to the over 700 members who accept this method of communication, and (so far as possible) by post to those who prefer this method.
- b) The AIACE-UK web site, with basic information and documents e.g. JSIS claim forms. The Website has recently been refreshed with a new design and certain technical and security issues upgraded.
- c) *Connect*, our twice a year newsletter which aims to share members’ activities and pleasures, rather than simply provide current administrative information. To increase our level of Communication with members during the COVID-19 crisis we have added a new, much shorter Newsletter to *Connect*. It is called *Connect-Contact*. The first issue was published at the end of March 2020 and we intend that it should appear roughly bi-monthly (up to five or six editions per year). The Editors of both publications, John Claxton and David Harley, welcome contributions – about topics, activities, journeys, and books – that would be of interest. We have all enjoyed such contributions, please keep them coming.
- d) Two general meetings a year. Usually our AGM is held alternately in London and another UK city with appropriate facilities; our autumn meeting is held in London. In October 2020 we held a General Meeting via Zoom (the ZGM) and the 2022 AGM will also be held using that platform. We hope to be able to return to “live” meetings as soon as it is safe to do so but it is likely that some meetings and other activities will continue to be held via Zoom when appropriate or useful.
- e) Twelve regional groups which meet once or twice a year or organize other activities in their respective regions. In principle these groups cover the whole of the UK, but given sometimes large distances not everyone can get to meetings; each group is autonomous, and the committee tries to ensure that one of its members attends each regional meeting to give and receive the latest information and to answer questions.

During the COVID-19 crisis the role of the regional groups has evolved to include identifying and assisting members who are vulnerable or at risk (while not compromising their own safety of course). The Committee considers that either the convenors, or another volunteer member from within each

regional group should be the first port of call for straightforward pensions or JSIS enquiries with only the more complex questions being referred to our Ambassadors as necessary.

IV) **Current Issues**

a) It has been agreed that, following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the correction coefficient on pre-May 2004 pension rights, which as calculated for 2021-22 is worth some 28.5% of rights earned before May 2004, will continue to be paid to all pensioners living permanently in the UK², no matter when they retire; the value of this coefficient will, as now, remain affected by annual changes in the €/£ exchange rate and by changes in comparative consumption costs. The current arrangements for the updating of salaries and pensions including the system of correction coefficients, will continue until at least 31 December 2023, but is to be reviewed this year. We also need to bear in mind that the correction coefficient is not *legally* an inalienable part of our EU pensions.

b) The continuation of the UK correction coefficient means that the mechanics for the payment of pensions are also unchanged. So, for those benefitting from the correction coefficient, wholly or in part, the pension is converted from Euros into Sterling at an annually fixed exchange rate. For those pensioners who do *not* benefit from the coefficient (i.e. whose pension entitlement was earned wholly *after* May 2004 the rules say that pensions should be paid in Euros to a bank in the EU, but that we may opt for payment in sterling to a UK bank via a market rate of exchange fixed by the Commission which will vary from month to month. That rate will generally be more favourable than the rate which individuals could obtain on the money markets.

c) We have not yet been conclusively informed what is intended for the JSIS equality coefficients. These allow for increased rates of reimbursement when medical costs in a Member State are particularly high compared to the Belgium base level. However, in principle, they are not available outside the EU (and there could also be a separate limit on UK reimbursements to reflect the high costs of private medicine here). New coefficients were decided recently, and, notwithstanding UK withdrawal, we have been assured that they will continue to apply unless and until a decision is taken to the contrary and pending the outcome of the current discussions on the revision of the General Implementing Rules of the JSIS, which lay down the general terms for the equality coefficients. Moreover, AIACE put forward a proposal, which was accepted by the Management Committee, to carry over the present coefficients for a further two years, as they otherwise risked falling because of an absence of sufficient representative over the reference period of the pandemic.

a) JSIS

i) *Overall:*

(1) Contributions to the JSIS deducted from pay and pensions (and paid by the institutions) still more than cover its expenditure, so the scheme is in surplus, which should protect it from Member States who wish to reduce the "privileges" of staff.

(2) The scheme as a whole, and in particular the Ispra Settlements Office (which administers claims from Scheme members resident in the UK), seems to work well. We continue to be impressed by the goodwill applied to almost all questions.

(3) Reimbursements are received quickly in the great majority of cases. Please contact us in the event of difficulty or unexplained delay in obtaining a claimed reimbursement.

² Provided that, for those retiring on or after 1 May 2004, the UK is the pensioner's "place of origin" or last place of EU employment.

ii) *Screening tests* (formerly known as *preventive medical examinations*) are available with full reimbursement³ every two years both for members and for those with complementary cover. However, anyone who has their screening tests carried out in the UK will have to pay for themselves and then reclaim the cost.

(1) In order to ensure 100% re-imburement, you must get an invitation letter from DG HR before booking a screening and obtain prior authorization for any eligible additional tests which may be required. All bills must be submitted as part of a single claim and not piecemeal.

(2) The UK system (insofar as there is a system) is not yet aligned with the DG HR and JSIS rules and none of the service providers has agreed to accept direct billing. However, it is possible to arrange reimbursable screenings here. First ask for an invitation (above), then, book with BUPA (via BUPA Manchester office, but the screening can be carried out in many different BUPA centres throughout the country), Roodlane (London and Glasgow) or Candover (Basingstoke). Members must pay for the service and then claim a re-imburement from JSIS in the usual way. Members of the scheme may arrange for any additional tests to be carried out at the same or a different hospital and reimbursed with the cost of your programme.

(3) in the future, other possibilities may open up; a new scheme (based on revised and improved protocols) has now been negotiated for some clinics in Brussels, and AIACE UK has been asked to help in the coming months to negotiate the new scheme with UK clinics.

iii) *Complementarity*: the JSIS at present accepts claims under complementarily for:

- dentistry
- dependency
- ophthalmology: spectacles/lenses but not cataract operations
- physiotherapy
- podiatry

NB JSIS no longer accepts claims for audiology/hearing aids.

iv) *Direct billing* is best avoided; it is cheaper and better for you to agree to pay a clinic yourself, if you can, then to get an advance from the JSIS if the cost is likely to be high (defined as more than 20% of your monthly pension), and to use the advance to pay the bill, claiming the costs against the advance received

v) *Cataract operations*: while prior authorisation is not always needed, sometimes, and, for the sake of certainty, it is better to seek it in all cases

b) PMO Contact

i) This very useful means of contacting PMO has been moved inside the Commission's informatics security curtain, called EU Login, where it will be called STAFF Contact

ii) if you use EU Login already you don't need to do anything

iii) If you don't yet use EU Login (e.g. for JSIS on line, or My IntraComm), but you would like to do so, we can help you.

c) The "chat room", Yammer for Pensioners has been replaced by "Teams After EC", a tool to which pensioners have exclusive and secure access. It allows you to take part in discussions and post questions or share experiences with other pensioners. Questions may be answered by other users or by volunteers from DG HR or PMO. To join send an e-mail to HR-TEAMS-AFTER-EC@ec.europa.eu.

V) **Branch Activities in 2021-22**

Although the pandemic is still very much with us the combined effects of a very high level of vaccination comprising two doses and a "booster" for most of the population as well as new and improved therapies

³ Subject, now for the first time, to ceilings.

mean that despite a continuing high rate of infections the most severe consequences such as hospitalization and deaths are very much reduced. As a result the range of protective measures has been progressively reduced and, by late February, they were removed altogether in England. The pattern varies somewhat in the other nations of the UK.

The Committee has continued to meet regularly via Zoom. Initially a stop-gap measure to enable us to continue necessary business, such meetings have become a familiar feature of our work and will, no doubt, continue to be so. On the back of those meetings several of our regional groups have also held meetings on the Zoom platform. We have taken out a corporate subscription which enables us to hold meetings of unlimited duration an up to 100 attendees. For the AGM in 2021 we paid for an upgrade to our subscription enabling us to exceed that limit. There was an excellent level of participation “live” and many more members later accessed the recording of the meeting. Similar arrangements were made for our Autumn General Meeting, with equally successful results.

In April 2021 we held a well-attended “Webinar” at which our member Martyn Bond presented his new biography of Count Richard von Coudenhove Kalergi, the colourful and charismatic early advocate of European union.

VI) Settled Status

Non-UK nationals who were living in the UK before its withdrawal from the EU, and who wished to continue to do so, should have applied for ‘Settled Status’ by the end of June 2021, to ensure continuing access to the NHS, renting of accommodation, banking and other services. The difficulties that were reported to us, leading up to that deadline, related mainly to evidential problems for those who had not been in economic activity (e.g. for family care reasons) and therefore had no “paper trail” to establish their residency.

Most of those issues were eventually resolved satisfactorily and we have had very few “post-deadline” problems reported. New issues have arisen concerning, in particular, newly retired British EU officials who wish to retire to the UK and who wish to obtain settled status for their spouses and, in some cases, children. The Home Office advice in these circumstances obtainable on its website, is ambiguous and confusing. It does not address the specific case of retiring EU officials of UK nationality. The Committee is following these cases, providing such support as we can and considering seeking professional legal advice on how best to protect those pensioners’ interests.

Belinda has continued to represent the UK Branch on the Editorial Board of VOX, the AIACE International magazine. She has worked hard with the Editor, Maruja Gutierrez, and with considerable success to improve the layout and content of the magazine. Members of the Committee have made several contributions to issues during the past year as a part of our efforts to ensure that former officials of UK nationality do not become “the lost tribe of Europe”, following UK withdrawal from the Union.

We note that, following an unfortunate intervention by the European Data Supervisor, the VOX magazine can no longer be distributed by DG HR to all EU pensioners as in the past. AIACE members are deemed to have given their consent to receiving the magazine and will continue to do so. Any member who does not wish to receive it may unsubscribe at any time.

VII) The Future

Following this “Virtual AGM” a new, or at least “refreshed”, Committee will be charged with steering us through the coming months of pandemic and war and, we hope, dealing with the issues of recovery

as the medical emergency gradually recedes. We will continue to keep members up to date on legislative and administrative developments which may affect them.

Please let us know of your concerns at this worrying time and do not hesitate to contact us or your regional convenor, or local team of AIACE volunteers. Finally, we are always looking for new volunteers to join our teams of JSIS and pensions Ambassadors. Training will be provided as required.