

AIACE UK - General Meeting, 28th October 2022 - report

Some 55 people attended the meeting in person in Newcastle or on Zoom.

'Testing the Global Britain Claim' - presentation by Professor Michael Clarke

Professor Clarke impressed the audience with an informed, informative and wide-ranging critique of the UK's foreign policy since 2016. He made the following points.

- The shift away from the EU towards the Asia/Pacific was a major change, enacted in an incoherent and hurried manner, without even involving the Foreign Office in planning and discussion.
- Actions undertaken have not been strategic, eg the non-legal reduction in aid and abolition of DFID, leading to loss of UK influence in key areas of the world. During the pandemic the Government ignored the National Security Council, leading to error and chaos.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine created a new dynamic and consensus among European countries, even including the UK (where Boris Johnson played an unusually positive role, to the benefit of UK). This was contingent on the remarkable role of President Zelensky and the support of the US (later Europeans) to the Ukrainian war effort.
- Putin's failure to win the war very quickly means a prolonged struggle, repeat wars etc over a period of time.
- The world has subsequently revealed a deep split between the liberal democracies and the illiberal states who oppose the US/NATO/European role.
- The next months will be critical as Europe struggles through a difficult winter and this will be a test of unity and resolve.
- The Ukrainian War has brought UK closer to the EU and could be a catalyst for reconciliation in the longer term, for example one could imagine a reconstructed EU with the UK in a non-core role.

The meeting thanked Professor Clarke for his erudite and energetic intervention.

Business Meeting

Following a convivial lunch, Chairman Tom Kennedy presided over the following points.

1. Appointment of the National Committee - 12 nominations had been received and the meeting agreed unanimously that the Committee should be so constituted and proceed with the running of the organisation.
2. Tom Kennedy reported that AIACE UK was functioning well, though he noted a decline in the meetings at regional levels. He reminded that he and other National Committee members were willing to attend regional meetings.
3. Finances - Treasurer John Wiggins reported a healthy financial situation.

4. JSIS - Michael Hocken reported on the discussions on the revision of the Implementing Provisions. The financial situation meant that the focus was likely to be on protecting the current rules rather than seeking ambitious new provisions.
On Screening, Michael encouraged members to benefit from the new agreement in place to cover the particular situation in the UK. This meant that members could be reimbursed for an 'off the shelf' programme compatible with the screening terms of reference, from private providers such as BUPA, Nuffield, Circle Health (formerly BMI) and Rood Lane, supplemented, where needed, by additional tests which also correspond to the Screening definitions. PMO offered 80% advances to cover costs for those with low pensions/where the total cost of the screening tests would exceed 20% of one's pension. Finally, pensioners could travel to Brussels or Luxembourg if they wished, though at their own expense, to benefit from a standard screening package.
Michael then explained the JSIS provisions related to care, whereby costs of care in a Nursing Home were covered to a good degree, whereas costs of care at home were both capped and means-tested and, for most pensioners needing more than 5-6 hours care per week, would be poorly reimbursed.
5. Pensions - Martin Clegg explained the likely outcome of the end of year adaptation of pensions and salaries. While the cost of living in Belgium and Luxembourg (one of the two elements in the calculation) were high, they were counterbalanced by the fact that the change of civil servants' salaries in a selection of ten MS were not positive. The outcome was likely to be a small increase. The final figures from Eurostat were expected very soon. A further element was likely to be payment of the postponed 2020 increase, which had been shelved due to the provisions in the Method in response to the fall in GDP that year.
Finally Martin reported that the Council had asked the Commission to submit a report with options for reducing administrative costs by a creative approach to the Method. The Commission had decided not to do so.
6. Belinda Pyke reported on the delays to the dissemination of the latest VOX. She appealed for contributions to the magazine. She and John Claxton were also preparing the next edition of Connect, which would be available in December.
7. Moya Denman promoted the Bruges-Natolin UK-European scholarships appealing for promotion and donations.