

AIACE-UK Annual General Meeting 13th June 2023 - Report

Tom Kennedy presided the meeting at Europe House, which consisted of 28 participants in the room and a further 51 on Zoom video conference.

1. Speaker - Dr Mike Galsworthy, European Movement

Dr Galsworthy described the history and work of the European Movement (EM), highlighting the healthy state of its membership (c 20K members and 21 staff) and broader support (220K on the mailing list).

He outlined the EM's strategy which was based on a vision (to rejoin the EU) and an approach (step-by-step pragmatic actions). This could be seen in three parts.

Firstly, 'stop the crazy', in other words lobbying and action to prevent the destructive efforts of the Brexiteers, for example to create a bonfire of EU Regulations or leave the Convention on Human Rights.

Secondly, 'alignment and association' whereby small steps were taken to improve relations with the EU and to take-up opportunities to boost support in particular communities, eg the fishing and farming industries, the arts and the scientific communities and youth.

Thirdly, building support with a view to a 65% total in favour of rejoining, considered by the EM (and the EU) as a minimum level of support for a credible rejoining of the EU. Winning by a hair's breadth or without youth support was insufficient.

It was necessary to invest in understanding the needs of different communities and to identify champions of the EU. This would start to create a picture of why we would rejoin and what restored membership would look like.

Dr Galsworthy highlighted the contrasting approaches of the main political parties, who would in the end be key to the mechanism and decision process.

Labour's near-silence on the issue seemed to be helpfully creating space for the pro-EU movement by avoiding the distraction of conflictual public discussion. Starmer's redlines and occasional hostility (eg "nicking our dinner money") were, however, very unhelpful. A future government would quickly have to recognise the need for international cooperation in the face of economic reconstruction.

The LibDems were clearly pro-EU even if they had dropped the unsuccessful approach of immediate rejoining. There would be opportunities on specific issues and perhaps through pressure on a future minority Labour administration.

The Conservatives remained an obstacle. Pro-EU Tories needed to organise against the nationalist conservatism which currently dominated the party.

How would rejoining happen? This was impossible to predict but would depend on strategy, context and events.

The meeting welcomed the lively and thoughtful approach outlined by the excellent speaker and, following an enthusiastic discussion with members, Dr Galsworthy underlined the potential usefulness of AIACE-UK members in providing expertise in upcoming discussions on policy and on relations with the EU.

2. Annual General Meeting

The Chairman noted the sad news of the recent deaths of Stanley Clinton-Davies, former Commissioner, and Tom Cunningham, the first convenor of the Scotland Region.

The Agenda was adopted with minor changes. It was noted that the previously announced point on change to the constitution was postponed until the Autumn General Meeting.

The Chairman presented the report from the Committee, noting the political upheavals that we had lived through over the last 12 months. He highlighted the following points:

- The steady membership figures (around 800), though this message was tempered by the likely gradual fall of new members due to the impact of Brexit.
- The positive contribution made by retiring National Committee member, Brian Porro, while noting that Brian remained a co-convenor for the Kent region and active in the JSIS working group.
- The fact that the pension correction coefficient would continue for pensioners resident in the UK irrespective of when they retired.
- AIACE UK always needed new volunteers for various roles, including ambassadors and regional convenors - members interested should contact the Committee.

The meeting thanked the outgoing Committee for its efforts and approved the report.

The Treasurer's report had been circulated and John Wiggins, Treasurer, outlined the healthy financial situation, which showed a modest annual surplus and a healthy savings balance. The meeting approved the report.

The meeting further approved the 12 nominated candidates for the National Committee (see Annex).

Pensions - The Chairman and our Pensions expert, Martin Clegg, explained that there would be an intermediate adaptation of salaries and pensions, backdated to 1 January, due to the inflation rate in Belgium and Luxembourg. The update would amount to 1.7% and a 1.67% increase in the correction coefficient (the amount due to each individual would vary according to the individual pensioner's share of overall pension rights acquired before May 2004). Thus for a pensioner with all rights acquired pre-2004, the increase would amount to 3.4%. For a pensioner with, say, 50% of rights acquired pre-2004, the increase would be 2.65%. At the end of the year a further assessment would be made and if inflation in Belgium and Luxembourg continued to fall sharply there might be a negative correction.

JSIS matters - The Chairman announced the PMO's new initiative (which had AIACE input) of a form to be completed by opticians for new glasses. This was designed to make the process of reimbursement smoother and was thought likely to reduce the number of claims that were rejected or needed to be revised.

Michael Hocken reported positive progress in the discussions around new JSIS implementing rules (the DGE or GIP) but it was too soon and would be considered improper, given that the Management Committee was still debating them, to discuss the details. On screening, the hybrid solution for the UK seemed generally to be working. On complementarity for spouses, there seemed to be a growing acceptance of reimbursement of private treatment at PMO provided that some documentation was provided that demonstrated unacceptable waiting times in the NHS.

Members were encouraged to sign-up to JSIS online where practical and possible so as to facilitate claims.

John Claxton had done excellent work as JSIS Ambassador and the meeting thanked him, as well as Michael Hocken, for this outstanding effort.

In the discussion, some useful clarifications were made:

- If a colleague consulted a private GP, consultant or specialist, they would receive reimbursement (based on the ceilings in force).
- PMO would not reimburse subscription payments/packages to private providers.

Finally, the question of providing proof of a spouse's income to PMO (eg for the Household Allowance and membership of PMO) was raised. Several colleagues reported that PMO would accept a declaration on honour that the spouse's income was below the relevant thresholds.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting with thanks to organiser Jane Cornelius and to our hosts at the EEAS.

Annex - National Committee 2023-24

The meeting approved the appointment of the following members of AIACE-UK.

Andersen, Pernille
Claxton, John
Clegg, Martin
Cornelius, Jane
Hocken, Michael
Hull, Bob
Huyton, Alan
Kennedy, Tom
Kent, Gail
Pyke, Belinda
Savoia, Emanuela
Wiggins, John

Draft 2