

INFO-SECTIONS No 2 - January 2016
Newsletter from the International Bureau to AIACE members

This newsletter aims to show how AIACE's international administrative structures are designed to promote and bring together the interests of our 11,000 members. It aims to provide a glimpse into some of the main activities of the International Bureau, and is distributed to members via the Sections, who send it out to their members, after translating it if they deem appropriate. Each Section chooses the means they think best to ensure that all members receive the Newsletter, be that in their own newsletters or bulletins, by email, on their website, or a combination thereof. The first issue covered the period from June to September 2015, and this second issue covers the period from October 2015 to January 2016.

1) CGAM (Management Committee for Sickness Insurance)

The Sickness Insurance Management Committee is a so-called “joint committee” bringing together representatives of the various administrations and of the staff, and one of its primary tasks is that of issuing opinions on Article 90 complaints made against PMO decisions. This system does not work well in practice: in more than a quarter of cases, the Committee fails to issue a majority opinion, and it is extremely rare that it finds in favour of the member (5 % at the most). However, the real problem lies ‘upstream’ of the Committee, and in the absence of any mediation service, what often happens is that it is only when a member actually lodges a complaint that the PMO takes a proper look at the case, and indeed frequently decides that the reimbursement has been rejected too quickly and makes a correction. The complaint is then moot. This whole process was set out in the report presented by the Bureau to the AIACE Administrative Board meeting in November 2015, before communicating it to DG HR and the PMO.

2) Top-up (or “complementary”) sickness cover for spouses over the age of 65

The Bureau sent a questionnaire to all 15 Sections seeking to clarify the conditions under which those spouses on a low pension can obtain cover under the national social security scheme. The answers received highlighted the enormous diversity of situations that exist, and huge disparities in the way spouses are treated according to the country where the pension originates. Spouses thus frequently find themselves excluded from equal treatment under the community scheme. Discussions between AIACE and the PMO continue on this front.

3) Preventive Medicine

The PMO recently introduced new preventive medicine programmes. These were presented by the Chair of the Medical Board at the November 2015 meeting of the Sickness Insurance Management Committee, who claimed that these represented a significant improvement on the previous programmes, and did away with a number of obsolete and even dangerous tests, replacing them with a new set of apparently well-evidenced examinations. The staff representatives did not share this analysis, any more than we did, and we made our views known in the course of the meeting. In practice, a new form of “virtual” colonoscopy has replaced the former physical examination, but otherwise there are no new tests. In fact, several tests that used to be carried out have been eliminated from the programmes, and we are concerned that the main driver for these changes was budgetary. The upshot of this debate was that the Management Committee agreed to reopen discussions and to return to this file at the next meeting.

4) Meetings with the three JSIS “Settlements Offices”

A number of earlier meetings between the AIACE Sections and the Settlements Offices they come under have previously taken place in Ispra and Brussels. New meetings are planned for 2016 in Ispra and Luxembourg. These meetings have proved very productive, giving a real opportunity to examine in detail and often resolve a series of both specific and more general problems, often by enabling misunderstandings to be aired and clarified.

5) International Administrative Board

The Bureau organized the most recent meeting of the Board in Luxembourg. The Board met with representatives of the various Administrations, and discussed with them our positions

on a range of issues, including “complementarity”, the operation of the Sickness Insurance Management Committee, as well as the difficulties faced by retired officials in accessing their Institution’s buildings. Often the former official is treated as an outside visitor, and subjected to additional, specific checks. The Board believes that this runs counter to the Staff Regulations by which retired officials remain bound.

6) Assises: 2016 and beyond

The 2016 Assises in Trieste have been organized in three modules, which enable everyone to choose the formula and duration that best suit them. The first four days include the working sessions, but also allow for a day to discover this lovely city. Those who wish can then extend their stay by two or four days, with visits around the whole region and a closing gala dinner,

These Assises will once again be organized by Artion. However, to ensure best value for money, the Bureau launched a call to tender amongst specialist congress travel firms, with the various tenders being submitted to the Board, which found that Artion was the most competitive, both in terms of the services offered and the prices quoted, in particular taking account of the number of support staff on the spot during the Assises to assist participants. We will therefore be working with Artion for the coming four years, although there is an annual break clause.

7) Membership lists

As things stand today, the International Association doesn’t actually know who belongs to the Association, and thus can’t invite them to attend the Annual General Meeting of members. This places the Association in an awkward not to say non-compliant legal and statutory position. The Sections have therefore been asked to provide the postal addresses of all members so that they can be contacted once a year by the organization they belong to and invited to attend the Association’s AGM.

8) VOX

AIACE’s flagship publication VOX continues to appear thanks to the capable efforts of its Editor in Chief, Pierre Blanchard. Michael Hocken, a member of the Bureau, has joined the editorial team. Issue No 100 was privately printed at significant cost. The Bureau therefore negotiated, with the assistance of DG HR, an agreement by which the Commission’s own services will print and distribute VOX according to an agreed set of deadlines. Issue No 101 was produced “in-house” by the OIB (the Brussels Infrastructure and Logistics Office), representing a considerable cost saving, and enabling the Bureau to redirect these funds towards the modernization of the AIACE INT website.

9) My IntraComm

Over a period of several months My IntraComm for Pensioners stopped being updated weekly. We expressed our considerable concern about this situation, and are glad to be able to report that DG HR was very proactive in seeking to find a way out of this impasse. The regular weekly updates in the form of “static” pages or “snapshots” resumed on 18 January, with a “new look” layout being introduced on 25 January. Further enhancements are under consideration, this time with the active involvement of AIACE, and there is even the possibility of “live” access to My IntraComm being granted via ECAS.

10) Website

The Bureau issued a call to tender for the development of a new website, which could be more easily kept up to date by the International Secretariat. A small Brussels-based firm with good references was selected and has begun work. It is hoped that the new site will be operational in early March.

11) New management appointments and structures at the Commission: PMO and DG HR

The Bureau was informed of a new “organization chart” at the Commission affecting those services with which we work most closely. The new Head of the Central settlement Office (PMO3) is Mr Bruno Fetelian, Mrs Monique Théâtre remains our correspondent, retaining responsibility for Relations with Pensioners. Her Sector is attached to a new Unit, headed by Mr Koen Biron, who comes under a new Director (Mr Fernando Garcia Ferreiro). The

Bureau has already established initial contact with each, and was happy to welcome them to our New Year Cocktail Party on 25 January. A number of working meetings have been scheduled throughout February.

The next meetings of the Bureau will be held on February 7th, and on 14-15 March, before the Board meeting.