

# MINUTES

## of the AGM of the AEJ UK Section

### held via Zoom on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022

**Attendees:** William Horsley (Chair), Charles Jenkins (Secretary), David Worsfold (Treasurer), Peter Norman, Rick Thompson, Firdevs Robinson, David Barker, David Lennon, Doros Partasides, Nevsal Hughes, Alan Mackie, Diana Maxwell, Michael Hornsby, Colin McIntyre, Alan Mackie, Michael Lake, Jack Hanning, Anthony Robinson, Martyn Bond, Euan Grant, David Buchan.

**Apologies:** Nick Hopkinson.

**Opening Remarks:** William welcomed everyone and said the British Section of the AEJ had come through the past year in good shape thanks to excellent teamwork and despite Covid-related constraints. He had circulated his Chairman's Report and his annual report as the Media Freedom Representative of the International AEJ. (*Both attached*)

**Chairman's Report:** William noted the sad death of Jonathan Fryer in 2021; the lockdown had meant he could not have the send-off he deserved, but there had been many written tributes. Peter Norman had moved to Yorkshire but said he expected sometimes come to London for in-person meetings, and he would go on assisting William as much he could to recruit speakers for professional meetings. William emphasised the benefits of our collaboration with Regent's University, which continues to offer its venues to us on very favourable terms. Discussions would soon take place with Regent's Events and Conferences manager and Faculty staff about possible ways of further strengthening links, e.g. through more coordination in arranging speakers and having more Regent's students at AEJ meetings. William added that the pre-Christmas social dinner at the Frontline Club in December had been an outstanding success. Perhaps it could be repeated.

Plans for the annual International AEJ General Assembly had been cancelled in 2020 and again in 2021 because of Covid-19 restrictions and the devastating fires in central Greece. Two 'virtual' GAs had been held in February and November 2021 with limited attendance. Plans are again being prepared for a physical GA in Greece before the end of this year. William was re-elected as the International AEJ Media Representative and Board Member for another two years. He remarked that the scale of violent attacks on journalists and attempts to silence them through the courts in many European countries had become even more urgent. The AEJ had been highly active with partner organisations in advocating stronger policies and actions to curb attacks on free media and European institutions had responded in positive ways.

UK Section membership had remained stable at about 40. William thanked Rick for producing and distributing annual membership cards. Rick asked if they were still needed, and several members spoke up to say the cards are extremely useful; Rick agreed to produce the 2022 cards; perhaps someone else would volunteer to take on the task next year.

**Secretary's Report:** Charles had circulated his annual report. (*Attached*). He said he was much enjoying his collaborative AEJ work. Despite the pandemic restrictions in 2021 the section had kept up good attendance levels at meetings on Zoom. A show of hands confirmed that most members favoured holding lunchtime meetings in person as soon as circumstances allow. An exchange of views followed concerning the possible staging of some meetings in "hybrid" format, with some participants joining virtually. Regent's offer to provide a package of technical support for hybrid meetings at a fixed cost of £100 would be explored..

Charles pointed out that following Peter's move from London William was often over-stretched. He and David Worsfold and other members were called on to give coordinated support whenever possible in attracting high quality speakers for our flagship meetings. Members with suggestions and contacts for suitable candidates were encouraged to contact William and Charles, and when possible to share the workload. The Section had attracted a wide range of participants, including foreign journalists and other non-AEJ members. Members were also encouraged to spread the word about our events and encourage suitable new members to apply.

**Treasurer's Report:** David Worsfold had distributed his Financial Report, which included a helpful three-year comparison of expenditure and income. (*Attached*) He said all the costs of the new website had now been paid, and the current balance at £3,628 had come down from a temporary peak and was again back to a usual 'quite healthy' level. In view of our regular overhead costs and likely future demands on the budget it was prudent to maintain the annual fee at its present level, and that view was generally supported. David is now on the Audit Committee of the International AEJ, which had provided him with some insight into the difficulties for the international Treasurer of collecting membership fees from various national sections when they were due. The UK paid our dues on time David was thanked for his excellent work as Treasurer.

**New UK Website:** Launched the previous week, the new website was warmly praised by William, who thanked Website Editor David Barker, and Designer James Thompson, for the enormous amount of work that had been involved. The site would need to be renewed frequently with fresh stories. David said he was happy to keep the site fresh. The redesign had been an opportunity to think again about the purpose of the website. The main ones would be to publicise AEJ events, be a showcase for members' activities and writings, track issues and events relevant to journalists, and reflect a European dimension on stories.

Members were invited to contact William and David with material that might be of interest, including original work and commentaries on current issues and trends in journalism. The Blogs, Books and Briefings Section has been revived so it can feature more pieces from AEJ members as merited. David is building up a library of copyright-free pictures and reminded members to send him any photos in their possession which might help to illustrate current stories or themes on the site, with attribution if requested.

**Social Media:** Firdevs said the new website will make it much easier to link to stories from our Twitter and Facebook sites. Social media was really important as a means to showcase the AEJ's activities and our presence there is still small: the Twitter account has 112 followers and Facebook posts get an average of up to 30 views... Retweets and "likes" by our members were crucial to reach a wider audience She appealed to members with Fb or Twitter accounts to make sure they 'follow' the AEJ UK. Twitter posts need to be immediate and as frequent as possible. Currently most of the posts are from William's media freedom output and out professional meeting reports written by a variety of members Firdevs was thanked for her speedy posting of available materials.

Martyn Bond suggested we should also look at having an AEJ UK LinkedIn account. The professional network has many journalist members and a professional demographic well-matched to us. William agreed we should look into this and asked for more detailed advice after more research by those members with an understanding of how a Group presence might serve our interests. Doros Partasides asked if e-mail addresses might be shared. Some members voiced concerns over privacy and security issues, and said any sharing of contact details should be done on a consensus basis. William thanked Doros for supplying a trove of professional photos taken at many of the physical meetings we have held at Regent's since 2019.

**Meetings, activities and membership:** During an informal exchange of ideas, William invited members to use every opportunity to encourage more non-members to attend our professional meetings. Charles was ready to add new names to the list of journalists and specialists who receive our event notices. Our door is always open for suitable newcomers to apply for membership. We could revive the idea of a flyer to be posted in the Frontline Club and elsewhere, and the new website could be a real asset to attract attention to what we do. A discussion followed about promising themes and speakers for future meetings. William reminded everyone of the need to have a good proportion of elected politicians and public figures among our invited speakers. A great merit of online or hybrid events was that we could hear from more newsmakers outside the UK.

**Election of officers:** William Horsley (Chair), Charles Jenkins (Secretary) and David Worsfold were all re-elected for another year 'Nem Con' – nominated by Rick and seconded by Martyn. Members thanked all three warmly for their professional and efficient running of the section.

R.T.