

Newsletter

April 2016

Letter from the President Turbulent Times

Rarely can an AES president have taken up office at a more challenging time for the profession. So wrote Professor Kenneth J. Thomson from the University of Aberdeen in these pages in 2001. Perhaps that is what every President thinks when the time comes around to writing their first Letter. Given some of the themes that Professor Thomson alluded to (global warming, biodiversity, EU Enlargement and closer to home, the demise of MAFF and ascension of the Research Assessment Exercise) you would be forgiven for thinking that little seems to have changed.

Open a newspaper or scroll through the newsfeeds and crises of one sort or another loom larger than ever. The collapse in oil prices, commodity and exchange rate volatility not to mention the ticking time bomb of obesity, international terrorism, the migrant crisis and alarming rises in global temperature. There is an awful lot of turbulence out there. As Ken's comments 15 years ago bear testament to, perhaps it was ever thus. And while our problems are possibly no more serious of those we have confronted in the past, my impression is that they are increasingly of an international, if not global, nature as the jet engine and internet shrink our world. Not only is it easier to relay international news, more of us have some familiarity with it, whether it be via the foreign holidays we've enjoyed, the foods we eat or just the people we meet.

In the face of such social, political and economic turbulence, textbook economics and common sense are in chorus: the solutions are best achieved via integration rather than isolation. And with those words, you can probably guess where this is heading. Not wishing to be too parochial on these pages (which statistics show are distributed to, if not read in, more than 65 countries) citizens of the UK will vote to remain in, or exit from, the European Union on 23 June 2016, a decision with genuinely profound implications for the UK and arguably the EU itself. As announced at this year's highly successful conference held at the University of Warwick and attended by 155 delegates from 50 countries, the AES has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Association of Agricultural Economists, the aims of which are to foster closer links and information exchange. I wholeheartedly support this initiative - one of the late, great Professor Giovanni Anania's (former President of the EAAE) many legacies. The mutual benefit it offers to members of both associations is clear. I for one hope it has prescience too.

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