

UEMO 2000/104

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UEMO Presence in Brussels

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Prior to the UEMO meeting in Florence in May 2000 a number of papers were circulated concerning options for establishing a UEMO presence in Brussels. Four main options were foreseen:

1. Establish a permanent Brussels based secretariat for UEMO
2. Appoint a Brussels based European liaison officer for UEMO
3. Appoint a consultant to provide EU intelligence and lobbying support for UEMO
4. Ask the Belgian, Dutch or British delegation (via the BMA European Office) to liaise on behalf of UEMO in Brussels

Option 4 seems to have been dismissed on grounds of possible conflict of interest. Option 1 seemed unpopular as it would entail a very substantial increase in the UEMO budget. With regard to the remaining two options the questions that arose were essentially:

- ⌘ How much will it cost?
- ⌘ What will it achieve?

These two questions need to be looked at together. What UEMO realistically expects to achieve at EU level needs to be in line with the resources it can make available and vice-versa.

Observations on appointing a UEMO European Liaison Officer,

This could cost between **£50,000 and £150,000 or more per year** depending on:

- ⌘ Whether the post is full time or part time
- ⌘ Experience and level of qualification of the post holder
- ⌘ Quality and level of equipment of office facilities made available to post holder
- ⌘ Travel, telephone and postal expenses incurred by post holder on UEMO business

There would also be significant start up costs incurred in establishing a UEMO legal entity competent to employ the Liaison Officer in Belgium, drawing up a contract of employment and finding and equipping office space for him / her. These would run to several thousand pounds.

Establishing a one person office in Brussels on anything less than £50,000 would require substantial cross subsidisation from another organisation in the form of e.g. free office facilities and / or part payment of the post holder's salary. At this point the option of having a UEMO liaison officer in Brussels begins to blur with the option of UEMO awarding a consultancy contract, as working for UEMO might not be the post holder's main occupation.

What could be achieved by appointing an EU liaison officer?

From my own experience, I would estimate that a full time UEMO liaison officer in Brussels could engage in lobbying / representation on 4 to 5 major issues at any one time, hold a watching brief on a further dozen or so issues and co-ordinate pre-lobbying of CP delegations ahead of CP meetings in order to ensure maximum support for UEMO positions. The liaison officer could also implement a targeted programme of contact building with EU officials, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Brussels based health interest groups so as to raise the profile of UEMO as a player in EU affairs.

Appointing an EU liaison officer would pre-suppose UEMO having a reasonably extensive agenda beyond its current campaign to amend the GP training provisions of the Doctors' Directive (Directive 93/16). This agenda might include some of the following issues:

- ✍✍ The review, in 2001, of the EU Directives regulating authorisation, advertising and sale of pharmaceutical products. The big pharmaceutical companies are gearing up to campaign for the lifting of the EU ban on direct to consumer (DTC) advertising of prescription drugs. Do Europe's GP see DTC as an unwanted development or are they relaxed about it?
- ✍✍ Free movement of patients. Do moves to treat patients as empowered consumers and encourage them to seek healthcare across borders threaten the role of GPs as gatekeepers of secondary care? Should UEMO campaign either for or against the extension of EU Single Market rules to healthcare?
- ✍✍ The new EU health action programme and the health information system it proposes. Should this system collect EU wide data on performance indicators relevant to primary care? Should there be a system for sharing best practice in primary care?
- ✍✍ Integrating health considerations into other EU policies. For example, should UEMO campaign for the EU's agricultural policy to take more account of nutritional issues?
- ✍✍ EU social policy. Do GPs have views on issues relating to employment rights – working time, parental leave etc. – or wider issues of poverty and inequality that they would like UEMO to campaign on at EU level?
- ✍✍ EU overseas development policy. Should UEMO campaign for greater spending on primary care projects in EU assistance programmes to developing countries?

Another type of work that an EU liaison officer in Brussels could undertake would be to put together bids for EU funding for educational exchange and curriculum development projects between UEMO members. However, in order to do this successfully the liaison officer would need significant input from UEMO member organisations, both in terms of management time in designing projects and pledges to commit funds should the application for an EU grant prove successful.

Observations on UEMO hiring an EU affairs consultant

The budget could vary between **£10,000 and £100,000 per year** depending on:

- ✍️ Range and complexity of services contracted for
- ✍️ Experience and qualifications of consultant(s) used
- ✍️ Whether the consultant is a “blue chip” firm or an independent contractor

Generally, information gathering services can be carried out by less experienced, more junior consultants and so are cheaper to provide. Planning and executing lobbying strategies requires more skill and experience and so is more expensive.

There is a competitive market in EU affairs related services in Brussels. It is possible to organise competitive tenders for consultancy contracts and it is possible to negotiate prices downwards if you are prepared to haggle. The Dutch delegation is, nonetheless, correct in its observation that smaller consultancies and independent contractors can provide better value for money than the “brand name” international firms – though only to the extent that the former are prepared to lower their fees in line with their lower overheads.

Hiring a consultant has less in the way of start-up costs and administration than appointing an EU Liaison Officer. However, the key to getting value for money from a consultancy contract are:

- ✍️ Have a clear idea of the services you are looking
- ✍️ Have a clear idea of the price you are prepared to pay for them
- ✍️ Talk to several different consultants / firms

What could be achieved by appointing an EU affairs consultant?

If UEMO’s need for representation in Brussels is not sufficient to justify appointing a liaison officer then hiring a consultant can be a cost effective way of ensuring it still has some sort of ability to act. As observed above, ensuring that the consultant stays within budget and delivers value for money will require UEMO to invest time and effort in defining a clear and focussed brief. Having defined a clear brief will also make life simpler when the time comes to evaluate the contract.

Should UEMO decide that its main need is for information about EU developments rather than a capacity to undertake lobbying then using consultants may be the most cost effective way of fulfilling this need. There are a number of companies in Brussels that specialise in providing customised newsletters about EU developments and it should be possible for UEMO to negotiate a reasonably priced service with one of them. Given the substantial overlap in information needs between UEMO and other EU level medical organisations UEMO may even wish to consider splitting the cost of such a service with, for example, UEMS or CP.

Conclusions

It would be useful if at the October 2000 meeting of UEMO there could be a discussion on the maximum annual budget UEMO would be able to invest in establishing a presence in Brussels. Using my knowledge of the Brussels EU affairs market I could then give UEMO a rough and ready estimate of what it could expect to buy with these resources.

This exercise would also be useful in possibly ruling out some options. Specifically, if the maximum annual budget UEMO could make available is under £50,000 this would rule out employing a liaison officer in Brussels even on a part time basis. The options would then become either to buy in consultancy services or to part fund a post in another organisation (e.g. the CP or one of the national medical associations).