**EC0421n1\_event review**

**REVIEW OF “AVOIDING THE OMNISHAMBLES”**

**Note by Peter Owen**

“Avoiding the Omnishambles” turned out to be very much a curate’s egg.

On the plus side, the written material on which it was based (“The New Government”) was of high quality and clearly consistent with our aim of providing practical advice based on real-world experience of government. The speakers (Lord Falconer and Dominic Grieve MP) were also first class – particularly Lord Falconer who was in a position to give a firm and clear account of the approach that would be adopted by an incoming Labour Government.

Yet despite that, attendance was poor – fewer than 40 people – and we received no press coverage.

The lack of response to the invitation was particularly disappointing. We had hoped that the relative ease of attending a two-hour session in London might tempt those who had found a two-day event in Ditchley too much of a stretch, but this proved not to be the case although invitations were sent to all those on the Ditchley list (whether or not they had attended) and to 20 or so others. There were no indications that any external factors had kept acceptances down.

It would be wrong to compare our attendance with that routinely achieved by the IfG. They cast their net very wide and land large numbers of generally rather small fish (so much so that it is often difficult to gain access to their sessions). But we did not do well.

On the administrative side the event went smoothly except for a hiccough in providing us with video and audio recordings (we would know how to deal with that in future) and the cost was an order of magnitude less than Ditchley – less than £1,000 as against £15,000.

A number of questions arise:

* Was this worth doing? Should we consider repeating it?
* If we stick to this format, what can we do to improve attendance?
* Would another format – perhaps a round-table discussion on Ditchley lines with a shorter list of selected guests – be more successful?
* Is there a better approach to promoting our material rather than just posting it on the website and hoping for the best?

On the policy front, it was blindingly obvious from Lord Falconer’s contribution that whichever of the major parties is in the lead after the election will introduce bigger support systems for Secretaries of State and a greatly strengthened Centre with a decision-making structure in which the Cabinet functions more as a discussion group than as a lead participant. Our line on these issues has been largely confined to pointing out the dangers, which can easily be portrayed as wholly negative resistance to change.

Should we now accept the inevitable and develop proposals for how, if this is to be the future, matters should be arranged to avoid the potential pitfalls and enable the new arrangements to function effectively? There is too little time for us to do much in the few weeks remaining before the election, but we might contemplate something – perhaps an open letter to the Prime Minister - in the immediate post-election period while the government is settling in.

17th April 2015