

**Minutes of the Meeting of the EAHIL General Assembly
held 24th September 2004 at 17.00hrs
in the Hotel Santemar, Santander, Spain.**

1. **Quorum.** Tellers reported that over 90 EAHIL members were present and had been issued with voting slips, therefore the Assembly was declared to be quorate.
2. **President's Opening Remarks:** Arne Jakobsson welcomed members to this important meeting, where the main business on the agenda was the important issue of deciding on the future of EAHIL.
3. **Greetings from MLA:** Eve-Marie Lacroix, the MLA Representative to EAHIL, introduced herself to those present and sent fraternal greetings from the MLA.
4. **Minutes** of the meeting held in Cologne on September 19th 2002, and **Notes** of the meeting (non-quorate) held on 25th June 2003 in Oslo were **agreed** as a correct record, and there were no matters arising not otherwise covered by the Agenda.
5. **President's Report:** in order to save time, Arne Jakobsson had previously circulated copies of his Report, which also included a summary of the EAHIL Survey, and which would be published on the website. The meeting voted to **accept** the President's Report *nem con*.
6. **EAHIL Survey of European Health Information Professionals:** The results of the survey had been published in the May issue (67) of the *Newsletter*. It had proved to be a very useful and interesting exercise. Many important issues, including the future of EAHIL, had been addressed in the questionnaire. Arne had presented a paper on the survey during a parallel session at the Santander conference, which had been very well attended and had engendered a lively debate.
7. **Treasurer's Report:** Tony McSean presented the financial outcomes for the previous two years, stating that although at present EAHIL had a reserve of over EUR 15,000, the outlook for the future was not so bright as it might at first appear, because in common with many other professional associations, EAHIL was suffering from a continuing decline in membership. Although Suzanne Bakker and Sally Wood-Lamont had secured considerable savings by reducing the costs of administration at the Secretariat and by transferring the production of the *Newsletter* to Romania (and they both deserved our heartfelt thanks for their splendid efforts), the fact remained that the trend of falling membership levels needed to be addressed. At the request of the Board, he had prepared three different budgets for the future, each one designed to cater for a different set of decisions regarding restructuring. After much deliberation in the Board and Council meetings, there would be two proposals for the future shape of EAHIL put before those present at the General Assembly shortly, for them to make the final decision. Following a proposal by Bruce Madge, seconded by Gabriella Poppi, the General Assembly **accepted and approved** the Treasurer's Report *nem con*.
8. **Secretariat Supervisor's Report:** Suzanne stated that the membership figures as at July 2004 had been compiled, and the figure was 424, although a substantial number of members had been late in paying. Although due to staff shortage and computer problems during 2003, the Secretariat was not able to carry out all it had hoped to do, she was happy to report that a substantial improvement to their financial and administrative work had been achieved in the current year by the introduction of a computerised book-keeping program. Interest in advertising in the *Newsletter* remained healthy. Due to excessive amounts of spam emails, it had been decided that the email address of the Secretariat would need to be changed.
9. **EAHIL Newsletter Editor's Report:** Sally Wood-Lamont reported on the successful move of the *Newsletter's* printing operations from the Netherlands to Romania, which had resulted in a reduction of printing costs by 50%. Sally gave particular thanks to Suzanne Bakker for her much-appreciated hard work in keeping in touch with all advertisers. Advertisements were a very important source of income. Also, Sally acknowledged and thanked all the regular contributors to the *Newsletter*, who had helped make the publication such a success. 2004 had seen the introduction of "themed" issues, and this had proved to be very popular, so much so that regular themed issues were now planned. It had also been proposed at the Board meeting that we should consider

changing the title of the *Newsletter* to something more substantial like “The EAHIL Journal”.

- 10. The Future of EAHIL: to consider recommendations from the Board and Council regarding the future of EAHIL as a fee-charging membership organisation:** Arne Jakobsson introduced this important agenda item, giving members some background to the current debate. EAHIL needed to address the problem of gradually diminishing membership numbers. As the Treasurer had indicated earlier, the present economic model was not sustainable in the medium to long term. Also, it appeared that the association was spending too much on subscription income administration, and not enough on professional activities. Another factor was the fact that the membership fee could provide a very real obstacle to many potential members, especially (but not only) those from some parts of Eastern Europe. Thus the Board and Council had discussed the situation thoroughly and had decided to recommend to the General Assembly that EAHIL should abolish the membership fee to all members in Europe. There was no doubt that this was a daring and radical proposal, but as the Treasurer had also pointed out, if we were going to do this, it would be best to do it now, whilst we still had financial reserves to see us through any difficulty or if it was proved not to have worked, rather than wait until our finances (and membership) were too diminished to make any big changes. The Board and Council had also discussed a “totally virtual” option, whereby the *Newsletter* was electronic only, but it had been decided that a good printed Newsletter was very prestigious to EAHIL and that it in any case it was financially viable and an increased membership would actually make it more attractive to advertisers, hence we should continue to produce it in the printed version at least for the foreseeable future. Thus, there were two alternative proposals to put to the General Assembly.

Proposal A:

- Membership fees should continue.
- The EAHIL Board will seek to reduce the administrative costs of running the Association within the present system.

Proposal B:

- From 2006 the annual membership fee to be abolished for individual, institutional and student members resident in Europe.
- The membership fee for those resident outside Europe and affiliated members will remain unchanged.
- From 2006 all non-EAHIL members resident in Europe will be eligible to join EAHIL free of charge if they participate in an EAHIL conference or workshop.
- From 2006 all conference and workshop hosts will be required to pay a fixed premium to EAHIL.
- All health information professionals will be invited to join EAHIL free of charge, subject to suitable validation.
- The printed EAHIL Newsletter will be maintained and distributed to all members.
- The effects of the change will be reviewed and considered at the General Assembly in 2006.

In answer to questions from the floor, the President confirmed that we would define “Europe” in the wider sense, as in being a member state of the Council of Europe, not as in being a member of the European Union. The General Assembly then voted on the proposals.

There was an overwhelming majority vote for Proposal B, with only one member voting against and two abstentions. Therefore it was agreed that from 2006, EAHIL would become a non-fee paying association to all members in Europe.

- 11. EAHIL website:** Happily, Benoit Thirion had volunteered to take on the important task of maintaining and developing the EAHIL website. Benoit had stated that he would welcome all suggestions and input from other members concerning the website.
- 12. EAHIL Membership Database:** The President stated that the prototype database had been demonstrated to Board and Council members and that further details would be

available soon in the *Newsletter* and the database itself would be put on the website.

13. **EAHIL Scholarships:** The Board had made 4 Scholarships available to support worthy applicants attending the 9th conference in Santander. This was very much an activity that EAHIL wished to continue in the future.
14. **Elections for the Board and President:** the Election Committee announced the results of the recent elections. 135 valid ballot papers had been received. Arne Jakobsson had been re-elected as President for the next two years. Board members elected were: Helena Bouzkova, Manuela Colombi, Linda Lisgarten, and Marta Virago was co-opted. Two current Board members would be leaving at the end of the year, namely **Gabriella Poppi** and **Ulrich Korwitz**. Arne Jakobsson presented both with a small gift in thanks for their great contributions to the work of the Board and EAHIL.
15. **EAHIL Prix d'Honneur Awards:** it was with great pleasure that the President announced the Board's decision to award the **2003 prize to Liisa Salmi**. Liisa had long been one of EAHIL's most valued, active and influential members. Most recently, her work on developing the principles for an EAHIL accreditation scheme had been outstanding. The President also announced that the **2004 prize was awarded to Sally Wood-Lamont**. Sally's contribution to the success of EAHIL was immense, especially her tireless work as editor of the *Newsletter*, a job for which she had the ideal qualities of intellect, practicality, tact and determination!
16. **Any other business:** Suzanne Bakker reminded members that we needed volunteers for a new Election Committee. Also, the President reported that Gabriella Poppi had proposed to the Board and Council that we should introduce awards for the best presentations at EAHIL conferences and workshops. It was hoped that this could be introduced in time for the next workshop.
17. **President's concluding remarks:** Arne Jakobsson thanked all present for their invaluable contributions and participation in the General Assembly. It had been a bold and visionary decision to opt for EAHIL to become a non-fee paying association, and one that he was sure would lead to even greater success for EAHIL in the future.