

## **EBAE: THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE**

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## **THE EARLY YEARS**

Prior to 1985, only one woman, Elisabeth Gerver, then Director of the Scottish Institute of Adult Continuing Education, sat on the Steering Committee of the European Bureau. This state of affairs simply reflected the management structures of most adult education organisations and did not imply that EBAE paid no attention to matters concerning women. Conferences on women's affairs had been previously organised in Norway, The Netherlands, the UK and West Germany, and it was during these, and other major meetings of the European Bureau, that the view was strongly expressed that women's affairs in adult education should be given more prominence and more attention paid to their position by the EBAE.

The conference on Women and Adult Education held at Wansfell College in the UK in September 1980 had made strong recommendations to EBAE that the level of women's participation should be increased and that it should hold international conferences for women at regular intervals because the field had much to learn from women's experiences with education and their promotion of new methods of teaching and learning. However, they also asked that women's issues should not be treated as something separate and distinct from the rest of the field. Women were moving in every sphere of adult education and the feminist perspective had a great deal to offer to discussions.. They also foreshadowed later developments by requesting that the EBAE should adopt a policy of equal representation of women on committees and also have two or three women monitoring the EBAE's work in relation to women's issues. At the EBAE steering committee meeting in November 1980 these recommendations were strongly supported by committee members. Following discussions, the EBAE president, Arthur Stock, proposed to put into practice the recommendations that, both in letters of invitation to conferences and in conference discussions, member organisations would be encouraged to highlight those matters which were of particular interest to women, and to consider the possibilities for including more women in their conference delegations.

Following further support for these proposals during the next five years, the steering committee was persuaded in 1985 to distribute a questionnaire to all its members seeking the answers to two main questions on:

- 1) the number of women in member organisations, and their position in the management structures;
- 2) what member organisations thought EBAE could do:

- a) to improve women's participation at EBAE conferences;
- b) to increase participation by women in the management affairs of the Bureau.

The occasion at which these hopes for improvements were translated into the beginnings of reality was the meeting of the EBAE General Assembly in 1985 where the findings of the survey were reported. The result was that the Steering Committee recommended, amongst other matters, that:

- the EBAE officer structure should include the post of an officer for women's affairs;
- the committee structure should be expanded to include a sub-committee for women's affairs.

These recommendations were supported by the General Assembly and put into practical effect immediately. Three women were voted on to the Steering Committee, in the category of individual member representation. These women, together with Elisabeth Gerver who held the seat on the executive in her own right, gathered at the next meeting of the steering committee in Bonn later that year and in a short space of time formed a committee, elected an honorary officer, and devised a working plan for the next three years. Because of the initial heavy programme a decision was made to share the officer post by dividing the three year office span into two eighteen month periods. The first officer was Katherine Leni Oglesby (England and Wales, period of office December 85 - June 87) and the second Joan Merens (the Netherlands, period of office July 87 - December 88). The other members of the committee, which included both men and women, were Peter Clyne (England and Wales), Gabrielle Douenel (France), Wolfgang Leumer (W Germany), Iris Van Riet (Belgium), together with the ex-officio members Willem Bax (Director-Secretary), Elisabeth Gerver (Vice President of the EBAE with special responsibility for women's affairs) and Arthur Stock (President of the EBAE).

## **THE FIRST PHASE: 1985-88**

### *Programme of Action*

One of the first tasks of the Committee was to draw up terms of reference so that it would be clear to the member organisations what the remit of the Committee covered and what it could be expected to do within the timescale envisaged. The terms of

reference accepted by EBAE at its December 1986 Paris meeting were:

- to monitor the participation of women in EBAE activities, to report on development, and to propose to the Steering Committee ways of actively encouraging EBAE members to increase the participation of women in decision-making;
- to conduct a survey of the present position of women in organisations in membership of the EBAE as a basis for regular reviews of the position of women in decision-making;
- to identify for the Steering Committee major research needs and possible sources of funding for research into participation of women in European adult education, with particular regard to decision-making;
- to advise the Steering Committee on any matter regarding the EBAE publications concerning women in European adult education;
- to propose other specific ways in which the EBAE could encourage greater participation by women in international activities in adult education.

It was decided that immediate priority should be given to:

- improving the participation of women in EBAE affairs;
- investigating the wider picture of adult education for women in Europe.

### *Improving the Participation of women in EBAE activities*

The rationale underpinning the practical steps taken by the women's committee was to:

- raise the profile of women's needs, and special nature of the work that was being undertaken for women, within the Bureau's activities;
- recognise and publicly value the work and achievements of women involved in the grassroots activities;
- improve the opportunities for their particular educational needs to be given a public hearing at conferences and workshops;
- increase the participation rate by women in European Bureau matters both at structural level and at the conference level.

The first practical step was to promote and increase the flow of information between European Bureau and its member organisations and vice versa; and to this end the committee produced three or four issues of a Women's Bulletin supported by DVV, but because of the resource costs, time as well as money, it was difficult to continue with this. However the idea was not lost but regenerated in a most productive form by the women's committee after 1988 in the form of a very valuable publication on grassroots adult education work with women.

The second and most visible step was for the Bureau itself to set an example by which it might encourage its members to facilitate women's participation in public events. In an attempt to evaluate the impact of this the sub-committee monitored whether there had been any discernible effect on the participation rates of women in EBAE conferences within a three-year period 1985-88. A first stage analysis was undertaken in November 1986 for the period 1983-85 to try and establish the extent to which women were acting as representatives of their organisations and countries, followed by a further analysis in June 1988 for the period 1986 to Easter 1988.

### *Conference Attendance*

So many factors may have had an influence on the choice of conference representatives that it was clearly difficult to discern, simply from the figures, the extent to which the establishment of the European Bureau women's sub-committee and the promotion of a policy on raising the profile of women had had an effect on the number of women representatives sent by member organisations and countries. However if the conference participation figures were taken at their face value a simple analysis could be attempted of:

- those conference themes which particularly attracted men or women;
- the overall picture of women representatives in terms of their attendance at conferences.

Some of the findings confirmed pre-suppositions.

In relation to the subject matter of the conferences and workshops:

- women were more visible as representatives when conferences were concerned with such matters as health and multi-ethnic education;
- those on policy and organisational matters tended to attract an overwhelming number of

men representatives. This was not very surprising given general employment patterns in adult education management in Europe.

However it was also noticeable that a growing number of women were being employed at management level in adult education, and member organisations would have to acknowledge and accommodate this.

Representation patterns:

- when the later period of 1986 - 1988 was compared with the earlier period of 1983 - 1985, it was seen that the number of women representatives was slowly increasing;
- those countries which had shown most inequality in terms of men and women representatives before Easter 1986 did show some degree of improvement in the later period.

However the overall picture was still far from good in terms of equality of attendance and it was disquieting that the three countries which had hitherto shown to have the best ratios of men and women representatives appeared to be allowing that ratio to deteriorate, possibly by resting on their reputations.

#### **Conference/seminar/workshop programmes**

In order to tackle the matter of recognition of women's voice in adult education and their contribution to the Bureau's programmes, the committee for women's affairs instigated a number of practical steps.

1. Each proposed conference programme was screened for the intrinsic interest of the subject to women in the field, the relationship of the contents to women's interests, and the contributions sought from women, particularly those working at the grassroots. Conference organisers were asked to:

- include working groups of interest to those concerned with adult education for women;
- invite some women to speak and to chair conference sessions;
- invite member organisations to draw their women members' attention to particular items of interest for them;
- incorporate a standardised form of wording in the conference publicity which set out the Bureau's policy of increasing the participation of women.

2. Targeted seminar.

A seminar for women who held management responsibility in the adult education field was organised, with the aims of promoting networks to exchange experiences, to discuss common issues, and explore solutions relating to their career experiences.

#### *Adult Education and Women in Europe*

The 1985 survey on the position of women in EAEA member organisations had highlighted that European-wide information on this matter was very slight and uneven, so in 1986 the sub-committee suggested that the following issues required investigation:

- what adult education provision is made by national, regional and local adult education EAEA member organisations?
- To what extent do women participate in these activities?
- To what extent are women involved in decisions concerning adult education provision:
  - at policy level (ministries, national organisation)?
  - at management level (regional and senior institutional level)
  - at the practical implementation level (teaching and organising)?
  - What kinds of adult education provision are women requesting?
  - Are these common for all European countries?
  - Are there marked differences between countries due to varying social, political and cultural conditions?

An initial study on "Vocational Education for Women in Western Europe: facts, issues, and future directions", had been undertaken by Katherine Leni Oglesby (EAEA, 1984) and this provided a starting point for undertaking a more detailed study.

Given the very wide range of questions and fields which these issues covered, the sub-committee began its work in this field by undertaking a small comparative study of two countries in order to explore the feasibility of a broader pan-European research project. A Dutch researcher with considerable experience in adult education, Joke Wagenaar, was found and the DVV and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs agreed to finance the project. The Landelijke Beraad van Plaatselijk Vormingswerk supplied funding for the necessary translation work while the EAEA covered the editing of the materials. The final report

was issued in 1988 as part of the EBAE four-year project on the "Education and Training of Adults in a Changing Employment Market" (Vocational Education and Training for Women: European Perspectives, EBAE, 1988).

On the basis of this it was decided that initiating a large pan-European research project on the subject of women, the labour market and education was too large a task for the Bureau to tackle and other European bodies as CEDEFOP and OECD should be invited to initiate the follow-up of the work of EBAE in this field.

## **THE SECOND PHASE: 1988–91**

In 1988 the first two women's officers moved on: Katherine Leni Oglesby to become President of the EBAE and Joan Merens to take up a new career in the Dutch armed services. Joke Janse de Jonge was elected as the new officer for women's affairs, and together with Rosa Falgas, a vice-president of EBAE, led the developments undertaken in the second and third phases.

In the second term activity concentrated on important consolidation work and several workshops were held, including:

- an exchange of tutors' experiences working on grassroot level with women's groups (results published November 1991);
- a seminar for researchers on methodology and practice on the subject of vocational training for women (results published December 1992).

### *Dissemination of good practice*

A subsidy from the EC and extra grants from the Catalan and Spanish institutes of women's affairs made it possible to invite 30 women from all over Europe to exchange their experiences on their educational work with women's groups at the grassroots level. The workshop took place in Gerona in Spain in May 1990 under the direction of Rosa Falgas Casanovas (then a vice-president of EBAE) and Joke Janse de Jonge (a co-ordinator of educational work with women in the Netherlands).

The papers given during the workshop discussed a variety of very interesting actual projects. As a result of the meeting the papers were published, with funding from the Catalan Government in book format, in English and Spanish, in 1991 under the title of "Grassroots Education for Women in Europe".

A further workshop was organised for women who held decision-making positions in the adult education field. This was a follow-up of the workshop in Toulouse, France, in 1987. The Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education took this workshop on board and obtained funding from the EC, a magnificent final effort before that institute had to be closed. Case studies of Spain, Scotland, the Netherlands and Denmark were presented and strategies for overcoming barriers and maximising opportunities were discussed and analysed.

### *Research on women's education*

A workshop for researchers was held in 1992 on "Vocational training for women: ideas, questions, outcomes and perspectives from research work in Europe", supported by the German Institute for Adult Education of the DVV and Felicitas von Kuchler and Klaus Meisel. The workshop was a combination of "national overviews" (the labour market and further education structures for women) and "innovative projects". Questions on further education research, focal points of educational work and considerations for the future were thematised in such a way as to promote discussion on possible prospects and developments for a European further education policy with women's interests in mind. Although vocational and job training had increased significantly, there had been little opportunity to debate these matters on a comparative European basis in relation to women and vocational training. Participants wished for a central focus for action and information in the future. A follow-up seminar was planned to build on the outcomes of this workshop.

One overriding conclusion of the three later workshops was that, in terms of curriculum, methods and organisation, women's training had proved itself to be innovative, creative and pedagogically effective. In the development of methods and techniques the women's education field had a lot to offer, not only to women, but also to other disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

These findings supported the EBAE's efforts to obtain funding for the translation into Spanish of a Dutch practical methodology book on courses for women on re-entering the labour market. In close contact with the Spanish Association of Adult Education a subsidy was provided for translation and editing the book. In 1994 the book was published and disseminated throughout Spain and it is notable that some training courses for long-term unemployed have already adopted its methodologies.

## **THE THIRD PHASE: 1992–94**

Once the position of women in the Bureau and the field generally was more firmly established, the women's committee could turn its attention to women's education on a wider basis.

Following a change of the Bureau's name to The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), the work of the committee was directed to four main objectives:

1. to facilitate joint analysis and understanding, develop basic common strategies for participation at an international level, and promote transnational co-operation;
2. to support communication and exchange of ideas on the most advanced existing practices in the area of local integrated plans for the education of adults;
3. to promote the creation of opportunities for co-operation between associations, universities and public institutions in order to provide adequate training for all aspects of the work of a practitioner in adult education;
4. to promote experimental research and studies with the aim of finding which organisational responses and international methodologies can best aid the provision of the right to education for adults.

In essence, the emphasis was laid on support for local systems of adult education; work on training and specialisation of tutors of adults, and work on access to educational opportunities. Within these broad parameters programmes were mounted to influence international policies within the field of adult education, work to improve research and development and work on the educational rights of workers and women's education. This work was supported by the three offices at Amersfoort, Barcelona and Brussels and by the project co-ordinators who are staff members or practitioners of one of the member organisations.

## **EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

### *Evaluation*

In evaluating the programme undertaken during the existence of the committee and setting these against the pan-European context, the following conclusions were drawn by the committee:

1. the goal of increasing the numbers of women in EBAE/EAEA affairs is more or less achieved. In conferences, seminars and preparatory and steering committees the number of women participating is much higher than 6 years ago, though not yet totally equal to that of men;
2. on the qualitative perspective, the measures and the money spent on affirmative action in the field of education and labour is still very unequal;
3. in most countries of the EC, the educational provisions especially designed for women are disappearing because of lack of funding;
4. on the other hand, AE structures are becoming more and more formalised: a law on adult education provision is not a rare piece of legislation any more in Europe;
5. in most countries a policy of 'so-called' integration is being introduced, parallel to the process of formalisation/legislation. However, if the integration is scrutinised, it becomes clear that:
  - the educational system is not designed to make women/girls self-supporting, independent and competent persons in society as a whole. The demand throughout Europe for the book on the grassroots women's courses has been great and indicated clearly the need for help in promoting women's independence;
  - many practical methodologies have been tried for women at the grassroots level, working together with university women, to attend a diverse and wide range of courses enabling them to obtain their equal share of the wellbeing and the opportunities offered in society;
  - methods which have emerged from the women's movement and which could have productively been linked to education and training systems generally have still to become part of the much more formalised system of the adult education and training field;

- most of the curricula of the adult education courses are designed for people in general and lack awareness of gender issues.

With every respect to the good intentions of the adult education tutors and organisers, it would appear that many access courses which enabled women to re-enter education and training have not survived the "integration" into the official systems of adult education.

At this particular period of time the importance of women re-entering the labour market is fully recognised by employers and policymakers because women are needed to fill the labour market shortages which are foreseen for the coming years. Adult education and training are the most essential instruments to prepare the next generation of women to take their responsibilities in society. The EAEA is currently considering a further project with the aim of producing guidelines for good adult education practice in respect to the education and training of women.

In the UK a research project has begun to explore how women benefit from informal, local, women-only learning projects and how they approach the hurdles to enter the further and higher education institutions to obtain new qualifications or job-training.

This research will comprise:

- an investigation of the major barriers to access to formal education/training, through a survey and literature search;
- an examination of five or six introductory women-only schemes or programmes, in both statutory and voluntary sectors, which have an established record in encouraging women to progress to further learning and employment.

A research project is planned to analyse the achievements and findings of the activities of the past six years made by the women's committee of EBAE/EAEA and to link this to IRIS and CEDEFOP findings in the same field. These findings, together with the more in depth UK research, will be evaluated and updated at seminars and serve as background material for the final publications.

A seminar, where both research findings can be presented, will be held by DVV, one of our member organisations, as a follow-up to the researchers' seminar held in March 1992.

## *Conclusion*

The work of the women's committee indicates clearly the march of policy change on the pan-European front. From small beginnings, much important work has been done to raise consciousness about the issues and attempt to address these. The small practical steps at the beginning have led to bigger strides on the European scene with research projects on the issues and conferences supported by the EC and then EU programmes to put the research findings and policies into concrete action. All these achievements are a tribute to the voluntary action of women in adult education in Europe.