

## **The international importance of a national association**

Edward Hutchinson  
Secretary, National Institute of Adult Education (England and Wales)

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It is my experience that some of the most perplexing and time-consuming problems that face the chief executive of a National Association in Adult Education, arise out of international contacts. I think it is very wise that the Australian Association should give attention to the matter early in its existence. By so doing, it can perhaps avoid some of the pitfalls and can offer creative leadership and example that may be of the greatest value in the next half century. One thing is certain—there is no established pattern of international relationships into which a new national association can fit comfortably and conveniently. There are a number of connecting strands but there is nothing approaching an organized network with a clearly discernible pattern.

One reason, of course, is the paucity of national associations themselves and the great variety of internal structures that they display. Secondly, international relations in adult education by no

means wholly depend on the activities of national associations of an inclusive kind. They are sustained to a far greater extent by the direct links forged by or through groups with special objectives, University Extension Departments, Workers' Educational Associations and Trade Unions, Country Women's Associations, Church Organizations, etc. Thirdly, the marginal character of adult education in all countries means that the money equivalent of the time and effort needed to sustain international connections is very hard to come by.

This having been said, I would add, with conviction born of experience, that it is not possible to establish a nationally representative body in adult education without the rest of the world assuming that it is a proper point of reference and contact. To make the most of this fact without falling foul of the rightful autonomies of the member bodies can be a very difficult operation. In large measure solutions have to be found *ad hoc* in the light of experience but a clear recognition, at the outset, that 'National' and 'International' are not wholly separable terms, will almost certainly ease the task.

### **The nature and extent of national associations**

It may be useful to remind ourselves how few national associations actually exist which are at all inclusive and representative. The following list is not necessarily complete but it comprises all that are known to me, and it will be seen that they are virtually confined to the Commonwealth and the United States.

Canada: The Canadian Association for Adult Education,  
113 St. George Street, Toronto (publishes *Food for Thought*,  
monthly).

New Zealand: The National Council of Adult Education,  
192 Tinakori Road, Wellington.

Norway: The State Adult Education Council, Arts and Culture  
Division, Ministry of Church and Education, Oslo.

India: The Indian Adult Education Association, 17b Indraprastha Marg., New Delhi (publishes *The Indian Journal of Adult Education*).

United Kingdom: (a) The National Institute of Adult Education, 35 Queen Street, London, W 1 (publishes *Adult Education*, six times a year); (b) The Scottish Institute of Adult Education, Education Office, Alloa, Clackmananshire (publishes *Scottish Adult Education*, quarterly).

United States: The Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 743 North Wabash Avenue, Chicago 11, Ill., U.S.A. (publishes *Adult Education*, quarterly, and *Adult Leadership*, monthly).

Even this limited list may be misleading in suggesting uniformities of structure and purpose that are denied by the facts. The two Institutes in the United Kingdom are essentially federal associations of corporate bodies, including the public education authorities, although they have limited provision for individual membership. They are not expected to provide, and are indeed constitutively restricted from providing, any direct service of adult education. The U.S. Association, on the other hand, is fundamentally an individual membership body with overlapping links with the National Association of Administrators of Public Schools Adult Education and a working connection with the Council of National Organisations which, itself, is more akin in structure to the Institutes in the U.K. The Canadian Association has an elastic structure and has gone further than either its U.S. or U.K. counterparts in direct action, notably in its association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Through its sponsorship of a 'joint planning commission', it has promoted working relations between a large number of national voluntary organizations, outside the framework of the Association itself. So one could continue, and the position is further complicated by the fact that there are several countries in which a national body related to a particular sector of adult education performs at least some of the functions of the 'inclusive' type of association. If one looks for a single

focus, in Ghana, for example, one turns to the Peoples' Education Association, or in Western Germany to the Federal Association of Folk High Schools.

The common element underlying these differences, and the one that gives international significance to the work of the bodies mentioned, is that they offer channels of communication and provide in their publications the widest forum for continuing presentation and discussion of ideas and experiences. To the extent that their regularly published journals, in particular, circulate beyond national boundaries and accept responsibility for presenting other peoples' experience to their home readership, there is a slow but persistent percolation of information.

I speak with diffidence of another element of persistence which a national association provides in a way that cannot be achieved merely by periodical representative conferences. On however limited a scale, a permanent association implies a standing machinery of government and a secretariat, 'secretary', 'director', 'administrator'—under whatever titles he works, a full-time principal executive officer is identified with the association to a degree almost inevitably greater than any member of his governing body. If he is at all worth his salt he becomes the personal repository of a knowledge, which it is his peculiar business to put at the disposal of all comers. He will be more than human if he does not develop some special affections and interests, if at a particular moment he does not regard some activities as more important than others, but he fails in his job if he is not continually aware of the whole estate. He is like the man in a church belfry who cannot ring changes until he has the knack of 'rope sight'—the ability to hold all the tufts on the ropes in his eye at once. These considerations are important within the national compass but even more so at the international level: it is not the task of a national association secretary to pass judgments on the work of the member bodies, but if he is to help the enquiring foreigner, as he will certainly

be expected to do, he must be willing to estimate the relevance of particular activities to the best judgment he can make of the needs of the enquirer.

I do not think it is only making a virtue of my own experience to say bluntly that a national association cannot play a full role nationally, and certainly not internationally, unless it can sustain a separate existence and a responsible secretariat however small. In saying this, I put person before place, and I would plead, also, the virtue of an independent operating headquarters—a permanent address, a place of resort with an accessible collection of books and records whether dignified with the title of ‘Library’ or not. There are sadly too few such focussing points throughout the world to which students of adult education—and the student of adult education is often a very senior adult—can be directed. Field study is more rewarding if it follows even a few days study of documentary material adequately classified and catalogued.

### **The framework of international contacts**

In what I have so far written, I am clearly pre-supposing that contacts across national boundaries are valuable for the development of adult education and that they should be encouraged and enlarged. To those already deeply implicated, this may seem self-evident and in no need of justification. I can only say that those responsible for the development of national systems of education show no great eagerness to make it possible. Particularly in the advanced countries we have far to go before the resolutions of the Montreal Conference last year, calling on governments to treat adult education as an integral part of their total national systems, are likely to be fully implemented. Without this, international connections will continue to depend, in the future as in the past, largely on individual initiatives and on sporadic benevolences from charitable foundations and international agencies.

I found it instructive in Montreal, and tried not to find it depressing, that I could identify only one former member of the World Association of Adult Education that was in existence from 1919, effectively until 1939, and formally until 1947. Certainly not more than half a dozen knew that this was not the second World Conference, but unquestionably the third, the first having been held, not at Elsinore, Denmark, in 1949, but under the auspices of the World Association, in Cambridge, England, in 1930. Created largely by Albert Mansbridge in the flush of educational enthusiasm that emerged during the first World War, and presided over by Thomas Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia, no international body ever had more devoted secretarial service than was given to the World Association by Miss Dorothy Jones who is happily still available to bear witness. I recently shared with her the rather melancholy task of disposing finally of surplus Bulletins and other documents, after having incorporated much valuable material into the Library of the National Institute in London.

It is true, that, since 1947, the microcosm of an international agency has again existed in the Adult Education section of the Education Department of Unesco, but the comparative indifference of governments has meant that the section has had a low esteem as judged by budgetary appropriations and consequently by its staffing and range of action. In two matters Unesco has exceeded the performance of the pre-war World Association. Apart from two 'world' conferences it has mounted, and encouraged others to mount, a number of regional seminars, and it has helped to bridge the gap between 'Fundamental' and 'Adult' Education. The first of these was not within the financial compass of the World Association, whilst the second scarcely existed as a recognized issue. To set against the quarterly Unesco Bulletin of Fundamental and Adult Education there are the two series of Bulletins of the World Association published without a break from July 1919 to February 1946.

This brief historical excursus may serve to point some of the difficulties that now prevent, and will probably continue to prevent, the re-establishment of a formal World Council or Association of Adult Education. It is the typical hen and egg situation—without large funds pre-committed, no justifying activity is possible; without previous evidence of usefulness no one is in fact likely to commit funds at all, and certainly not on the scale required to make formal organization viable. This was clearly the reasoning of the great majority of the delegates present in Montreal last August, reinforced by quite legitimate doubts as to just what could be the terms of reference of such a body, given (a) the willingness of Unesco to perform certain functions generally admitted to be desirable; (b) the established existence of specialized bodies such as the International Federation of W.E.A.s., the Associated Country Women of the World, and the probability of other links being forged in the fields of University and Residential adult education, and as an element in the potentially very powerful World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession.

What emerged from lively and at times heated discussion was modest enough, but useful if the interested parties, including National Associations, intend that it shall be so. Unesco was asked to maintain and extend what it has in fact been doing in the way of publication and encouragement of personal contacts through seminars and conferences, but to bring into being a more permanent consultative committee, with a known basis of membership, drawn from people with appropriate kinds of experience of field work and of promoting co-operation at national, regional and international levels. In relation to the great variety of practices to which the words 'Adult Education' attach, to the difficulties of equating geographical and political representation and to the mere problem of linguistic diversity, whatever Consultative Committee is created, within realistic limits of size and expenditure on meetings, will be a very modest mouse to come out of the mountain.

When representative national associations are thicker on the ground and much more firmly rooted in their own plots than they commonly are now, they may be the obvious points to which Unesco should look for an important part of the membership of a permanent Consultative Committee. But I fear that day is far off. In any case, this refers mainly to cross-connections between organizations. Special reference was made in the Montreal recommendations to Unesco, to the importance of providing an international focus for people professionally concerned with adult education as a matter of content, process and administration. The pressure for this came mainly from the U.S.A., the only country where a sizable number of people regard themselves as professional adult educators at large, rather than as professionally employed in the service of a specific organization. Certainly so far as the United Kingdom is concerned, there is no very widespread understanding of what our American friends are driving at. Despite our long and properly respected experience, there is nothing in Britain that can be identified as an organized profession of adult education. There are many small groups of people who associate on the basis of common occupational interests, as for example, Tutors employed by University Extra-Mural Departments and the W.E.A., in the Tutors' Association; Community Centre Wardens in the Society of Neighbourhood Workers, Principals of Residential Colleges, Teachers in Evening Institutes, etc., but there has been little attempt to define entry standards or to sponsor organized training even for such groups, much less to seek for any common core of theory and practice that might become the basis of a recognized qualification for service in a number of different fields.

I suspect that this is an area in which growing awareness of other people's attitudes and problems may exert considerable influence. However little we in the U.K. may feel the need to rationalize our experience for our own sakes, we are compelled in some measure to do it for other people. It is something of a paradox that Manchester University should recently have established a Diploma course in Adult



Education primarily for students from overseas, and that the much longer established Diploma course at Nottingham University should, over the years, have attracted larger numbers from abroad than from the United Kingdom.

There is a point of substance here for those concerned with national associations based mainly on a corporate membership. They may have little meaning for the main body of field workers and particularly for that great majority in all countries to whom adult education is only a limited part-time commitment. Representative national bodies tend, almost inevitably, to be employers' associations, and if the benefits of international contacts are to flow into the daily work of adult education, there is need for a balancing force of organized employees. This is not so apparent in the case of voluntary organizations where professional service usually carries a large element of commitment to the objectives, explicit and implicit, of the organizations; or as regards the modern residential colleges and centres where the unit is commonly small and discrete. But it certainly applies when universities employ Extra-Mural or Extension staffs of some size and, even more strongly, when public education authorities are directly involved in programme planning and execution. It is particularly as regards the last category, that the Adult Education Committee of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession may come to assume a good deal of importance.

What are the practical implications of all this for a National Association of Adult Education? Here, for what it is worth, are my own answers:

1. The very creation of such an Association will bring a response from other parts of the world.
2. Much of this response will be in the form of personal enquiries, some of them only tenuously related to the declared purposes of the Association.

3. In order to deal intelligently with them, the Secretariat will have to know all it can about the background circumstances in the enquirer's own country. When, for example, a correspondent in the U.S.A. asks for details of 'Summer Schools' in England, it is important to know that he is almost certainly looking for a University Summer Session where his studies will rank for credit at home. Such possibilities are virtually non-existent in England, but we have many scores of—in our own terms—'Summer Schools'.
4. To build up the requisite fund of knowledge, a National Association must receive – and someone must try to digest – a veritable mountain of paper, much of it excruciatingly dull. There is vitally necessary work to be done in organizing translation and abstracting services, and this is certainly a matter in which Unesco is the only conceivable world agency at the present time. It will not act without continuous pressure from those who want the service.
5. The Association's officers must be aware of the existing agencies for international contact and must have opportunities to meet, in person, as many as possible of the people working for them. At the present time, I would have in mind:

*Unesco*—primarily, but not exclusively, its adult education section. The Exchange of Persons, Librarian and Museum sections, are also relevant.

*The Adult Education Committee of W.C.O.T.P.* based in Washington (D.C.), U.S.A., but now acting with the aid of consultants (of whom Mr. Hely is one) in the major regions of the world.

*The International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations* operating from the headquarters of the British W.E.A. in London.

Although not of 'world' status, the *European Bureau of Adult Education*, working from Bergen (N.H.) in the Netherlands, has promoted useful contacts, particularly in the field of Residential Education, including three 'trans-Atlantic encounters'.

Following a meeting at Sagamore in the U.S.A. after the Montreal Conference, plans are on foot to maintain connections between people with particular concern for University adult education. The Editor is better informed about this than I am.

I have avoided a rhetorical approach in writing this article. I know only too well that a new national association, operating on a continental scale and against a background of long-established autonomies, will have plenty of internal problems to resolve. But the Australian Association emerges at a time when it is impossible for intelligent men and women not to be aware that the well-being of their fellow-countrymen is inextricably interwoven with the well-being of all men everywhere. There can be no more useful service than to keep that fact in the forefront of educational policies at all levels.

### **The role of adult education**

It seems sometimes to be assumed that in the economically developed and educationally sophisticated countries the problems are few or none, that adult education is of only peripheral importance, and that the help which Unesco can give is minimal. None of these assumptions is true. However, it is also true that the needs of the developing countries are even more urgent—indeed spectacularly urgent. ... Some of the developing countries can meet these needs from their own resources, and seek nothing from outside save sympathy and understanding. Many others, and in particular countries in Africa and Asia which have recently attained independence, must look to the developed countries for help of various kinds. We believe that this help the developed countries should give generously, speedily and unconditionally...

It is relevant to stress again that what is new is the *rate* of change in this mid-twentieth century. Even twelve or fifteen years of full-time schooling is inadequate equipment for fifty years of adult life; what

we, who are now adult, learnt at school is partly out of date, and certainly needs to be supplemented. This will be even more true of the next generation. Adult education alone can meet the needs of our situation, and here and now it must be accepted as a normal and necessary part of the sum total of educational provision. That is its role in a changing world. (*Report of Commission I, Unesco World Conference*)