

WITEC - « WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Dr. Gertrud Humily, Executive Director, International Education

Ministry of Defense, Paris, France

WITEC is an extensive European network of universities, for the development and support of women in science, technology and engineering. WITEC was established in 1988 within the European COMETT-Program as a sectorial University-Enterprise-Training Partnership. The WITEC secretariat is based in Sheffield Hallam University, U.K. They operate at all different levels : a WITEC group can be based within a company, within a national women's professional body or in a particular region, also in an academic institution. All decisions are made by the International Board.

Women represent 51,3 % of the European population, but are seriously under-represented in engineering, science and technology. Their potential is wasted and needs to be harnessed because there is a shortage of highly qualified scientists and engineers throughout Europe. On the other hand, women can offer excellent management skills to technical enterprises. Unaware of their potential, they miss out on such opportunities.

Activities :

WITEC proposes to provide equal opportunities advice. It gives advice regarding the encouragement of women into science & technology. It can provide national & international contacts for European project work. It has a database of all the members which can help to link different organisations throughout Europe. Working in the field of women in technology can sometimes be a frustrating and lonely experience. WITEC provides support, advice, ideas & links other people who work in the same field.

Who should join WITEC ?

Membership of WITEC is open to all committed to the advancement of women in the areas of science, technology and enterprise : such as universities, enterprises, unions etc. as well as individual employees, students, researchers, etc.

University and company staff can obtain placement grants to work for a few months in other European countries. Company staff can go on placement to universities in order to take part in research work & to make links with universities. WITEC gives grants to female under-graduates, post-graduate and recent graduate students, who want to gain work experience in a scientific or engineering field in another European country and helps to find placements.

WITEC has a library of research covering women in science & technology and has been commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Unit of the European Community to produce a handbook of women in experts in science, technology & engineering. The handbook will facilitate the further career progression of women experts in academic & industrial fields. This project will be supported by the Leonardo program which will be one of the two new actions of the European Community for the years 1995-1996, concerning support for innovation in vocational training, Socrates being the program for quality of education systems which will replace Erasmus.

These two new actions will have a much greater budget (1 billion ECUs to Socrates and 80 million ECUs to Leonardo). They will replace the current programs (e.g. COMETT, FORCE, PETRA, EUROTECNET, ERASMUS, LINGUA , and others, YOUTH FOR EUROPE being a third program).

Equal Opportunities between men & women in vocational training is clearly stated and greater weight will be placed on language training than in COMETT. Beside these new programs, the European Union did sign on April 12, an agreement with the United States which allocated 1.1. million ECUs to encourage and support the cooperation between academic institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. A possibility to have support for a collaboration program amongst some WEPAN members in the US and some WITEC groups in universities is high and I would be happy to help in the setting up of such a program. The collaboration can take place at different study levels and be expanded to professors and staff. Bi-cultural programs with total credit transfer and common Master programs could also be launched. I would like to finish by saying that Europeans are more and more aware of the need to develop equal opportunities and many schools are extremely interested in setting up attractive curricula with an international touch for young women.

