

## History

The origins of EECERA lie in the late 1980s when Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal, UK early years researchers, began to look for support from colleagues in the UK and in Continental Europe for the development of different research perspectives on the issues facing young children and families. The characteristics of quality early childhood education and care were becoming important across Europe as Governments sought to address the impact of the expansion of full-time female employment and through the development of early childhood 'provision'. The word 'provision' is preferred to 'programme' (a word used more commonly in the US) as in most of Western Europe early childhood and family services are provided by the State.

Many in this UK group were associated with TACTYC (Teachers of Advance Courses to Trainers of Young Children) and with the EYCG (Early Years Curriculum Group). They made initial contacts with European colleagues through the Association for the Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) producing a *'Comparative Directory of Initial Training for Early Years Teachers'* in September 1991. Later, through the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE), contacts were made in Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden and other publications followed.

In 1985 the Government in the Netherlands had introduced a Primary Education Act bringing preschool and primary school together into a 4-12 year age range. As a result a conference was held by Frea Janssen-Vos in Noordwijk in 1990 to trouble some of the issues that arose from having four year olds in schools. Three speakers at this conference, Tony Bertram, Ferre Lavers and Chris Pascal made contact for the first time and began to trouble the concept of 'quality' as applied to early childhood programmes. Ferre was committed to organizing a conference at Leuven in Belgium in 1991 to celebrate the first 10 years of his Centre for Experiential Education (EXE). The three founders of EECERA decided to hold annual conferences alternating between the universities of KU Leuven, (Belgium), and Worcester, (UK), where the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) was then based, to explore quality in early childhood education.

At the Worcester conference in 1992, Tony with the support of Chris and Ferre launched the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA). The acronym emphasized that in the 'era' of the 'EEC' (European Economic Community), as the European Union was then known, EECERA intended to sustain the European traditions of early childhood research. It was at this conference that the famous child logo first appeared. The first membership fee was paid by Kathy Sylva and some 30 others followed immediately. After a generous invitation by Christos Frangos of the university of Aristotle, Thessaloniki, (Greece), the location for the 1993 conference, it was decided, would be Greece, not Belgium, and thereafter future EECERA annual conferences would take place in a different European city. It was also decided in 1993 to launch a peer review journal, the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal and that the first Coordinating Editor would be Chris Pascal.

A provisional constitution setting out the aims of the association was drawn up using the UK's Charity Commissioners model of a Trust. The new organisation would be run and owned by its members.

By 1997, Belgium, United Kingdom, Greece, Sweden, France and Portugal had all hosted EECERA conferences but there was still no formal executive structures in place and no formal officers. The six conference chairs had formed a loose oligarchy which made decisions as a Board of Trustees, operating democratically according to a set of principles based on the legal structures of UK charitable foundations. An Editorial Board ran the Journal which was wholly produced and printed by the Association through the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) in the UK. The membership had grown to about 150 people. It was decided that a series of protocols should be developed to more closely define the operation of the Association, that the Board should elect a President and that a Members' Trustee elected directly by the Members for three years should be part of the Board of Trustees. The first elected President of EECERA was Tony Bertram.

In 1999 in Helsinki, the first Members' Trustee, Miguel Zabalza, was elected and the journey towards full democratisation of EECERA began. Miguel had been Chair of the 1998 conference in Spain. Bud Spodek was very keen to create a similar organisation for Pacific Rim countries and with support from EECERA, he used much of the organisational and governance structures from EECERA. In 2000, Chris and Tony contributed to the Inaugural PECERA Conference in Kobe, Japan. <http://www.pecera.org/about.htm>. EECERA is very proud to have supported PECERA's creation and looks to support others too across the world.

EECERA Conferences in London 2000, Alkmaar in the Netherlands and Cyprus followed and at the Glasgow conference in 2003, the international publisher Taylor and Francis, having been chosen in open competition by the Board, launched the revamped journal now producing three issues per volume. After the Malta conference, Tony Bertram retired as President and Ferre Laevers was elected. In the course of the next three conferences in Ireland, Iceland and Prague, the EECERA Annual Conference became the largest and most significant event in Europe for early childhood researchers with more than 650 delegates from all over the world attending each year. Several Special Interest Groups (SIGs) had produced themed editions, books and other publications and were now a central mechanism for cross national networking and collaborations. The Association developed protocols and structures to make its democratic processes open and participatory through the mechanism of an Electoral College which controlled elections to the Board.

In 2008, before the Stavanger conference, Chris Pascal was elected President and in Strasbourg, the 2009 EECERA Conference was held at the heart of Europe in the Congress of the European Parliament. At the 2010 Birmingham Conference, the EECERJ, now cited in the ISI SCII, was re-launched as a four issue quarterly.