

Gender Inequality in Production and Reproduction Priority Network

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Executive Summary

The Gender Inequality in Production and Reproduction Priority Network (1 October 2004 - 31 March 2010), co-ordinated by Professor Jacqueline Scott was a £3.2K million investment to explore the changing dynamics of gender equality in contemporary society. It comprised nine projects in three linked strands:

- pathways to adult attainment; resource allocation in (re)production
- gender, ethnic and class inequalities
- policy responses to gender inequalities in employment and work-life balance.

The Network regularly exceeded its key performance indicators and despite encountering some difficulties (including problems caused by serious illness and maternity leaves) it met all of its objectives. GeNet also attracted extensive additional funding from other organisations to support its activities and for commissioned work in addition to the core activities funded by the ESRC award.

The researchers were exceptionally prolific producing: 22 books, 203 refereed articles, 120 book chapters, 79 research reports and 92 working papers and some practitioner oriented publications. All of the nominated publications are of international standing.

The Network emphasised the value of both quantitative and qualitative methods in understanding gender inequalities with a stronger emphasis on quantitative research than has often been the case in research on gender. It created substantial new datasets and conducted new quantitative analysis (including data cleaning) of existing large and complex datasets which will provide new resources for future generations of researchers to interrogate.

GeNet made only a modest contribution to advancing theoretical debates in the field (mainly through individual projects rather than built across the Network) and did not fulfil its potential in terms of advancing methodological debates about combining quantitative and qualitative research (although it is also important to acknowledge that this assessment is relatively premature given that this investment only finished in March 2010).

The Network Co-ordinator put significant effort into developing the international focus and impact of the research despite the fact the empirical work was grounded in the UK experience.

The Network only generated 'ordinary' cross-disciplinary learning - namely the exchange of literature, data, invitations and so on - or rather than a deeper collective forging of ideas to produce genuine inter or even trans-disciplinary theory.

An impressive website was established that is achieving over a quarter of a million hits per year and is to be archived for future generations by the British Library.

The Network Co-ordinator used 'knowledge brokers' to help organise a series of high-profile conferences /seminars to disseminate the findings to academic and non-academic audiences.

GeNet produced a very rich empirical evidence base about the changing dynamics of gender in contemporary UK that is an important resource for non-academic organisations and is likely to continue to be drawn on in future discussions about work and family.

The Network has not had an identifiable impact on policy or practice (organisations did however, identify findings from individual projects which were interesting and informative) - although this is common to most academic work as it is difficult to attribute specific cause/effect relationships. GeNet was also unfortunate in the timing of its final message. The General Election and associated change of government and programme of spending cuts, which coincided with the end of this award, meant that long-standing relationships which had been cultivated with policy-makers were lost.

Professor Scott led, and developed, the Network in a very effective way. She put significant effort into building capacity in the social sciences - one of the ESRC's strategic policy objectives - which it is beyond the ability of smaller scale investments to achieve.

Gender equality was an original theme that did not significantly overlap in its empirical focus with other concurrent ESRC investments. However, network members had a range of individual connections with other ESRC and non-ESRC major investments.