**Topic for discussion: Sustainability and Gender Action Plans
(chaired by Dr Sarah Barnard)**

GenderTime, as well as other 'sister projects', have benefited from European funding to enable the implementation of gender equality plans (GEPs) across a range of research institutions. An important factor for consideration, throughout these activities but particularly as these projects come to an end, is the sustainability of the initiatives and the need to continue building on progress made.

Rubery (2003) highlights contextual factors as impacting on the sustainability of the gender equality commitments: The rise of equal opportunities for women and men up the European agenda; The impact of the gender equality perspective on policymaking and outcomes; Critical dependence on a political will to implement the agenda; Limited knowledge/ understanding on part of policymakers at EU/member state level.

Other research has analysed the impact of existing power structures in the application of change in action research (Dillon, 2014). Clearly the people in organisations are crucial to the structures and cultures of the institutions in which change is needed to minimise gender inequality – and this cannot come from only those with the remit to work in this field alone- this has been recognised in GenderTime with the requirement to include key people with institutional power (named 'Transfer Agents') In this sense a broad feeling of 'ownership' of the initiatives can help embed them into the normal practices of the organisation (Burns, 2013). Therefore, a holistic view of GEPs and how they interact with organisations is needed over and above a detailed understanding of GEPs activities. Burns' (2013) systemic action research suggests that sustainable change needs 'system realignment' not only isolated problem solving.

In GenderTime different methods have been employed while implementing the GEPs in order to increase sustainability: working with long term visions and goals; networking within and outside of the organization; building trust, credibility and legitimacy; utilizing already existing structures and tools within the organization; creating alliances, involving people and appointing successors. Many of the actions have been specifically designed to continue after the project has ended: setting up new routines for gender monitoring functions; formal networks and platforms for exchange and discussions; changing decision-making procedures and increasing transparency. However, there is also an awareness of factors that obstruct sustainability: lack of funding, internal politics and competing priorities.

The Gendertime stakeholder workshop will provide an important platform for discussions of these issues as we agree with Burns (2013) who states that stakeholder involvement is crucial to ensure sustainability.

Three questions for consideration:

1. What does 'sustainable' mean in relation to GEPs?
2. What are effective ways of ensuring sustainability of GEPs?
   a. Examples from your institution
   b. Examples from other institutions
   c. Relevant evidence in the research/practitioner literature
3. What are the main factors that prevent sustainability and how can these be overcome?

References

Burns, Danny (2013) Systemic action research: Changing system dynamics to support sustainable change. *Action Research*, *12*(1), 3–18. http://doi.org/10.1177/1476750313513910

Dillon, Michael (2014) A Foucauldian analysis of power relations in an action research study. *Action Research*, *12*(2), 209–223. http://doi.org/10.1177/1476750314529598

Rubery, Jill (2003) *Gender mainstreaming and the open method of coordination: is the open method too open for gender equality policy?* UMIST Report.