International Research Network

Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation

By Falco Pfalzgraf

This report presents the International Research Networking Project
"Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation"

The project has been led and conducted by:
Dr Falco Pfalzgraf
Reader in German Linguistics
School of the Arts
Queen Mary University of London

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1. Establishing a new International Research Network

The establishment of the international research network *Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation* was initiated in the wake of the international conference Attitudes towards Gender-Inclusive Language: A Multinational Perspective, held at Queen Mary University of London in September 2022. Organised and led by Dr Falco Pfalzgraf (QMUL), this two-day event featured 33 papers presented by 46 speakers from 17 countries and attracted 192 attendees from 36 countries. The conference highlighted the urgent need for a comparative approach to research on gender-inclusive language to advance both academic understanding and practical applications.

In September 2022, Dr Pfalzgraf took the very first steps towards establishing the research network by creating the JISC mailing list G*ender-Inclusive Language*, which has since grown to over 400 subscribers. He also reached out to distinguished academics and esteemed practitioners, inviting them to join as founding members of the planned research network. With a solid group of contributors identified, Dr Pfalzgraf began preparing an application for £45,000 through the AHRC Research Networking Scheme in February 2023, submitting it in mid-June of the same year.

The AHRC evaluated the application for the international research networking project *Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation* as "4 – Very Good". However, the proposal did not receive funding, partly also due to the scheme's permanent closure at the end of June 2023, which resulted in unprecedented competition among applicants.

Despite this setback, the commitment of the founding members remained unwavering. Nearly all of the distinguished academics and practitioners who initially agreed to join decided to proceed without funding. All planned events were transitioned to an online format, and the research network's activities were carried out entirely on a voluntary, unpaid basis. This extraordinary dedication reflects the passion and perseverance of those involved in establishing this international research network, which aims to bridge academic research and practical implementation in the field of gender-inclusive language.

2. Founding Members

The International Research Network Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation was officially established in September 2023.

The founding members are:

- Dr Falco Pfalzgraf (QMUL), founder and research network organiser

Practitioners:
- The Civil Service (UK), Karoline Oakes
- The Carbon Trust (UK), Hilary Hume-Smith
- The Council of the European Union, Jennifer Pickering
- The Danish Language Council (Dansk Sprognævn), Dr Marianne Rathje
- The Icelandic Language Council (Árnastofnun), Dr Ágústa Þorbergsdóttir
- The Swedish Language Council (Språkrådet), Dr Lena Lind Palicki
- The German Goethe Institute, Andrea Pfeil
- RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services (USA), Dr Glenda Leung
- Dabru Eleynu Gender-Inclusive Hebrew (Israel), Dafna Eisenreich

Academics:
- Prof Dr Sofie Decock (Ghent, Netherlands) for Dutch
- Dr Michela Baldo (Birmingham, UK) for English
- Dr Laura Hekanaho (Helsinki, Finland) for Finnish
- Dr Julie Abbou (Aix-Marseille, France) for French
- Prof Dr Gabriele Diewald (Hannover, Germany) for German
- Dr Sofia Lampropoulou (Liverpool, UK) for Greek
- Dr Federica Formato (Brighton, UK) for Italian
- Prof Dr Ute Gabriel (Trondheim, Norway) for Norwegian
- Dr Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck (Frankfurt/Oder, Germany) for Polish
- Prof Dr Ruxandra Vişan (Bucharest, Romania) for Romanian
- Prof Dr Emma Renström (Kristianstad, Sweden) for Swedish

3. Rationale

Research on gender-inclusive language is a timely and important topic in today's society. It helps us understand how language can perpetuate gender biases, stereotypes, and inequality. Research on gender-inclusive language helps making women more visible in society and is also important for marginalised gender groups, such as transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals.

A cooperation between researchers and practitioners from outside the proverbial ivory tower helps challenging societal attitudes and biases. Together, we can foster cultural change and create a more inclusive society that values and respects all individuals. Research helps shed light on the challenges they face due to gendered language, and provides evidence-based strategies to create more inclusive and respectful linguistic environments. Through research, we can identify effective strategies to encourage more inclusive and equitable language use. We can improve communication strategies, promote empathy, and enhance dialogue among diverse individuals. All this can only be done when we bring together academics and practitioners from diverse fields to collaborate on this important issue.

Research on gender-inclusive language holds significance for various stakeholders, as it provides valuable insights that can inform policy-making and guide language-related practices in the domains we cover: government bodies and related institutions, cultural associations and institutions, NGOs, and businesses in fields like writing, translation, and language education.

Our research network has generated fruitful and novel interaction by bringing together practitioners and academics from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The participating academics cover various languages and work in diverse disciplines and fields such as Linguistics, Psychology, Translation Studies, and Languages. They all conduct research on gender and language, with a focus on encouraging gender-inclusive language. Our research network has led to interdisciplinary collaboration, and has facilitated the transfer of knowledge and expertise across the different aforementioned disciplines and fields.

Moreover, the research network has advanced knowledge and understanding in these fields by facilitating collaborations between the participating academics and practitioners, promoting research on gender and language, and sharing best practices with regard to the use of gender-inclusive language in various contexts. The research network has also contributed to the broader societal discourse on gender and language, including the role of language in shaping our perceptions of gender, and the importance of gender-inclusive language use in developing gender equality.

The conferences and workshops provide opportunities for participants to learn from each other, exchange ideas, develop new perspectives on gender and language, and thereby overcome challenges. Our concluding event has facilitated discussions and exploration of synergies, potentially leading to future collaborative projects and initiatives that improve gender-inclusive language use in different contexts.

The activities and outcomes of the research network so far have been of interest to a range of academic audiences and disciplines, including Linguistics, Psychology, Translation Studies, and Languages, as well as practitioners. The research network has helped promoting and implementing gender-inclusive language, and it will also path the way for future cooperation on lager projects related to gender and language.

4. Events

The importance of networking and collaboration cannot be overstated, particularly in fields where research and practice intersect on an international level. Within our research network, both academics and practitioners have greatly benefited from participating in our conferences and workshops. These events provided invaluable opportunities for exchanging ideas, sharing knowledge, and addressing specific challenges participants face in their work.

By engaging with peers who encountered similar challenges, participants were able to identify potential solutions, taking advantage of the collective expertise of the group. Additionally, the conferences and workshops offered an avenue to learn about best practices and successful strategies from others in the field. This exchange of insights enriched everyone involved, as participants drew inspiration and practical lessons from one another's experiences.

Beyond the immediate outcomes of problem-solving and knowledge-sharing, the events facilitated the creation of long-lasting connections and professional networks. By engaging with fellow academics and practitioners, participants formed relationships that promise to be valuable for future collaborations. This exemplifies the strength of the interdisciplinary approach that underpins our network.

Moreover, the reach of our events extended beyond the immediate participants. For those unable to directly contribute to the research network, we ensured accessibility by holding all events online and archiving them on our research network website **gender.pfalzgraf.net**. This approach maximised the impact of the events, allowing a wider audience to benefit from the discussions and insights shared.

The following five events have been part of the establishment of our research network:

4.1 Opening event, held on Friday 17 November 2023

During the opening event of the International Research Networking Project "Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation", the key participants in the project – academics and practitioners – met for the first time, to briefly introduce themselves and the work they do in their organisation/s. The day concluded with a group brainstorming session, where participants reflected on their motivation, expectations, and aims with regard to the project. This informed the future project events with regard to the academics' and practitioners' questions, needs, and sharing of information and good practice.

The following 29 network participants, residing in 15 countries and working on 15 languages (and beyond), contributed to the opening event:
- Event organiser and moderator: Dr Falco Pfalzgraf, QMUL

Academics (names listed in the order of the languages covered):
- Dutch: Prof Dr Sofie Decock, Ghent University
- Dutch: Prof Dr Tanja Mortelmans, University of Antwerp
- Dutch: Prof Dr Sarah Van Hoof, Ghent University
- English: Dr Evan Bradley, Penn State University
- Finnish: Dr Laura Hekanaho, University of Helsinki
- French: Prof Dr Daniel Elmiger, University of Geneva
- German: Prof Dr Gabriele Diewald, Leibniz University Hannover
- German: Dr Sascha Stollhans, University of Leeds
- Greek: Dr Angeliki Alvanoudi, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Greek: Dr Sofia Lampropoulou, University of Liverpool
- Italian: Dr Federica Formato, University of Brighton
- Norwegian: Prof Dr Ute Gabriel, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NTNU)
- Polish: Dr Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
- Romanian: Prof Dr Ruxandra Vişan, University of Bucharest

- Spanish: Prof Dr María Muelas Gil, Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)
- Swedish: Prof Dr Emma Renström, Kristianstad University
- Translation; English/Italian: Dr Michela Baldo, University of Birmingham

Practitioners:
- The Civil Service (UK), Karoline Oakes
- The Carbon Trust (UK), Hilary Hume-Smith
- The Danish Language Council (Dansk Sprognævn), Dr Marianne Rathje
- The German Goethe Institute, Andrea Pfeil
- The Icelandic Language Council / Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Dr Helga Hilmisdóttir
- Swedish Language Council (Språkrådet), Dr Lena Lind Palicki
- RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services (USA), Allyson Nolde & Dr Glenda Leung & Rebecca Israel & Dr Chryso Hadjidemetriou
- Dabru Eleynu Gender-Inclusive Hebrew (Israel), Dafna Eisenreich

Additionally, 51 attendees from 21 countries participated as "attending only." These countries included Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom (UK), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United States of America (USA).

The total of 80 participants highlights the considerable interest in this subject area and underscores the value of facilitating collaboration between practitioners and academics, addressing a gap many have identified.

Recordings of the presentations, as well as relevant material such as PowerPoint presentations, have been made available in the repository on the conference webpage **gender.pfalzgraf.net/research-networking-project/conferences--events/opening-event**

4.2 Conference "Language and Gender: Achieving Conceptual Clarity", held on Friday 19 January 2024

This was the second event held within the year of the network's founding. Selected academics presented papers, while other interested academics and practitioners worldwide joined as "attending only" participants to engage in discussions and other activities. The conference/workshop specifically addressed the unclear and overlapping use of terms such as "gender-inclusive", "gender-fair", "gender-neutral", etc., across various disciplines and languages. The aim of the event was to achieve conceptual clarity and to give impulses for standardisation.

The following 11 network participants contributed to the conference/workshop "Language and Gender: Achieving Conceptual Clarity". Their names are listed in the order of the languages that they covered:

- Conference organiser and moderator: Dr Falco Pfalzgraf, QMUL
- Dutch: Prof Dr Tanja Mortelmans, University of Antwerp
- English: Dr Evan Bradley, Penn State University
- French: Prof Dr Daniel Elmiger, University of Geneva
- German: Dr Sascha Stollhans, University of Leeds
- Greek: Dr Angeliki Alvanoudi, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Italian: Dr Federica Formato, University of Brighton
- Polish: Dr Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
- Romanian: Prof Dr Ruxandra Vişan, University of Bucharest
- Spanish: Prof Dr María Muelas Gil, Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)
- Swedish: Prof Dr Emma Renström, Kristianstad University

A total of 137 participants registered for the conference, representing 39 countries: Algeria, Austria, Beirut, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malta, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA).

This impressive international participation highlights the global importance of advancing discussions on the intersection of language and gender and underscores the widespread relevance of this topic across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. By providing a platform for

interdisciplinary dialogue, the conference sought to clarify conceptual ambiguities and refine theoretical frameworks, advancing more inclusive and precise approaches in both academia and practice. The strong international engagement reflects the urgency and resonance of these issues in our increasingly interconnected world. Recordings of the conference presentations, as well as relevant material such as PowerPoint presentations, have been made available in the repository on the conference webpage **gender.pfalzgraf.net/research-networking-project/conferences--events/terminology-conference**

Moreover, this conference served as a foundation for network participants to conduct further research on the subject, culminating in the publication of an edited volume. For more details, refer to the "Achievements & Results" section of this report.

4.3 Conference "Language and Gender: Research and Desiderata", held on Friday 31 May 2024
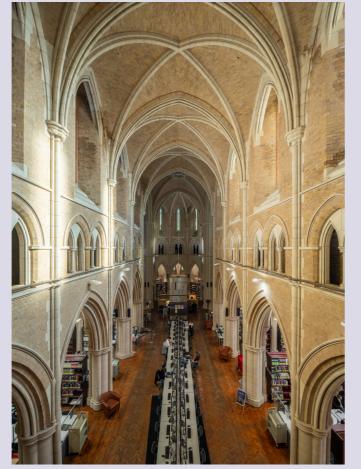
This was the third event held within the year of the network's founding. Selected academics presented papers covering 12 European languages, offering an overview of their discipline's past and present. Research desiderata were discussed, and the event featured presentations of (then) current research conducted by the respective speakers. Again, other interested academics and practitioners worldwide joined as "attending only" participants to engage in discussions and other activities.

The following 16 network participants contributed to the conference "Language and Gender: Research and Desiderata". Their names are listed in the order of the languages that they covered:

- Conference organiser and moderator: Dr Falco Pfalzgraf, QMUL
- Dutch: Prof Dr Sofie Decock, Ghent University
- Dutch: Prof Dr Sarah Van Hoof, Ghent University
- English/Italian Translation: Dr Michela Baldo, University of Birmingham
- Finnish: Dr Laura Hekanaho, University of Helsinki
- Greek: Dr Sofia Lampropoulou, University of Liverpool
- Greek: Dr Marianthi Georgallidou, University of the Aegean
- Greek: Nteniz SARRI-CHASAN, University of the Aegean
- German: Prof Dr Gabriele Diewald, Leibniz University Hannover
- Norwegian: Prof Dr Ute Gabriel, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NTNU)
- Swedish: Prof Dr Emma Renström, Kristianstad University
- French: Prof Dr Daniel Elmiger, University of Geneva
- Italian: Dr Federica Formato, University of Brighton
- Spanish: Prof Dr María Muelas Gil, Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)
- Polish: Dr Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
- Romanian: Prof Dr Ruxandra Vişan, University of Bucharest

In total, 126 participants registered for the conference. They were based in in 30 countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom (UK), Ukraine, and the United States of America (USA).

Building on the success of the first two events of our research network, this conference once again attracted impressive international participation, reaffirming the widespread interest and critical importance of our network. As with previous events, recordings of the presentations, along with supplementary materials such as PowerPoint slides, have been made available for further reference and accessibility in the repository on the conference webpage **gender.pfalzgraf. net/research-networking-project/conferences--events/ research-and-desiderata-conference**

Furthermore, this conference laid the groundwork for network participants to pursue additional research on the subject, which ultimately led to the publication of an edited volume. For further details, please refer to the "Achievements & Results" section of this report.

4.4 Conference/Workshop "Language and Gender: Practical Aspects and Implementation", held on Friday 6 September 2024

This was the fourth event held within the year of the network's founding, a conference/workshop which was led by practitioners involved in the International Research Networking Project "Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation." Focusing on questions related to the implementation of gender-inclusive language, they presented achievements and challenges within their organisations and companies.

As always, individuals interested in the subject were invited to join as "attending only" and were given the opportunity to participate in discussions, Q&As, and the like.

The following 11 network participants contributed to the conference/workshop "Language and Gender: Practical Aspects and Implementation". Their names and affiliations are listed in the order in which the presentations were delivered.

- Dr Falco Pfalzgraf (QMUL), Conference/workshop organiser and moderator
- Dafna Eisenreich (Israel), Dabru Eleynu Gender-Inclusive Hebrew
- Michal Shomer (Israel), Multi-Gender Hebrew
- Karoline Oakes (UK), The Civil Service
- Beth Hanley (Belgium), Université libre de Bruxelles
- Dr Melanie Bhend (UK), University of Nottingham
- Dr Marianne Rathje (Danmark), The Danish Language Council / Dansk Sprognævn
- Dr Helga Hilmisdóttir (Iceland), The Icelandic Language Council / Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies
- Allyson Nolde & Rebecca Israel & Tim Poepsel (USA), RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services

Again, the success of this event was overwhelming: Exactly 130 people participated in the conference. Excluding the 11 presenters, 119 attendees registered for the event. They were based in 35 countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, the DR Congo, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malta, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom (UK), Ukraine, and the United States of America (USA).

The presenting practitioners were enthusiastic about the co-operation within our network and are eager to push the initiative further.

There will be no printed proceedings, but most presentations were recorded and are available on the conference webpage **gender.pfalzgraf.net/research-networking-project/ conferences--events/workshop-practical-aspects-and-implementation,** together with the related presentation files.

4.5 Concluding event, held on Friday 15 November 2024

This was the fifth and final event held within the year of the network's founding. It was a non-public meeting open only for all participants in the research networking project which brought together a select group of academics and practitioners to collaborate, draw meaningful conclusions, and explore opportunities for future network initiatives.

Actively participating in the event were:
- Dr Michela Baldo, University of Birmingham
- Dr Melanie Bhend, University of Nottingham
- Dr Evan Bradley, Penn State University
- Prof Dr Gabriele Diewald, Leibniz University Hannover
- Dafna Eisenreich (Dabru Eleynu Gender-Inclusive Hebrew)
- Daniel Elmiger, Prof Dr (Univ. Genève)
- Dr Federica Formato, University of Brighton
- Prof Dr Tanja Mortelmans, University of Antwerp
- Dr Falco Pfalzgraf (QMUL), event organiser and moderator
- Emma Renström, Prof Dr (Univ. Kristianstad)
- Dr Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
- Michal Shomer, Multi-Gender Hebrew
- Dr Ágústa Þorbergsdóttir, The Icelandic Language Council / Árnastofnun
- Prof Dr Ruxandra Vişan, University of Bucharest

Apologies for absence from the event were received from:
- Rachael Browning, RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services
- Prof Dr Sofie Decock, Ghent University
- Prof Dr Ute Gabriel, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NTNU)
- Dr Laura Hekanaho, University of Helsinki
- Dr Helga Hilmisdóttir, The Icelandic Language Council / Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies
- Rebecca Israel, RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services
- Dr Sabrina Link, University of Urbino Carlo Bo
- Allyson Nolde, RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services
- Dr Lena Lind Palicki, The Swedish Language Council / Språkrådet
- Andrea Pfeil, The German Goethe Institute
- Jennifer Pickering, formerly lawyer at The Council of the European Union

- Tim Poepsel, RWS Language, Content & Intellectual Property Services
- Dr Marianne Rathje, The Danish Language Council / Dansk Sprognævn
- Prof Dr Sarah Van Hoof, Ghent University

The vast majority of contributors found the establishment of the research network and its events to be highly beneficial, and there was strong interest among contributors in continuing their involvement with the network. Most contributors supported the idea of organising occasional conferences or/and workshops, possibly on an annual basis, designed to engage both academics and practitioners. It was collectively agreed that the network should maintain its informal structure, rather than becoming institutionalised or formalised. Plans for the future were discussed. For details about this, please refer to the "Looking ahead" section of this report.

5. Achievements & Results

First and foremost, participating academics and practitioners, representing diverse linguistic backgrounds and working with or across various languages, have been able to explore ways to support one another. Through their collaboration, they have identified synergies to not only research but also to further advance the implementation and promotion of gender-inclusive language. Specific areas of achievement are:

5.1 Research & Publications

We have established a cross-disciplinary, international research network of academics who utilise diverse approaches to conduct research on gender-inclusive language, transcending linguistic and disciplinary boundaries and focusing on comparative analysis across languages. Participating academics have provided an overview of the current state of research concerning the various languages they research. They have identified desiderata and synergies to further advance their research.

International cooperation among diverse researchers who work in linguistics and related disciplines has been encouraged with regard to gender-inclusive language. As a result, we have paved the way to achieving more conceptual clarity by comparing and improving unclear/indistinct terminology that is currently being used in various languages and across different disciplines.

Conferences organised by the research network have let to further, more detailed research in the areas covered, which resulted in the creation of two books with publishers of excellent international standing. Both edited volumes are due for publication in 2025.
- *Gender-neutral, Gender-fair, Gender-inclusive. Towards Conceptual Clarity across European Languages.* Palgrave Macmillan (Palgrave Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality). Edited volume consisting of 10 chapters. Editor: Falco Pfalzgraf. Additional contributors: Evan Bradley, Federica Formato, Sabrina Link, Tanja Mortelmans, María Muelas Gil, Véronique Perry, Emma A. Renström, Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, Ruxandra Vişan.
- *Gender-Inclusive Language. Research and Desiderata.* De Gruyter Mouton (Trends in Applied Linguistics). Edited volume consisting of 15 chapters. Editor: Falco Pfalzgraf. Additional contributors: Michela Baldo, Melanie Bhend, Eva J. Daussà, Sofie Decock, Gabriele Diewald, Federica Formato, Ute Barbara Gabriel, Christophe Gagne, Laura Hekanaho, Michael Hornsby, Tiziana Jäggi, Vít Kolek Palacký, Sofia Lampropoulou, Georgallidou Marianthi, María Muelas Gil, Amanda Remsö, Emma E. Renström, Denise Sarri-Chasan, Anna Lisa Somma, Anastasia Stamou, Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck, Sarah Van Hoof. Ruxandra Vişan

The participating academics are keen to further engage in the research network.

5.2 Implementation

A research network of practitioners from various countries and sectors, including companies, associations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and others who work with and in different languages, with a focus on or connection to gender-inclusive language, has been established. Participating practitioners have described their work and the impact it has. They have shared examples of challenges and best practices related to gender-inclusive language. Synergies between their efforts to advance gender inclusivity have been explored in our workshop/conference. The participating practitioners are keen to further engage in the research network.

5.3 Communication

Members of the international research network Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation utilise the JISCMail list Gender-Inclusive Language for communication among themselves and with interested academics and practitioners outside the core network: **jiscmail.ac.uk/gender-inclusive-language**. As of December 2024, this mailing list has over 400 subscribers from more than 40 countries.

6. Looking ahead

The international research network *Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation* is now fully established. As agreed, it will maintain its informal structure rather than becoming institutionalised or formalised.

The vast majority of those involved in setting up the network in 2023/24 have committed to continuing their input and engagement in the future. Many contributors supported the idea of occasional (possibly annual) conferences or/and workshops, ideally suitable for both academics and practitioners.

A popular topic suggestion for the proposed 2025 conference/workshop was addressing the current "backlash" against (gender-)inclusive language, and reflecting on our roles as experts in this challenging climate.

In his role as research network founder/organiser, Dr Falco Pfalzgraf (QMUL) would like to thank all network members for their engagement and contributions.