Methods description

The EU Rights Project has developed a new methodology: advice-led ethnography, collaborating with Citizens Advice (Craven and Harrogate

Districts).

The project received queries directly from clients, took on referrals from other

Citizens Advice offices in the Yorkshire area, and gave second-tier advice to

advisors from non-government organisations (NGOs) around the country, giving advice and offering drafting and advocacy services to EU nationals.

Each referral went through a process of informed consent so that I could draw from the cases a separate, parallel research ethnography, comprising of field notes, and analysis of documentation. I have not included the document data in the archive, as this is sensitive and is not my data, and it would be impossible to adequately anonymise it, but where appropriate have included excerpts in the field notes.

The aim was to gather rich, compelling data that provided an important snapshot of law in practice through a relatively small-scale project on a few long-term cases, drawing out the problems they encountered within the welfare system to produce fine-grained data for the ethnographic study.

With each interaction with clients, or advisers contacting me for second-tier advice on behalf of their clients, I compiled field notes. As the aim was to be able to cover cases that required ongoing work, and multiple interactions, the objective was to collect a few, fine grained studies: over the course of 16 months of fieldwork, the plan was for 30 legal action research

studies. However, the demand for input was so great that the project took on as many cases as possible, and exceeded this by some way.

I also received evidence submissions: that is, pre-prepared case studies, or more general observations, that did not require my input. I aimed to document, in particular, aspects of various interactions — letters, phone calls, form filling, appeal drafting, tribunal hearings, for example — that created hurdles in the claims and appeals processes.

The vast bulk of my data is from the case studies, which I triangulated with focus group work: I conducted two focus groups. The first focus group was preparatory (that is, they were conducted before the ethnographic fieldwork started) and were helpful forums for identifying key issues, while the later group and interviews were reflective (as in useful testing grounds

of the advice-based data to see which perceptions and experiences were shared and/or struck a chord), and the transcriptions showed how common problems generated a lot of enthusiastic inter-group discussion.