

MINUTES

1. Welcome, apologies and overview of agenda

Present: Elliot Stern (Chair); Siobhan Campbell; Ronan Palmer; Jim Watson; James Wilsdon; Elizabeth Robin; Jamie Saunders; Penny Hawkins; Dai Harris; Gary Kass; Nigel Gilbert; Ben Shaw; Candice Howarth

Apologies: Liam Kelly; Michael Kell; Sarah Whatmore

Minutes of last meeting were reviewed and accepted. Chair had asked SC to take on role of Deputy Chair and she had agreed.

2. Update of CECAN activities

NG and BS presented an overview of CECAN's activities over the past year including leadership work, case studies, methodological innovation, capacity building, quick wins and plans

General

- CECAN has large social media presence, series of Evaluation Policy and Practice Notes (4 published, 6 in prep) to try to increase understanding of how complexity fits in context of policy evaluation
- 2016 quick wins of intermediate results by end of first year achieved
- 2017 Quick wins set to maximise impact and continue to build solid academic foundation

Case studies

- Each case study is co-produced and challenge-led, working in advisory capacity with government departments, but CECAN will not actually be conducting evaluation
- Has been a challenging process: need to balance engagement with users in government, identification of clear evaluation/complexity challenges matching novel methods to policy needs – captured by challenge of navigating Stern et al. (2012)¹'s triangle of evaluation questions, available methods and policy attributes in developing impact evaluations
- Ongoing case studies include Rural Development Programme (RDPE), Enforcement of waste crime (Environment Agency), Regulating our Future (FSA, Theory of Change)
- Potential cases: RHI (BEIS), Marine management (Defra), Water framework directive (EA), UK Climate Investments funds (BEIS)
- ES: what are the common themes across case studies that could be explored? How are case studies linked to form a coherent set? This was also discussed at the previous AB meeting.

Methodological Innovation

- Entails adding, combining, extending new methods and translating methods from domain to another
- CECAN is developing its own way of working (modus operandi) that in time could be systematised
- Work in progress: enhancing theory of change to account for feedback loops, network analysis of dependency models, evaluation methodology based on common pool resource management, qualitative approaches, subjectivity and experiences of policy process, agent based modelling to construct counterfactuals, integrating mixed methods into a visualisation tool
- GK: what is CECAN's baseline against which change can be seen? BS noted that Dione Hill's fellowship is evaluation of CECAN's capacity building

Capacity building

- Five doctoral studentships (funded by the university partners)
- Fellowships via responsive or solicited route. Seven current fellows, target of 20 by end of the year
- Programme of lunchtime seminars in central London, 8 so far and workshops
- Is CECAN developing skills in core team to lead and develop evaluations (SC)? CECAN partners have put in bids to ITTs and engaged in bidding for evaluation work which is expected to continue (NG)

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67427/design-method-impact-eval.pdf

Demonstrating impact

- How will CECAN demonstrate practical results to real people on the ground who don't follow academic publications? (ER) What is evidence of CECAN's real value? (JS)
- SC: would like to hear more about the co-production approach. Will be likely to be a focus of an output – journal paper and/or EPPN (BS)
- Good to consider external networks (e.g. Global Environment Facility) that CECAN could tap into to bring in ideas
- How does CECAN broaden out the concept of Nexus (local, cities, private) to others (JS)?

Areas/Themes to consider at future AB meetings

- JWi: how are uncertainties such as Brexit impacting on the questions explored?
- ER: Can CECAN produce guidance on how to talk about evaluation quickly/simple, who to contact etc.
- ES: To clarify the distinctive contribution of CECAN to evaluation. This has to go beyond the purely methodological and include, for example, working with stakeholders, ethical dilemmas, making recommendations; and linking knowledge with action (Overlaps with some of the modus operandi that BS referred to previously.)

Challenges faced by CECAN

- Expectation management whilst still trying to do get things underway and build collaboration
- Prioritising without paralysing ourselves
- Case studies are about working in government and consequently have to be led by where opportunities are. We want to reflect and think about the issues we want to focus on in future
- ES: worth (i) exploring existing case studies to identify commonalities, common theme at the moment is regulation (GK) and the challenges as part of TOC as well as way we work, be reflective but also the importance of leaders and champions in government to drive adoption of new approaches (ER)
- How to create space for difference schools of thought on CECAN issues to come together and interact with one another. The challenge of multidisciplinary (ES)

3. Paper 1: Role of the CECAN Advisory Board

ES/GK presented their paper on role(s) of the Advisory Board. The paper identified areas where a more active role for AB members who were interested, and had the time, could add to CECAN's capacity and take advantage of the experience and AB networks. This could for example include think pieces and responding to CECAN priorities rather than alongside the necessary business aspects of AB meetings. It could also include 'attaching' AB members with relevant expertise to particular work-streams or activities.

Capacity Building

- ER: UKES keen to work with CECAN, particularly around evaluation capacity building
- SC: challenge role of evaluation in gov. ER: help get evaluation recognised as a discipline in gov
- Consider supply of and demand for evaluation (SC)

Broaden network: Multilevel policy perspectives

- JWa: UKERC keen to collaborate and opportunities to work with devolved administrations (RHI, ICF).
- ES: community of practice & knowledge carriers not always located in central government also regional coalitions, local enterprise, academia, professional and community networks). CECAN perspectives needed to tap into these wider networks.
- JS: explore options below national level that could open up in future and put AB ahead of the game
- JS: evaluation at local level doesn't happen due to limited budget etc. policy, politics, politicised. CECAN and AB to think about the current and future world within which this is operating, new models of policy delivery – e.g. entrepreneurial rather evidence-based policy

Outputs and legacy

- JWa: Would like meetings of the AB to include a seminar mode to talk about a topical issue. Could contribute a blog.
- PH: Can CECAN demonstrate the value of evaluation in tangible terms, (e.g. return on investment through evaluation). Need to provide rationale for why that's a good use of tax payers' money
- JWi: ideas for think pieces. Opportunity to input into *Guardian* Column on Science & Policy
- CECAN has a role in raising challenges to *ex post* model of policy evaluation
- ES: AB should in future collaborate with CECAN on future funding

4. Legacy and future funding of CECAN

- CECAN funding until Sept 2019 and need to start thinking about follow ups now

- CECAN's USP is that it has managed to get academics, policy analysts working together

Vision and horizon scanning

- GK: horizon scanning necessary as system could be different (structures, ways of working, Brexit)
- PH: how is CECAN going to achieve its vision? By doing more of the same? Who are the other players that can contribute towards that vision? What is CECAN offering that's different from others?
- JS: look into who else is looking after the nexus and enable doors to be opened. Need to also explore what policy is. Phase 2 would need to reflect more about how world is messy, multi-tiered, and that organisations out there are working on this.
- JWa: Methodological development, capacity building and applying that expertise to particular areas. Shift from demonstrating impact and application to demonstrate real-world change in evaluation
- ES: would need to be complementary to modus operandi to engage in the real world and find ways to respond to a challenge, change mindsets
- SC: context, everyone in cross-gov department group in evaluation interested in CECAN so would be interest on methodological development, and being wider than nexus.

Partnership working

- GK: focus on policy and actors in the system. Working in partnership raises issues of accountability
- ES: hook on less methodology and capacity building and more on modes of engagement

Scope

- ES: Whitehall orientation of CECAN, phase 2 could be more decentralised and less Whitehall-focused
- ER: what is CECAN's niche? CECAN has learned how to interact with people. Have a lot of experience, now have a skillset no one else has and horizon scanning can support this.

Evaluation

- NG: CECAN at the moment is not doing evaluation. Phase 2 could be about actually doing this
- SC: could look at NCRM as ways of sustaining this type of work

Impact and network

- JS: can CECAN be the 'go to' Centre in this space?
- ES: could be a range of possible relationships: doing evaluation; niche player in highly complex areas; intermediary expertise that other evaluators use to increase capacity to deal with complex problems
- JS: Meta role and intermediary role which means getting out there

5. Paper 2: Impact of Evaluation workshop

AB discussed paper 2, plans for the evaluation impact workshop planned for May 2017, presented by BS. A lot of existing work, how do we build on that and bring in a complexity nexus dimension.

What makes the workshop different?

- ES: Workshop adds the complexity dimension - 'what would evaluation look like under complex and less complex world'?
- GK: Is there focus coming from the case studies that could be brought through to this workshop?

Context and scope

- ER: UKES annual conference in May on this topic, on use of evaluation. Could have a session at the conference, under theme of how to make evaluation have more impact
- GK: CECAN vision helps provide the context of this event. How might we overcome limitations? CECAN's focus on how to improve policy making in context of evaluation and complexity
- SC: how to get maximum impact from spending.
- ES: time dimension doesn't feature clearly. Expect part of the agenda to explore how do we know it's having impact rather than assuming it is. Useful to get an idea of what people think impact might be and when it is visible. How do we know is when we see it? How can it be made more prominent?
- ER: get across the timing issue: need to allow time for evaluation, need luxury of time to observe

Workshop design

- ES: stronger on process than on content. Importance of conceptual lens used depending on audience. Needs to have a sense of what evaluation component of that is. Need 'in complexity settings' in title
- RP: how will participants benefit. (NG: from being in the same place together, facilitated by CECAN)
- ES: good to pose questions rather than give expectations that we have the answers. The workshop has the potential to provide aspects of CECAN's horizon scanning to better understand current world.

- LK: capacity building point (Session 2) needs to have more prominence. With a shrinking public sector workforce, staff are being encouraged to develop skills beyond their immediate day job. There is not going to be abundance of expert staff available, how do we get a diverse workforce up to speed and confident with using methods?
- NG: is workshop too short? ES: one option would be to gather evening before whilst sticking to one day. This would encourage informality and exchange BS: concern that 2-days was too much to ask from people. SC: policy people can't do 2 days, has to be 1 day. RP: if in 1 day would need to pull back on presentations and maximise facilitation
- GK: other format where academics organising become the audience and put participants in the front seat with all as active participants
- ES: ask participants what impact they want from the outset, e.g. when they agree to attend.

6. AOB

- SC: British Academy focus on impact & quarterly 1-day seminar on evaluation and looking for ideas.
- NG: March conference session 'learning from history'
- GK: Defra and Royal society collaborating on a science conference
- ES: can a list of internal events and outputs be made available to AB members to participate in
- NG: could AB lead discussion session at next meeting to discuss what policy will look like in 5 years
- NG: Looking for someone to replace KI: NG to circulate JD, AB to suggest anyone would be suitable

Actions

- SC to send more details about British Academy seminars
- GK to share more details on how CECAN could contribute to Defra/Royal Society event
- Following discussion of ES and GK paper, NG requested the AB to take forward thinking on future of policy landscape. ES agreed to circulate an initial note for AB input. This could be part of a broader horizon-scanning exercise that had been identified as a priority for CECAN's longer run sustainability
- NG to circulate Knowledge Integrator Job Description to AB
- CH to circulate Doodle poll for next meeting in about 6 months