



CECAN 3rd Advisory Board meeting

2-5pm Monday 17th July 2017

**University of Westminster,
London**

Minutes

Present:

Elliot Stern (Chair), Peter Barbrook-Johnson, Siobhan Campbell, Ben Fagan-Watson, Nigel Gilbert, Penny Hawkins, Gary Kass, Amy Proctor, Elizabeth Robin, Jamie Saunders, Ben Shaw, Sarah Whatmore

Apologies:

Ann Humble, Michael Kell, Liam Kelly, Ronan Palmer, Jill Rutter, Jim Watson, James Wilsdon

1. Follow-up on previous minutes (January 2017)

The Chair highlighted a number of items from the minutes of the previous meeting which led to brief discussions:

- UK Evaluation Society and CECAN still need to discuss capacity building for evaluation practitioners (e.g. jointly badged training courses). CECAN was represented at the UKES annual conference with a stand, which was very successful and attracted a lot of interest. **Action** Ben Shaw and Elizabeth Robin to further discuss.
- Government Social Research had jointly organised an event with the British Academy on evaluating complexity. CECAN's work was picked out by many of the speakers, but the event didn't really tackle 'complexity' as an issue – there were concerns expressed that complexity is not really gaining traction as a useful framing for evaluation.
- Several advisory board members mentioned that it would be useful to have both an overarching strategic oversight of what CECAN is up to, but also a clearer idea of CECAN's day-to-day activities. This grounded knowledge of what CECAN does will help the advisory board members to engage with its work and provide relevant advice.
- It was noted that in the last meeting, the Advisory Board started talking about whether CECAN could get a fairly significant contribution from the private sector or an NGO which could fund a significant chunk of CECAN. **Action:** Ben Fagan-Watson and Peter Barbrook-Johnson to investigate possibilities for funding from the business and charitable sectors.
- Chair reminded members of previous discussions of AB roles. For example previous agreements that AB should get presentations that went beyond

activity reports to help members understand CECAN challenges, engagement and learning. Today's presentation on the Environment Agency case study (Item 3) was an example of this; as was the inclusion of methodological innovation and capacity building under Item 2 and Item 6 on CECAN 'learning so far'. Also previously suggested that AB members with available time could be attached to specific CECAN workstreams (e.g. invited to team meetings; occasionally circulated with working papers etc.) so as to better inform discussions at the Advisory Board,

2. Update on CECAN activities, case studies, methodological innovation and capacity building and discussion (Nigel Gilbert, Ben Shaw)

Nigel Gilbert and Ben Shaw presented an update on CECAN's activities following which Advisory Board members raised various points

- CECAN is gradually developing a wider array of contacts in a variety of government departments. Primary focus has been the 4 co-funders, but the Health and Safety Executive have been willing to pay for some supplementary activity. Initial contact with Transport for London, the Scottish and Welsh government and Highways England has all been positive, and CECAN Associates are being appointed to cement the links we have.
- The Advisory Board asked for a richer description of activities around case studies, and clarity on what constituted a 'case'. Ben Shaw stated that cases are 'policy challenge led', and involve working closely with one of the co-funders. Evaluation needs and the presence of complexity is identified through semi-structured interviews, and written up into formal cases for support which are provided to the CECAN Executive Group. The aspiration is to act as collegiate, engaged practitioners that are trying to elicit learning within the system.
- The maturity of various methods (e.g. QCA) was highlighted; is CECAN really developing 'new' methods? And if so, how can their usage be scaled up, so that they are not abandoned after early stage development? Nigel Gilbert stated that many of the methods that CECAN is working with are not necessarily new, but are being trialled in new contexts; in combination with different methods; and in novel applications.
- Fellowships: The Advisory Board noted that many of the current CECAN fellowships had been used to build CECAN's capacity, particularly around methods. But it would be useful to revive the idea of government staff being seconded in to CECAN to a) allow them to work closely with the CECAN team b) allow them to have the space and time to innovate methods and c) build their capacity to conduct complexity-sensitive evaluations. It was noted that the Associate scheme could also be used for this purpose.
- Training: The training sessions offered by CECAN could be systematised more, and offered as part of an overarching syllabus (even if this is not a

formally validated University programme). Could this be discussed with UKES?

- Quick wins: It is worth reflecting on how many of these are focused on *outputs* vs longer term *outcomes*, and how these relate to a conscious theory of change.

The following actions were noted following these discussions:

- CECAN has funding for one big conference in 2018 (300 people attended the 'Sustainability in Turbulent Times' conference. **Action:** the Advisory Board should offer suggestions for overarching themes or sub-topics that could be explored at this event.
- Siobhan Campbell noted that research agencies or consultancies tend to be practitioners rather than academics, and are not necessarily skilled-up in tackling complexity. Her experience in BEIS suggests that government would upskill staff and then find that practitioners couldn't answer their calls to tender in satisfactory way. **Action:** Nigel Gilbert to explore the possibility of a workshop specifically with the practitioners, which would outline barriers and drivers to adopting complexity-sensitive methods.
- **Action:** CECAN admin managers to invite the Advisory Board members to the International Symposium in November 2017
- Jamie Saunders suggested that it would be useful to do a case study that is not with a (central) government body, and drew attention to a new organisation called 'New Economy', <http://www.neweconomymanchester.com/>, which is trying to baseline if devolution is going to work, focusing on Manchester. They have a budget, a Mayor etc so could be an interesting case study for CECAN to work on. **Action:** CECAN team in Newcastle and Westminster to scope out this as a potential case for investigation.

3. Environment Agency (EA) case study presentation and Q&A (Amy Proctor)

Amy Proctor gave an overview of the EA 'Waste Crime' case study, which utilised QCA. This embedded case study started 1 year ago, using formal, structured interview as an initial step to assess complexity and evaluation needs. The EA were keen to explore more a behavioural / contextual approach to evaluation, and to move beyond early economic approaches to learn what works well, in what contexts. The CECAN team proposed a method that utilised system mapping, QCA and realist methods, and involved QCA experts Dave Byrne and Barbara Befani. Workshops were organised which involved a mixture of operational and strategic people from the EA, as well as economists and representatives from Wales and Northern Ireland. It was perceived as quite an unusual gathering of people who work on similar areas within the Agency but wouldn't necessarily come into contact. The workshops went well, and have allowed the team to assemble an evaluation framework. The EA's operational teams are collating data using a short, QCA-type approach. Dave and

Barbara have ongoing advisory capacity and are the 'guiding hands' at analytical stage in Autumn. Among the themes in the presentation were:

- The importance of the co-production process: The CECAN team have found that the case studies are experimental by their nature. Central to this has been a method of co-production with policymakers, and testing methods in a participative way. This gives the funders 'think time' before being locked into contracts, which should not be underestimated.
- CECAN's way of working: This has been a slow and iterative process, though, and it takes time to build relationships and establish trust. The role of the 'Scrum master'¹ is important in maintaining momentum and also managing expectations; this involve becoming knowledgeable enough to tackle questions about complexity / methods without being an expert. The workshops the CECAN team organised provided opportunity for expertise exchange, and also allowed for crossover between CECAN teams who might otherwise not come into contact.
- CECAN offer: independent advice is welcomed by co-funders and allows them to be more experimental. Important not to overcommit resources and do the evaluation for them.

The advisory board discussed the following points:

- Government needs to contract through the established procurement process. But how do you contract an emerging, adaptive evaluation? Government departments can contract in a way that allows room for experimentation (e.g. with deliverables specified as exploratory workshops, and development of an evaluation plan). This does run the risk of contractors attempting to steer you to the methods they are familiar with. Government also needs in-house expertise and a willingness to take on some risk.
- Different forms of expertise: The Advisory Board noted that stakeholders from outside the EA were not involved in the workshop (at the EA's request) which may have failed to capture the full complexity of the situation in the evaluation plan. There were also interesting questions about the different forms of expertise present in the workshop (from both inside CECAN and the EA, including subject experts, staff from EA with a strategic overview, and evaluation methods experts) and how you can ensure that the right people are represented, and work together in an interdisciplinary way.
- Generalisability: The Advisory Board discussed the extent to which the approach used could be replicated (e.g. providing 'thinking space'), or whether the main point of the case studies was to demonstrate methods and encourage their uptake. The Board also questioned how the CECAN team could draw out the *specific* learning about the particular policy area, and the *general* learning that has broader applicability. The CECAN team members noted that the different co-funders are coming from very different baselines,

¹ Or 'facilitator' – see <http://scrummethodology.com/>

and different institutional lessons can be drawn from each context, as well as each specific case. **Action:** CECAN teams in Newcastle and Westminster to articulate the case study process and lessons learned for the next Advisory Board.

4. Paper 1 – Thinking about policy-making and policy landscapes (Elliot Stern)

Elliot Stern presented slides entitled 'CECAN and Policy-Scenarios: Starting thoughts and questions'. This paper argued that it would be useful if the Advisory Board was able to work with CECAN...

- To clarify existing policy scenarios –and sub-parts of scenarios - within which CECAN currently engages with policy making
- To consider the extent to which CECAN outputs (tools, methods, models etc) could be applied more widely within these scenarios
- To begin to assess the implications of emerging/evolving scenarios for continued utility and applicability of CECAN outputs

Within such frameworks the following questions could be considered:

1. What are the policy making scenarios within which CECAN currently engages with policy sponsors (e.g. through its case-studies)?
2. Is CECAN focusing on sub-parts of these scenarios and is there already scope to extend the deployment of CECAN outputs within current policy-making scenarios?
3. What do we know or could cost-effectively find out about probable/possible future policy-making scenarios?
4. What do these scenarios imply for the continued application of existing and planned CECAN outputs?
5. Do evolving/emergent policy-making scenarios suggest a need to extend, modify or more fundamentally innovate planned CECAN outputs in the medium term, e.g. when current funding ends?

In the discussion that followed, chaired by Siobhan Campbell, Advisory Board members raised the following:

- Gary Kass noted that there is a question about the use of the word scenarios. In the presentation its usage suggests both present and future scenarios interchangeably, and in conventional government usage scenarios is understood to be about the future. In a lot of the slides scenarios could be called 'frameworks / models'. Elliot acknowledged that the term scenarios is used variously.
- Elizabeth Robin noted that the presentation could also be read to suggest that there is one current scenario and a multiplicity of future scenarios. A current 'Government policymaking scenario' doesn't necessarily exist, and there are questions about how much they are centrally driven. Policies between (and even within) departments may use different models / framing (e.g. state shrinkage true in some but not all policy areas, and is being implemented in different ways over different timescales).

- Elliot Stern stated that the underlying point of the paper is that CECAN has been set up in a way that assumes the primacy of Whitehall, but this may not be true in the future. Are QCA, process tracing etc transferable to other levels of governance, domains, and other foci of evaluation?
- Penny Hawkins noted that the Transaction series of policy and evaluation books attempts to dig into these issues – they explore espoused models of policymaking and then the reality, and where evaluation fits in this.
- Siobhan Campbell said that policy has evaluation classed as a ‘delivery skill’ rather than a strategic skill. This paper could lead to a much bigger discussion about what policymaking is trying to achieve, and how CECAN can help. Elliot Stern agreed that evaluation in complex settings raised as many questions for policy makers as for evaluators.
- Sarah Whatmore stated that ‘Policy scenarios’ implies present and future, and some type of temporal change. But there is also within the present or a set of future scenarios an important spatial dimension. Dealing with EA in Whitehall (in flood risk) is different to the EA staff ‘at the coal face’. There are a multiplicity of actors and a variety of agencies, which would lead to a variety of scenarios. It would be useful for CECAN to look at engaging with agencies at different levels and scales.
- Jamie Saunders said that the paper presents really useful questions for the future of CECAN. The multiplicity of scenarios in the *present* will help us understand the richness of the situation which feeds into the next stage of CECAN; the scenarios in the *future* help to scope out how evaluation could play out in 2029 (for example) for a multiplicity of actors.
- Elliot Stern pointed out that this presentation followed from previous discussions of the AB role. It took the view that the Advisory Board by drawing on ideas from political-science e.g. about policy-making, policy landscapes and scenarios could make more of a strategic contribution to CECAN’s future sustainability.
- There are questions about how the Advisory Board takes this forward. CECAN doesn’t have uncommitted resources and many Advisory Board members also have little time. However it was agreed that the outcome of this kind of discussion could be useful in exploring future scenarios for CECAN.
- The Advisory Board discussed the practicalities of demonstrating what you’ve *done* or what you *have the potential to do*, in terms of scenarios that implied in this paper. It was agreed that some exploration of these issues could demonstrate that CECAN could be self-sustaining, and that CECAN has some way of getting more funding.
- **Action:** Advisory Board to take further discussions following from this presentation via email.

5. Paper 2 - Internationalising CECAN and the international workshop in November (Ben Fagan-Watson)

Ben Fagan-Watson gave a brief presentation on 1) CECAN's international strategy and 2) the 'International Symposium' planned for November 2017. The advisory board discussed the following points:

- The Advisory Board suggested that CECAN needed to be clear on *why* we were internationalising (beyond a request from the ESRC to do so). We should be clear on positive reasons for internationalisation, and it should be a clear part of CECAN's identity in the future. This international, interdisciplinary focus with practical application will fit neatly within the broader aims of the (newly created) UKRI.
- The Advisory Board suggested CECAN should be driven by where and how do we think we will be most effective - responding to calls, or influencing calls? Creating space for innovation, or doing the innovation?
- The Advisory Board suggested that CECAN should use existing networks to connect to international partners, e.g. Development Studies Association conference in September, where CECAN should have a presence.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may provide a useful frame for CECAN to work within; they fit with recent trends in international development to think 'globally' rather than 'internationally'. The SDGs are an area where complexity and nexus come to the fore, and could provide a useful guide.
- **Action:** Advisory Board to take further discussions following from this presentation via email.

6. Reflections on CECAN's learning so far (Ben Fagan-Watson, Peter Barbrook-Johnson)

Peter Barbrook-Johnson presented a brief summary of CECAN's learning so far. This represented an initial presentation of thoughts, which would be followed by a fuller report written between July and October 2017. The Advisory Board discussed the following points:

- The board noted that the nexus / sustainability is often the starting point that leads to policy that wants to address (or at least simplify) complexity. It would be useful to have some reflections on the nexus of environmental and social issues, as this has been relatively neglected so far. It was acknowledged that this is difficult to implement, as Whitehall is very siloed and therefore struggles (and our case studies may struggle) to take a 'nexus' approach. It is worth considering if our case studies and fellowships seek to address a nexus perspective; or a complexity perspective; or an evaluation perspective.
- Evaluation can be perceived as merely the tail end of the economic appraisal, with many policymakers assuming it will be sufficient to re-run the impact assessment after implementation. While social scientists in the UK government are interested in the complexity agenda that CECAN is exploring,

they are relatively few in number compared to economists. CECAN's approach which uses ex-ante methods, system modelling etc is a different way of thinking about setting things up that is not about economic assessment. It will be interesting to see if down the line CECAN can turn these case studies into interesting evaluations or if there is a reversion to the (economic evaluation) norm.

- The Advisory Board questioned whether CECAN wanted to be perceived as 'disruptive'; making the case that complexity-friendly approaches deal with 21st Century challenges in an exciting and communicable way.
- The board stated that testing and demonstrating that methods work is useful, but combining this with *improving practice of evaluation* would make methodological innovation even more useful.

Action: Advisory Board to respond to lessons learned presentation via email.

6. AOB

Michael Kell has resigned from the Advisory Board, but nominated Jeremy Lonsdale (Also from the National Audit Office) to take his place. This nomination was agreed by the Board. Chair suggested that JL might be offered a briefing by CECAN management.

Chair also asked about accessibility of presentations and other background material e.g. on the EA case study; CECAN activities and innovation; CECAN learning so far; policy-making/scenario slides; and internationalisation presentation.

Action: Nigel Gilbert agreed to make a Sync folder available to the Advisory Board with materials from AB meetings and other key documents.