# MINUTES

**Present:**

Elliot Stern, *Emeritus Professor of Evaluation Research, Lancaster University (Chairman of the Board)*

Julian Barr, *President of the UK Evaluation Society*

Philip Bradburn, *Audit Manager, National Audit Office*

Jamie Saunders, *Strategy and Engagement Officer, City of Bradford District Council*

Dave Stone, *Deputy Chief Scientist, Natural England*

James Wilsdon, *Director of Impact and Engagement, Sheffield University*

Nigel Gilbert, *Professor of Sociology, University of Surrey (CECAN Director)*

Ben Shaw, *Deputy Director of CECAN, University of Surrey*

*In attendance:*

Kelly Boazman, *CECAN Impact Manager, University of Surrey (Secretary)*

Alex Penn, *CECAN Senior Research Fellow, University of Surrey*

**Apologies** were received from Siobhan Campbell, Rebekah Eden, Philp Garnett, Penny Hawkins, Liam Kelly, Jim Watson and Sarah Whatmore

## 1. Welcome, matters arising from previous Minutes and Agenda for this meeting (Elliot Stern)

Elliot Stern (ES) opened the meeting, noted the apologies received and invited everyone else to introduce themselves. ES welcomed the new members (Philip Garnett (PG) and Dave Stone (DS)) to the Board and noted Gary Kass's departure. PG was recommended to join the Board by Jamie Saunders (JS) and has already attended a CECAN project meeting (Barnett Hill, Oct '18) to get to know the team. DS is replacing Gary Kass (Natural England) and has also attended a CECAN project meeting (Newcastle, Feb '19). ES thanked Gary Kass *in absentia* for his contributions to the Board.

ES observed that a lot of effort is put into finding and agreeing a date for the Advisory Board meetings and so it was disappointing to receive so many apologies.

It was agreed that there were no matters arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting and they were accepted as an accurate indication of the discussions that took place.

## 2. Update on CECAN activities (Nigel Gilbert)

A document entitled "Update of CECAN Activities" [paper 1] was circulated to the Board prior to the meeting and NG presented highlights from this, which included:

### *Seminars, webinars*

The series of CECAN seminars and webinars has continued. The CECAN team has learned that webinars are more effective than seminars since the logistics of organising them are simpler and the audiences reached are larger. CECAN has organised more webinars than seminars and does not intend to organise many seminars in future. Videos

of the webinars are captured and shared via the CECAN website. NG invited members of the Board to contact him if they would be interested in delivering a webinar or could propose potential presenters.

*Workshops*

CECAN has run a workshop about Big Data with the Alan Turing Institute (ATI). NG is pleased to have established a relationship with the ATI and will report further as this develops.

- JS asked if anyone from the Open Data Institute (ODI) attended and NG explained that although there was no one from ODI at the workshop, there are links with CECAN, for example NG is a member of an Advisory Panel for one of their recent projects. JS added that the ODI has an Outreach Node based in Leeds, of which Bradford Council is a founding member and funder. JS thought it would be interesting to see if there is a link between data and policy evaluation when activity cascades out to the regional nodes and eventually whether links might form between ODI, ATI and other big data organisations.

CECAN is continuing to deliver a series of CPD courses based on the CECAN Syllabus and CECAN 2 will continue to deliver these. NG commented that it is a learning process for the CECAN team, for example the team has learned that more specific session titles attract better numbers of attendees.

- ES commented that it is not just about attracting lots of people, rather the right sorts of people and since complexity is not very specific in nature, there could be some value in more ambiguous titles so as to attract attendees who might otherwise have considered the topic not relevant for them.
- JS suggested that with regard to reaching out to other sectors and new audiences, there may be value in promoting a CECAN CPD Course via groups such as the Local Government Association who might circulate it to their community of analysts who are involved with policy support and evaluation activity.

As reported at the last meeting, CECAN was awarded additional ESRC funding for developing international links, entitled "New approaches to the Participatory Steering and Evaluation of Complex Adaptive Systems". A three-day workshop has taken place, organised primarily by Dr Alex Penn, and attended by delegates from a wide range of countries including the USA, Australia, Mexico, Germany and Japan. NG reported that it was a very interesting and inspiring workshop. It is too early to know exactly what has come of it but Alex Penn has already visited Italy and other members of the CECAN team are due to visit Arizona later in the year, so there is lots of potential for further follow-up activity. It was agreed that a report from the event would be useful, in particular ES suggested that it would be interesting to consider how terms such as "Complex Adaptive Systems" are used by different people.

*Evaluation Policy Practice Notes (EPPNs)*

CECAN continues to publish a series of EPPNs, the most recent of which document the CECAN Case Studies at the Environment Agency, BEIS and Defra. More EPPNs will continue to be published; the next one is concerning modelling bovine tuberculosis.

*CECAN Ltd*

NG shared the good news that a spin-out company, CECAN Ltd, was set up in July 2018 and has already won a contract with Defra in response to an Invitation to Tender (ITT) published at the end of last year. A bespoke training course for the Department for Education is also under negotiation and, if it goes ahead, will run through CECAN Ltd. CECAN Ltd does not employ any staff, rather it contracts out members of the CECAN team from their respective institutions to work for a fixed number of days on a specific project. CECAN Ltd was established in response to an increasing volume of requests for consultancy-type work that CECAN was receiving. It is envisaged that CECAN Ltd will offer training and consultancy and will also bid against ITTs (which it is able to do more easily than a university could, thanks to its ability to respond far more quickly and flexibly to legal and financial negotiations). While it is unlikely that CECAN Ltd will be able to raise the levels of funding needed by CECAN to become self-sufficient as the ESRC Transition Funding starts to taper down, it is an important contributor to this and NG described it as "an interesting experiment". The Board was keen to find out more about CECAN Ltd and further conversation ensued resulting in the following comments and suggestions:

- ES suggested that the University of Surrey might be persuaded to consider a partnership with CECAN Ltd rather than making it a wholly owned subsidiary, since the process of doing this is proving challenging. A partnership would allow each organisation to protect themselves from the other's risks.
- Julian Barr (JB) asked whether CECAN Ltd would be eligible for business grants (for example through Innovate UK) and NG reported that this is currently being explored within the CECAN team.
- NG reported that the issue of Intellectual Property (IP) is proving difficult for Surrey, which does not seem to recognise that this is not a traditional type of spin-out company (i.e. a technology start-up). It is anticipated that there will be a licence agreement between CECAN (i.e. Surrey) and CECAN Ltd that allows each to use the other's IP however NG does not consider this a significant issue since all of CECAN's work is already in the public domain. JB shared his experience from running a social sciences consultancy: their strategy has always

been to have their IP as open-source and he has found that most customers will want to buy from the originator, and therefore trying to keep IP "under lock and key" is not always helpful; it is much more important to develop strong branding and ensure that the open source IP clearly shows where it came from. NG agreed fully with this point.

- ES shared an idea that CECAN Ltd could potentially act as a "shop front" for University of Surrey activities that do not fall under traditional research (e.g. consulting, advising) but added that if the conception is about complexity rather than about CECAN / Surrey, then CECAN Ltd could also act as a "shop front" or channel through which multiple institutions might facilitate such complexity-related activities, and thus an exclusive partnership with Surry may not be the best way forward.
- James Wilsdon (JW) offered to share with NG some examples of other universities that have been more successful with commercialisation in the social sciences.
- JS encouraged CECAN to think about engaging with non-academic publications, e.g. the trade press, to share the CECAN story more widely and promote the importance of complexity (and the associated required skills set) to a broader audience.

### 3. Priorities for CECAN 2 (Ben Shaw)

Ben Shaw (BS) gave an update on developments for CECAN 2, in particular matters discussed at the CECAN project meeting that took place in Newcastle on 26 and 27 February 2019. In addition to the material included in the slides of his presentation, the following points were discussed:

#### *Possible areas of work*

The CECAN team met in Newcastle at the end of February to plan for CECAN 2. Members of the Advisory Board and some co-funders joined the first day of the meeting. In particular, funding was very high on everyone's minds. Discussions also took place around further developing relationships with Defra, BEIS and new partners (e.g. in Environment, Public Health and Wellbeing including those in the Third Sector); what tools, methods and approaches might be brought into CECAN 2; building capability and capacity; a CECAN Publication Strategy.

- ES advised distinguishing between areas which are not very complexity-oriented, those that are 'waking up' to complexity thinking and those that are deeply embedded already. ES observed that Public Health in the UK is probably among the world leaders in complexity thinking whereas parts of the voluntary sector are at the other end of the scale. ES proposed that CECAN should adopt tailored approaches to new partners in relation to where they might be on this scale and that it should be very clear on what it can add to sectors that are already leading in complexity.
- ES also advised differentiating the levels at which CECAN intends to engage with different areas and organisations and prioritise the development of new partnerships accordingly.
- JS pointed out that Public Health currently rests with local government and this creates an interesting juxtaposition whereby Public Health may well be steeped in complexity but local government is not. JS added that a lot of Public Health is keen to move back to the NHS and leave local government even though the current research shows that Public Health has made a considerable difference whilst it has been hosted within local government, even despite strong cuts. JS further added that engaging with Public Health would also 'open the door' to groups such as MHCOG and local government, in such a way that would link to the place-based evaluation work that CECAN 2 is interested in pursuing.
- JB shared that the new Vice President of the UK Evaluation Society (UKES) is Tim Chadborn who is Head of Evaluation at Public Health England and suggested that he could be a good contact for CECAN.

Two other important activities that are currently underway are CECAN's work on a Complexity Evaluation Framework for Defra (carried out further to CECAN Ltd's successful response to the aforementioned Defra ITT) and continuing work on the CECAN Annex to the revised Magenta Book. BS shared that the draft Annex is written and will be published when HM Treasury is ready).

#### *Working with the Third Sector*

BS shared that CECAN has been approached by Lankelly Chase Foundation (LCF) for support with their evaluation activities. Discussions are underway and CECAN hopes to use this as a strategic step to gain access into the rest of the Third Sector.

- JS informed BS that LCF has very recently partnered with five or six other foundations to create a new programme of work called "Local Motion", hosted by the Lloyds Bank Foundation (LBF). The project is fundamentally looking at how charitable foundations might completely redesign the way charitable funding is invested across the UK. A post has been advertised for the role of "Director of Collaboration" paying over £70k per annum to lead on this work. JS strongly advised CECAN to read the advertised job description and use it for the basis of a conversation to make contact with Paul Street at LBF.

*Productivity, the Industrial Strategy*

BS explained that discussions covering topics such as productivity, circular economy and the Industrial Strategy are taking place with BEIS. The Board reminded CECAN that corporate organisations could play an important role here (as well as a source of funding) and advised carving out a clear avenue for them to engage with CECAN.

- JW reported that there had been lots of discussion about the interface between complexity evaluation and the Industrial Strategy at the Productivity Insights Network conference and advised making contact with Prof Phil McCann and Prof Tim Vorley from Sheffield University to find out more about this.

*Other suggestions*

- JS explained that a national voluntary review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is currently underway in preparation for the Government reporting back on them later in the year. This is currently a fairly low-key activity taking place within DFID where they are progressing the UK's response to the SDGs, in particular about the complexity of managing 17 goals, 160+ indicators, and interactions between national and local governments, commercial sectors and so on. JS suggested that CECAN might be able to contribute in this area which could potentially lead to some funding and is a high-profile space to operate in although the risks would also be high.
- JS went on to make the broader point that CECAN 2 might benefit from establishing mechanisms to remain updated about activities within government such as these and develop a clear strategy for determining which activities it might respond to (or purposefully not respond to).
- JS suggested that it might be beneficial for CECAN to work with UKES to develop a policy statement on complexity in evaluation, agreed by the UKES membership. This would allow CECAN to act as a driver for seeding complexity thinking into other organisations and broader key audiences who, in turn, will update their approach and models. In this way, simply by being in existence, CECAN drive fundamental thought in other key arenas so that it gains a life of its own beyond something that is still currently time limited.

## 4. Sustaining CECAN financially and intellectually (Nigel Gilbert)

*CECAN Ltd*

In addition to the matters already discussed about CECAN Ltd, NG shared a further description of the Complexity Evaluation Framework project that CECAN is working on with Defra (a project that was set up further to CECAN Ltd's successful response to a Defra ITT). He observed that CECAN Ltd is expensive because of overheads and therefore is not likely to bring in the large sums of funding that CECAN 2 requires to survive.

*Other projects*

NG explained that as a result of their roles in CECAN, members of the team are often invited to bid for funding from the Research Councils. As an example, NG was invited to participate in a Sandpit event organised by NERC because of his role as CECAN Director. From this, a project (ANTICIPATE) has been funded. Further information about the project can be found here. While this is not a "CECAN project" per se, it has been inspired by CECAN. Proposals are also in development in the area of Productivity and consideration is being given to engaging with the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). NG concluded that there are a lot of Research Council funded proposals and projects which take people from CECAN and so some thought is required as to whether such projects should be branded as CECAN activities in some way.

*Government funding*

NG explained that government departments are keen to work with CECAN but are prevented from paying such work by the procurement process. NG added that there is also an issue about departments often wanting CECAN to work on things that are actually public goods and therefore they do not want to pay for them. In any case, CECAN must focus on winning larger amounts of funding than government departments are usually able to release.

Ideally what would be best for CECAN would be for government departments to contract with ESRC who could then release the funding to CECAN. NG does not foresee this happening in the near future. NG also reported that there is an increasing amount of interest in UKRI and across government departments about having "Knowledge Brokers" and NG considers CECAN to be a good example of this. Unfortunately, as this is still quite a new concept, the Research Councils do not currently have a clear way of funding this activity.

- JS shared that there is a new framework (The Public Value Framework) included in the Spring Statement, which is supposed to change the way the Government procures and develops public value. This opens the door to conversations about public values, social values, common public good issues and so on.

**5. Activity: An introduction to CECAN's Systems Mapping Process (Alex Penn)**

Alex Penn (AP) facilitated a practical session in which members of the Board participated. The aim of the session was to demonstrate the CECAN approach to Systems Mapping by generating a map to identify the factors that influence whether or not complexity thinking is connected across the world of policy and practice (within environmental policy).

AP explained that CECAN uses participatory Systems Mapping a lot. It is a way to bring diverse stakeholders together to collaboratively construct a model of the complex system in which they are embedded. People with diverse understandings of different parts of a system are brought together around a table and begin by identifying what they consider to be the most important elements in their system and how they interconnect and causally influence each other. From there, it is possible to carry out various sorts of analyses on the maps.

In the time available, the group was able to come up with a first-stage map that identified a number of elements within their system. There was not enough time to identify all of the causal links but some were starting to emerge as the time ran out. AP explained that if this were a 'real life' Systems Mapping exercise, it would be at the point where participants would continue to identify links and influences, then begin redefining their system before further mapping would be carried out eventually ready for analysis. AP pointed out that the Advisory Board's map still included a lot of disconnected factors and that there would be little value in analysing it as it stands.

*Reflections on the exercise*

ES asked about feedback from groups at Defra and BEIS who have used this approach with CECAN. AP explained that participants have reported that it helps them to express the way they think in a more articulate fashion and thus re-frame their system. Putting ideas down on paper forces participants to clarify issues and ultimately uncover things that they might not otherwise think through. Having diverse people around a table from different parts of a system, with different perspectives, is really crucial in re-framing what the system is; participants understand how other people might think differently about how something works within a system and understand that there are other stakeholders involved. That practical re-framing is essential in understanding which parts of the system influence the outcomes.

ES picked up on an earlier point made by AP about comparing a Theory of Change logic with a Systems Mapping logic and commented that in evaluation he is often fighting against people who are falling back on Theories of Change, which are ultimately quite linear whereas Systems Mapping pushes participants into 'necessary indeterminacy' and 'useful ambiguity'.

BS added a final point that the CECAN team decided to run this activity as a way of doing something different with the Board (i.e. not another presentation about an area of work) and asked whether members found this a productive use of the meeting. ES responded positively, noting that involving the Board in this way and illustrating how CECAN thinks is helpful in understanding better how the team works and in putting context to the Agenda items.

Members of the Board agreed to provide further reflections on the activity to AP after the meeting.


**6. AOB and date of next meeting**

Nothing further was discussed under AOB.

The next meeting will take place in October. KB will arrange for the CECAN Centre Managers to circulate a Doodle Poll for availability and then confirm the date, location and time. **[ACTION: KB]**



**SUMMARY OF FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS**

- Nigel Gilbert (NG) invited members of the Board to contact him if they would be interested in delivering a webinar or could propose potential presenters.
- James Wilsdon (JW) offered to share with NG some examples of other universities that have been more successful with commercialisation in the social sciences.
- Members of the Board agreed to provide further reflections on the Systems Mapping activity to Alex Penn (AP) after the meeting.
- Kelly Boazman (KB) to poll for availability and then confirm the date, location and time of the next meeting.