

MINUTES

Present:

Elliot Stern, *Emeritus Professor of Evaluation Research, Lancaster University (Chair)*

Julian Barr, *President of the UK Evaluation Society*

Siobhan Campbell, *Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor, Department for Transport*

Penny Hawkins, *Independent Consultant – FYI left DFID last year*

Liam Kelly, *Strategic Science Lead, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division, Scottish Government (via telephone)*

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

Ben Shaw, *Director of Policy Studies Institute (CECAN Deputy Director)*

In attendance:

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

Adam Hejnowicz, *CECAN postdoctoral researcher, University of York*

Dione Hills, *CECAN Fellow, Tavistock Institute*

Henry Leveson-Gower, *CECAN Fellow, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*

Apologies were received from Gary Kass, Jeremy Lonsdale, Ronan Palmer, Frances Rowe, Jamie Saunders, Jim Watson, Sarah Whatmore and James Wilsdon,

1. Welcome and overview of previous Minutes (Elliot Stern)

Elliot Stern (ES) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Julian Barr (JB) to the Board. JB is replacing Elizabeth Robin on the CECAN Advisory Board. ES also invited those in attendance at the meeting to introduce themselves.

ES described the Minutes of the previous meeting as a good indication of the complicated discussions that took place and the Board agreed. He also welcomed the fact that the current agenda included a number of items on learning emerging from CECAN alongside activity reports. It was noted that discussions had been and would continue to be ongoing with regard to CECAN activity against a changing policy context. Further to the last meeting, Nigel Gilbert (NG) has created a secure shared folder using Sync and has shared this with the Advisory Board. It was noted that it is possible to access Sync without having to download anything. JB requested a copy of Paper 1 from the previous meeting. **[ACTION: Kelly Boazman (KB)]**

2. Update on CECAN activities (Nigel Gilbert)

A document entitled "Update of CECAN Activities" was circulated to the Board and NG presented highlights from this, which included:

- A revised CECAN website
 - This is more considered than the previous site, it looks better, works well and is being accessed by lots of people

- International Workshop, November 2017
 - The event, which ran as part of the ESRC Festival of Research, included delegates from ten countries, the European Commission and NGOs such as Oxfam. NG thanked the two members of the Board who attended. The event generated quite a lot of “buzz” and spread the CECAN name and brand well.
- Upcoming Annual Event, July 2018
 - This will take place at the IMechE building in London and a “save the date” notice will be forthcoming. NG requested advice from the Board with regard to identifying a keynote speaker – *see below*.
- CECAN seminars, workshops and Policy Notes (EPPNs)
 - These are attracting an audience mainly of policy analysts and are now being videoed and added to the CECAN website for broader dissemination. Webinars are also proving popular, for example there is one planned for 31st January with Gill Westhorpe and 120 people have already registered for it.
 - There are three workshops that CECAN would like to put on: one for evaluation practitioners, one around commissioning and procurement and a third with the What Works? Centres. Some discussion ensued – *see below*.
 - Four more EPPNs have been published on the CECAN website since the last meeting.
- New Fellowships
 - NG highlighted two of the most recently appointed CECAN Fellows: Joanna Boehnert and Fay Sullivan. Joanna is a graphic designer working on the visual representation of key features of complex systems. NG noted that this is not being done by anyone else and Dione Hills (DH) added that the work so far has been extremely thorough and very interesting. Fay is Head of Health Policy Research at NatCen and is looking at what constitutes best practice in evaluating complexity via a comparison of evaluation practices and innovation in the areas of the Nexus and health.
- CECAN staff
 - Kelly Boazman (KB) joined CECAN in September 2017 and is responsible for recording and maximising CECAN’s impact
 - CECAN’s Knowledge Integrators, Pete Barbrook-Johnson and Ben Fagan-Watson, left their post in December 2017. Pete has started a three-year RCUK Fellowship and Ben has taken up a permanent position at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Recruitment for a replacement is underway and the role will be called “Relationship Manager”. NG invited suggestions from the Board of potential candidates – *see below*.
- Upcoming team meetings
 - January 2018: Writing Retreat. KB has organised a Writing Retreat in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, with the aim of progressing draft academic papers (and therefore increasing submissions in early 2018) and also for completing the Magenta Book annex.
 - March 2018: Intra-project meeting to take place at Cranfield University.
- Priorities for the next six months
 - Resolve plans for Continuation Funding or activity will start winding down from August under the current arrangements with a complete close-down by February 2019. Some discussion around this followed – *see below*.
 - Submission of academic papers. The Board agreed that drafts could be shared for comment if this would be helpful.
 - Completion of the Magenta Book annex, with a view to perhaps “launching” it at the Annual Event if the timing is right.

DISCUSSION

CECAN Annual Event: NG explained that the event aims to attract policy analysts and evaluation practitioners to hear what CECAN has to say around complexity and evaluation and asked the Board who might be invited as a keynote speaker to best attract such people. Discussions within the CECAN team have identified Andy Haldane (Bank of England) or someone like Michael Gove (Defra). ES outlined the difficulties of finding someone who was both knowledgeable and high profile. Siobhan Campbell (SC) and Penny Hawkins (PH) pointed out that it could be risky inviting a politician to give the keynote speech. PH suggested inviting two keynote speakers: one with a focus on complexity and the other with a focus on evaluation.

Specific suggestions from the Board included:

- Ian Boyd (Chief Scientific Adviser, Defra)
 - Also booked for the upcoming UK Evaluation Society (UKES) Conference
- Patrick Vallance (Government Chief Scientific Adviser with effect from spring 2018)
- Bridget Rosewell (National Infrastructure Commission)
- Michael Kell (Chief Economist at the UK National Audit Office)
 - Henry Leveson-Gower (HLG) identified a potential link between Michael Kell and CECAN partner, Helen Wilkinson from Risk Solutions
 - Noted that Michael Kell participated in the first CECAN conference
- Head of Climate Change at KPMG, PWC etc. for a private sector view
 - JB suggested that he might be able to facilitate a connection here, if desired

CECAN workshops: ES, DH and NG discussed the purpose of the upcoming workshops, which NG agreed would likely be a mixture of general awareness raising, dissemination of CECAN learnings and elicitation of input from attendees. It was noted that many evaluation practitioners think that they are already recognising the importance of complexity; indeed, DH pointed out that the term “complexity” is used loosely in the evaluation world and there is certainly a need to “get sharper” about key terms.

CECAN Relationship Manager: NG shared that response to the advert for this role had thus far been poor, likely due to the short length of the contract (up to August 2018, in line with current funding). The post could perhaps work as a secondment opportunity for someone looking to increase their professional network. The role is to act as a proactive liaison between the CECAN Team and government agency co-funders. In addition, NG would like the appointed candidate to lead on the organisation of the three above-mentioned workshops in terms of content, structure and who to invite. JB agreed to circulate details of the opportunity via the UKES Council. **[ACTION: JB]**

CECAN future funding: NG explained that the criteria for further funding were currently unclear. Some discussions have begun with ESRC, but details about transition funding are sparse and nothing is currently known about the views of government co-funders. A meeting of the co-funders is scheduled to take place on 26th February 2018.

PH asked whether an evaluation of CECAN was planned and DH shared a summary report from her CECAN Fellowship (Evaluating the Capacity Building elements of CECAN), in particular referring to a survey that was carried out in September and which could be repeated in July. NG added that DH’s evaluation has been broader than just considering capacity building elements and that this could be further expanded now that arrangements are in place for DH to continue working with CECAN through to August 2018. NG further added that the Research Councils are no longer interested in comprehensive evaluations of projects but through KB’s role, CECAN is carefully recording evidence of impact, for example interviews with case-study participants.

It was agreed by everyone that whatever the future holds for CECAN, lessons learnt must be recorded somehow and disseminated.

3. Choice of case studies and learning from them (Ben Shaw)

In response to requests at the previous meeting, Ben Shaw (BS) gave a presentation about the learnings from the CECAN case studies, highlighting the following points in particular:

- Originally, the team had envisaged quite a linear approach to how the case studies would work but the reality is much more complex and thus the method (i.e. “how CECAN does case studies”) has evolved.
- Case studies have proven quite challenging and certainly not a smooth process, however always interesting.
- In practice, availability of data has been less of an issue than originally thought.
- A particular challenge has been in striking a balance between satisfying the case study partners (i.e. the government department co-funders) in terms of helping them to achieve their aims and pushing them to think longer-term and consider new ideas.
- CECAN is positioned on the cross-over between academia and practice, acting as a “broker” to enable people to conceptualise complexity (“socialising complexity”).
- The case studies have covered all four Nexus areas and a range of evaluation stages.
- A first attempt to summarise learnings from across the case studies was produced at a meeting in Falmouth in August 2017. A matrix was produced and has been made available to the Advisory Board in the shared Sync folder.
- Innovation has been in the use of existing methods in new settings (as opposed to “inventing new methods”).

DISCUSSION

ES reminded the group that during the CECAN set-up stage, it was agreed with ESRC that the focus would not be on brand new methods rather on exploring new settings and also the integration of approaches in relation to particular problems. CECAN must be clear that the **innovation** is in methodology and not methods. BS added that there was also innovation in the capacity building elements of CECAN's activity and DH expanded on this to add that, as identified in the aforementioned survey, it is about **culture change**: giving practitioners the authorisation to think about complexity and realising that it is not such a messy problem after all. Indeed, in providing practitioners with a set of terms through which they can make sense of complexity, this leads to new thinking and therein lies the innovation.

ES suggested further consideration of the benefits of collaborative working, in particular exploring **spin-off** from case studies into other parts of an organisation. This could be a potential criterion for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the case studies.

There was some discussion around frameworks and tools for extrapolating findings from the case studies so that the **lessons** and new thinking can be carried forward beyond the life of CECAN. The Magenta Book annex captures a lot about how to practically apply CECAN's work. BS pointed out that most of the case studies followed a process of bringing people together, gathering perspectives on complexity, providing a CECAN interpretation of these and from that proposing the most appropriate methods for the matter at hand. There is quite a skill in doing this and that should also be something that CECAN looks to capture and carry forward.

Suggestions for **further developments** included:

- Not just bringing academics into the world of practice but also encouraging practitioners to engage more with academia; making sure the learning journey flows both ways. Some of this is already captured in the case study interviews.
- Involving evaluation practitioners (not just evaluation commissioners) in the case studies.
- Extending CECAN's activity to look at the relationship between policy-making and evaluation: complexity does not necessarily mean that you need to approach evaluation differently (although it might), but it definitely means that you need to approach policy making differently.
- Exploring the appraisal system.

4. What we have learnt [paper 1] and the CECAN Syllabus [paper 2]

NG presented the previously circulated Paper 1, informally referred to by the CECAN Team as "The Manifesto". The document attempts to capture CECAN's learnings in terms that are easy to understand with the aim of illustrating where CECAN is at and what it wants people to take away from the work so far. There was some discussion around who the target audience might be and NG explained that it is aimed at everybody and is therefore a fairly generic document in that sense. The idea is that it should act as something interesting that readers would want to follow up on: a more interesting version of a leaflet. NG further added that some positive feedback has already been received from co-funders.

Other comments on Paper 1 included:

- Whether or not the UK can really be referred to as "a world leader in evaluation" (page 9).
- ES really liked page 2 and suggested that a version of the information on that page could be produced specifically for policymakers, if it were within CECAN's remit to do so. SC offered to facilitate routes into policymaking and will discuss this further with NG outside of the meeting. **[ACTION: NG and SC]**

Moving to Paper 2, The CECAN Syllabus, NG thanked Board members for their suggestion at a previous meeting to create one. The document is now publically available via the CECAN website and is intended for use as the basis for MSc modules etc. To There is an outstanding action from the previous Advisory Board meeting to look at CPD courses with the UKES. CECAN is keen to put together a series of CPD sessions, more or less along the lines of the Syllabus and would welcome input from the UKES. JB and NG will discuss this possibility further. **[ACTION: JB and NG]**

Other comments on Paper 2 included:

- ES described it as a well-structured document with a well chosen bibliography
- PH will promote the syllabus through her work to develop an evaluation course with the Health and Human Sciences department at Glasgow University
- SC suggested looking at the Government Social Research (GSR) sponsored short courses when putting together the CPD provision
- SC will promote the syllabus to the Cross Government Evaluation Group (CGEG), which she chairs
- A continuation strategy for CECAN could be based around training, offering and certifying courses etc.

- The syllabus could be sign-posted from the Magenta Book

5. DEFRA (RDPE) case study presentation and Q&A (Adam Hejnowicz and Frances Rowe)

Adam Hejnowicz (AH) began his presentation by acknowledging the case study's co-lead, Frances Rowe from Newcastle University, who was unfortunately unable to join the meeting. AH explained that the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) comes out of the EU Framework and described it as a big policy with lots of activity, working on a relatively small budget. The RDPE covers three main areas, which are: farming and forestry competitiveness, agri-environment and socio-economic development. The majority of the funding (c. 80%) is in agri-environment.

The case study, originally planned as two separate studies, incorporates two distinct workstreams: helping Defra to understand how to bring a complexity perspective to their current evaluation of the RDPE and in planning for future policy, especially in the context of Brexit. The study has centred around two workshops, the first of which took place in July 2017 and the second is due to take place in February 2018.

Observations and learnings from Workshop 1 (evaluating current policy):

- The session was attended by Defra policy analysts as well as representatives from the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the devolved nations. This generated a lot of cross-learning.
- Attendees seemed to understand that they were dealing with something complex but struggled to articulate it well.
- Attendees were introduced to complexity appropriate evaluation methods to use in the commissioning process. This was done by working through Barbara Befani's evaluation toolkit (available on the CECAN website), which allowed participants to better understand the questions they were asking and therefore which methods would fit best.
- Initially participants were mainly interested in experimental / quantitative methods but by the end of the workshop they saw that theory-based methods were far better placed for answering their questions.
- Many participants were introduced to configurational theory-based methods for the first time.
- By the end of the workshop, participants understood that there was no single "gold standard" method for evaluation and that often a combination of methods is the best approach.
- Participants engaged well with the evaluation toolkit and it has been suggested in the post-workshop interviews that there is interest in arranging for Barbara Befani to teach evaluation teams about using the tool.
- The toolkit has provided a way of approaching this policy area through the introduction of complexity appropriate methods and building capacity in them. This is not something that would otherwise have happened.

Comments about Workshop 2:

- This workshop will consider how to use complex systems thinking to better design policies and evaluation frameworks, so it is addressing policymaking and evaluation together.
- The workshop is very much about planning ahead not intervening after the fact (as in Workshop 1).
- Alex Penn (from the CECAN team) will facilitate a systems mapping workshop looking at policies around animal health, agri-productivity, environmental land management and "The Rural" and asking "what lies ahead (especially with Brexit in mind)?", "how do these policies fit together in a system?" and "how do they interact?".

Other general comments and discussion about this case study:

- In addition to the key learnings outlined in his presentation, AH observed that although participants have been engaged and open to CECAN's suggestions, people are working in silos so achieving such a good level of cross-talk between bodies has been challenging but invaluable.
- It is as yet unclear what Defra intends to do with the outputs from Workshop 2 and what the potential spread / uptake might be beyond the case study. It is possible that the approach to be explored in Workshop 2 could serve as a model for other departments.
- Options are being explored for including members of Defra's teams working on the 25 Year Environment Plan and on EU Exit.
- ES described the study as a very interesting live example of an approach CECAN is taking and insight into what is going on.

6. CECAN Fellowship: Evaluating Benefits of Behavioural and Institutional Regulatory Interventions (Henry Leveson-Gower)

HLG gave a presentation about his CECAN Fellowship project and his learnings from the experience so far. The project is based around Ofwat's "Trust in Water" strategy and looks at how regulation has to go beyond approaches based only on 'getting the incentives right' and draw more systematically on insights from behavioural and institutional economics. HLG found it interesting that Ofwat had picked up on the challenging concept of "trust" and he had interviewed a range of stakeholders from within the system of water and policy (e.g. farmers, land owners, water providers, regulators, consumers) asking what "trust" means to them.

HLG made the following observations about his work:

- Ofwat and industry had conceptualised what trust meant by focussing on what customers thought of their water company.
- In general, customers do seem to trust their water company however as trust implies a relationship, it is very difficult to say for sure whether or not it really exists. Customers don't often think "beyond the tap" until something goes wrong.
- Incidents suddenly create a (positive or negative) perception around the trustworthiness of an organisation that can last decades.
- A number of interviewees talked about trust becoming increasingly important in the future as prices of water were likely to rise (for the first time in a long time) with inflation.
- There is no shared framework for talking about trust or evaluating if it exists.
- If Ofwat is serious about "Trust in Water" there is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

DISCUSSION

The water industry and the different players within it is becoming an increasingly **complex, systems-based** world. It is HLG's view that most innovative solutions moving into the future will need to take that systems world more seriously and that there are an increasing number of players, thus **relationships** are more important. ES added that in an individualised world, dominated by linear-thinking and macro-economics, concepts from social sciences such as game theory and value-based trust are important sources of balance.

HLG found that institutional trust is a rather under-explored area and there was some discussion around how one might make sense of complex systems through an institutional viewpoint. It was agreed that institutional complexity was interesting and that HLG's work in the area of water could transfer well to areas such as the energy sector.

DH noted that the concept of trust has come up in a number of the post-case study interviews and in the Magenta Book annex. The thinking from HLG's fellowship could be very helpful in complex evaluation. This may be an area to consider developing in a future-version of CECAN.

NG thanked HLG for his contribution and encouraged him to publish the work.

7. AOB and date of next meeting

7.1 The CECAN Annual Event

In addition to the above-noted conversation (ref: point 2), the following suggestions were made:

- Consider involving case study participants to interact with delegates
- SC invited and encouraged the CECAN team to publicise the event through the CGEG
- In addition to suggesting speakers, the Advisory Board will make suggestions for themes [**ACTION: BOARD**]

7.2 Nexus issues in developing countries

JB, NG and ES discussed the possibility of applying for funding through the GCRF in relation to working on Nexus issues in developing countries. It was noted that while CECAN is mainly UK focussed, internationally-focussed organisations such as CEDIL and DFID were not particularly concentrated on complexity (like CECAN is) and therefore there could be scope for CECAN to expand its interests. NG confirmed that he would be happy to consider a GCRF bid if input from Board Members was offered.

7.3 The role of the Advisory Board over the coming months

As CECAN moves closer to the end of the current funding period, and plans for future versions are being determined, the Advisory Board agreed to act responsively at times that are useful to the CECAN team. The Board invited interactions with the Team in between meetings, for example to comment on draft ideas etc. Protecting CECAN's legacy is very important to everyone.

7.4 Date of the next meeting

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

Summary of Actions

- **KB** to send a copy of Paper 1 from the previous meeting to JB
- **JB** to circulate details of the Relationship Manager post via the UKES Council
- **NG and SC** to discuss SC's offer to facilitate routes into policymaking with regard to promoting Paper 1, a.k.a. "The CECAN Manifesto"
- **NG and JB** to discuss CPD courses
- **Advisory Board** to suggest themes for the CECAN Annual Event
- **KB** to arrange for the CECAN Centre Managers to circulate a Doodle Poll and confirm the date, location and time