

## MINUTES

### 1. Welcome and apologies

*Present:* Elliot Stern (Chair), Siobhan Campbell; Penny Hawkins; Ann Humble; Gary Kass; Ronan Palmer; Elizabeth Robin; Jamie Saunders; Elliot Stern; Sarah Whatmore, Nigel Gilbert; Ben Shaw; Candice Howarth; Helen Wilkinson

*Via phone:* Liam Kelly

*Apologies:* Jim Watson; Michael Kell, Jill Rutter, James Wilsdon

### 2. CECAN Terms of Reference (ToR) and Communications strategy

#### *Terms of Reference (ToR)*

- The CECAN Advisory Group (AG) has an *advisory* role and if particular issues arise where the AG could provide useful advice (e.g. ethics), CECAN would consult the Group.
- The CECAN Director reports directly to the co-funders group which has representatives from each of the funders (ESRC, NERC, DECC, DEFRA, EA and FSA).
- Evaluating the success of CECAN and its progress will rest with the co-funders, but the Centre would greatly value advice from the AG.
- Elliot Stern as chair of the AG will nominate a Deputy Chair.

#### *Communications Plan*

- The Comms plan was tabled for information and should AG members have feedback or request more information, they should get in touch with the Director.
- It was considered important to consider the relevance of policy interventions and context to CECAN and how CECAN's Comms plan will evolve and adapt to this.
- It was recommended that the Plan should incorporate CECAN's position as a champion for certain issues.

#### *Action points*

- *Chair: to nominate Deputy Chair*

### 3. Progress report and planned activities

#### *General*

- CECAN's contract is with ESRC but it is co-funded by ESRC and NERC with DECC, Defra, EA, and FSA.
- CECAN is planning to contribute supplementary guidance on complexity for a new version of the Magenta Book.

#### *Case studies*

- CECAN will not carry out evaluations but will use case studies to relate methodological work to practical examples of evaluations.
- The CECAN team is currently looking to identify case studies through interviews, then developing criteria to select the ones that will actually be used and is in discussion with co-funders on the case studies to select.
- It was pointed out that the case studies are currently very English, and there is a need to engage with Wales, Scotland and local governments to better reflect these and ensure that CECAN can engage with other parts of the UK
- There was a discussion of the political context and how CECAN will inform policy evaluation in the light of Brexit, SDGs etc.
- It was suggested that CECAN needed to be explicit about how case studies were being selected, why this collection etc.?

#### *CECAN impact*

- The Director observed that the Call for CECAN was very much about *ex post* evaluation and CECAN responded to this. Nevertheless, there were ongoing debates within policy circles about what was seen as an excessive focus on the Magenta Book, *ex post*, RCT-focused, evaluation.

- Members were of the opinion that CECAN should be challenging the current landscape in order to be innovative.

#### *Communicating work and success*

- Continuing discussions with stakeholders could be useful to clarify the funding model for sustaining CECAN, working out the pros and cons of different models
- CECAN should consider how it can add value and work with private sector etc. whilst thinking of its partners' commercial interests and balancing open access and publicly available data

#### *Action points*

- AG: email NG ideas for whom could chair the 13<sup>th</sup> Sept launch event Panel

### **4. Presentation: 'Agent based modelling - introducing a powerful policy tool'**

Helen Wilkinson of Risk Solutions gave a presentation on Agent Based Modelling followed by discussion

- Had to work hard on stakeholder engagement and show it could provide a test bed to help understand how world works, not attempt to model the world in detail. Need to do more to talk to stakeholders about complexity in general because people don't fully understand how messy a system can be and how difficult change can be.
- Established peer review group to challenge throughout, as well as sensitivity testing.
- An econometric model was created in parallel, but it couldn't distinguish between different reforms as it wasn't discriminatory enough. Some interconnections couldn't be represented in an equilibrium model, meaning it predicted huge benefits from the policy change being evaluated but the ABM only marginal ones.
- The Director noted that the forthcoming Evaluation Policy and Practice Notes will have a section on advantages and disadvantages of approaches.
- Case studies will provide opportunities to explore different methods for different issues. Aim is to test methods and organise suite of methodologies vital for non expert evaluator to help navigate
- It was observed that analysts want to know what meta knowledge we have to ask better questions. Need database of questions policy makers should ask, not methods available.

### **5. What would success look like for CECAN?**

- In discussion it was observed that what counts as success will evolve. CECAN's immediate goal is to satisfy 'quick wins'. Longer-term goal: change how policy evaluation is done to improve policy making.
- CECAN is continuing to develop the Theory of Change as developmental tool to help make sense of what's going on now and over time, develop this and track progress.
- It was noted that success is about getting ideas used, which is a challenge about the culture of policy making and evaluation rather than a cognitive one of supply suitable tools and techniques. There is a need to help audiences understand what they need.
- CECAN is uniquely placed to have ongoing discussions with aim of developing mutual learning and adjustment.

### **6. What can we learn from other similar centres?**

- CECAN is interested in challenge led, interdisciplinary work, operating at boundaries of research and policy, cross stakeholder.
- We should be looking for examples of other centres: What's gone well? What do we want to avoid?

#### *Action points*

- AG: share examples of other centres CECAN can learn from

### **7. Future advisory board meetings: agenda, date, location**

#### *Action points*

- Chair suggested that some future AG meetings could be in seminar mode to allow for in-depth discussion of some topics
- AG: send CH dates they can't do for meeting in January
- AG: send agenda items for next meeting