NCRM Placement Fellowships

Advertised Placement – Role and Person Specification

Placement Title

Innovative approaches to using big and open and / or administrative data for ageing related local decision making

Name of receiving organisation	**Centre for Ageing Better**
Location of placement	**Centre for Ageing Better, home institution, and at fieldwork study locations**
Desired length of placement	**6 months**
Desired time commitment per week (part-time, full-time, or proposed %)	**Part-time / Full time**
Approx. Start Date	**October 2017**

Project Description (max. 400 words)

Background The Centre for Ageing Better (Ageing Better) is an independent charitable foundation working to create a society in which everyone enjoys a good later life. Ageing Better believes that more people living longer represents a huge opportunity for society. But changes are needed so more people enjoy good health, are financially secure, are socially connected, and have a purpose in later life. In addition to evidence reviews and evaluations of promising interventions focusing on specific topics (employment, later life transitions, aids and adaptations for example), some of our work is cross cutting and undertaken at a local level. For example we have established two strategic locality partnerships (Leeds and Manchester) and we are providing co-ordination to the network of UK age friendly communities, a WHO initiative.

Considerable work is underway locally to plan and take action to address some of the key ageing related challenges facing society and to help people to live better later lives. But effective decision making and strategic planning relies on anticipating, and understanding the relationships between actions and outcomes and this is complex in environments where there are multiple, overlapping interventions taking place in a locality. Further complexities are that interventions may span both social and physical environments, they may be delivered across diverse communities, implemented at different levels and across different geographical / socio-economic and cultural settings and be directed towards present and future cohorts of older people. Monitoring frameworks such as the WHO's age friendly cities indicators have been a helpful focus for local M&E but they need to be populated with up to date and potentially linkable data – which is not without challenges, and their ability to support causal analyses that help explain as well as track changes across a system are relatively untested.

New methods such as those being developed and applied in settings such as CECAN (Centre for Evaluation of Complexity at the Nexus) and the increasing availability of big and open data as well as the ability to link existing administrative datasets are of considerable interest to the Centre. However analytical practice in the context of local ageing related policy and strategy is relatively underdeveloped and more exploratory work is needed to test the applicability of different analytical strategies in this sector.

This project

This project will explore new and innovative ways of analysing local data sets to support ageing-related policy-making, as well as to help advance research, monitoring and evaluation methods in the context of local decision making that affects the lives of current and future generations of older people. The successful applicant will be able to work with a sample of local sites that have expressed an interest in this project, for up to six months. Engagement will necessarily be in depth only with some and more consultative with others.

The project will explore strategic research and evaluation interests in localities, and either undertake or help stakeholders to scope out practical analytical strategies for making best use of big, open and / or administrative data sets to address ageing related strategic issues. The project will also explore the applicability, challenges and benefits of using, in the context of local ageing decision making, research approaches and methods such as those that are being tested by CECAN. While CECAN was established in the energy environment, food and climate change 'nexus', the research methods developed and applied by CECAN offer an interesting case study on how to overcome the challenges of understanding, modelling and evaluating complex and overlapping policy initiatives.

11 councils have so far submitted an expression of interest in participating in this project. These include Manchester, East Lothian, Isle of Wight, Bristol, Suffolk, Norfolk, Sunderland, Leicester, South Staffordshire, Solihull, Cornwall and a number of multi-site organisations. More information about the localities interests can be made available on request.

Examples suggested by Ageing Better to localities when soliciting expressions of interest included:

- understanding how local policies and programmes affecting the physical and social environment interact to affect the wellbeing of older people across different geographies and communities;

- exploring how lifestyle factors, social networks, city or locality geographies and infrastructures affect physical activity levels in different areas.

- how to better identify different types of people who are at risk of or experiencing isolation or loneliness and how to most effectively develop and deploy multiple interventions addressing issues affecting them

Key Deliverables (max. 200 words)

The shape of the project and key deliverables will be agreed with a steering group consisting of the Centre for Ageing Better, NCRM, CECAN, a member of the UK Age Friendly Communities network and a representative of the academic's home faculty / department, but deliverables are likely to include:

- Reports, presentations, academic article(s) characterising the role of evidence and data in supporting local decision making across the multiple sites that participated in this project, as well as the issues and challenges faced, and analysing the potential for using big and open data, and applying innovative methods to strategic issues in the Ageing nexus
- Proposal(s) for specific projects in which innovative research or evaluative approaches could be applied to harness the potential of big and open data to support decision making and modelling, exploring or explaining the impacts of multiple policies and practice on different communities and cohorts of older people.
- Presentations at ageing conferences and / or events convening members of the analytical communities (e.g. evaluation conferences and seminars).

Role Description (max. 400 words)

The successful applicant for this project would be expected to develop a methodology and shape the project working with Ageing Better's Evaluation Officer. They would then lead on developing and working with localities and external agencies, undertake literature reviews and drafting reports and presentations. The anticipated activities and methods are set out in the next section.

Research Methods (max. 200 words)

The research methods are likely to include desk based reviews of literature and documentation, site visits and interviews, and workshops. The precise scope and scale of the work and the approach will be agreed between the researcher and the steering group. However, it is likely that some of the activities will include:

- Familiarisation with the range of actors involved in the project
- Analysis of Expressions of Interest to participate from up to 15 localities to identify the range of interests in this project and to provide a basis for planning fieldwork and engagement with selected case study sites
- A review of the literature covering analytical and evaluative issues in local decision making around Ageing and Age Friendly Cities.
- Fieldwork in a sample of localities – to examine in depth the strategic challenges that are the focus of localities interests, as well as the data and analytical issues (such as the potential 'connectability' of relevant administrative and big and open data within and across typical places (cities), and across different spatial levels, over time, and across different cohorts of people).

- Visits and collaboration with some of the leading data / analytical institutions in the UK (see Annex) to explore and understand the range of innovative approaches and tools being developed, deployed and tested within the research community, including for example, the use of Machine Learning, Qualitative Comparative Analysis, Agent Based Modelling and Dynamic Pattern Synthesis, and examine their applicability to the range of strategic evidence needs within and across localities involved in fieldwork for this project.
- Analysis and synthesis of opportunities and challenges and development of proposals, with localities and Ageing Better, for how these approaches could be deployed in the ageing context in support of strategic planning, decision making and evaluation.
- Depending on timescales and feasibility – working alongside one or more sites to link and analyse data relating to an agreed topic or strategic challenge, or to develop a proposal for such work which could be undertaken.

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications and academic experience	PhD with several years post-doctoral experience	Professor / post doc with substantial post-doc experience
Knowledge & experience of specific Research Methods	Social research / quantitative data analysis	Social Research / Complex analytics / modelling
Knowledge & experience working with public sector	Some experience of working with UK institutions and local services and the challenges of obtaining, linking and managing data to support decision making	Considerable experience of UK institutions and local services and the challenges of obtaining, linking and managing data to support decision making
Communicating and influencing	Good communication skills evidenced through multiple research projects with stakeholders across a range of settings	Credibility across a range of stakeholders and excellent written and verbal communication skills. Demonstrable experience of drafting convincing and accessible research reports for non-academic audiences
Topic expertise	Some experience in research into ageing or older people, and / or knowledge of one or more of Ageing Better's priority areas	Considerable experience in research into ageing or older people, and / or knowledge of one or more of Ageing Better's priority areas
Working style	Able to work effectively both independently and as part of a team	Able to provide leadership at a senior level working effectively both independently and as part of a team and with high levels of flexibility.

Further details

Further details on this specific role can be obtained from:

Name	Matt Baumann
Role	Senior Evaluation Manager, Centre for Ageing Better
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Further details on the application process can be obtained from:

Name	Alexandra Frosch
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Annex A: Key agencies the researcher may benefit from engaging with during this fellowship as part of scoping out new analytical approaches

- CECAN is pioneering the development and application of analytical and evaluative innovations in the policy nexus of energy, environment, food, water and climate change, in recognition of the limitations of traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation which are unable to address system related complexity.
- The ESRC/AHRC funded Spatial Design Network Analysis software project is set up to help architects worldwide design cities that are better for people's health, have lower crime rates and encourage sustainable transport.
- The ESRC funded Urban Big Data Project is collecting 'big data' – combining large and diverse sources of data – to create a detailed picture of Glasgow, helping urban planners and local authorities to find the best policies.
- The UK / US Time-Space Trajectories project is looking to push forward a cutting-edge research agenda in the interdisciplinary modelling of complex epidemiological trajectories of well-being and place. It is based on the realization that a major methodological challenge in epidemiology and community health today is modelling the complex inter-dynamics of time, place and well-being.
- The Future Cities Catapult aims to advance urban innovation, growing UK companies, and making cities better by bringing together businesses, universities and city leaders so that they can work with each other to solve the problems that cities face
- The Administrative Data Research Network delivers a service providing secure and lawful access to de-identified linked administrative data to researchers. The work of the ADRN provides a structured and auditable route to allow accredited researchers to carry out research based on administrative data. It also offers a linking facility whereby the data collected from different bodies can be linked together and offer an invaluable benefit to researchers and government.
- The Open Data Institute aims to equip, connect and inspire people around the world to innovate with data.
- University of Essex's Institute for Analytics and Data Science is looking to become a world-leading centre of expertise and excellence for research, education and professional training in the theory and practice of big data, smart analytics and data science.
- The Royal Statistical Society has demonstrated a strong interest in innovation in statistical analysis. According to the Statistical Society, "for statistics as a discipline to thrive, methodologies need to be advanced and tailored to the challenges of data analysis in an increasingly complex world".
- The UK data service is funded by the ESRC to support researchers, teachers and policymakers who depend on high-quality social and economic data.