



Minutes of the 414th NESC Council Meeting, 17th October 2014

The meeting took place in The Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough St, at 10 am.

Attendance: John Shaw (Chair), Michael Ewing, Theresa Carter, Karin Dubsy, Clodagh McDonnell, Mary Walsh, John McHale, David Hegarty, Brid O'Brien, Seán Healy, James Doorley, Karen Murphy, Anna Davies, Frank Allen, Pat Smith, Edmond Connolly, Christopher McCamley, Gavan O'Leary, Shay Cody, David Begg, and Seán Ó Riain.

Secretariat: Rory O'Donnell, Helen Johnston, Anne-Marie McGauran, Noel Cahill, Richard Holland and Philip Lawton.

Apologies: Seámus O'Donoghue, Niamh O'Donoghue, Sally Anne Kinahan, Tony Donohoe, Mike O'Sullivan Manus O'Riordan, Ian Talbot, Mary Daly, John McCarthy, John Murphy and Oisín Coghlan.

1. **New Members:** John Shaw welcomed Karen Murphy and Theresa Carter as new members, replacing Caroline Fahey (C&V Pillar) and Siobhan Egan (Environmental Pillar) respectively.
2. **Minutes of the Meeting of September 2014** were approved.
3. **Tackling Disadvantage in a Time of Limited Resources:** Dr. Helen Johnston gave a presentation on work that she is carrying out for the OECD.

John Shaw invited Council members to provide comments which could feed into the final report.

Members queried how the new activation approach is working in practice raising issues about the adequacy of resourcing and the ability of service-users to negotiate the new services.

Members noted the importance of highlighting the risks associated with new activation measures, such as increasing pressure to take precarious and low paid jobs and resulting growth in polarisation. They raised the need to consider how to respond to these risks. Members also discussed how the new approach tackles poverty, including for those under 24; its treatment of lone parents; people with disabilities; the issue of childcare; and, access to higher education.

In terms of tackling disadvantage Members noted that the issue of progression from employment schemes remains critical. Members drew attention to the challenge of developing more inter-agency work particularly in a context when there are cuts to resources. They also noted the importance of investment in services and infrastructure (e.g. in broadband in rural areas) particularly services which the most disadvantaged can afford. In addition, they noted the need to develop structures which engage local stakeholders and empower them to find their own solutions. They highlighted the importance of Public Participation Networks and the need for Government support. The importance of one-to-one contact with people in disadvantaged communities to build up confidence and capacity; and training local people on environmental issues were also stressed. Finally, the importance of providing spaces for people to meet and connect was noted, in particular as a means of developing social enterprises for the most deprived communities.

In terms of the approach to this area of study Members suggested Sen's capabilities framework and a before and after comparison. The latter would highlight the impact of austerity on services and allow an assessment of the changes. In addition, ethnographic study which would allow more detailed tracking of a particular group of people under the new activation process was seen as a way to build on this work.

4. **Other Business:** None

The next meeting was set for: **Friday, 21st November**, Clock Tower, 10.00 a.m.