



Minutes of the 437th NESC Council Meeting, 30th June 2020 @ 2pm (via WebEx)

The meeting took place virtually via webex from the Department of the Taoiseach, Room 301.

Attendance: In room 301: Elizabeth Canavan (Chair), Online: Jasmina Behan (DPER) Brid O’Brien, Feargal O’Brolchain (DoF), David Hegarty (DBEI), Denis Duggan, Edgar Morgenroth, Elenor Denny, Feargal O’Coigligh, Geraint Ellis, Ian Talbot, Joe Cunningham, John McKeon (DEASP), Karen Ciesielski, Kevin Callinan, Maeve McElwee, Michelle Norris, Patricia King, Paul Donnelly, Philip Hamell, Sean Healy, Sinead O’Flanagan, and Damien McDonald.

Secretariat: In room 301: Larry O’Connell, Anne Marie McGauran, Online: Damian Thomas, Helen Johnston, Jeanne Moore, Cathal FitzGerald, Noel Cahill, Edna Jordan, Sinéad Nic Coitir and NESC Interns Orlaith Hennessy and Rachel Merriman

Apologies: James Doorley, Orlaigh Quinn (Dave Hegarty attending), Derek Moran (Fergal O’Brolchain attending), and Robert Watt (Jasmina Behan attending).

1. Minutes of the Meeting December 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed without amendment.

2. From Crisis to Sustainable Recovery & Resilience: Larry O’Connell introduced this paper for discussion.

Council members thanked the Secretariat for an interesting paper. The points made in the discussion included the following: the importance of agility, noting that the crisis shows a strength in Ireland in the ability to pull together that could be harnessed for other crises including housing; difficulties for some in availing of online opportunities; the need for more consultation with the community and voluntary pillar; the strong policy response in supporting incomes, though noting that it has not worked for everyone, including businesses for whom the responses to date are not effective; the need for support to business to be provided on a structured basis; the importance of short-cycle learning in the context of the changing nature and value of work; and ensuring that road space reallocated for walking and cycling should be permanently assigned to these uses. Members also highlighted issues for further consideration, including: the biodiversity emergency and the value of nature; local environmental effects; positive achievements in relation to food security; vulnerability of transport networks; and the effect of the crisis on the ability to object to planning permissions. It was noted by some that the major responses made to the crisis were by nature exceptional and not appropriate on an ongoing basis, though others noted that the crisis revealed weaknesses in existing arrangements to which we do not want to return.

3. Welfare and Employment in Ireland: Dr. Helen Johnston explained that a revised version of the main report had been prepared for the cancelled March Council meeting and that a summary of this report had been circulated to members at that time. In light of the Covid crisis, an epilogue chapter was added. This documents the main social welfare measures taken to address the fall out of the coronavirus pandemic and to reflect on their implications for the future of the Irish social welfare system. Council members were supportive of the work and points raised included: the importance of social insurance, without losing sight of the high share of people on means-tested payments; concerns in relation to some planned pension changes (the total contributions approach and auto-enrolment); the expenditure implications of the proposed reforms; and need for care in interpreting the motivation of recent government decisions. It was agreed that the full final draft report would be circulated again to members to be approved by written procedure.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, 24 September 2020.