

Minutes of the 458th NESC Council Meeting (in person), Thursday, 2nd October 2025 @ 10am

The Clock Tower, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Attendance: Liz Canavan (Dep Chair), Noelle O'Connell, Jerry Mac Evilly, Diarmuid Torney, Brid O'Brien, Seán Healy, Kevin Callinan, Colin Scott, Colette Byrne, Ian Talbot, Brian Duff (DSP), Jason Taylor (DHLGH), Kevin Daly (DoF), Dermot Coates (DETE), Barry Vaughan (DoT) and Professor Alan Smeaton (DCU).

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Gráinne Collins, Colette Bennett, Cathal FitzGerald, Gemma O'Reilly, David Hallinan, Noel Cahill, Jeanne Moore, Damian Thomas, and Andrew Olande-Murphy

Apologies: John Callinan, Andrew Brownlee, Nat O'Connor, Caroline Whyte, Karen Ciesielski, John Enright, TJ Flanagan, Damian McDonald, Niamh Moore-Cherry, Nichola Mallon, Chris van Egeraat, Declan Hughes (Dermot Coates attended), John Hogan (Kevin Daly attended), John McKeon (Brian Duff attended), Graham Doyle (Jason Taylor attended) and Oonagh Buckley.

1. **Administration:** The minutes of the last meeting (June) were agreed. Liz Canavan welcomed Siobhán O'Sullivan who recently joined the NESC Secretariat.
2. **Artificial Intelligence:** Siobhán O'Sullivan introduced a paper, 'AI Power, Promise and Peril'. This was followed by a presentation by Professor Alan Smeaton, a member of the AI Advisory Council, who gave an overview of key developments in AI. He emphasised the responsibility of leaders to put in place AI policies for their organisation and to promote AI literacy. Council members welcomed the paper and two presentations. Members commented on a range of risks associated with AI including the risk of getting bad advice, fossil fuel lock-in and other environmental impacts, the dominance of a small number of high-tech companies, lack of fairness and people being left behind, and the loss of income to the social insurance fund if employment is adversely affected. The Department of Social Protection has an innovation hub which will be used to trial the application of AI to some of its processes while the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is proceeding to implement its Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity including the establishment of an AI regulatory sandbox. Other key themes in the Council discussion were the importance of leadership on AI, regulation, governance and AI literacy. There is scope for NESC to add value on how to address these issues for Ireland.
3. **Shaping Ireland's Demographic Future:** Gráinne Collins introduced the revised report on demography. Members welcomed the report. It was agreed that the final report would identify those policies that are going in the right direction and where the gaps are in relation to the demographic challenge. In addition, the role of housing will be given more emphasis, both as an influence on migration and the role it plays in balancing it. The report is to be published finalised via written procedure.
4. **Energy Transition – A Systems Perspective:** Gemma O'Reilly presented the report on this subject. It was proposed that there should be a recommendation for an 'all of government' energy framework – this would make clear that existing energy plans are maintained and included in the recommended approach. Other suggestions were to be more specific on the process for designating Zero Carbon Business Parks and on what is required to more effectively promote energy literacy. It was agreed to finalise the report via written procedure.
5. **Social Cohesion & EU Presidency: Update** Colette Bennett presented an update on this work and pointed out that this was the first time that there would be a NESC event on the official EU presidency calendar. She expressed her appreciation to the Director and colleagues in the Department of the Taoiseach for securing this. Members welcomed the planned programme of work. The chair noted the need to think carefully about the final recommendations and what would be most useful.
6. **AOB:**
 - a. **Bioeconomy Work with D/CEE:** Members will be asked to participate in a workshop on the Draft Bioeconomy Strategy & Action Plan on Jan 21st 2026. Further details will be provided in the coming weeks.
 - b. **Cost Rental:** The Director noted that Noel Cahill is undertaking further research on cost rental in Ireland and that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is supportive of this work. A paper will be brought to the December Council meeting.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, 18th December 2025, at the Clock Tower, Marlborough Street.