

Minutes of the 459th NESC Council Meeting (in person), Thursday, 18th December 2025 @ 10am

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

Attendance: John Callinan (Chair), Liz Canavan (Dep Chair), Brid O'Brien, Seán Healy, Naomi Feely, Andrew Brownlee, Ian Talbot, Kevin Callinan, Noelle O'Connell, Diarmuid Torney, Colette Byrne, Niamh Moore-Cherry, Chris van Egeraat, TJ Flanagan, Caroline Whyte, Karen Ciesielski, Oonagh Buckley, Fergal McPartland (DCEE), Rónán Hession (DSP), Claragh Mulhern (DHLGH), Kevin Daly (DoF), Eimear Flynn, (DPER), Dermot Coates (DETE), and Barry Vaughan (DoT).

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Cathal FitzGerald, Colette Bennett, Gráinne Collins, Niamh Garvey, Gemma O'Reilly, Noel Cahill, Jeanne Moore, and Damian Thomas.

Apologies: Jerry Mac Evinly, Colin Scott, John Enright, Damian McDonald, Nichola Mallon, Declan Hughes (Dermot Coates attended), John Hogan (Kevin Daly attended), John McKeon (Rónán Hession attended), DPER (Eimear Flynn attended) and Graham Doyle (Claragh Mulhern attended).

- 1. Administration:** The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and the Chair welcomed new members, Andrew Brownlee, CIF and Naomi Feely, Children's Rights Alliance
- 2. Artificial Intelligence:** Siobhán O'Sullivan introduced a revised report. Members welcomed the report, particularly the socio-technical framing, the treatment of the environmental impacts and the links to wellbeing framework. Members highlighted a number of issues, including the importance of human oversight; usage and influence of incomplete data; lessons from social media; long-term cognitive impacts; financial liability implications of AI; drivers of AI literacy and the role of the third level institutions; 'economic prosperity'; and term 'pitfalls' rather than 'peril'. The report is to be finalised via written procedure.
- 3. Infrastructure:** Cathal FitzGerald introduced a revised report on 'Policy Trade-offs and Strategic Infrastructure Delivery'. Members highlighted that the policy context has changed somewhat, in particular with the publication of the Government's *Accelerating Infrastructure - Report and Action Plan*. Issues raised included the balance in the paper between the issue of delivery and the focus on energy; the continuing disconnect between intent and action on the ground and the presence of silos; leadership and decision making around priorities and trade-offs; importance of cross-government structures to on-the-ground implementation; the importance of a pipeline of infrastructure projects; public participation, resourcing, and the Aarhus Convention; local focus on what's going on beside you; learning from what has worked; and the value of long-run thinking. It was agreed that the Secretariat would bring the topic back to a future meeting having considered the Council's feedback.
- 4. Social Cohesion & EU Presidency:** Colette Bennett presented a working paper report on social cohesion and updated on wider project and EU Presidency activities. Members welcomed the work, highlighting a number of issues including: the importance of moving beyond a narrow transactional approach to social cohesion and protection; the sensitive nature of identity and place and the term 'left behind places'; simplifying the language around the policy ecosystem; the potential of a life-cycle approach; a possible fourth lens on culture, norms, values and their institutional basis; the environment as an aspect of social cohesion; the importance of both 'input and output' delivery in creating trust; the role of online virtual communities. It was also suggested that NESC would consider how its work on Better Work could be highlighted during Ireland's EU Presidency.
- 5. AOB:**

Schedule of Council Meetings for 2026: Council meetings will take place on the last Thursday of each quarter in 2026: 26th March, 25th June, 24th September and 17th December 2026.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, 26th March 2026, at the Clock Tower, Marlborough Street.