

Minutes of the 457th NESC Council Meeting (in person), Thursday, 26th June 2025 @ 10am

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

Attendance: Liz Canavan (Dep Chair), Graham Doyle (DHLGH), Hubert Fitzpatrick, Noelle O'Connell, John Enright, Seamus Coffey, Chris Van Egeraat, Jerry Mac Evilly, Caroline Whyte, Karen Ciesielski, Nichola Mallon, Diarmuid Torney, Brid O'Brien, Seán Healy, Nat O'Connor, Kevin Callinan, Owen Reidy, Colette Byrne, Ian Talbot, Gerard Brady, Robert Scott (DPENDR), Kevin Daly (DoF), Keith Fitzgerald (DETE), and Barry Vaughan.

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Gráinne Collins, Colette Bennett, Gemma O'Reilly, David Hallinan, Niamh Garvey, Jeanne Moore, Damian Thomas, Ella MacLennan O'Neill, Hannah Kollen, and Nicole Bolger.

Apologies: John Callinan, TJ Flanagan, Colin Scott, Damian McDonald, Niamh Moore-Cherry, Declan Hughes (Keith Fitzgerald attended), John Hogan (Kevin Daly attended), David Moloney (Robert Scott attended), John McKeon, and Oonagh Buckley.

1. **Administration:** The minutes of the last meeting (March) posted online in April, were agreed.
2. **Ireland's Changing Demography: Trends, Challenges and Policy Implications:** Gráinne Collins presented an updated report which was welcomed. Issues raised included data, research and policy gaps; balance between inherent uncertainty and the ability to model and plan; contextual and dynamic analysis; breath and level of detail across various sections; Department of Finance's Future 40 work; age structure and impact on the labour market; infrastructure deficits; detailed analysis of population ageing; environmental factors; youth and community development work; economic growth and wellbeing; ESRI modelling; and investment in the energy grid. It was agreed the work would be revised for the October meeting.
3. **Strategic Planning and Delivery Capacity:** Damian Thomas presented a paper which included results of interviews with senior civil servants. Members welcomed the emphasis on better longer-term thinking, a shared understanding of the challenges and the risk of artificial segmentation of challenges facing Ireland. They emphasised the need to balance the narrative with references to scale of investment and achievements over recent years. Issues raised included: the distinction between strategy and delivery; investment un/certainty; pro-cyclical investment; understanding what is needed versus wanted; the comparative centralisation and the relative weakness of Local Authorities vis-à-vis international models of local democracy; categorisation of 'soft' and 'hard' factors; the meaning of public sector 'reform'; leadership and the views of the political system; comparative work including the Future Generation Commissioner for Wales; prioritising key strategic projects and policy coordination; service user perspectives and community development. The Council also noted other initiatives relevant to the discussion and further work including the Civil Service Policy Handbook; the OECD Centre of Government research and the Local Democracy Taskforce. It was agreed to develop the work for further consideration by the Council.

Carrying Capacity: Parallel work in this area, focused on Carrying Capacity, is being undertaken by the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC). Keith Fitzgerald, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, provided an update. It was agreed the Council will continue to engage with NCPC.

4. **Ireland's Energy Transition: Systems:** Gemma O'Reilly presented an overview of the work which has applied system thinking framework to the energy system. Members welcomed the work and agreed on the need to streamline the findings. Members agreed to provide written feedback to the secretariat. It was agreed a final report would be prepared for the October meeting.
5. **AOB:**
 - a. **EU Presidency, EESC and Social Cohesion:** It was agreed that work would begin on social cohesion which would be part of the Irish EU Presidency programme, in late 2026.
 - b. **Remote and Hybrid Work:** It was agreed that a Working Group would be formed on this issue.
 - c. **Council Member:** Council informed Nicola Mallon taking up a position with SONI in NI. No conflict of interest was deemed to occur.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, 2nd October 2025, at the Clock Tower, Marlborough Street.