

Minutes of the 461st NESC Council Meeting (in person), Thursday, 25th June 2026 @ 10am
The Clock Tower, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Attendance: Liz Canavan (Dep Chair), Brid O'Brien, Naomi Feely, Ian Talbot, Nichola Mallon, Chris van Egeraat, John Enright, Caroline Whyte, Karen Ciesielski, Kevin Callinan, Noelle O'Connell, Neil Gannon (DoF), Robert Scott, (DPER), Stephanie Harris (DoT) and Fiona Millar (DoT Intern).

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Siobhán O'Sullivan, Cathal FitzGerald, Colette Bennett, Gráinne Collins, Niamh Garvey, David Hallinan, Gemma O'Reilly, Noel Cahill, Jeanne Moore, Damian Thomas and Interns Amelia Sarmiento, Molly Morris, Alan Ponce, and Emily Cryan.

Apologies: John Callinan (Chair), Damian McDonald, Andrew Brownlee, Colin Scott, Diarmuid Torney, Colette Byrne, Niamh Moore-Cherry, Seán Healy, Jerry Mac Evilly, John Hogan DoF (Neil Gannon attended), David Maloney DPER (Robert Scott attended) and John McKeon DSP.

1. Administration: The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. A Resilient, Secure, and Prepared Ireland: Cathal FitzGerald outlined the findings from engagement with experts on how the Council could contribute to policy development in security and defence. It was noted that, despite the complexity and sensitivity of the topic, NESC would be well positioned to provide a trusted forum to engage with these issues. It was agreed that a key objective would be to enhance shared understanding and the quality of debate. It was noted that further feedback from the Department of Defence has yet to be incorporated. The next phase will involve further engagement with relevant government Departments, working towards a NESC symposium. Members highlighted the need to consider: a broad definition of threats and security; the Shared Island aspects; threats in a European context; Ireland's level of defence spending; and Ireland's proportionate contribution to European defence and security.

3. Developing Ireland's Well-being Framework: A Critical Moment; Jeanne Moore presented the draft report which focused on progress and challenges, in particular in relation to policy integration and impact. The draft report was supported by Members, in particular the dual pathways approach in terms of policy integration and strategic direction. Issues raised by Members included the need to highlight further the purpose of the Framework; the disconnect that exists among the public with WBF; the value of practical applications and impact; the level of political support and the role of cross party consensus; the need for stronger engagement with political actors at both the national and EU level; influence on the budgetary process; and stronger regional and local focus as a catalyst for more effective implementation. It was agreed that the report would be finalised by written procedure.

4. Social Cohesion Towards a Shared Sense of Purpose: Colette Bennett presented the report and its core recommendations. There was broad support for the report. Issues raised by Members included balanced regional development and role and impact of national planning frameworks; local government, centralisation and the importance and practicalities of enhancing local government capacity; role of civil society, supportive structures and funding in shaping an active democracy and society; labour market institutions and social dialogue and longer term economic and social issues; reaffirming the 'centre ground'; value of the children's rights perspective; specific actions on disinformation; and in a wider context the disconnect between the priorities of the EU Presidency and day-to-day concerns of Irish people.

Members were asked to provide detailed observations in writing. It was agreed that work will continue on the report, its core messages, recommendations and presentation.

Members were also updated on wider work in relation to ongoing consultation, in particular with children in July; place-based research work; and the November 23-24 conference. As part of the EESC process a short Reflection Paper, *Building Social Cohesion – Towards a European Social Contract* (Working title), has been developed. This will be formally endorsed by members of the EESC at the November 23 meeting. The reflection paper this will be circulated to members.

5. AoB: Remote & Hybrid Working: Damian Thomas provided an update on the project and indicated that a Draft report would be brought to the September Council Meeting.

Next meeting will take place on Thursday, 24th September 2026, at the Clock Tower, Marlborough Street.