



Minutes of the 405th NESCS Council Meeting, 20th Dec 2013

The meeting took place in The Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough St, at 10 am.

Attendance: John Shaw (Chair), Sean Ó Riáin, John Murphy, Jim Walsh, Simonetta Ryan, Dorothy Watson, Michelle Norris, Pat Smith, Shay Cody, Frank Allen, Donal Lynch, Matt McGann, Mike O'Sullivan, John McHale, Mary Walsh, James Doorley, Caroline Fahey, Seán Healy, Brid O'Brien, Ian Talbot, Eileen Kehoe, Tony Donohue, Karin Dubsy, and David Begg.

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Anne-Marie McGauran, Jeanne Moore, Noel Cahill, Helen Johnston and John Sweeney.

Apologies: Michael Ewing, Edmond Connolly, Mary Daly, John Moran, Oisín Coghlan, Sally Anne Kinahan, and Geraldine Tallon.

Minutes of the Meeting of November 2013 were approved.

1. **Matters arising:** None.
2. **Jobless Households:** Dr Dorothy Watson of the ESRI gave a presentation on the key findings of her 2012 study on this issue. Simonetta Ryan and Jim Walsh, both of the Department of Social Protection, summarised aspects of the Department's policy perspective on the issue. Helen Johnston outlined the key questions posed in the Secretariat's discussion paper. A discussion then took place on the overall issue of jobless households, and the role NESCS might play in relation to the policy response. The issues raised included the following:

1) Aspects of existing and necessary research: -childcare supports; family formation in, and the spatial distribution of, jobless households; the fiscal costs of jobless households, and the costs which could be saved by reducing the number. It was also noted that solutions to the joblessness of those with low levels of education, of lone parents, and of people with disabilities have been researched and discussed over many years, the focus on how employment household decisions being a useful new focus.

2) Comparative perspective:

It was noted that NESCS should not duplicate work which other organisations are carrying out on this issue; members suggested that it would be useful to compare Ireland with other countries (not necessarily the UK) which have a lower proportion of individuals living in jobless households, to see how have they tackled, or more importantly, avoided, the problem.

3) The underlying problem and approaches to developing policy responses:

Many agreed that the Department of Social Protection is addressing the poverty implications of jobless households quite effectively through social transfers, but services are needed in addition to income supports, to help those in jobless households to move into employment. This requires the input of other departments and agencies (e.g. Department of Education and Skills; Department of Environment, Community and Local Government). For example, people with disabilities who wish to enter the labour force need a complex range of tailored supports. The activation process focuses mainly on those on the Live Register, whereas many of those in jobless households are not on the Live Register. Unemployment and low-employment welfare traps need to be addressed. The poverty of these households and in particular of their children is important to address, and if the number of jobless households is not reduced the Government will find it difficult to meet its poverty reduction targets. Several members suggested that NESCS's best contribution might be to approach it through the perspective of the Developmental Welfare State, which encompasses not only income transfers, services and innovative measures, but also the labour market. It was also noted that jobless households are a reflection of structural inequalities in Ireland, with those with low education and renting their home most likely to be in a jobless household. It was agreed that the Secretariat will reflect on the discussion come back with suggestions on how to take this work forward.

It was decided to move the April 2014 meeting from Friday 18th (Good Friday), to Thursday 17th April.

The next meeting was set for: Friday January 17th 2014, Clock Tower, 10.00 am.