



## **Minutes of the 423<sup>rd</sup> NESC Council Meeting, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

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

**Attendance:** John Shaw (Chair), Tony McGovern, Mary Daly, Anna Davies, John McHale, Frank Allen, Gavan O’Leary, Tony Donohoe, Simonetta Ryan, Karen Murphy, Seán Healy, David Hegarty, Barry Quinlan, Peter Cassells, Mary Doyle, Shay Cody, Ian Talbot.

**Secretariat:** Larry O’Connell, Anne-Marie McGauran, Jeanne Moore, Helen Johnston, Damian Thomas, Noel Cahill and Richard Holland.

**Apologies:** Rory O’Donnell, Michael Ewing, Mary Walsh, James Doorley, Bríd O’Brien, Seán Ó Riáin, Michael O’Sullivan, Oisín Coghlan, Danny McCoy, John McCarthy, and John Murphy.

- 1. Minutes of the Meeting of Sept 2015** were approved.
- 2. Reconstruction:** The Council discussed the fact that the reconstruction report would not be completed in advance of the election and proposed. Helen Johnston noted that the ‘development project’ components of this project are being actively advanced. One of these on investment in infrastructure will be presented at the December meeting.
- 3. Funding Irish Higher Education— A Constructive and Realistic Discussion of the Options:** Mary Doyle (DES) outlined the context and importance of the work. Larry O’Connell gave a presentation on the analysis to date and reform options. Council members endorsed the work and the proposed direction of reform. The discussion addressed quality, capital investment, emigration, the distributional effects of reform and the need to support part-time, mature and graduate students. It was suggested that the reforms might be treated as a major ‘structural reform’ under the EU fiscal rules. Concern was expressed that more flexible HR could mean casualization, but the problems of lack of institutional autonomy in regard to other dimensions of HR were commented upon. The issue of efficiency is wider than static unit costs and includes strategic issues such as the desired number of higher education institutions in Dublin. In replying to the discussion, Peter Cassells, Chair of the Expert Group, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to discuss these matters with the Council and the value of NESC’s capacity to reframe policy issues.
- 4. Jobless Households and the Quality of Supportive Services: Information Note on Work in Progress:** Helen Johnston introduced this note following which Anne-Marie McGovern gave a presentation that mapped the socio-economic characteristics of the areas of the proposed research. Council members expressed their strong support for this work. Advice offered by various Council members included the following: adopt an action research approach, this could involve asking service providers to comment on a vignette of the situation of a jobless household or having joint roundtable discussions; include people from relevant community

and voluntary organisations and the business community in the research; acknowledge the positive aspects of life in the area concerned – one indication of this is the desire of people to live in the area. The review of literature presented in the information note was considered to be very valuable, but it was suggested that there could be greater complementarity than acknowledged among the different perspectives. The need for more investment in childcare and early education was emphasised and reference was made to the possibility of appropriate recognition of the investment characteristic of this expenditure in the fiscal framework. The value of quality local employment projects was also noted. Concern was expressed in regard to the situation of vulnerable under 25-years olds; this group is eligible for very low social welfare payments and includes some who are extremely deprived and struggling with addiction. Other issues raised included the legal obligations on public bodies to respect human rights, the capability of Intreo to address joblessness across the whole spectrum, the definitions of jobless households and full employment and the adequacy of the number of households to be interviewed in the study.

Helen Johnston thanked Council members for their suggestions. She noted that the goal of the research was to get a better understanding of what is happening at micro level. The focus is to be on employment and it is intended to examine the challenges of particular groups, for example ethnic minorities.

#### **5. Any other business:**

The next meeting was set for Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> December.