



Minutes of the 418th NESC Council Meeting, 20th February 2015

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

Attendance: Martin Fraser (Chair), Frank Allen, Manus O’Riordan, Shay Cody, Tony Donohoe, Ian Talbot, Mary Walsh, David Hegarty, Karin Dubsy, Michael Ewing, Oisín Coghlan, Bríd O’Brien, Seán Healy, Karen Murphy, James Doorley, Mary Daly, Seán Ó Riain, Anna Davies, John McHale, John McCarthy, Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Seán Ó Foghlú, Peter Cassells, Mary Doyle, Laura Casey.

Secretariat: Rory O’Donnell, Larry O’Connell, Jeanne Moore, Helen Johnston, Damian Thomas, Noel Cahill, John Sweeney and Richard Holland.

Apologies: John Murphy, David Begg, Pat Smith, Michael O’Sullivan, and Sally Anne Kinahan.

1. **Minutes of the Meeting of January 2015** were approved.
2. **Discussion Paper for the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education.** Seán Ó Foghlú acknowledged the input of the NESC secretariat in helping prepare the paper and noted the current turning point that is the national context for the debate. Peter Cassells sketched the process of engagement and communication the Expert Group has underway with stakeholders and the wider public that will lead to eventual recommendations. Mary Doyle outlined the framework and strategy for the sector in the Hunt Report. Rory O’Donnell introduced the discussion paper itself and four key questions on which members’ views were sought.

A thorough discussion ensued. Some notable emphases were: concerns that student engagement has lessened, that the extent of it and reasons for it are not sufficiently understood, that some causes are internal to the HE system itself, while declining resources per student are also a clear threat; the need to receive and process quality feedback from students themselves, and from those who do not participate in HE in the first place; the interconnectedness of reforms at each level of the educational system— i.e., that success with Junior Cycle reform, in revamping the FET sector, in improving literacy, etc., will impact on what HE also can achieve; the extent of employers’ needs for graduates with across the full spectrum of disciplines; the importance of a clear vision for HE and of its purpose should underpin the rationale for how it is funded; the role of R&D and the importance of absorptive capacity in particular for a small country; the implications for student mobility of a national network of mission diverse HEIs in providing diverse opportunities to students of a consistently high quality.

3. **From Recovery to Renewal: Seeking a Shared Perspective for Ireland. Proposed Approach and Structure.** Several suggestions were made as to how the nature of the type of report under consideration here could be clarified and on the most appropriate framework for developing it.
4. **Jobless Households and the Quality of Supportive Services: A Proposal for a Qualitative Research Study.** This proposal was welcomed and several views offered on the need and scope for gathering qualitative data and on the relative role of state services in the overall situation of these households.
5. **NESC’s Online Performance in 2014.** The report on this was noted.
6. **Other Business:** Council Chair, Directors, Members and Secretariat passed on their thanks and best wishes to David Begg on his retirement.

The next meeting was set for: **Friday, 20th March 2015**, Clock Tower, 10.00 a.m.