

Labour Market Advisory Council

Friday, 8th May 2020

10.30am (Remote Access)

In Attendance:

Minister of State Pat Breen, Alex Connolly (Adviser to MEASP)

Apologies were received from Minister Doherty who was attending a Government meeting.

Council Members: John Martin (Chair), Angela Smith, Frank Gleeson, Terry Corcoran, Ade Stack, Bríd O'Brien, Kara McGann, Ger Gibbons, Sinead McSweeney, Susan Hynes, Philip O'Connell

Ex-Officio Members: John Conlon, Dermot Coates, Jenny Connors, Andrew Brownlee, David Hegarty, John Shaw

Apologies were received from: William Beausang who was replaced by Phil O'Flaherty.

D/EASP Officials: John McKeon (Secretary General), Jacqui McCrum (Deputy Secretary General), Hugh Cronin, Ailbhe Brioscu

Secretary: Louise Kavanagh

i. Opening Remarks

The meeting opened with some introductory remarks from Minister of State, Pat Breen, who was standing in for Minister Doherty. Council members adopted the Agenda and approved the Minutes of the inaugural meeting, without amendment.

ii. Revised Terms of Reference

The Council briefly discussed the updated Terms of Reference. Ger Gibbons advised that ICTU have objections to provisions of the Terms of Reference. He and Bríd O'Brien (INOUE) requested a number of further amendments, including a balance between the 'needs' of employers and employees and the focus on the role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). DEASP undertook to confer with the Minister in this regard.

iii. LMAC Policy Paper: '*Preparing for Economic Recovery*'

The Council first exchanged general views on a first draft of the Policy Paper: '*Preparing for Economic Recovery*'. Virtually all speakers agreed that the draft represented a solid starting point; the sole dissenting view was expressed by Ger Gibbons.

An extensive roundtable discussion of the draft ensued, section by section. Key inputs included:

- The inclusion of ‘solidarity’ in the guiding principles.
- The importance of institutional capacity with regard to public employment services delivered by DEASP and training and education supports delivered by the education and skills sector, as both will have significant service delivery challenges in the period ahead.
- A sharper focus required on the increasing capacity of the FET sector in terms of flexible and adaptable methods of FET delivery, both through full and part-time courses and the delivery of in-work training and upskilling, with an emphasis on transversal skills, digital upskilling, and pathways to occupations/sectors for displaced workers.
- Some focus required on the need to strike a balance: between the level of income supports, work incentives and disincentives and the need for the TWSS not to incentivise employers to reduce output whilst being subsidised.
- Regard should be had to the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.
- Any consideration of sectoral issues should be contextualised with regard to varying timeframes for recovery: short-term; early exit; and medium-term.
- DEASP should consider adapting its PEX profiling model to assist in dealing with new jobseekers transitioning from the Covid-19 income supports.
- Utilise, and where necessary adapt, ‘tried and tested’ active labour market programmes, while bearing in mind affordability and have regard to, where appropriate, labour market and activation measures adopted by our European counterparts. Labour market supports should be based on good evidence and previous evaluations of programmes and schemes.
- Attention should be paid to transforming the TWSS/STWS into a more appropriate short-time work scheme, drawing on the lessons from other EU countries.
- Embrace innovative ‘digital pathways’ which support the wider economic agenda: more online delivery of third-level education to alleviate the demand on housing and the environment; increased remote and hub working; flexible learning plans to promote a work/life balance.
- The need to continue to focus on employers and employees as labour costs for many SMEs are by far their biggest cost (30/40% for many); recognise that the demand curve for sectors will differ; and be aware of the need to stop firms from becoming unviable because of the lack of labour supports. Continued emphasis required on increasing employment levels, particularly full-time employment levels.
- Meeting the needs of those who are not comfortable with new modes of learning, thus avoiding a ‘digital divide’ within the labour force.

- A continuing focus should remain on youth unemployment, but a focus must also remain on vulnerable less-skilled older workers who are displaced and who, following previous recessions, fared worse than younger unemployed.
- Promoting the use of social dialogue and collective bargaining to promote decent work, address the challenge of precarious employment and low pay and to reduce unemployment duration.

At the end of the discussion, the Chair reiterated that it is still a working draft and invited all Council members to supply written commentary by COB, Friday 15th May. A more advanced draft will then be circulated to members for discussion at the next meeting.

Action Points

- ✓ Written commentary on the draft discussion paper is to be submitted to the Secretariat, by COB, Friday 15th May who will then circulate them to all members.

Date of Next Meeting:

Friday, 22nd May 2020 @ 10.30a.m.

(Remote Access via Zoom).