

**Labour Market Advisory Council**

**Friday, 22nd May 2020**

**10.30am (Remote Access)**

*In Attendance:*

Minister Regina Doherty, Alex Connolly (Adviser to MEASP).

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

*Apologies* were received from: Susan Hynes and Sinead McSweeney.

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

*Apologies* were received from: William Beausang and John Shaw who were replaced by Phil O'Flaherty and Nigel Clarke, respectively.

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

**Secretary:** Louise Kavanagh.

**i. Opening Remarks:**

The meeting opened with introductory remarks from Minister Doherty who thanked the Council for their continued support and effort, and noted the considerable progress that has been made on developing the Policy Paper. Minister Doherty noted that we are approaching the end of the first emergency phase and deliberations are ongoing regarding the next phases of the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. Hence, there is real urgency for the Council to complete its Paper to assist her in these deliberations.

Council members adopted the Agenda and approved the minutes of the meeting of 8<sup>th</sup> May, noting some amendments from Ger Gibbons. Revised minutes will be circulated in due course. **(Subsequently circulated).**

The Chair noted the revised Terms of Reference for the Council which have been agreed with the Minister and circulated to members for information. Ger Gibbons acknowledged that the revised document is an improvement on previous drafts, but he maintained reservations regarding:

- The reference to the 'core objective' which supersedes an earlier reference. It is not clear what is meant by 'decent work' in this context without a specific reference to SDG Goal No.8.
- There is no reference to addressing the needs of workers and jobseekers.

## ii. Draft Policy Paper ‘*Preparing for Economic Recovery*’

The draft Policy Paper ‘*Preparing for Economic Recovery*’ is at an advanced stage and a consensus was sought on its content at the meeting, subject to further drafting suggestions. The Chair emphasised that the draft Policy Paper does not necessarily reflect the individual views of members nor should it be read as having the endorsement of the organisations from which membership is drawn.

Council members first exchanged general views and reactions to the latest revision which reflected discussion points from the previous meeting and written commentary received by the Secretariat. An extensive roundtable discussion of the draft then ensued, section by section. Key points which emerged from the discussion included:

- Align the Council remit in the Foreword with the revised Terms of Reference.
- Bríd O’Brien (INO) suggested that the Guiding Principles need to assume that the vast majority of people displaced by the policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic want to return to work, and shuttered / closed businesses and organisations to return to trading / work.
- A sharper focus on aligning enterprise supports with available labour market supports.
- Regard should be had to the need for wider diversification of export markets; the draft only cites the domestic manufacturing of in-demand products and services.
- Ger Gibbons (ICTU) called for an explicit reference to social dialogue/collective bargaining, drawing upon recent ILO and OECD reports. He also pointed out that the European Commission has stated that Ireland’s tax rules are being used by companies that engage in aggressive tax planning.
- Attention should be paid to childcare issues experienced by workers who are not in a position to resume their job due to extended school closures and affordability issues.
- The need to clearly detail the transition from PUP to other labour market supports: T-WSS, Short-Time Work Schemes, etc.
- The capacity of businesses to rehire should feature in the design of business and labour market supports and have regard to social distancing requirements that may remain in place in some sectors. Such supports should also seek to ensure that existing terms and conditions of employment for workers are maintained. Kara McGann (IBEC) expressed concern about the latter recommendation since some firms post-lockdown might not be able to survive without modifying wages and working conditions.

- Consider lessons learned from the first phase of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and determine what we want to achieve over the short, medium and long term. This will include assessing the impact of the current economic arrangements on individual income and firm costs.
- Align Active Labour Market Policies to what is happening in the labour market. Activation services should be holistic and person-centred, thereby improving the individual's prospect of gaining sustainable employment.
- Transition to digital activation services must serve to augment the current 'face to face' provision, and not replace it for those clients who are unable or unwilling to use digital platforms.
- Refer to the work of local employment services and community education providers who support marginalised groups in terms of upskilling and digital capability. This invaluable work is often a catalyst on a longer journey to employment.

At the end of the discussion, the Chair invited all Council members to supply written redrafting suggestions by COB, Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May via the Secretariat. A revised draft incorporating redrafting suggestions and the discussion points from today's meeting will be circulated to members' by mid-week for sign off, before submission of the finalised Paper to the Minister, hopefully on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> May.

### **iii. Next Steps: Work Programme**

The Council will need to consider what topics to address once the Policy Paper has been published. A number of topics have been noted already, including: Short-Time Work Schemes; Remote Working and the Digital Divide.

The Council should also discuss the timetable for programme evaluations, which is cited in the Terms of Reference. Once a programme for evaluation has been decided, the Council may wish to consider establishing an Evaluation Sub-Group to oversee the evaluation work and report back to the Council. (A similar sub-group worked well for the Labour Market Council).

The Chair and Council Secretariat will discuss the Council work programme with the Minister and revert to members shortly with proposals and a date for the next meeting.

### **Action Points**

- ✓ Written commentary on the draft discussion paper is to be submitted to the Secretary, by COB, Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May.