



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FORUM

# DIVERSE VOICES

International Students  
in Irish Higher Education

Papers from the  
ICOS International Student Forum,  
University College Cork,  
November 17, 2007



**STUDENT**  
TRAVEL CARD

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## Background

The 2007 students' forum entitled "Diverse Voices: International Students in Irish Higher Education", which was organised by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS), aimed to build on the success of previous ICOS student forums. As the number of international students who choose Ireland as their study destination is constantly increasing, there is greater need than ever for students themselves to be afforded opportunities to openly discuss issues which impact on their lives in Ireland. By bringing together over 130 students from 30 countries studying at 20 different higher education institutions in Ireland, the 2007 ICOS' students' forum uniquely achieved this aim. The forum was also held for the first time outside of Dublin and UCC proved to be both a very popular and excellent venue.



In order to give the forum direction and scope, a number of representatives from student groups such as FOSIS Ireland (Federation of Student Islamic Societies), Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Erasmus Society Network (ESN), officers from students' unions and various representatives from ICOS Council Members participated in the planning meetings. From the outset, it was decided that integration would be the main theme of the forum.

Over a number of months, ICOS assembled an interesting and diverse panel of guest speakers to focus on the different aspects of higher education and integration in Ireland. Some who came to Ireland as international students offered personal reflections on their experience. Institutional support, living arrangements and availability of cultural peers

are just some of the issues which affect integration. A significant number of international students have a tendency to only mix with students from their home country. This can really limit their experience in Ireland. People can forget that integration is a two way process. Simply engaging in conversation with people from different cultures can kick-start integration.

The presentations were followed by workshops which focused on integration from both the international student and home student perspectives. Another workshop looked at institutional and Irish government policies regarding international students and explored how international students themselves can become more involved in decisions which affect them.



“Most international students both expect and desire contact with home students but research findings suggest there is low interaction” according to Sheila Power, ICOS Director. “This forum was beneficial for all attendees, as it allowed them to explore the issue of integration more fully - both from the international and home students’ perspectives. Participants included Irish student leaders, researchers and international students both at undergraduate and post-graduate level.”

Councillor Rotimi Adebari, Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council, reflected on how the forum provided an opportunity to celebrate our cultural differences.

Mike FitzGibbon, Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods, UCC shared his expertise on the multicultural campus.

Neo Zhang, Northern Ireland's International Student of the Year 2007, and Diane Nititham, PhD student, UCD, shared their experiences on being international students in Ireland and illustrated how they both overcame various barriers which were preventing their full integration into Irish life.

Kris McElhinney, President University College Cork Students Union, Gary Lanigan, Vice President and Welfare Officer, Students Union, ITT Dublin and Manuel Yoacham, President Erasmus Student Network, UCD, provided insight into how Students Unions are promoting diversity on campus.

By becoming a representative for international students in her college, Loice Kashangura, Student Representative for International Students, Milltown Institute, demonstrated how international students can become actively involved in campus life.

DCU PhD student, Ciaran Dunne's presentation provided insight, derived from his research, regarding the main obstacles and facilitators of integration from the home students' perspective.

Sarah Holt, International Study Coordinator, UCD, shed some light on the complex area of policy affecting international students and highlighted how students themselves might best attempt to influence policies especially at institutional level.

Hamidreza Khodabakhshi, USI President, illustrated how the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is committed to promoting equality.

Feedback from the forum was overwhelmingly positive. 100% of attendees rated the event as being beneficial and 38% said that the forum should be an annual event. One attendee said that the forum provided "an opportunity and moreover a platform for the various international students all over Ireland to meet up and exchange their ideas."

We have compiled the main papers and findings from the forum in this publication and we hope, it will provide useful insights for international students, as well as those who work with them. The findings are rich and diverse, as all of our guest speakers and

attendees brought their own unique perspectives and ideas and contributed to making the forum a great success.

***Colin Tannam, Programme Officer, Irish Council for International Students***

## **Official Opening Speech & Welcome by Councillor Rotimi Adebari, Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council.**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to open today's event. I was elected Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council in June, 2007. I have now travelled all over the country to open conferences. The work has been overwhelming. I've also received invitations from other countries too.

When we talk about multicultural Ireland, the concept is relatively new. Ireland has a history of emigration. However, this reality has now changed to immigration. All of this started in the mid nineties when the Celtic Tiger kicked in. Before the Celtic Tiger kicked in, people say that one sector of the economy where diversity was highly evident was in the area of education. Before the nineties, students were coming from all over the world. There are over 30 different nationalities in this room today which is brilliant. In Ireland today, there are over 60 different nationalities living here. Originally I'm from Nigeria. I know a lot of Nigerian people who come to Ireland to study medicine. This area attracts a lot of international students into the country.



Immigration brings many challenges - people from different countries have to live together. One of the reasons why we are at this forum today is to bring many nationalities together so that we can talk about integration. You should get to know the

person next to you and network. It's a great opportunity to learn about other cultures and celebrate our cultural differences. At the end of the day, Ireland will be better for it.

In 2002, statistics show that there were over 10,000 international students enrolled in third level education Ireland. In 2006, there were over 25,000 international students. That's an increase of over 50% in a very short space of time. If you look at the population census within recent years, 10% of the population is now born outside of Ireland. There is a need for forums like this. We are all part of this society and want to be a part of this community. We all want our culture to be accepted. It's a great honour to be here today. A great programme has been lined up. Enjoy the day – it is your day. Today's event can contribute to the model on managing diversity.



## **Official Welcome by Mr. Mike FitzGibbon, Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods, UCC**

It's a privilege to welcome you all to UCC, especially those of you who travelled all the way here. I hope that you will gain from the work of today. The programme today covers institutional and personal perspectives. A few years ago, I spoke at a similar forum on interculturalism which was aimed at international students. What I'm trying to do this morning is to look at what has changed, and how things have changed over the last five years.

As Rotimi said, the population of Ireland has changed a lot since 1994. I left Cork and went to live in East Africa. At that stage, there were practically no physically visibly different immigrants in Cork. People who you saw that looked different were predominantly students in colleges. After I left followed the economic boom. Therefore there was an increase in immigration. When I came back, the streets of Cork had changed a lot. I loved the experience of hearing different languages as I walked past people. 12 years may seem like a long time but for a city or society it's nothing. Where have we gone? There has been progress. However, some of the reports from the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) paint a damaging picture and basically illustrate that racism is continuing. I suppose the positive thing to take is that as racism is reported, the number of incidents do not appear to be increasing. The negative side is that they do not seem to be decreasing either. The Economic Social and Research Institute reported that one third of immigrant workers experience some form of discrimination. There are scales of discrimination. In particular, black Africans are more likely to be discriminated against. As you go down on the scale, you find that Asians are more likely to experience racism than Eastern Europeans and, believe it or not, white African people are more likely to experience discrimination in commercial dealings than Eastern Europeans.

NASC is an Irish immigrant support organisation based in Cork. A recent report of theirs illustrated that asylum seekers continue to have little or no proper education in Ireland and that immigrants continue to experience discrimination. The recognition of qualifications related to universities shows that the process takes too long. Many people are unaware that there is a body, the National Qualifications Authority, to assist with this. Obtaining proof of qualifications is a problem for asylum seekers.

Research shows that those immigrants, who have taken additional education in Ireland, have achieved positive outcomes in their lives.



I'd also like to mention USI (Union of Students in Ireland). USI have always been proactive in relation to equality. There was a report published in 1997 by Gerard Boucher entitled "The Irish are friendly but...". This highlighted at that time how the situation was for international students. The report, just like this forum, is good for assessing integration with the Irish. I also think that there is a huge gap in the research around administrative staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) and their attitudes to interculturalism.

It is brilliant to see the continued growth in the international student population. Every class I teach, I have approximately 2 non-Irish nationalities present. In some classes I have 7 or 8. The levels of non-Irish students in our International Development programme is approximately 15% consistently. These students bring diversity and knowledge. Their contributions to these programmes are of enormous value, not just for Irish students, but also to the staff who teach on them. They also contribute to extracurricular activities. It was our non-Irish-national students who made fundraising efforts for charity this year– they raised about €20,000 for one charity in Africa.

The issue of course fees is another major challenge for international students. Assessment schemes should be equitable. We need to not be afraid to recognize that there are institutional barriers. If our institutions are serious about the challenges which interculturalism brings, they must recognize these barriers.

While many of the immigrant visitors to Ireland may experience some negative responses, predominantly I suggest that their overall experience of mixing and sharing with Irish people is positive.

Integration is a shared responsibility. It's not only the responsibility of migrants to our countries. It's a two way process with Irish people. We should all take part in the efforts that are taking place in our communities.

The universities are helping with integration. Our university recently founded the Irish Institute of Chinese Studies. We continuously run many programmes which help to increase our understanding of diversity - such as Development Studies and Migration Studies programmes.

Other smaller initiatives are taking place – one such programme that I'm involved in is teaching new communities in the Cork area on multimedia. The objective is so that they can tell their own stories through video.

On the positive side, in the recent Economic and Social Research Institute report, two thirds of the immigrant people interviewed said they socialized regularly with Irish people. As more integration takes place and as more Irish people become friendly with people from other countries and other cultures, much of the fear that drives racism and discrimination will disappear. I think that a recognition of the huge benefits that society gains from interculturalism will help.

Thanks.

## An Introduction to Irish by Dr. Ciarán Dawson, Ionad Na Gaeilge Labhartha, UCC

Ciarán thanked ICOS for giving him the opportunity to transfer Irish to the forum's attendees. He spoke about the importance of Irish and its significance in UCC. Since 2000, 800 people have studied an Irish module at UCC. He said that by learning some Irish phrases, it is something that people who are visiting or coming to live in Ireland can do to work proactively towards integration. Ciarán went on to speak about the historical context of the Irish language.



Attendees had the opportunity to learn some Irish phrases such as "Hello: Dia duit", "I am: Is mise...." and "I come from: Is ás... mé."



**Integration and Participation by Neo Zhang, Queens Graduate and Northern Ireland's International Student of the Year, 2007.**

Good morning everybody. What's the craic? Firstly, a little introduction about myself, I'm Zhang Yu Huai, aka Neo, Northern Ireland's International Student of the Year, 2007.

When ICOS asked me to speak at this forum on integration and diversity, I said that they assigned me a mission impossible, as the scope of the topic is immense. After their clarification, I realized that they would like me to talk about my own experiences of integrating into a different society and embracing diversity.

I recalled that, after my graduation from my High School in China, I underwent three major operations for collapsed lungs within a year, hence my physique was weak and my personality became introverted. Still, I took a major step in my life – declining an offer from a Chinese university and opting for Queen's University Belfast.



Upon my arrival, I was warmly welcomed by the university, the international students and the local community. Soon after, Accommodation Office offered me a part-time job which granted me many opportunities to socialize with other students. Their hospitality helped

me transform into an outgoing and confident young man. Thus, I renamed myself 'Neo'-the Greek word for new to express my determination to open a new era in my life.

In return for the hospitality I received, I was inspired to run for the positions of International Students' Officer and Chairman of the International Committee in the Students Union. I successfully gained the highest votes in history and became the first Chinese national Student's Union officer. I set helping new international students and promoting diversity as my priorities. To achieve my goal, I have been welcoming new international students in the airport as a volunteer of the International Friendship Association and providing them with advice on integration with local communities and help their daily problems. Also, I started promoting multicultural diversity by writing in the University newspapers, presenting a talk show on Queen's radio, organizing a food Festival, Chinese New Year Festival and Malaysian Night.

As I am always keen to contribute to a wider community, when I assumed the post of Deputy Convenor of National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland, I organized a cross-campus multicultural awareness training event to promote diversity in both Queen's and the University of Ulster. As a result of positive feedback and media coverage, the Ulster Quaker Service Committee approached me to translate a prisoner's handbook, where I played a significant role in translating the handbook into Mandarin and Cantonese. This was an extremely rewarding experience as I was given the opportunity to improve Asian prisoners' welfare by overcoming their language barrier.

Despite a hectic social life and the language barrier, I have done well in my studies. I love Management and I effectively practised the theories in my voluntary jobs. Due to my academic and social achievements, the university selected me as a role model for first year students and nominated me as an exchange student for the University of Alberta Canada. Meanwhile, financial investment companies in Ireland and Northern Ireland both offered me internships. Finally, I opted for the NI option because of the good experience I had in Belfast and in turn my goal was to contribute to the prosperity of their local economy.

As a Marketing Assistant, my job was highly related to my company Invest NI's strategy. I was even delegated a project where I had significant involvement in the decision

making process relating to a multimillion pound inward investment. To maximize my contribution, I served the Sports and Social Committee within Invest NI voluntarily. Due to my performance and voluntary work, I was voted as 'Best Newcomer of 2006' by the entire staff and was rewarded at the Annual Staff Conference.

Indeed, in the UK, I am not what I used to be. The experience and the people here have significantly transformed me. As I have recently been offered a place at the University of Oxford, to continue my business studies, I am about to open up the next page of my life. I am eager to share my international experience with my prospective colleagues. After that, I am keen to come home and contribute to my country China.

If I can embrace the diversity and seize the opportunities here, of course you can! I believe you can make the most of your time in Ireland and make your experience extraordinary!

Thank you for your time and attention.

**Diane Sabenacio Nititham, Metro Eireann contributor and PhD student, UCD.**

**“Still Finding My Voice: Self-explorations as an American /Asian American/  
Woman of Colour International Student in Ireland”**

I started writing my talk over two months ago. I knew I wanted to talk about my experiences of integration and that I wanted people to clearly understand where I was coming from, what I have experienced. However, as I often find, another story was sitting underneath, something that was trying to poke its way through. That story is what I want to share with you today, the story and challenge of trying to feel comfortable in my space in Ireland, to feel that integrated, and to feel that I belong and am at home.

During the next few minutes, I will talk about these challenges. In doing so, I do not want to oversimplify the many experiences of international students. My story is one of many. We all come from different countries, and our experience differs across gender, ethnicity, sexuality and cultural practices. There are also different types of international students, from those who are doing a semester or year abroad, on a cultural exchange programme, as well as those doing a full undergraduate or postgraduate degree, or seeking a professional qualification.

My experience sits in an interesting position for me, for as I work on my PhD on migration and identity, I often sit in my academic bubble of terminology, hiding among books and journals of theory. It is the everyday practices and interactions against the backdrop of my student status that affects me deeply. Thus, I am led to believe that integration is not just a policy, but is lived and felt.

My time in Ireland has been a journey in self-exploration. Prior to arriving in Ireland, I lived in the United States. I was born in Chicago to two migrant parents, one from the Philippines, and the other from Thailand. Now, it might be easy to say I am Asian American – and to most of you, this might be an obvious distinction. However, I have many problems with calling myself Asian American. Naming myself as such, in the United States, calls attention to my position in being in a minority, wherein ‘American’ refers to someone who is often of European descent. I frequently referred to myself as a woman of colour, and for me, this asserted my position as a visible minority, as someone



who is aware of my position in society, but one that is in solidarity with other minorities, but not calling attention to my specific ascribed racial or ethnic background.

This isn't the only way I would have described myself. I was also on the dance team in high school, a musician, an artist. I am a sister, a daughter, a writer, a student, I am sometimes funny and occasionally sad, and I am just under 5'2". Surely, these, even in addition to my cultural adjectives, are just merely adjectives. However, it is the power and value placed upon these adjectives that give them real meaning – with sometimes joyful memories, in other cases, painful experiences.

When I moved to Ireland, I found myself using the term 'Asian American' after years of finding it extremely problematic. First, I often found – and find – people mistaking me for an international student from China. When I begin to speak and my American accent is heard, I hear an apology. Or I'm told I don't look American. Why? I'd like to make it clear that I do not find it offensive that I am mistaken for being Chinese. There is a whole history as to why I appear Chinese; my great-grandparents were from China. There are several problems here with this initial perception—1) assumptions about Chinese students and their language abilities; 2) What it means to be American.

I don't always think about my identity, particularly on the day-to-day. It is when I interact with people that I begin to see facets of myself. And in moving to Ireland, I have seen new facets of my identity. For one, in your programme, I identified myself as a Filipina-Thai American. While in the US I would not particularly use this descriptor, I use it in Ireland as a political choice. I aim to call attention to my different histories, my parents' histories, and my desired connection with their countries of origin. I choose to identify myself in different ways depending on the context, as how I identify myself is linked to my own understanding of everything I have experienced, from pride in my cultural heritage to being a recipient of discrimination. I use it as a way to highlight my social and cultural history. But I also use the term American, as I do feel it is important to challenge people's assumptions that my Asian heritage signals my arrival from Asia. Encoded within this is encoded another set of assumptions of what it means to be a migrant.



Some have said to me to toughen up, that it doesn't matter what people say. Maybe I could put on a little bit of a tougher skin, but in other ways, it does matter what people think. Stereotypes, assumptions about an entire nationality or ethnic group, a categorisation of a group of people is not just linked to people's individual thoughts; these reflect a collective history, the popular imagination, the discourse used, common views of the general public. It is linked to actions and the way society is structured. It is linked to how we understand a sense of belonging.

I am...and you are... more than a name could hold.

We, as international students, whether we plan to be here in Ireland for a few months to a few years, or think about staying permanently, we are living lives that are restricted and temporary. But even among the challenges that migration often brings, we bring with us our culture, our heritage, our socio-political histories, our languages, our beliefs, our ways of living, our individual choices. We are living lives that are whole and still in the process of becoming. We come from a range of different countries, of social and cultural backgrounds. Our differences are something to be celebrated, not used as a tool for division.

The first year and a half I constantly questioned my decision for moving abroad, for committing myself to research that I felt incredibly important --- but at what cost? Sure, I had made new friends, but no one understood the depth at which I experienced racism -- - I didn't feel comfortable talking to new friends about these things. Several times I had to

explain my entire life history in order to have a friend understand why I was so hurt by someone's comments that had seemed so benign to her a few minutes before. I felt I couldn't find anyone to 'get' me, that this was another sign that I didn't quite belong here.

It is a struggle I continue to face—as I am a racialized person – but fortunately, these experiences of racism and discrimination are few, but they still affect my sense of self. More luckily, there have been many wonderful things since I have moved here. As I become more comfortable with myself, as I make sense of these new formations of myself, I learn more about the importance of culture and how integration as an international student, no matter how long I plan to live here, is important. But I couldn't make sense of this without recognising the multiple facets of my self.

So for me, my integration in Ireland, while hopefully on my terms, is not only informed by my own experiences of acceptance, but also by regulations and policies that limit my belonging. The best I can do in terms of my part in integrating into Ireland is to be aware of my sense of self while being mindful of what connections need to be made at the individual and collective, political, local and global community levels.

I consider my time in Ireland my life training ground. What I have learned out of my difficulties here is that lying within these problems is the capacity for utmost transformation. And for myself, one of biggest transformations for me was the realisation that our identities are so crucial to how we integrate, no matter what our affinity to affiliation to Ireland.

If I am to impart some of what I've learned along the way is that in order to achieve meaningful integration, everyone needs to be willing to understand and to recognise the urgency of talking about our differences and commonalities. The willingness to see in a different light is one of the beginning steps to building an integrated, multicultural society.

Of course, this will take a lot of steps, as integration is a complex process, and we all come to the table with our different histories. Doing so will give us the strength to assert ourselves, to be more visible and have our voices heard, particularly as we make Ireland our home.

## **Integration and Participation: the International Student's Perspective: Questions and Answers**

**Question:** How can we make it easier for everybody to contribute to integration?

**Diane:** It's incredibly important for everybody to contribute to integration. We all come to the table with different experiences – especially those who are in new situations, who are not in the majority. We are all in a position to challenge preconceived ideas.

**Neo Zhang:** Life is an assimilation and accumulation of your experiences and social relationship. As we all have different backgrounds, experiences and opinions, we ought to seek for similarity and learn from the differences. Through this way, the different experiences between us would create mutual tolerance and constructive relationships for each other.

**Question:** My question is regarding the introductory speech by Mike FitzGibbon and concerns regarding financial barriers for international students in Ireland. I realize that international students have to pay very high fees and I was wondering why this is the case [and] when they come in there are other costs such as accommodation and transport. Why do they have to pay 3 times more than Irish EU students?

**Mike FitzGibbon:** The fees which Irish people pay are subsidized fees and they're subsidized by 50% or 60%. It hangs off this idea of what the economic cost of putting a student through university is. EU students are subsidized. Personally I don't believe that any student should be paying a different amount than other students. In our college here, we have a certain number of incentives for students coming from the South, we have a reduction of 50% in the fees for a certain number.

**Question:** Having gone through the experience Diane, do you think education can mediate/alleviate racism? I come from a culture where we value visitors more than ourselves.

**Diane Nititham:** Thanks for your question. I don't have a specific vision on what can be done but I do think that education is extremely important. My belief is that if there is a

programme/initiative where education about race, ethnicity, cultural difference, acceptance and tolerance is started right from the beginning, we wouldn't have as many problems as we have today. When I first started in third level education, this is when I started to interrogate all of these terms about difference. I couldn't understand why it was only at the age of 19 and 20 that I was really put into a situation where I had to think about this idea and how structured society is when most people have formed their ideas about the world. I'm sure that young people are more than capable of discussing the issues surrounding difference. Discrimination is something that is learned. It's not something that is natural. I think that education is very important and crucial to diversity. There must be increased dialogue.



**Question.** I'm inspired by what you said. Most people share experience and struggle to integrate. Do you consider yourself more American or Thai?

**Diane Nititham:** That's an interesting question. I think that changes from day to day. Most of the time when I'm in my normal frame of mind, I'd say American. But yesterday I was looking on You Tube at Filipino traditional dances. We performed them when I was a child and certainly that experience in my upbringing is connected to my cultural heritage. I was trying to show stuff to my friends at work but they just weren't getting the same perception as I was getting- "it's so amazing." I felt that longing to go there. It's something that's very American for me. I've also been to Thailand several times. When I go there, my family certainly don't see me as Thai, they see me as American. I think it

depends what context I'm in. I'm all of these things. I feel like a kaleidoscope. Sometimes you feel one thing, then you feel another.

**Manuel Yoacham, President Erasmus Student Network Society, University College Dublin.**

Hi everyone, I'm happy to see that so many people are attending the forum. I would like to talk to you a little bit about life as an international student on campus. Though my Irish accent can be misleading, I am in fact from Chile, and am no stranger to having to adjust to new surroundings. Though it can be daunting and sometimes frightening, in my experience, it can also be very rewarding. The most difficult problem facing international students today in Ireland is the issue of integration. It can be hard to meet new people, and even when you do meet new people, it can be hard to become part of an already well established social circle. As a result of this, you often see international students grouping together, and where this is not always a bad thing, it can also limit your experience and understanding of your host country and of its people.



But how can this problem be remedied? The responsibility of integration does not fall solely on the international students themselves, but also on the local student bodies. The local Students Union, the Erasmus Society in certain colleges, the international office in others, they must all help out in every way they can. But, being the President of the biggest Irish Erasmus section, as well as the SU International Officer, I can tell you that it is far easier to work with international students rather than just for them. Trust me;

the officers want you to approach them with new ideas, suggestions and enthusiasm. I know a lot of international students do not approach us for a number of different reasons, but the ones who do are the ones who make a difference.

I've been studying here in Ireland for the past 5 years, but I didn't do the standard Leaving Certificate which virtually all secondary school students do here. I did another programme which I'm sure many of you have heard of: the International Baccalaureate. Our class was somewhat segregated from the other students in the year, and this did not sit well with me, so I worked with the relevant authorities in my school to change things, and guess what? Things have changed! Maybe you're completely happy with the cultural profile of your college, and happy with your environment, which is good, but if you think more could be done for you, don't be afraid to ask! People won't get offended, as I said before, we want to help you. This is what we are here for!

Also, keep in mind that Ireland is an increasingly international and diverse country. Most people want to get to know other cultures and become friends with foreign students. College is all about trying and learning new things and having a great time so do get out there, it has worked out great for me, and after all, why come to a new country and not get to know their people.

So, I hope you are all having a good time here at the ICOS International Forum, and I hope to meet many of you throughout the day. Thank you very much.



## **Kris McElhinney, President University College Cork Students Union**

I am here as Students Union President, UCC. I don't deal with students on a day to day level as much as I'd like to. But we have an Academic Officer, a Welfare Officer, an Education Officer. What I'm saying is that if you're not already familiar with the Students Union in your college, they can offer a lot of support services. Welcome to Cork. UCC was opened in 1845. There are 123,000 people living in Cork. We've a lot of staff, so the campus is diverse before we start with international students.

Combining our large population of domestic students, we also have a very large body of international students. In the past 10 years, it's been a major focus for the Irish Government to increase the student numbers. The main target is international students, in particular since the state started to cover fees for domestic students. Now we have a vast range of countries representing UCC. There are 76 different countries. A large number of students come from Erasmus and all over the world from various continents.

There are an awful lot of definitions on the student experience. What happens when people come to study in Ireland, how do they relate to people? Irish people are very welcoming and they want to know all about you. They are very forthcoming, but in university it's not always the same. Immersing yourself in the host culture is very important. You shouldn't only stick with people from your own culture. I arrived in the Isle of Man not knowing anything, like a lot of you. I had the same separation from home. I didn't do the leaving cert which is what Irish people talk about a lot.

Getting involved is one of the easiest and most profitable activities e.g. international student societies can be very useful. Sport is another great way to get to know people. There are many native sports which you wouldn't get to play when you're away such as Gaelic football, handball and hurling. They are lifetime opportunities – so you should take advantage and play these sports.

One of the biggest things I encourage people to do is to learn the Irish language. People in Ireland don't use it that much but it's still fantastic to have.



Why are international students different? They're not really. They're only different if you treat them as different. In Ireland, there is a huge diversity of students already e.g. students with a disability [and] age is no longer a common factor. There's a huge amount of people with different abilities and experiences. What do international students bring to Ireland? English as a first language – various teaching styles. Academic supports become far more important and then social network supports. When we're talking about the cultural style of getting involved in other countries, one of the things that's very important is for universities to realize that students don't sometimes understand straight away what is going on. You do need to have the PowerPoint and learning styles are different. In Ireland it's generally about the lecturer getting up and speaking for half an hour. We can't do this anymore because we need to engage with the students.

A lot of people only spend time with other persons from their country. They get to talk on the phone, Bebo and Facebook – all these technological advances which make the world smaller. But if you're talking to people from home everyday, not talking to people from Ireland or from other continents can limit your experience. For the next month, try to manipulate the amount of time you spend with people from your own country. If you set aside two days per week where you go out and do something new. Go out and meet new people.

International students need to be aware that a lot of activities are paid for.

Quality Assurance is another issue. The degrees that you're undertaking must be of a high standard. It's not just like you're going on holiday and taking couple of months out. A quality assurance document was launched recently by the Higher Education Authority. It basically sets standards of what you should expect if you're studying here on Erasmus.

Another issue is distance learning. If you're studying from home in your own country, what's to make sure that you'll have full access to facilities and services – that you are getting the best from the experience that you can. Very often, international students don't get involved. They won't vote at elections or engage with the students union. Really the student's union is there to protect students – all students regardless of where they come from. One thing that always worries me is the amount of international students in the international student society – very often they're run by domestic students. I'd like to see international students really becoming involved and organising their own activities. This is a great part of the experience – not just consuming a different country, but actually being a leader. One of the things that we're never asked about is an International Students Union Officer in UCC. There should be someone there all of the time to coordinate and link in with students.

What do international students teach us? It's a fantastic thing for Ireland and for Cork and UCC that there are so many international students coming here because we get to learn a lot about other countries. I didn't go on an Erasmus year but I'm pretty sure that I've met just as many people from different countries because they come here. We learn a lot about culture and even academically – there's a whole new perspective on things. One of the things I was really interested in was an Erasmus forum where basically all of the students had come back to Ireland, having studied away, came together and suggested what they'd like to change about their own university. So what you might do when you go back is go and make suggestions about what would make your home institution better. If not, come to us here and suggest one.

**Gary Lanigan, Vice President and Welfare Officer, Students Union, ITT Dublin**

Thanks Kris, that's a hard act to follow. I'd like to welcome you all. I'm privileged to be here.

It's great that so many people have turned out for this. I'm 23 and I commute to Dublin every day. I graduated in Economics and Business Management this year. This is my first time being involved in the student's union. I've learned so much about myself and international students and how we work together. I love musicals and I love getting involved. I think that they are a great way to get to meet people. [There are] 2,044 international students in ITT – this represents 1/8 of international students in the total student population. One of the great things I found about being in a small college is that everybody gets to know each other. It's only a matter of weeks before students get to know each other.



I'm extremely new to this whole thing. I remember one of my very first cases was a deportation case. This was how I got introduced to Colin and how I became involved in the forum. I have to say that Colin was extremely helpful. Dealing with a case as hard as that for one of my first cases was extremely tough. But with Colin's help, I got through it all. I got to learn so much and it was an amazing experience.

At present in ITT, we have 47 clubs and societies and this grows every week. Every year, more and more international students are becoming active members of our clubs and societies. It's great to see when international students set up societies themselves and they have set up some of the more successful ones, most notably an Alaskan student who set up the basketball society. He's going from strength to strength. There are also a lot of international students, who received bursaries, who have brought their skills. As Kris said earlier on, it's great when us Irish students can get some international students on board. It makes us Irish a lot better when it comes to sport.

Looking at the list of all the clubs in Tallaght – there is something for everyone. I say to all international students to try and get involved. It's one of the greatest experiences that you'll ever get to be involved.

## **Diversity on Campus: The Students Union Perspective - Questions and Answers.**

**Question:** I came to Dublin two years ago and I started learning about Students Unions. My first observation is what are Students Union contributing to me, both as an international student from Asia and as a Muslim? I have not seen any changes.

**Manuel Yoacham:** Students Union is a big organisation so change can be slow, granted two years is a long time. Because officers change from year to year, sometimes things do not get carried over as much as they should. As the International Student Officer, if anybody contacts me, I go out of my way to bring my points to the relevant person – e.g. the Welfare Officer, the Education Officer or the President. I try to press the point as much as I can. Unfortunately, I don't have any power on a big scale to change things. What I'm saying is that the International Officer or office of these student bodies aims to make changes. The Students Union do try to make these changes but it's hard to implement them on a very large scale because officers change every year. So when changes are brought in, they don't get noticed sometimes.

If you find that there is something which should be changed, come and have a chat with me.

**Kris McElhinney:** You introduced yourself as a Muslim student. We generally promote the student first. I accept quite readily that we haven't really done well on the Muslim aspect, we don't promote the Christian aspect either. In fact, religion and culture is something which we are not prioritizing. On international education committees, there are issues which come up e.g. Halal catering is always something that is an issue. Providing Halal food is becoming more and more central with regard to what is now expected.

You talked about voting but that's probably the worst time to get what you want. Politicians are the worst people to talk to. They offer this and that. But unless you stand to be on councils or Muslim Cultural Society - they are part of the Union and integral part of the university. At the end of the day, students' unions will get their students involved. So if you find that things are not being done, it's probably because you are not doing

anything about it yourself. We all come from our own backgrounds - bringing your own background with you to Students Union can help create a difference.

**Question.** My question is related to integration – how do we perceive integration? Is it the assimilation of the new cultures to the host culture? Or is it directional in both ways? How do you view integration as opposed to assimilation?

**Kris McElhinney:** It's not about assimilation. International students are great because they have their own unique stories that Irish people will be interested in. By their own nature, Irish people try and find out as much as possible about you. There are two types of students. There are a lot of students who want to party through college. Alcohol is a huge problem in Ireland and our culture is very skewed in that direction. Generally speaking, participating in other non-alcohol related student activities is the best way to avoid this. Students Unions may not be proactive in this area but student activities are the best way to meet others.

I was involved in being a 'buddy' for the Erasmus society. When new students arrived, they are assigned somebody. It's a great way to start a friendship. I met a huge number of people through this way. There were a lot of Muslim students and the more we talked the stronger the friendship became. You just need that first stepping stone. However, you can't force it either – this is one of the things I've learned that integration cannot be forced.

**Manuel Yoacham:** I have heard of this before where one becomes so emerged in the host culture that they lose their own cultural identity. I think it's up to every person themselves. For me coming from Chile, I found a very good niche on how to fit into Irish society while at the same time maintaining my Chilean identity. If you're finding it difficult to integrate, just keep speaking to people and asking questions.

**Suzanne Buckley:** I'd like to address it from an International Office perspective. We're very aware that integration for international students is an important part of the quality of life you have here as a student. We have tried to address it on a smaller scale. At the moment we're working on a buddy scheme with the Erasmus students. It is very much designed as an integration project, rather than one based on assimilation. We try to pair

students who are returning from Erasmus with students who are going out on Erasmus. We also look at pairing them with international students here.

The other is our Chinese Institute. We have Irish students who will be going to China. We have tried to pair them with Chinese students who are here. The relationship for both of these programmes is mutually beneficial for all participants. It's much more difficult for us to do it structurally at postgraduate level mainly because students are more isolated. The irony is that because you're isolated, you probably need it more. We're aware of it and we're trying to address it. Change takes time and we'd be interested in hearing from the students if you've comments on how to address it.

**Question:** I've been in many lectures where Africa has been represented as the antithesis of Europe. If you talk about poverty, talk about Africa. If you talk about disease, talk about Africa. If you talk about bad civilization and failing, talk about Africa. From this we draw the vulnerability and capacity of people in Africa. I'm from Uganda. What is the way forward for us to talk about Africa, as opposed to only looking at its vulnerabilities?

**Kris McElhinney:** My housemate last year was from Africa and I learned a lot this way. Very often the only thing you hear about Africa is on the news. This can hammer to death the idea of the poor areas. I think it's a case of mixing and meeting with more people. This is why conferences like this are fantastic.

**Gary Lanigan:** When I went to Africa, as I said, it was possibly one of the most powerful experiences. We encouraged students to go out with us and we ran fundraisers. In the end a group of 12 went. I strongly encourage people to go and I do hope that I go back again. I go back to a point that Kris said – that the Irish love hearing sob stories. We rang a phone show one of the nights we were there to encourage people to do more for Africa and possibly to visit Kenya.

**Sheila Power:** I just want to acknowledge the importance of the issue and the question that Joseph raised. I know that this forum is about internationalization and student mobility. Quite rightly, we are focusing on this. There is a broader issue – internationalization also involves internationalizing curricula and the content of our



teaching and learning. If institutions want to take internationalization seriously, then they have to look at issues around students and how they fit in and how they are supported in institutions. But they also need to look into what we are teaching, how we are teaching it and the messages we need to put across. I think that question will be good for another day.

**Question:** What are the best and worst aspects of dealing with international students?

**Kris McElhinney:** One of the worst things is when people speak in a foreign language and laugh, it can make you paranoid (half joking). One of the best things, I've learned so much about cooking. One of my best friends is from Pakistan and I got to sample a lot of Pakistani food.

**Manuel Yoacham:** Probably one of the worst aspects is that international students tend to keep their problems to themselves. I find out about a lot of problems through different department in UCD. The best thing is that international students are always up for the craic – having a good time and going to parties.

**Diane Nititham:** It's incredibly important that we look at the integration of international students on a structural level, as well as an individual level. Today you've mainly talked more about the individual in terms of joining Students Union. I personally haven't expressed any interest in joining the Students Union. I don't feel that it provides anything for me as an international postgraduate student. On the individual level, I feel that I cannot accept the responsibility of educating everybody around me. I agree that the buddy system is a great initiative for both international and host students. I feel that the SU should keep in mind that it's so much more than just having conversations. It's about the structural change that needs to happen. I don't want to see the responsibility fall on international students – it has to happen in multiple directions.



**Kris McElhinney:** You said that you didn't want to join Students Union, everybody is automatically a member so it's more a case of being involved. We're very much in favour of any suggestions regarding structural changes. Sometimes it is quite hard. Here in UCC there was going to be a computer science class of just Chinese students. The Students Union was very much against this as it would lead to institutional segregation. These are the types of structural problems which we are continuously dealing with. A real benefit of the international student experience is at least understanding another culture. I may not be aware of the problems and issues you face, but at least by talking to me you can share your problems.

**Comment:** My concern is when a student first comes to the university. I'm from India and when I first came here it was a very big shock. I didn't know anybody. People used to smile at me or speak behind my back, saying that I was odd. In India, a smile is enough to say hello. But here it's hello and then a long conversation after that. From the beginning, newly arrived international students should be introduced to other students by the International Office. I mainly made friends with Asian students so I didn't have the opportunity of being with Irish people.

I'm a first year student in UCD. I work for the Students Union and I was elected class rep for 720 people. As an international student, I would say that to have a friend and how to be a friend ourselves...I find that I have to make an effort to integrate into the Irish psyche and to open up to Irish culture and to compromise my own culture. International students generally stay here for a year or 6 months, so people may say that they don't have to make much of an effort but you do. You come here to learn the language and culture. It's a shame to return home and say that the only thing you learned in Ireland

was your course. You have to integrate and reach out to the Irish community. For me it's not as hard if you're willing to compromise and learn from the Irish. It's a good experience and you won't forget it.

**Manuel Yoacham:** I know of a few different people in Dublin who started to organise events. I know a Brazilian girl who organized Brazilian themed nights, where there was Brazilian music, dancers and food. This was a great idea, as the easiest way to connect with Irish people is through social events. You can bring your culture to an entire group of people.

**Loice Kashangura, Student Representative for International Students, Milltown Institute**

I am delighted to speak at today's forum. There has been a dramatic change in the number of international students in this country -both EU as well as non EU. What's the attraction? I recently asked this to another international student and he said if there are no opportunities why are you here? I was trying to say what are the opportunities that are relevant here in Ireland? If there are no opportunities then you wouldn't be here. That is a good statement.

I attended a conference in Milltown Institute last year entitled "Changing Shades of Green." Some people sing about their 40 shades of green. We are here talking about the changing shades of green. Ireland is the best within European and global movement of people. People are motivated to move by the lack of opportunities at home and they are drawn here by opportunities to work, study, learn English, to rejoin their families or simply to have a good time. Diversity will continue to be a part of Ireland's future from its cities to its rural heartland. Therefore managing diversity in Ireland, as across Europe, is a challenge for us all.

I'll speak about opportunities in relation to the students I interviewed. I'll also speak about my own personal experience. First of all, the public attitude to migrants has been more positive here in Ireland than in many other parts of Europe. There is a general acceptance of international students in many colleges. However, there is one..."where are you from...how long are you here for?" You know what that means to me? To me that means, please don't say that you're here forever. In my country, you don't say where are you going. It brings the whole problem of language interpretation from different cultural contexts.

Another issue is intercultural interactions. We learn from local students, as well as from other non-Irish students. With the Irish students and international students we encounter, there has been a significant report of enrichment of each other. One student in Milltown said that she's enriched by the various cultures she has come into contact with here. Personally, my constant interaction with people from various backgrounds has challenged my embedded beliefs. In one way I have come to appreciate my Irishness

more than ever. In another sense, I now have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the others of those different groups. In Africa there is no hurry. When somebody comes to you, you give them time. When students come to me, I may not have the solution but at least they are happy that I will spend some time with them. The experience I've had in the college is shared by many people.

I have been here for 4 years. It's important that I participate in the activities which are important as a part of college life. I've been involved in the student council and I also represented the student body at the academic council, which was very challenging. I've learned a lot of things. I've learned skills that will be of great use when I return to Africa. I will use the skills I've learned through the participation of activities in college.

The doors to quality education are wide open. We have so many opportunities here – access to part time jobs, exposure to good educational facilities and technologies is crucial to the student's life. This is what makes a Western education highly effective and respected around the globe.

Efficiency in terms of delivery is very important. We are privileged here to access materials. You can actually get a book on the day it's launched and you can use it the following day in your essay.

There are several challenges; immigration issues, when you talk about visa renewal. I've been here for the past three years and going to the immigration office. This year when I went I was told that my course wasn't on the Milltown list. I had to go back and say this to my college. I couldn't understand it. I was in the middle of essays and class presentations which are crucial to my assessment. This is something which must be addressed – how can ICOS help to make our life easier when it comes to the immigration office?



Another point is identity issues. Each person is entitled to a personal identity. By being in a foreign country, one is bound to have new experiences. People may be forced to bury part of their identity. Sometimes I'll say something and people will say what language is she using? The challenge is a reality. How can I articulate myself? How can I learn to better my expression? I've heard people say she actually misses this. Language is a barrier and there are problems, especially in terms of academic issues. For some of the students who are here, English is not their first language. People need to express some form of compassion. In Milltown we're lucky. Students from Germany and France for example can write in their native language and people can help them to integrate.

There are issues around accommodation fees and general maintenance. Development-education is about empowering people to have better chances in life. How can we translate what we've learned here to some of our backgrounds which may be deprived?

I conclude, integration is not about absorbing the other but is about enriching each other. It's a give and take two way system. It's not about creating small Kenyas, small Russias, small Zimbabwes in Ireland. It is about participating. It's a challenge to step out and be part of the life – to give and receive.

**Exploring Home Students' Attitudes Towards International Students** presented by  
**Ciarán Dunne, PhD student, Dublin City University**

When you present later on in the day it is good because you've seen which issues have arisen. The main issue which I've picked up on is integration and what exactly integration is and how you define it. More importantly, whose responsibility is it – international students, local students or the responsibility of the institution? I think it's the responsibility of all three groups, and how they work together. Also, another interesting theme from today is identity. Diane spoke about it a lot, as did Loice - how our identity is challenged when we come across people who are different to us. Our identity is negotiated very much not just on how we see ourselves but also on how people see us. Whether we like it or not, the way people view us affects how we're treated and that in turn informs how we define ourselves.



I'm here to talk about student diversity in Irish higher education and report on research that explored relations between Irish and international students. How many of you are undergrad or postgrad students? How many of you arrived in Ireland hoping to meet Irish students? How many of you are 100% satisfied with the amount of contact and the level of relationships you've had with Irish students since you got here?

Looking at the amount of hands raised, I can see that not so many of you have the level of contact you desire with local students. Research suggests that this is a common issue internationally. We have always had a tradition of diversity in higher education in Ireland. However, in the last 10 years, numbers have increased very significantly. Limited research has been conducted into how culturally different students relate to each other on campus. Therefore, I decided to focus on this topic. The reason I feel this is important is not because I'm concerned only about the wellbeing of international students. Research shows that learning in a diverse environment can benefit all students by exposing them to differing perspectives, values, worldviews etc. Ultimately, research argues that student diversity can benefit the overall institution and help achieve the institutional mission.

Looking at research conducted outside of Ireland, the overall conclusion is that studying in a diverse environment can offer tangible benefits to the individual and to the educational institution. However, if interaction between students is not taking place, those benefits, such as the improved ability to work in teams, improved leadership skills, improved critical thinking, greater cross-cultural competence, may not be realised. These benefits will not be achieved without interaction between the diverse student groups. That was my concern when undertaking my research.

International research also shows that interaction between local and international students is often below the level of expectations – especially of international students. For some reason, little research has been conducted among the local student population exploring how they experience interaction and what barriers they may encounter. Despite the rapid increase in diversity in student bodies in Irish higher education, limited research has been carried out in Ireland.

International research indicates that student diversity can foster educational benefits once interaction is taking place. However, interaction between home and international students tends to be low. Therefore, I felt that it was time to engage with the host culture students and explore their perspectives. This has been the focus of my PhD research.

Among the research findings, it was interesting to see how Irish students articulated their definition of cultural difference. The way they perceived culture and culture difference



was quite unusual and unexpected. Although they certainly identified international students as being culturally different, they also identified mature students, that is, non-traditional older students, as being culturally different, even if they were Irish. That is, they grouped international students and mature Irish students together. Specifically, they tended to speak about international students as being much more 'mature' than they were. Therefore, I asked them what maturity meant to them. From the concept of maturity, many characteristics emerged.

Firstly, they felt that international students have different goals for college than traditional Irish students. As such, their academic motivation is different to Irish students. Secondly, they felt that international students have more responsibilities than Irish students. Thirdly, they spoke about international students as having some degree of authority over Irish students.

In terms of academic motivation, the Irish students spoke about international students as sitting in different places to them in lecture halls. They said international students sit at the front of the lecture hall whereas Irish student typically sit at the back. They said the reason for this was that they may need to listen more, but mainly they felt that this reflected their greater engagement in the academic side of college life. They viewed international students as having very clear academic goals for their college experience. Irish students were not as clear about what they wanted to get from college and gave relatively greater priority to the social side of college life. The Irish students certainly wanted a qualification but were not as dedicated to the academic side of things. Secondly, in terms of responsibilities, they felt that the international students had a lot more demands. These included financial pressures, and possibly family responsibilities which most Irish students typically do not have. They were aware that many international students have families and as such face extra responsibilities which impact upon their behaviour in college.

In terms of 'authority', they perceived international students as being academically superior, despite language barriers and alternative learning styles which might clash with those dominant in Ireland. Importantly, they felt that international students were judgmental about their behaviour, particularly their social habits, including their alcohol consumption. Many students said that "if they're judging me at this level, I won't bother

talking with them. I won't tell them about going out last night because I will feel like they are looking down on me."

I should point out that these issues emerged through my discussions with the Irish students rather than being imposed on the students. They also felt that mature students – Irish or international - represented 'parents' in class and they did not particularly want their parents to be in college with them!

Living arrangements also had an impact. If they had to commute for two hours, they were much less likely to participate in college life and interact with international students. 'Curriculum' also emerged as a huge issue; the physical size of the teaching environment, the number of students in the class, the timetable, the workload, how the lecturer spoke to the class, organized group work, and encouraged (or not) interaction between students. All of these issues combined together to impact upon the likelihood on interacting with international students. Furthermore, Irish students tend to make their best friends during their first year in college and they tend to stick with those. The Irish students would make judgments about how interested they felt international students were by observing their body language.

In addition to this, international students tend to socialize with other students from their home country. Therefore, the likelihood of Irish students approaching them will be significantly reduced as Irish students spoke about being anxious approaching international students, particularly when they were in groups. Where large numbers of international students from one country or region are present, their actual 'need' to interact with local students was reduced. This creates further barriers.

A major issue from the research relates to the idea of 'Institutional support'; how does the institution encourage mixing between students on campus, both inside and beyond the formal learning environment and in the overall? In the current research Irish students felt there was an acute lack of institutional support and called for formal interventions to promote contact with international students.

All of these issues are closely related – institutional support, curriculum and friendship formation, living arrangement etc. Institutions need to address student diversity from the

top down. They need to treat the diversity that now defines their student bodies as an educational resource. This requires tangible investment in initiatives to promote intercultural relations.

Finally, when students did report mixing – how did the Irish students report their experiences of this? Many students viewed interaction with international students as ‘demanding’ and concluded that it was simply not ‘worth the effort’. Part of this ‘effort’ was the perceived need to alter communication style; speak more slowly, moderate their accent, avoid using slang, and generally monitor what they were saying. Some students argued that in situations where they were adapting their communication style so dramatically – including avoiding certain topics which they felt might cause misunderstandings – they were therefore being superficial, and therefore questioned the point of talking with the international student in the first place. Finally, one the biggest issues identified as central to Irish students’ experiences of intercultural contact with international students was their concern about being perceived as racist. This was particularly linked with concerns about good-natured teasing being misinterpreted as deliberate insults. This is one issue which certainly warrants further study, as for Irish students this form of communication is an important part of relational development.

It is not possible to cover all the findings in this short time. Overall, however, the research indicates that intercultural contact is perceived to be a very complex and multidimensional issue from the perspective of Irish students. Without specific institutional support, the barriers to such contact will not be overcome. As such, it is the responsibility of institutions to develop specific policies to promote intercultural relations between students so that the potential benefits of student diversity can be achieved.

**Sarah Holt, International Study Coordinator, International Office, University College Dublin**

I've been invited to talk about policy. One of the overarching themes of what we've been talking about today has been policy towards international students. So when ICOS asked me to speak at today's event regarding policy issues, I thought oh that's no problem – I deal with policy issues everyday in my job. I came to Ireland as an international student to study in Trinity. I studied at DCU also as an international student. I've been working in the International Office in UCD for the last 4 years as part of the student support team. So basically if anybody has problems similar to the ones that Loice talked about at the GNIB for example, students come in to talk to us. Similarly if they have any problems with university policies, they come in and talk to us.

I spend a lot of time in my job dealing with policies related to international students, but more in the sense of helping them to negotiate these policies and make them work for them. This is kind of difficult. Not only have I lived through the frustration that you guys have faced, there's a huge mountain of counter productive and sometimes really unfair regulations relating to international students within Ireland and in institutions. Now UCD pays me to relive that experience every single day when people come in and talk about it. It can be quite stressful sometimes. Every one of you has an experience and they collectively come into the international office. That's why we understand what you're going through.

Basically if it was up to me all of the policies in Ireland and in my institution would take into account our needs first and foremost. Unfortunately, what I've learned in Germany and Ireland, from being an international student myself and as part of my job now dealing with international students and lobbying for international students, is that it's very clear that policies related to us are not formed by us or made by us or with our interests specifically in mind. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that Ireland makes policies for you and you and you. It's just not the case and it's not productive to think in those terms. That's why I think what Ciaran had to say is so significant. In order to get over that we need to understand the context we are coming into and then learn to negotiate within that context. So that's really what I'm going to talk about today.

I'm going to review what has already been said but also give you some ways in which you can negotiate policy and learn to speak their own language – so you can hit the nail on the head when you're speaking with people who have influence over things that affect your life.

To put it into context, international students are not unique to Ireland. For the past 10 or 15 years, there have been more and more people going outside of their own country to study. Since '99, there's been an increase of 61% in the numbers of people who study outside their home country which is huge. This is why Ireland has become more interested in attracting overseas people to study here. Why would Ireland want international students? From an institutional perspective, diversity in education is obviously seen as a good thing. It benefits the classroom and brings different perspectives to education. Having Joseph stand up earlier and tell us about his perceptions of Africa in Ireland is invaluable. If he's in a classroom context, he can use that. He can contribute an idea that people wouldn't have thought of before and that's just amazing.

Additionally from a university perspective, we are publicly funded in Ireland and so funding is always up and down and we don't know where it's coming from. So it's really important for universities to raise revenues from international students in whatever way possible. Also in terms of economics, they actually do want to keep you here because it will help the economy grow if you stay here and become a part of the economy. Ireland needs that. Some people recognize it and some don't – that's why the policy gets so muddled. I guess if you're asking yourself "Sarah is up here telling us that we're this great benefit to Ireland that when we go down to the GNIB, why don't they give me a big hug. I deserve a big hug. I'm doing great things for this country and they don't know it." But the fact of the matter is that we're dealing with people and every single person in here has their own story and their own perspective.

There are some people out there who are only really interested in the control of borders and this is something that we're going through in Ireland just recently. It's a problem around the world – where I come from and in the UK as well. It's not good but it's a fact of life. It's an obstacle and we need to face it.



We've got public policies that aren't really that student friendly. This has been accentuated by a lot of the things that Rotimi and Mike spoke about. I'm not going to talk about immigration in Ireland because we already know about it. What's important to reinforce is identity and how national identity influences policy. I think Ireland still is in a dynamic period and they haven't decided which way they're going to go in terms of their own identity and this really reflects on how policy is formed about others. Basically the policies in Ireland filter down to universities because we have to answer to national bodies. I think it's in your institutions that you'll find that you have the most power. Within your institutions, policy regarding international students can vary from institution to institution and from school to school within your university. So there isn't a mechanism for joined up thinking. It's a good time to get out there and do something about it. The funding is very limited in large institutions and the policies are made to benefit as many people as possible. Even though your institution may have an international office for example, the likelihood is that the international office is not well funded enough to do a lot of the things that you've been talking about today about things that we should be doing.

I'm not making excuses here. I know everything that you've said - it comes up everyday. Just to give you an idea of staffing for international offices: TCD has 2,400 students from outside Ireland and they have 10 fulltime staff in their international office. That breaks

down to 240 students per 1 staff person. DCU has it better. They have 1,200 students from outside Ireland and 6 fulltime staff in their international office so that's only about 200 students/staff member. UCD has 3,000 students from outside Ireland and 8 fulltime staff working in international affairs – that's 375 students per staff member. It's not all doom and gloom. The trend in Irish universities is to increase the number of international students. Every university wants more international students. But we're going to have to wait until the revenue comes in to start implementing these policies. The reality is that it's going to take a little while to happen.

In the meantime, what can you do? You have to make yourself very visible to stakeholders. Go out there and tell them what you need. We've been talking about this culturally – sometimes it's difficult for people to talk about what they want and need, but you have to do it. I'm going to tell you why. As international students, we always assume that people may know what it might be like to be lonely or to be out of our own context or to be upset. But people don't know – most people have never left their own country, except being on holiday. It makes a huge difference when you try not to take things personally. I would advise you guys to get in touch with the Students Union, get in touch with members of university administration at higher levels – managers, directors and vice presidents. If you have an international office, get in touch with them. If you don't have one, get in touch with people to get yourselves an international office. The more people you bring on board, the more you're going to be able to affect change. Even talk to your lecturers and supervisors about it.

So few words of advice would be look at the big picture and just remember the context that you're working in. Remember what's going on in Ireland and keep that at the back of your mind the whole time. Don't take issue with a lot of little things – don't write to the president if there's no hot water in the residences. No one will take you seriously. Focus on what you bring to the institution and use that as your argumentation – why they want you to be here? Put your thoughts in writing. If you have a record of it, it's so much easier to say "Well I wrote to you on this date and why haven't you addressed this issue yet?" Be clear and concise and cite reasoning. Don't just go into the international office and say that there aren't enough events going on for international students on campus. Go in with ideas and solutions. That's a really good way to go. Don't just go with a grievance. Chances are that the international office staff realize that they don't have

enough staff. So you need to say well I'll help you organise that. They do want to see more going on campus in every aspect.

Basically to sum up; if you can get your ideas across in a clear way, with clear benefits for the university and Ireland as a whole, not just for yourself, you're more likely to get a response. And if you get a response, it's likely you got your point across and that's the first step towards influencing policy.



## **Workshop: Opportunities and Challenges for International Students**

The first workshop was on opportunities and challenges for international students. A significant challenge which was identified was that of Language barriers. A number of students said that their English was not good when they arrived in Ireland. They also said that the Irish accent can be difficult to understand. However, after only a short period of time, the majority of students said that their English had improved and that it continues to become easier to understand the Irish accent. One student was given a present of English language cds from her Irish friends which were of enormous benefit to her.

In order to integrate, it was agreed that students need to penetrate through a group. When the Irish form a group, it can be hard to penetrate that barrier. Students said that the solution for this is that you go and organise student activities, like the Students Union said.

It was acknowledged that integration is a two-way process. Some students do not feel comfortable in getting involved with students from other cultures. It was agreed that the best way to counteract this was for students in this position to open their minds and learn from each other by organising an event together or attending each others celebrations e.g. non Muslim students going along to a Muslim celebration. This would help to show that at the end of the day everybody is normal just like everybody else.

It was acknowledged that we all come from different backgrounds with different cultures and values. Although one cannot integrate 100%, everybody can get involved to an extent so that society can appreciate differences.



## **Workshop Two: Exploring Home Students' Attitudes towards International Students.**

Participants from the second workshop looked at home students' attitudes towards international students. They pooled together a variety of factors which impede international students from socializing with Irish students. The main barriers identified were cultural differences, different objectives for life, Irish drinking culture, language, legal issues and social cliques.

The groups who listed cultural differences came up with solutions like cultural showcases, exploring common interests, study and reading about the culture of the country one is going to study in prior to going away. For language problems, the solutions included that students need to mix more with the Irish and avail of English classes if they are on offer in the college.

One group said that Irish people view international students as illegal immigrants. The solution they came up with was to challenge this and change perceptions.

It was suggested that the best remedy for no common interests was to get involved - to participate more and to get involved in the local bodies.

As for the pub culture, one group said that it was important to exchange information – talk about pub culture and ask why is this and what do you do at pubs etc. Another group reiterated that one does not have to drink in pubs if they do not want to.

The last common theme was on different objectives within the college -what international students try to achieve as opposed to what Irish students are trying to achieve. The solution was to get more involved in college activities.



### **Workshop 3: Policy Matters which affect International Students.**

The group agreed that the best way to influence policy issues which affect international students, was for students to come together and write letters and/or organise meetings with the relevant department. Having ten signatures on a letter would be a lot more effective than just one signature. It was agreed that presenting their case in a calm and rational manner would achieve a lot more in the long-run as opposed to acting angrily to a policy issue.

The group also reiterated the important role that Students Unions play and how easy it is for international students to work with their Unions.



**Loice Kashangura:** I would like to make a recommendation to ICOS – being an organisation which funds people to come out here and experience something different. Ensure that people are not just given tickets, prepare them for something different. For some people, it's the first time that they move out of their own culture. Therefore the only world they know is theirs. I'm commenting that something be done to prepare people for coming out here, apart from just providing for their upkeep.

Sheila Power, ICOS Director thanked the panel and introduced Hamid Khodabakhshi, Union of Students in Ireland (USI) President. She added that Hamid is a wonderful role model and shows what international students can do.

## **Closing Remarks by Hamidreza Khodabakhshi, Union of Students in Ireland (USI) President**

I would like to thank ICOS for inviting me to speak at today's event. My name is Hamid, I'm from Iran. I'm the President of USI since November 3. I'm honored to be here today. I have to say that you guys are lucky. When I came to Ireland in 2000, we didn't have these forums or discussions. If it wasn't for some people in this room, I wouldn't be here today. The fact is that when I came to this country, there was no GNIB office, there was an office on Harcourt St. and you had to queue at 1am the night before.

One of the reasons why things have improved is due to the work of people like ICOS. Another reason is people like you lobbying to make sure that your voice is heard.

In some countries unions exist, but they may not act democratically e.g. bogus elections may take place.

I will fill you in on the background of USI. USI is a national body which represents third level students. We represent over 300,000 members. By paying the capitation fee to your college, you automatically join us. Thank you for the €5 you've given us, although it's not as much as you've given your college! We try our best to represent you.

I urge you to attend USI Congress to lobby on policy issues. We get politicians to listen to and understand the voice of students. [At this] time of year we invite all house Oireachtas members to listen to our issues.

International students – first and foremost colleges want your cash. I have been to several forums. Academic councils regard international students as a market. Every college has marketing people who go abroad to recruit international students. Since you're paying, make sure you're getting value for your money -get involved.

As well you bring cultural diversity. I remember when I used to come to Ireland to visit my uncle years ago. People used to buy my little sister chocolate because she was a novelty – she had dark skin. Nowadays, Ireland has become a very diverse society. One reason is partly due to the students. The other aspect is that it's so hard to get students to stay in their country after they finish their education. Now with the Graduate

Employment Scheme students can stay on to work. However, the scheme has a lot of loopholes such as you have to earn over €30,000 per year to get your visa etc. Maybe if you're an engineer you'll earn that much straight away but many of my colleagues, including Irish, wouldn't. If you study Arts, I doubt that you'd get a salary of over €30,000 straight away so it does cause difficulty.

I want to speak about my own experience. I'm originally from Iran. I moved to Dublin in 2000. I studied Engineering in DIT. DIT has a great mix of students – both international and Irish students. It helped form my accent – it's not from Dublin, it's not from the country. No one knows where it's from. Since after my first year, I continuously ran for Class Rep., and I was elected. In first year, I'd always ask a lot of questions and complain to the lecturers so from second year, people automatically elected me to be their class rep. I feel that I've learned more through my experience of SU than I've learned from my course. In 2003, I founded a society.



Societies are one way of getting involved with the people who you like. Friends from societies are the ones who you keep in touch with after your course. If you haven't started joining societies, look at what's available and join. If one you're looking for isn't there, you can always set one up yourself. Unions gather class reps to come together.

I sat on some Faculty Board for Engineering meetings. That gave me the experience of sitting in a very formal meeting, rather than just complaining. As well as that it shows you how different views from class reps can be implemented. When you're chairing the meeting, you have to get everybody's views across. To finish, I was elected Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs in DIT. This year I was honoured to be elected USI Education Officer.

One important point – you can never learn the language without learning the culture. When I moved to the country, everything was different e.g. the weather and food. The day when you can accept that there are other people's views is important. You need to accept that they may not be as valuable as yours but to them it's different and it has a lot of meaning. The day you accept that is that day you're learning the language and the day that you're starting to change.

Are you complaining about things all of the time, or have you come to a level where you can enjoy it? Many colleges have international offices. For those that don't, there should be a welfare officer or an equality officer. Try to find out from your union who this person is. Seek advice from your union or international student society. If you need more advice, you can contact USI.

You should introduce yourself to the international office staff. It's very important that you present your work to the other people e.g. Irish students. A lot of groups and unions do great work but make the mistake of not sharing their work. You should show a movie from your home country to attract people.

Bars are social place in Ireland, they are good for organising table quizzes. Remember if you don't want to drink you don't have to. In Ireland, a lot is centred around the bar e.g. funerals, weddings and even meeting a solicitor.

If there's a special day/ceremony in your country, you should do something. I organized an Iranian new year's day event. Let your friends sample your country's traditional food.

It's difficult for international students when it comes to politics because they can't vote. Politicians don't care since you can't vote.

I want to thank ICOS for organising for this event.

**Sheila Power:** Sheila thanked Hamid and said that he “is a pace setter rather than someone who is following.” She then introduced her colleague Colin Tannam to close the forum.



### **Closing speech by Colin Tannam, ICOS Programme Officer**

We have been planning today's Forum for the past 12 months. We wanted many perspectives on the integration of international students in higher education in Ireland. Looking at the great turnout and diverse range of nationalities here today, this has certainly happened. As I compiled the list of attendees, it was inspiring to see representatives from 30 different countries.

I would like to thank everybody for attending this Forum in Cork – many people refer to Cork as “the real capital of Ireland.” Many attendees travelled from counties faraway. Your time is much appreciated. Thanks for raising some interesting and pertinent questions. This forum is all about the international student and without your presence and contribution; it would not have been the success it turned out to be. On behalf of ICOS, I would like to say Go raibh maith agaibh!



We were eager to have students from ICOS' various member institutions participate. Thanks to our members for promoting the event in their institution.

Councillor Adebari, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to open the forum. Your words were thought provoking.

Mike, thanks for sharing your expertise on the multicultural campus.

It is an honour to have such a multifaceted and gifted panel of guest speakers and facilitators participating in the forum.

Neo and Diane shared their experiences on being international students in Ireland. It was inspiring to hear what you both have achieved and how you overcame the various barriers which were preventing your full integration into Irish life.

Kris and Gary provided insight into how Students Unions are promoting diversity on campus.

Manuel highlighted how Student Unions want to work with students, rather than for them.

By becoming a representative for international students in her college, Loice demonstrated how international students can become involved in campus life.

People can forget that integration is a two-way process. Ciaran's presentation provided insight into how both the host student and the international student play important roles in relation to diversity on campus.

Sarah, thanks for shedding light on the complex area of policy related matters.

Hamid, thanks for illustrating how USI is committed to promoting equality.

I would like to express ICOS' gratitude to the speakers for sharing their time, perspectives and insight into diversity on the campus. All of your contributions made it a great day.

My colleagues at ICOS; Paul, Louise, George, Ruary and our Director, Sheila, have all played a pivotal role, both throughout the various planning stages of the forum and today. I would also like to thank everybody who attended the planning meetings.

The Department of Education & Science kindly sponsored this event. Without their funding, we could not have organised an event on a scale like this one. Many thanks.

I would like to thank UCC for kindly hosting the Forum and providing the facilities.

A special thanks goes to Suzanne Buckley, Support Officer for International Students, UCC for her time, commitment and enthusiasm for the Forum. Thanks for organising the logistical arrangements. Thanks also for promoting the Forum in Cork. Suzanne and I spent many many hours speaking on the phone, in person and via email in relation to the forum. It is evident from today that our hard work came to fruition. Thanks also for chairing the morning session. On behalf of myself and ICOS, we cannot thank you enough.



Thanks to Alessandro – our official photographer.

Diane said that “our differences are something to be celebrated, not used as a tool for division” Mary Robinson, former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights once said that “we must counteract the tendency to homogenise the other, the tendency that sees us as individuals with separate identities, but them as a homogenous and terrifying mass, where individuals, families and personalities do not matter.” Everybody has made a significant contribution to today. This event has demonstrated how cultural diversity enriches us, both on the campus and in society in general, rather than segregates us.

On that note, I would like to express gratitude again to everybody here today. I hope that I haven't left anyone out! I am delighted with the turnout. The learning and sharing of experience that we have achieved today does not end here. We will be publishing the

findings and will also place them on the ICOS website. I am confident that the Forum will lead to networking. The opportunity for this starts in just a few minutes at the multicultural reception.

Finally, inspired by Neo's award in N.Ireland, maybe one initiative worth pursuing is the idea of an International Student of the Year award in this jurisdiction. With the necessary cooperation of the institutions and a "generous" sponsor, ICOS would be happy to work on the detail.

**Sheila Power, ICOS Director** officially closed the forum. She thanked attendees for working hard and for being attentive throughout the day. She said that she hoped all attendees would enjoy the multicultural reception.



### List of Participants

NB: Please note that we compiled this list from the handwritten registration forms, so we hope participants will forgive us if they find any errors in the spelling of their names.

NAME	NATIONALITY	INSTITUTION
Alan Mukata	Zambian	UCD
Alfred M'Sichilli	Zambian	UCC
Alice Drajea Sr.	Ugandan	TCD
Ayswaria Deepti	Indian	NUIG
Amir Hajbaba	Iranian	UCD
Bader Al-Bakr	Kuwait	UCC
Barry Colfer	Irish	UCD
Bastien Savreux	French	AIT
Belinda Lumbala	Zambian	UCD
Chidongo Phiri	Zambian	UCC
Ciaran Dunne	Irish	DCU
Clement Ninziza (Rev.)	Burundian	TCD/ISE
Colin Tannam	Irish	ICOS
Cuthbert Milaho	Tanzanian	UCD
Dave Daly	Irish	UCC
Dhanya Chithambarankutty	Indian	UCC
Diane Nititham	Filipina/Thai American	UCD
Dias Iskaliyev	Kazakh	UCC
Diyana Rahman	Malaysian	UCC
Dominik Ueblacker	German	UCC
Esayas Bekele	Ethiopian	UCC
Fidelis Loluk	Ugandan	UCD
Gary Lanigan	Irish	ITT

Georges Labbad	Syrian	DIT
Giovanni Costamagna	Italian	AIT
Godwin Jere	Zambian	UCD
Ha Van Thuan	Vietnamese	UCD
Haile Tesfay	Ethiopian	UCC
Hala Mohammad	American	NUIG
Hamidreza Khodabakhshi	Iranian	USI
Haswadi Hassan	Malaysian	TCD
Henry Opolot	Ugandan	UCD
Intan Shah	Malaysian	UCD
Irina Eddaira	Russian	UCD
Jacob Shawa	Zambian	UCD
Jacobo de Vera	Spanish	NUIM
Jacqueline Mpanga	Ugandan	UCD
Jesse Omamogho	Nigerian	UCC
Jia Xu	Chinese	UCC
John Mwanja	Ugandan	UCD
Joseph Okalebo	Ugandan	UCD
Joseph Okoboi	Ugandan	UCD
Kris McElhinney	Irish	UCC
Laura Nagle	Irish	NCI
Lei Xu	Chinese	WIT
Li Yue	Chinese	AIT
Lionel Perini	French	AIT
Loice Kashangura	Zimbabwean	MI
Liuyun Zhao	Chinese	DIT
Lorena Diaz Garcia	Spanish	NUIM
Loice Kashangura	Zimbabwean	Milltown Institute
Louise Staunton	Irish	ICOS
Maksududl Hasan	Bangladeshi	UCC
Manuel Yoacham	Chilean	UCD

Marta Sulewska	Polish	UCC
Mario Ximenes	East Timorese	UCD
Michelle Buddecke	Canadian	UCC
Mike Fitzgibbon	Irish	UCC
Mohammamad Mahmud	Bangladeshi	DIT
Mohamed Kyande	Tanzanian	UCD
Moses Olinga	Ugandan	UCD
Mupo Sikuniso	Zambian	UCD
Mustafa Alquraish	Saudi	UCC
Nattiga Silalai	Thai	UCC
Neo Zhang	Chinese	QUB
Nick Beard	Irish	TCD
Nur Farhana	Malaysian	UCD
Nur Suhada	Malaysian	UCD
Olabisi Ojo	Nigerian	UCC
Omari Kiruwale	Tanzanian	UCD
Paul O'Keeffe	Irish	ICOS
Paul Rollan	Irish	UCD
Peter Molloy	Irish	GCD
Phruaksa Lawongsa	Thai	UCC
Qi Wang	Chinese	DIT
Qianling Zhou	Chinese	DIT
Qiaohuan Cheng	Chinese	DIT
Rakesh Dontireddy	Indian	UCC
Rongbing Yang	Chinese	NUIG
Rose Miyombo	Zambian	UCD
Rotimi Adebari (Cllr)	Nigerian	Optimum Point
Ruizhi Liao	Chinese	UCC
Ruiwei Zhu	Chinese	UCC
Saeid Daneshgar	Iranian	UCC
Sajdah	Saudi	UCC

Salma Yusop	Malaysian	UCC
Sarah Holt	American	UCD
Sendoyi Mulonda	Zambian	TCD
Shadreck Mukuba	Zambian	UCD
Shahzad Quidwai	Pakistani	TCD
Shane Andaloc	Irish	UCD
Sharbhanu Dastidar	Indian	WIT
Shazlina Johari	Malaysian	UCC
Sheila Power	Irish	ICOS
Siti Ismail	Malaysian	UCD
Sreenath Chandran	Indian	NUIG
Srinivas Suda	Indian	UCC
Stomin Hudson	Tanzanian	UCD
Suzanne Buckley	Irish	UCC
Taddele Belay	Ethiopian	UCC
Ted De Barbieri	American	UCC
Thanasit Thamsiroj	Thai	UCC
Theresia Kuiwite	Tanzanian	UCD
Tirhas Gebremedhin	Ethiopian	TCD
Tong Li	Chinese	DIT
Veneranda Mtobesya	Tanzanian	UCD
Wen Wu	Chinese	UCC
Wenbin Chen	Chinese	UCC
Woldemariam Irkon	Ethiopian	UCC
Worawut Khunsin	Thai	UCC
Xu Hao	Chinese	AIT
Ye Tian	Chinese	DIT
Yiling Liu	Chinese	DIT
Yupeng Liu	Chinese	DIT
Zhao Kim	Chinese	UCC





**“Diverse Voices: International Students in Irish Higher Education”** University College Cork, November 17.

Hosted by the Irish Council for International Students and kindly supported by the Department of Education & Science

### **PROGRAMME**

**9:30 AM: Registration**

**10:00 AM: Official Opening Speech & Welcome by Councillor Rotimi Adebari\***, recently elected Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council and **Mr. Mike FitzGibbon\***, Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods, UCC.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

**10:30 AM: Integration and participation: the International Student’s perspective.**

#### **Speakers**

**Neo Zhang\***, Northern Ireland’s International Student of the Year 2007.

**Diane-Sabenacio Nititham\***, Metro Eireann journalist and PhD student, UCD.

**11:10AM: Questions and Answers from the floor.**

**11:30AM: Coffee Break**

**12.00PM: Diversity on Campus: The Students' Union perspective**

**Speakers**

**Manuel Yoacham\***, President Erasmus Student Network, UCD

**Kris McElhinney\***, President University College Cork Students Union.

**Gary Lanigan\***, Vice President & Welfare Officer, Students Union, ITT Dublin.

**1:00PM: Panel discussion & questions from the audience**

**1:30 PM: Lunch**

**WORKSHOPS & DISCUSSIONS**

**2:30 PM: Short presentations on the following topics:**

- **Becoming Involved-Opportunities and Challenges for International Students** presented and facilitated by Loice Kashangura\*, Student Representative for International students, Milltown Institute.
- **Exploring Home Students' Attitudes Towards International Students** presented and facilitated by Ciaran Dunne\*, PhD, Student Dublin City University.
- **Being an International Student in Ireland; Policy Matters** presented and facilitated by Sarah Holt\*, International Study Coordinator, International Office, University College Dublin.

**3:15 PM: Parallel workshops**

#### **4:00 PM: Plenary Reports from Parallel Workshops**

#### **Questions and Answers from the floor**

#### **4:45 PM: Closing Remarks**

#### **5:00PM: Multicultural Reception**

#### **Profile of Speakers and facilitators**

\***Rotimi Adebari** became the first black mayor in the Republic of Ireland when he was elected Mayor of Portlaoise in June 2007. The new mayor said his election was proof that Ireland is not just a country of a thousand welcomes, but it is a country of equal opportunity.

Elected as a Councillor in 2004, Nigerian born Mr Adebari has a Masters degree in Intercultural Studies from Dublin City University. He is involved in many intercultural organisations working in close co-operation with government agencies to bring about a further understanding of the many cultures that are now found in Ireland and how future changes can be planned for in advance.

\***Mike FitzGibbon** took his primary degree in Maths Science. After a decade spent working in engineering, principally in the electronics sector, he spent a number of years working in development in East Africa, after which he took an MSc in Rural Development, with a particular focus on developing country issues. He worked with the Higher Education Equality Unit for four years at the turn of the millennium, in the areas of ethnicity and interculturalism; at this time, he also worked in the International Famine Centre, a centre set up around the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine, researching issues around food insecurity and famine.

Mike now works within the Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods, in the Food Business and Development Department in UCC. He lectures on the new BSc in International Development programme, covering topics such as international

development, conflict and peace, and communications and development. Current research areas include the uses of information and communication technologies in development, in particular as a means of addressing social deprivation, and strategies that mitigate against the spread of HIV-AIDS.

\***Neo Zhang**, Northern Ireland's International Student of the Year 2007, studied Management at Queens University. He beat off stiff competition from more than 2000 students, representing 130 nationalities, to win the award. The first Chinese national to become a student officer at Queen's, Neo has been active in promoting multi-culturalism and diversity by organising events, writing articles for the University's newspapers and presenting a talk-show on Queen's Radio.

As Deputy Convenor of the National Union of Students and Student Union of Ireland (NUS-USI), he organised a cross-campus "Multicultural Awareness Training" event, which resulted in his being asked to help translate a prisoners' handbook into Mandarin and Cantonese. He also served as NUS-USI's Student Volunteering Officer. During his internship with Invest Northern Ireland he was voted Best Newcomer 2006 by his colleagues, in recognition of both his work performance and his commitment to voluntary activities.

\***Diane-Sabenacio Nititham**, a Filipina/Thai American, is pursuing a PhD in Women's Studies at University College Dublin. Her research focuses on meanings of home for Filipina migrant workers in the Irish care industry. She is a co-convenor of the Feminist Reading Interrogative Group and has co-organised seminars and conferences in Women's Studies, UCD. Diane has a BA in Communication with an emphasis in media and cultural studies and an MA in Social and Cultural Foundations in Education from DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. Diane contributes articles on a regular basis to Metro Eireann Newspaper.

\***Manuel Yoacham**, BA in Social Sciences student, UCD. Manuel, who comes from Chile, has been studying in Ireland for the past 5 years. He has played an active role in student life. He advocates to work with international students,

rather than for them. He is the President of the Erasmus Student Network in UCD and is also the International Officer for the Students Union.

**\*Kris McElhinney**, a recent graduate of UCC, is the current Students' Union President in UCC. During the 4 years which he spent studying in UCC, he held a variety of positions. As well as founding the Journalism society, sitting on both the Societies and Clubs Executive, Kris has also held office with a number of political societies. This was then followed last year by serving as the Societies President in UCC.

**\*Gary Lanigan**, graduate in the BA in Business Management from the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT), Dublin, is currently the Vice President/Welfare Officer in the Students' Union, ITT.

Gary's priorities as Welfare Officer include; campaigning for improved student safety amidst the recent attacks on innocent students; highlighting the ever increasing problems surrounding alcohol such as drink driving and unwanted pregnancy. Since joining the Students Union in Tallaght, Gary has dealt with a lot of cases from both home students and international students. Over the summer, Gary along with 11 other people made up of ITT staff and students, made the long trip to Kenya where he spent 2 weeks volunteering. The voluntary work involved visiting some deprived parts of the country. As part of the volunteer work, Gary distributed donations and helped to teach children.

**\*Loice C. Kashangura**, a Zimbabwean student who is currently completing her final year of the BA in Theology and Anthropology at Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, was appointed the institution's International Student Representative. Loice is a professionally qualified secondary school teacher and has taught in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda. Other areas of interest and courses undertaken include; Creative group facilitation, gender-based violence/child protection in humanitarian agencies, working together-managing

human interactions and dealing with conflict. Loice has engaged in extensive development work to empower disadvantaged women in Uganda and Zimbabwe.

\***Ciarán Dunne** holds a BA in International Marketing and Languages, and an MA in Intercultural Studies from DCU. He is currently in the final year of his PhD, which focuses on the barriers to, and facilitators of, intercultural contact from the perspective of host culture students in an Irish university.

Ciarán lectures in Intercultural Communication and Spanish Language in DCU and has completed courses on 'Strategic Planning for Campus Diversity' and 'Creating the New Intercultural Campus' while working as an intern at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in the United States. His main research interests are cultural diversity in higher education and the internationalisation of higher education.

\***Sarah Holt** works in the International Office at University College Dublin, where she assists international students who are making the transition to the Irish higher education system.

Sarah has a BA in English and German from Bowdoin College, USA, an MPhil in Anglo-Irish Literature from Trinity College Dublin and an MA in Intercultural Studies from Dublin City University. Her interests are integration of international students and intercultural learning. Sarah has been an international student in Sri Lanka, Germany and Ireland.

\***Hamidreza Khodabakhshi** studied Structural Engineering at Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), where he served as Vice President in charge of Academic and Student Affairs at DIT Students' Union. Now USI Education Officer, Hamidreza's priorities for campaigning include securing improved access to Higher Education, improved grants and supports for all students, greater inclusion of

students from lower income backgrounds, minority backgrounds, students with disabilities, mature Students and international students.

Hamidreza sits on educational bodies such as the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) and the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN). He is the officer with special responsibility for academic and European Affairs and also chairs USI's Education Working Group.



The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) is an independent non-profit network of educational institutions, NGOs and individuals interested in international education and working with government and other agencies to promote good policies and best practice in relation to the recruitment, access and support of international students in Irish education.

What are ICOS' Key Aims?

- o Promoting the rights and entitlements of international students
- o Promoting good practice and professional standards in the quality of service offered to international students in Irish educational institutions
- o Promoting the role of international education in contributing to global understanding and human development

How is ICOS governed?

ICOS is governed by a Council made up of its members and to which it reports annually at its AGM. This body decides on broad strategy and membership issues and elects an Executive Committee to oversee the implementation of its work programme.

## Council Members

### Member Institutions

- American College Dublin
- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Ashfield College Dublin
- Ballsbridge College of Further Education



- Dublin Business School/ LSB College
- Dublin City University
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- English Language Institute
- Galway- Mayo Institute of Technology
- Griffith College Dublin
- International Study Institute Ireland
- Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
- Institute of Technology Sligo
- Institute of Technology Tallaght
- Institute of Technology Tralee
- Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland
- Milltown Institute
- National College of Art and Design
- National College of Ireland
- National University of Ireland Galway
- National University of Ireland Maynooth
- Portobello College Dublin
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
- Shannon College of Hotel Management
- Tipperary Institute
- Trinity College Dublin
- Union of Students in Ireland
- University College Cork

- University College Dublin
- University of Limerick
- Waterford Institute of Technology

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