

## **College closure crisis: ICOS calls for immigration solutions and education meeting**

**Four weeks to the day after the first group of students were hit by a college closing its doors – and on the day that a first meeting will be held between immigration officials and student representatives – the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) is calling for immigration solutions to be put in place that can quickly bring relief on a growing number of student hardship situations, followed by an early meeting with officials from the Department of Education and Skills.**

“Each passing day with no classes is a problem for *all* affected students,” says Dave Moore, ICOS spokesperson. “However, we are increasingly encountering situations of acute hardship where students have been left without valid immigration permissions as a result of the college closure crisis.”

“All non-EU students are required to obtain a Certificate of Registration (GNIB card) by registering with the authorities within three months of arrival – and to renew periodically as their studies progress. To do so they need various paperwork, such as proof of enrolment with a functioning college and a statement from an Irish bank account showing proof of funds,” explains Moore. “For the most recently arrived students this is impossible – they have no valid letter from a college and no scope to open a bank account, which a college would usually provide documentation for. Some students arrived to find colleges already closed, many who did get a few classes before the closures did not manage to get all the documents they needed to register in time.”

“Some students are already out of status under the temporary immigration permission in their passports, others will be in this situation in a matter of days. A further group of students due to renew their permissions at this time are now stuck as well. They not only have no classes, they head toward the summer break facing the prospect of becoming undocumented.”

“The tight funds many students operate on are dwindling fast,” says Moore. “For those with no classes, no GNIB card and so scope to take part time work, the situation soon becomes acute. We are already looking at issues of homelessness and real financial hardship.”

“One basic relief for these students would be to ensure that all those affected have their immigration permissions made valid to 1<sup>st</sup> September, not just those who were already documented until that time, which is the present guidance. This needs a crisis response desk to deal with undocumented students.”

“Fundamentally, students want to study. Immigration solutions are partial solutions in this situation but they are urgently needed. ICOS urges the authorities to act swiftly to resolve these issues and to move forward with addressing the wider educational issues.”

“With hundreds of students displaced, we hope that Department of Education officials will follow the lead of immigration officials and meet with student representatives as a matter of urgency,” concludes Moore.

## TIMELINE ON COLLEGE CLOSURES

Date	Development
Thu 13/2/14	Eden College has state accreditation as language school withdrawn, pending appeal - <a href="#">Irish Independent coverage</a>
Tue 25/02/14	Eden College loses appeal over withdrawal of state accreditation; dropped from membership by MEI language schools group - <a href="#">Irish Independent coverage</a>
Sun 12/04/14	Sunday Times publishes investigation with undercover reporter into 7 colleges over willingness to abuse study visa system. Article poses serious questions for Eden College and 3 others (BCT, Millennium and New Media College)
Mon 14/04/14	<a href="#">Closure of Kavanagh College</a> is notified to students in late evening email
Tue 15/04/14	Kavanagh College students arrive to find doors shut - <a href="#">Evening Herald coverage</a>
Wed 16/04/14	<a href="#">INIS announces suspension of four colleges, including Eden College, from issue of visas and residence permits</a> following Sunday Times revelations
Thu 17/04/14	Staff of Irish Business School issued with <a href="#">letter</a> stating it is wholly separate from Eden College, with which it shares building
Fri 25/04/14	Closure of Eden College advised to staff late afternoon, many students unaware through weekend
Mon 28/4/14	ICOS on the ground to support affected students from early morning; more than 300 students seeking information and advice - <a href="#">Evening Herald coverage</a>
Tue 29/4/14	Eden College contents stripped overnight.
Thu 01/05/14	Closure of Irish Business School announced to staff and students late afternoon; <a href="#">students call Gardai</a> seeking to prevent removal of evidence; ICOS on ground late evening
Fri 02/05/14	ICOS on the ground to support affected students, at least 200 in attendance, many student voices in media over weekend - <a href="#">Evening Herald coverage</a> . Some students emerge as having been transferred from Eden to IBS following visa suspension of former.
Sun 04/05/14	Sunday Times exposes <a href="#">hidden link between Eden College and Irish Business School (IBS)</a>

### NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) is an independent organisation, founded in 1970, advocating for the rights of all international students in Ireland, whether studying in higher education, further education, in a language school or other setting.

Contrary to some reporting, neither Kavanagh College, Eden College nor Irish Business School (IBS) were closed by the Irish authorities. In each case, the owners announced the closure of the operation and appear to have simply walked away.

Representatives of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) are meeting today with student leaders from the three closed colleges. This meeting will take place at IBAT College from 11am.