

**IRISH COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**SUBMISSION**

**WHITE PAPER ON OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AID**

JUNE, 2005

## **SUBMISSION:**

### **WHITE PAPER ON OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT (2005)**

#### **1. *Introduction***

This submission is made on behalf of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS). ICOS was established in 1970 to promote the welfare of international students in Ireland and its mission is to enhance the quality and the benefits of international education in Ireland by providing expert support services to international students and the institutions which host them. ICOS is an independent, non-profit organisation with over 40 members made up largely of representatives of Irish universities and institutes of technology. ICOS's mission statement and list of current members are attached as appendices.

One of ICOS' main responsibilities over the years has been to collaborate with the Department of Foreign Affairs and more specifically with Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) in the management of the Fellowship Training Programme (FTP). The FTP attempts to fill capacity deficits in the programme countries through the sponsorship of well placed individuals to undertake programmes of study abroad mostly at post-graduate level.

ICOS welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on Ireland's ODA programme and while the organisation will make a few general comments on the aid programme overall, the focus of its commentary will be on the on-going potential of the Fellowship Training Programme (FTP) to contribute to the development process and to Ireland's wider Foreign and International Education Policy objectives.

#### **2. *General Comments:***

ICOS would like to confirm its ongoing support for Ireland's Development Cooperation Policy as elaborated in the 2002 Review and subsequently adopted by Government. We would like the White Paper to reiterate this policy and ensure a continuing focus on poverty reduction and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals as the guiding principles behind all our aid efforts.

ICOS is disappointed, however, that the Government has reneged on its promise to allocate 0.7% of GNP to development by 2007 despite the widespread public support in Ireland for such a commitment. ICOS would like to see a new commitment to the 0.7% target and a new timeframe for its implementation.

### **3. Fellowship Training Programme (FTP)**

#### **3.1 Policy**

The FTP contributes to Ireland Aid's overall strategy aimed at capacity building in the programme countries. The FTP also reflects the basic needs orientation of Ireland's overall ODA programme and names its priority areas for fellowship support as Primary Health Care, Education, Technical and Vocational Training, Agriculture and Rural Development, Engineering, Public Administration, Management Skills, Human Rights/Good Governance and IT skills.<sup>1</sup>

ICOS supports this policy and the renewed commitment to the FTP contained in the 2002 Review. However, in practice, many policy and management issues in relation to the FTP which have been previously aired have never been comprehensively addressed and the numbers of fellowships being awarded in recent years have declined for reasons which are unclear.

*ICOS would like to see greater engagement between DCI and interested stakeholders about the potential of the FTP and some deeper and broader research into its long-term benefits and impact. The last review of the FTP was carried out in 1999.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **3.2 Conflict Resolution, Democracy and Human Rights**

Development and the aid effort in many countries is undermined by the presence of internal conflict, lack of security and the absence of adequate measures to safeguard human rights. Ireland Aid quite rightly in its 2002 review places a new policy focus on "governance, democracy and human rights" and seeks to develop strategies for strengthening civil society organisations in the programme countries and elsewhere. Because of its own history of conflict, on-going experience of peace building, and active civil society Ireland is in a unique position to offer quality education and training opportunities and experiences in this area. Such opportunities are already well subscribed to by other international students thus offering an unparalleled learning environment for Irish and international students alike. Currently (2004/5), DCI is sponsoring a small number of study fellows from Palestine and Timor Leste on programmes in Human Rights Law and Peace Studies.

*There is great potential for the number of fellowships in these and related areas of study to be increased and ICOS recommends that DCI actively looks at this possibility including broadening the geographical base for such opportunities to include suitably qualified candidates from outside the programme countries.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland Aid: Fellowships Policy (2001)

<sup>2</sup> Review of the Fellowship Training Programme 1999 (R.S.Drayton)

### **3.3 Fellowship Programme and coherence with broader Irish Government Education and Foreign policy objectives**

In November, 2004 the Government launched its report on the Internationalisation of Irish Education Services<sup>3</sup>. The main objective of the report and its recommendations was to identify ways to promote Ireland as a centre of excellence for international education. While driven by the economic argument that international fee revenue is vital for the sustainability and development of financially hard-pressed institutions, the report also acknowledges the social argument for increased internationalisation saying that expansion will promote tolerance and interculturalism and will build networks and contacts to support economic growth, and financial and political co-operation.

In reality, however, the benefits of an international education to the students themselves, to the institutions they work in and to the country at large will be denied to students from sub-Saharan Africa and other lesser developed countries unless there are support mechanisms in place in the form of fellowship and scholarship programmes. The FTP is development focused, nevertheless its wider significance in terms of contributing to the “global education” of both the recipient and the receiving institution should not be overlooked. The presence in our country of talented people from the South contributes to cultural understanding and breaks down barriers of prejudice and superiority as well as providing important and enriching research in development studies and other disciplines.

*ICOS recommends a broadening of the fellowship programme which takes into account its value as a tool in developing the links between Irish and developing country institutions for the greater benefit of both and in the context of the increasing internationalisation of education generally.*

*ICOS also recommends increased support for the development of institutional links in higher education between Ireland and developing countries. Supporting curriculum and staff development, offering joint courses and facilitating staff exchanges and cooperative research will all contribute to capacity development and to increasing the potential for greater involvement of recipient country nationals in the process of their own development.*

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<sup>3</sup> “Internationalisation of Irish Education Services – Report of Interdepartmental Working Group” Nov ’04