



ANNUAL REPORT 2019



Letter from the ICOS Chairperson

It is a great honor and privilege to pen this foreword in my first year as ICOS Chairperson. I would like to acknowledge and thank the previous chair, Ben Finnegan, for his good guidance during his term.

I also thank my colleagues on the ICOS Board who give freely of their time and expertise. We share passionately a common goal to ensure that Ireland remains a safe and welcoming destination for International students. This collegiality and shared purpose is fundamental to the success of ICOS.

ICOS continues to be very proud of our association with Ireland's Fellowship Programme. This programme continues to grow in size and diversity, and it is fantastic to welcome such a range of students to our country and academic institutions.

ICOS is a strong voice for international students and the issues that concern them. While overall the experience is very positive there are a number of areas where Ireland falls short of expectations. A particular and ongoing concern is the availability of affordable and high quality student accommodation. While there have been improvements in immigration services, visas and registration continues to be a source of complaint. ICOS also continues to campaign to maintain affordable insurance for International students which are in danger of substantial increases due to recent legislative changes.

The organisation is a member of five national forums including the High Level Group on Internationalisation. On these forums we actively represent the shared interests of members and International students.

As I write this we are in the depths of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has fundamentally changed the way that we as individuals and organisations communicate and work. This has necessitated a massive shift in mindset, and a need to try to create some sense and normality in an absolutely abnormal situation.

During COVID-19 all students have experienced increased levels of anxiety and feelings of fear. These feelings are magnified for International students who do not have the support of a family structure while studying away from home, and often feel isolated and lonely. ICOS and its members will continue to collaborate to help and support all of our students through this difficult time.

We are incredibly lucky to have such a dedicated and committed team. I thank the team for their hard work throughout the year, and their seamless transfer to the "new norm" during the COVID crisis.

It is clear that the Irish 3rd level sector has risen to the challenges that COVID-19 has brought, and I look forward to working with the ICOS Board, staff, and member institutions to continue meeting and beating these challenges. ICOS will continue to play a pivotal role in higher education and we will work together to ensure an excellent student experience in Ireland for all International students.

Warmest regards,

Shane Mooney

ICOS' work is guided by its Strategic Framework (2017 – 2021). The Strategy was adopted by the ICOS Council at its AGM in 2017 after a period of consultation.

Strategic Goals

In its new strategy, ICOS has articulated four goals against which we will measure our achievements as follows:

1. INFLUENCE POLICY AND STANDARDS

Represent the shared interests of our members and international students to ensure we have a policy environment which is respectful of international students' rights and promotes practices and services that are underpinned by quality and good customer care;

2. BUILD CAPACITY AND VOICE

Strengthen the capacity of our members to deliver quality services to international students while also empowering international students to pursue their rights;

3. SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

Support and showcase the important contribution of international education to international development;

4. STRENGTHEN OUR ORGANISATION

Re-brand and enhance our organisational profile and build a sustainable and well-run membership organisation that is responsive to change.



ICOS is contracted by Irish Aid to provide professional services
in the delivery of Ireland's Fellowship Programme

Review of Activities 2019

1. Influence Policy and Standards

ICOS seeks to act as a voice for both international students and its members in advocating for good policy and practice in international education.

ICOS represents members on the High Level Group which advises and supports the Government on its International Education Strategy. ICOS also represents members on other relevant national forums concerned with student learning and support services ensuring that the international student perspective is considered in all discussions. In 2019, ICOS attended all Quarterly meetings with INIS and GNIB where ICOS members' questions and concerns on student immigration policy and service issues were raised.

The main focus of ICOS' commentary in 2019 was on barriers to internationalisation such as the lack of suitable affordable student accommodation; problems related to private health insurance cover for international students on foot of regulatory changes and immigration policy and customer service issues. ICOS also conducted a focus group on hate crime which formed the basis of its submission to the Department of Justice on hate speech.

Summary:

In 2019, ICOS was represented on and actively contributed to national forums attending over 25 meetings and conferences. Our formal representation includes:

- High Level Group on Internationalisation
- Immigrant Immigration Network (IIN)
- ACELS/QQI Recognition Committee
- Alliance for Affordable Insurance for International Students



2. Build Capacity and Voice

ICOS seeks to strengthen the capacity of our members to deliver quality services to international students while also empowering international students to pursue their rights.

Key activities in 2019:

Training

2019 saw a reduction in the number of training workshops delivered due to the resignation of the Training Manager and the role not being filled again until July 2019. This contributed to an almost 52% reduction in the number of training sessions provided compared to 2018 (16 trainings delivered in 2019 compared to 33 in 2018).

There were some positive developments in 2019, however, that can be built on in future years. Interest in sessions with students – undergraduate and postgraduate, international and domestic – increased, with ICOS delivering sessions to slightly more than 1000 students in 2019 compared to 350 in 2018. These included visa information sessions, as well as sessions that encourage students to reflect on their own culture and appreciate the cultures and cultural diversity among students in their classes.

ICOS also developed a new session for students towards the end of 2019 entitled “Dealing with Culture Shock and Homesickness.” This session was delivered to a group of 25 international students in November and was well-received. It now forms part of ICOS’ offering on our website.

Furthermore, ICOS also held “open” trainings for HEI staff in 2019 for the first time. With training spaces provided by DBS and LIT, ICOS used Eventbrite to advertise and sell tickets to anyone who wished to attend across all institutions and other interested organisations, and this attracted 20 attendees to the Dublin session and 13 to the Limerick session. Building on the success of this strategy in 2019, ICOS plans to hold similar open sessions in 2020.

Finally, ICOS developed a training brochure towards the end of 2019 that was posted to all our member institutions. This brochure outlines all of ICOS’ current training offerings.



Annual Seminar

ICOS hosted a very successful seminar in June 2019 on the theme, “Supporting the Employability of International Students.” An experienced panel of speakers presented relevant research findings and shared their experience on the topic.

Seminar participants heard from representatives from business, employer representatives, recent international student graduates and career consultants. There was also a learning and sharing session for discussion among participants.

The seminar was generously hosted by National College of Ireland. Over 60 participants attended the event.

Information and Advice

ICOS continued to deliver its information and advice service to ICOS members and international students, mediating in a significant number of individual cases involving students who were experiencing problems.

In 2019, ICOS responded to 804 queries, representing a 16% increase on the number of queries handled in 2018. The most frequently raised issues were agency closure (214), immigration and visas (123) and disputes with schools (111).

11 calls or referrals were recorded as being received from Citizens Information Services.

In 2019, ICOS introduced a new case management system called 'Salesforce'. ICOS received a donation of licences through the Salesforce Non-Profit scheme.

Table: Information and Advice queries and casework 2019

ICOS Support to Public 2019													
Query Type	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Academic	6	3	9	4	3	3	5	2	0	2	1	1	39
Accessing a service	0	1	1	0	3	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	10
Accommodation	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	10
Agency Dispute	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	7
Agency Closure	1	0	0	1	0	171	13	0	2	24	0	2	214
Course Fees	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
Course Query	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	2	3	13
Employment	1	2	2	3	3	4	2	2	4	5	4	0	32
Family Reunification	1	0	2	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	10
Fellowship	11	3	4	7	1	1	4	5	1	2	1	2	42
Hate Crime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human Rights	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ILEP	1	0	0	3	1	2	2	1	0	3	0	1	14
INIS	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	5
Insurance	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	3	2	9
Internship	1	0	7	2	1	0	1	2	0	2	3	0	19
Media	1	0	4	2	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	13
Membership	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NGO	0	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	9
Racism	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5
Research	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Scholarship	2	4	4	3	3	1	2	2	4	4	0	1	30
School Closure	0	4	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	10
School Dispute	11	9	17	11	11	8	5	6	11	9	8	5	111
Special Visa Scheme	2	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Stamp 1G	4	0	3	2	2	1	0	5	3	6	1	0	27
Training	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Undocumented	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	5
Visa Query	9	10	19	13	12	4	7	13	13	11	8	4	123
Visa Registration	0	1	1	3	3	0	1	1	3	3	6	3	22
Volunteer	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total queries	54	46	86	64	59	203	44	42	46	84	47	29	804

3. Support International Development through Higher Education

In 2019, ICOS continued its collaboration with Irish Aid on the management of the Fellowship Programme having successfully bid for a new contract for services in 2018 until the middle of 2021. The Fellowship Programme offers qualified candidates the opportunity to pursue masters' level studies in disciplines relevant to their countries' development priorities.

On the operational front, for the Irish Aid Fellowship Training Programme (FTP), ICOS processed 189 applications for 2019 entry during January-March. ICOS then provided placement and associated support to 70 FTP candidates during May-September who were put forward by the Fellowship Selection Committee in April 2019.

ICOS also provided placement and associated support for seven additional Fellowship strands – the Courtney Fellowship for Burundi (1 application), IDEAS Scholarship for Vietnam (31 applications), the Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme for South Africa (16 applications), the Roger Casement Fellowship for Nigeria (1 application), the Ireland-Palestine Scholarship Programme (35 applications), the new Frank Ferguson Fellowship (1 application), and the Séan MacBride Fellowship (2 applications). A total of 169 applicants were supported across all seven Fellowship strands.

The final incoming number of awardees across all strands for 2019 was 122 for whom ICOS arranged flights, short-term accommodation and orientation briefings. Long-term accommodation in student residences was arranged by ICOS for 95% of 2019 incoming Fellows. ICOS organised the annual Irish Aid Fellowship Orientation Day which was held on 21 September in the Herbert Park Hotel in Ballsbridge, and was attended by 121 of the 122 newly arrived 2019/20 Fellows. Mr. Brendan Farrell represented the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade and delivered remarks welcoming the fellows.

ICOS also supports the development of Irish Aid's fellowship alumni networks. The main objective is to further develop, support and maintain a functioning alumni network for fellowships supported by Irish Aid, including not just FTP fellows, but also those supported by other Fellowship programmes, including IDEAS and Kader Asmal.

Key activities in this respect are the maintenance of an alumni contact database and alumni web page, but ICOS also continues to moderate and post on a social networking group via Facebook for Ireland's Fellowship Programme alumni which now has 697 followers (+ 17% on December 2018). ICOS also continues to monitor an Ireland's Fellowship Programme alumni group on LinkedIn, which had 134 members at the end of 2019 (+ 28% on December 2018). managing a database of 1909 (+7%) records and moderating a Facebook group which had 709 (+42%) followers at the end of 2019.

ICOS provided administrative and welfare support for all new and continuing Irish Aid fellows and continues to receive very high satisfaction ratings with over 95% of fellows finding the post-arrival briefing session by ICOS' Programme Officers to be helpful. 97% indicated their satisfaction with the level of support provided by ICOS in the immediate weeks following their arrival.



Summary:

Services provided by ICOS to Irish Aid Fellowship Programmes

- Financial and administrative services
- Coordination of placement of fellows on academic programmes
- Pre-and post-arrival information, orientation and briefings to fellows
- Travel and logistics service
- Immigration assistance and advice
- Accommodation queries and assistance
- Social and cultural events
- On-going support, advice, information and trouble-shooting
- Tracking studies of fellows post-completion of studies
- Production of tailored directories of eligible courses and supporting application materials for each fellowship pathway
- Public information and communications through dedicated website and case studies
- Support for the development of local alumni networks for the fellowship programme

Outcomes

The overall objective of the Fellowship Programme for the contract period is to strengthen the institutional capacity of development partners in countries benefitting from Irish Aid support through the provision of higher education opportunities. The indicators developed for this objective relate to:

Indicator 1: The relevance of the research carried out by study Fellows and dissemination of results;

An analysis of research topics undertaken by the 2018/19 group of fellows would suggest a high degree of relevance to Irish Aid's priorities. Of the 51 thesis titles available, the main fields of research can be grouped under Finance/Economics/Business (25%), and Sociology / Politics / International Relations, Agriculture / Environment / Geography and Human Rights & Democracy / Peace and Reconciliation / Law (all on 16%).

Indicator 2: The contribution of study Fellows to policy development in relevant fields in their own countries on return;

At the post six-month mark since returning to their employment, 30% of respondents reported that they have had the opportunity to formally present or publish their thesis findings and 28% of all respondents reported that some of their thesis recommendations had been implemented or were in the process of being considered for implementation.

Indicator 3: The achievement of honours degrees by a high proportion (at least 85%) of study Fellows.

90% achieved either first class honours or upper second class honours.

4. Strengthen our Organisation

ICOS made significant progress in strengthening our organisation in 2019.

Governance

Strengthening ICOS' Board and following best practice in terms of governance of the organisation remains a priority for ICOS. Three new members were elected to the ICOS Board at the AGM in 2019 while Ben Finnegan (MU) continued to Chair the organisation until December when Shane Mooney assumed the role of Chair. Sally-Anne McIver (Griffith College) and Audrey Byrne (DCU) continued in their roles as Vice-Chairperson and Company Secretary respectively while Sheila Mahon (NCI) took up the role of Treasurer until December.

The board agreed to establish a Finance & Governance Committee in early 2020.

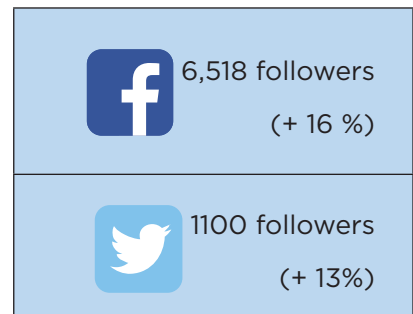
ICOS was granted Charitable Status by the Charities Regulator in 2018 and progress was made towards compliance with the Finance & Governance Committee overseeing a compliance checklist and new procedures being established.

Communications and Policy

In 2019, ICOS continued to build on its new website including maintaining the “Know your Rights” sections, designed to raise students' awareness regarding their rights in an accessible way.

ICOS provided regular updates to its members through the ICOS newsletter, and kept international students informed on relative news updates through ICOS' social media. The number of 'likes' and follows on our social media channels continued to grow markedly throughout the year.

ICOS made policy submissions to the Department of Education in relation to the reform of the Higher Education Authority Act 1971, and the Department of Justice's review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989.



Membership

ICOS had 31 members at the end of 2019. One new member, IBAT college was admitted at the AGM in June.

Staffing

ICOS had a number of staffing changes in 2019. In August, Sheila Power, who had been the Director of ICOS for 14 years retired, and was replaced by a new Executive Director, Sarah Lennon.

Additionally, the Programme & Training Manager resigned her position following her maternity leave and the acting Programme Manager was offered the post on a permanent basis. The vacancy at Programme & Communications Officer was filled internally and ICOS also added a Programme Assistant to its staff complement.

Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

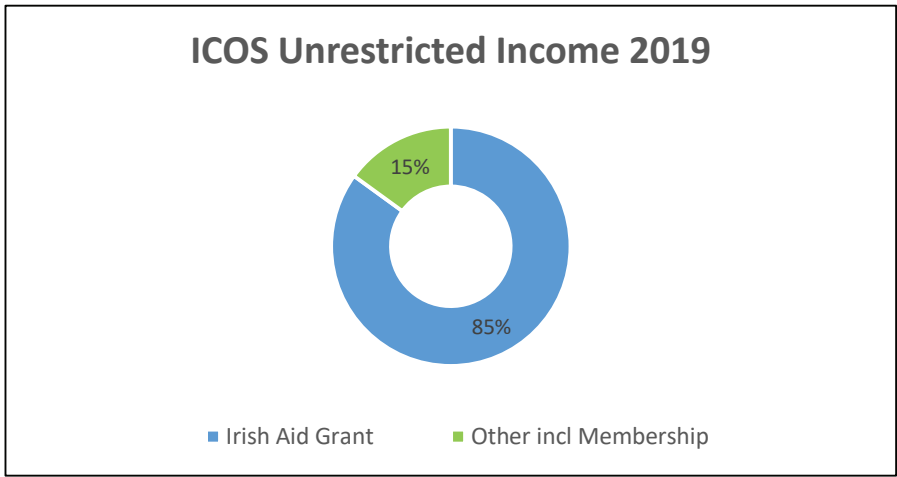
ICOS is a signatory to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, which provides a framework for organisations to refer to when designing and implementing their public communications strategy.

Balance Budget

In 2019, ICOS had income of €3,882,228 and expended €3,879,754 on the delivery of services resulting in a surplus of €2,474.

ICOS is heavily reliant on the Irish Aid Fellowship Programme, which comprises 85% of our unrestricted income.

A full set of accounts are available to members.



ICOS Council 2019

MEMBER	Representative	Position:
Athlone Institute of Technology	Mary Simpson	Director of International Relations
Ballsbridge College of Further Education	Robert Griffiths	Head of E.F.L.
CCT College Dublin	Neil Gallagher	College President
Champlain College Dublin	Stephen Robinson	Director
Cork Institute of Technology	Carmel Jordan	International Officer
Dublin Business School	Shane Mooney*	Head of Student Experience
Dublin City University	Audrey Byrne*	International Mobilities Officer
Foundation for International Education	Monica Freiband*	Experimental Education Officer
Galway Mayo Institute of Technology	John Joe O'Farrell	Director of International Engagement
Griffith College	Kevin Geoghegan	International Office Director
IBAT College	Finbarr Murphy	Registrar
ICD Business School	Vincent Barry	Director
IES Abroad	Megan Markey	Center Director
Institute for Study Abroad - Butler	Maria Keane	Resident Director
Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire	Denise McMorow	Student Experience Manager
Institute of Technology Carlow	Donal McAlister	International Affairs Manager
Institute Of Technology Tralee	Edward Scully	International Manager
International School of Business	Francis Kelly*	Director
Limerick Institute of Technology	Cliona Campbell*	International Manager
Mary Immaculate College	Holly Cowman	Director
Maynooth University	Claire Doran*	Director of Internationalisation
National College of Ireland	Sheila Mahon*	International Officer
NUI Galway	Louise Kelly	International Student Officer
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	Corriena Brien	Student Services Manager
TU Dublin	Arnaud Teyssou*	International Recruitment Manager
TU Dublin (Blanchardstown Campus)	Mairead Murphy	Marketing & Development Manager
TU Dublin (Tallaght Campus)	Stella Browne	
Trinity College Dublin	Louise Staunton*	International Student Experience and Global Officer Manager
Union of Students in Ireland	Megan Reilly*	Vice President for Equality and Citizenship
University College Cork	Suzanne Buckley	Support Officer for International Students
University College Dublin	Caroline Mangan*	Global Experience Manager
University of Limerick	Josephine Page	Director
Waterford Institute of Technology	Sinead Day	International Affairs Manager

*board member

Individual Honorary members

Ms Alice Grattan Esmonde

Professor Brian McMurry



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