

Mr Alan Shatter T.D.
Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence
Minister's Office
94 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

16 November, 2012

Re: Doubling of GNIB Registration fee to €300 from 19th November

Dear Minister Shatter,

Members of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) have asked me to convey to you in the strongest possible terms their shock and dismay that the GNIB Registration Certificate fee has been increased by 100% with effectively no notice and without reference to the impact of a sudden fee increase on international students themselves, the educational institutions who are supporting them and indeed on Ireland's own International Education Strategy which they now feel is being undermined.

ICOS would urge you, as the responsible Minister, to reconsider this decision and especially the timing of the implementation of any change. There are many reasons why ICOS is making this request, not least because:-

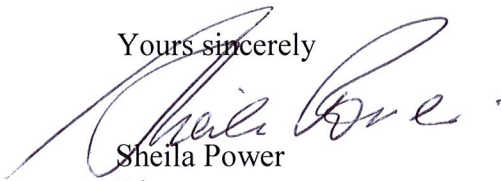
- It is totally unfair and inequitable to the international students themselves and the institutions who invite them here to introduce this kind of change without adequate and proper notice. Effectively some non-EEA students on the same programmes will be paying double the fee of peers who luckily manage to register before 19th November.
- The professional reputation of Irish HEIs is damaged when they are put in the position of issuing inaccurate information on costs to students who have recently come to Ireland or are preparing to come here in the near future.
- If this is an income generation initiative by the Government, it could backfire if non-EEA students considering Ireland as an educational destination begin to ask 'what next?' when they learn of this fee hike and the manner of its introduction.
- Many commentators in the industry had noted the potential for Ireland to attract more students based on the apparent disarray and confusion in the UK on student immigration matters. Instead, Ireland's potential advantage is being undermined by this sudden and dramatic registration fee increase.
- What is the function of the High Level Group which advises the Government on implementation of its International Education Strategy if it is not consulted on matters of this importance and potential impact on that strategy?

This is not an exhaustive reflection of the reaction that ICOS has been receiving from its member colleges. The mood and tone of that reaction is perhaps best captured in the excerpts from emails collated on the attached page.

ICOS has previously recognised and continues to support the good work that has been done in recent years by the Government led by the Department of Education and Skills in ensuring that Ireland has a coherent International Education Strategy that is well supported by stakeholders, including your Department. It is regrettable that this united and coordinated approach is being undermined by a lack of constructive debate and consultation on this important issue. It is not too late to postpone your decision on the GNIB fee increase and we would ask you to do so.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheila Power', written over the typed name.

Sheila Power
Director

Cc Mr Ruairi Quinn T.D., Minister for Education and Skills
Mr Ciáran Cannon, T.D., Minister of State in the Department of Education and Skills

ICOS is a representative association of over two dozen higher educational institutions and ngos interested in international education and promoting the rights of international students in Ireland. www.icosirl.ie

Sample ICOS member reaction to the GNIB Registration fee hike for non-EEA students and other legal residents in Ireland due to take effect on 19th November, 2012

“We would strongly urge for a delay until at least January. We all have current students who will be disadvantaged by this decision and it will most certainly undermine our joint efforts in bringing non-EU students to Ireland – e.g. an India mission is about to take off next week, another mission to Vietnam and Malaysia will take place in December. There is also a reputational issue in that we should be able to advise our students well in advance of a change being implemented – how will they feel about the institutions and us professionals within? This is totally unacceptable.”

“I’m shocked. Some students that arrived in September have not yet received their GNIB card and will now experience a higher charge than their peers who have been processed to date. [The Government should] make it fair for these students.”

“Does anyone know what strategy INIS/GNIB were using to let people / institutions know of this change? It seems to me that everyone has been taken by surprise, and there is no official channel for getting the information out except by updating their website.

I’ve emailed the American study abroad community, and none of them knew about it. Not even those embedded within the big Irish universities. And of course they’ve already sent out the information to their incoming students stating the fee is 150 euro.”

“Shocked to hear this. I didn’t know myself, but the office have told me that there is a mini panic among students trying to organise their visa before Monday.”

“This will obviously hit international students very hard. It goes against the spirit of promoting Ireland as a destination for international students. Our institution pays this fee on behalf of the students, so now I have to find an extra 10,000 euro in my budget before January. “

“If a student is in the country for less than 90 days they are not required to register with immigration. One semester only students will now probably try and avoid paying the increased fee and hope it won’t cause problems as they are here for about 90 days (although a semester is just over 90 days plus orientation and any extra days they stay at the end). They will be taking a risk every time they leave the country for travel and we cannot force them to register nor can we keep track of who has registered or not. The appointments this year have been extremely slow and a number of students have still not registered through no fault of their own. It is extremely unfair on these students as just because they didn’t have immediate travel plans they were put to the end of the list and will now have to pay €300.”