

Annual Report



2017



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Foreword

A Cháirde,

It has been a pleasure and privilege to work with ICOS as Chairperson since being nominated by the board in September 2017. It is clear to see that the organisation prides itself on fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity, with a friendly and approachable ethos, which I know is shared right across the entire membership.

In 2017, with a strong new 5-year strategy in place, ICOS continued its advocacy and capacity building work to make Ireland a welcoming and safe place for international students. While there was some progress on quality assurance with the publication in May 2017 of the heads of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill, which will underpin the introduction of the long-awaited International Education Mark, the acute shortage of suitable and affordable student accommodation in major urban areas continued to capture headlines, with students reporting a lot of stress finding a place to live. Meanwhile, immigration services, both for visas and registration, remained a significant source of complaint despite the introduction of online systems, and there were concerns too about private health insurance cover for international students in the context of changing regulations.

Against this backdrop, ICOS continued to actively represent the shared interests of members and international students. In 2017, we were active on five national forums, including the High Level Group on Internationalisation, while our annual seminar explored the accessibility and adequacy of our counselling and wellbeing services for international students. The ICOS/Union of Students in Ireland (USI) jointly organised student forum in April also addressed student wellbeing among other matters, including the accommodation crisis. Meanwhile, there was steady demand throughout the year for ICOS' training, advice, information and mediation services.

ICOS continues to be very proud of its association with the Irish Aid Fellowship Programme, and in 2017 we were happy to be awarded a new contract for services by Irish Aid to the end of 2018. The fellowship programme continues to grow and diversify, and in 2017 Nigeria became the latest country to have a named fellowship: the Roger Casement Fellowship in Human Rights.

I would like to thank the very dedicated ICOS staff team for their hard work, and I offer my thanks also to my colleagues on the ICOS Board who have contributed of their time and expertise to ensure that ICOS makes a positive impact on behalf of international students. I look forward to the year ahead, and to helping ICOS continue to play a pivotal role in higher education in a diverse and inclusive Ireland.

Le dea-mhéin/Warm regards,

Ben Finnegan

Review of Activities

Strategic Goal 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

ICOS seeks to act as a voice for both students and higher education institutions 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 represented members on other relevant national forums concerned with student learning and student support services, ensuring that the international student perspective was considered in all discussions. In 2017, ICOS attended all Quarterly meetings with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), where ICOS members' questions on student immigration policy and service issues were addressed.

The main focus of ICOS' commentary in 2017 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 believes that increased efforts are required to find ways to address the issue of affordability in the short and medium term.

from ICOS' response to the National Student Accommodation Strategy

The HIA ruling provides... the opportunity to find a solution which is fair to non-EEA students and does not disincentivise study in Ireland.



from ICOS' statement on the Health Insurance Authority (HIA) ruling about Private Health Insurance for non-EEA students



Summary of ICOS' Representation

In 2017, ICOS was represented on and actively contributed to national forums, attending over 20 meetings and conferences. Our formal representation includes:

- High Level Group on Internationalisation
- Immigrant Immigration Network (IIN)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Consultative Group
- Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS)/QQI Recognition Committee
- Higher Education Authority (HEA)/Irish Research Council (IRC) Research Project Advisory Group on Study entitled "The Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education"

Strategic Goal 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.

Training



ICOS Programme and Training Manager, Emma Dwyer, at a training session with students of the J.E. Cairns Business School in NUI Galway in September 2017

2017 was a busy year for ICOS in the delivery of our training workshops with a 20% increase in the number of workshops delivered compared to 2016.

In particular, there was an increase in demand for the provision of Intercultural Awareness and Cross Cultural Communication briefings to postgraduate student groups, as well as to undergraduate students travelling abroad for study or volunteering opportunities.

ICOS also delivered tailored workshops on topics specifically requested by members. In 2017, one such workshop focused on mental health support for international students, while another explored working with Chinese students.

Summary

- 11 student workshops on intercultural communication reaching 270 students
- 10 workshops for support and academic staff reaching 130 staff across 6 HEIs
- 3 information and orientation sessions reaching over 300 students

Information and Advice Queries and Casework 2017

Query Type	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Accommodation	2	2	2	0	3	1	3	1	1	1	1	0	17
Course query	5	5	7	2	5	1	0	4	1	2	0	0	32
Fellowship	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	8	6	27
Insurance	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	8
Internship	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	11
Other	4	4	5	2	0	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	28
Scholarship	5	2	1	2	3	0	3	3	3	2	4	1	29
School closure	5	4	3	1	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	21
School dispute	4	18	2	4	5	2	11	7	7	25	15	4	104
Stamp 1G	1	8	6	6	0	6	9	8	5	7	3	1	60
Studying in Ireland	3	4	6	3	1	2	2	2	1	1	10	1	36
Visa	17	24	18	10	5	18	16	10	9	28	18	9	182
Employment	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	5
Report racism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Course fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total queries	52	76	53	32	27	32	45	41	30	84	65	26	563

Casework directly with students keeps ICOS' finger on the pulse of what is happening on the ground, and while we cannot solve all problems, we provide information and support to international students regarding their entitlements, and often mediate on their behalf where there is clear infringement of rights.

ICOS has limited resources to do this work, but seeing justice served, even in a handful of cases, is reward in itself, and a good outcome can make a huge difference for the affected individual(s), and also supports Ireland's reputation as a safe place to study.



ICOS defies its relatively modest resources to contribute and support in a very significant way the needs of a growing subset of the student body.

Gerry O'Sullivan, Higher Education Authority

Annual Seminar



Contributors at ICOS' 2017 Seminar. L-R: Dr Abigail Chantler (HEA), Dr Sharon-Harris Byrne (IT Carlow), Mr Gerry O'Sullivan (HEA), Dr Esther Murphy (TCD), and Mr John Phillips (UCD).

ICOS hosted a very successful seminar in June 2017 on the theme, “Reaching out to International Students – How can student counselling and wellbeing services become more accessible and inclusive?” An experienced panel of speakers presented relevant research findings and shared their experience on the topic.

The Royal Irish Academy in Dublin was a popular venue for the seminar, which was attended by over 60 people.

International Student Forum

In April 2017, in collaboration with USI and Trinity College Dublin's Global Office, ICOS held an international student forum to capture feedback from students on their experience in Ireland with particular reference to their experience of accommodation availability and standards near their place of study.

The forum also explored factors which influence students' wellbeing while in Ireland. 20 international students across 12 colleges participated in the forum. The findings of the forum were captured in a report that was disseminated to stakeholders, and which is also available on ICOS' website at internationalstudents.ie.





I think they do a good job at the orientation week, however there are so many questions throughout the year.



I soon realised that locals don't interact much with international students. I have never been invited into an Irish home or to spend time with them. All my friends are international.



Strategic Goal 3: Support International Development through Higher Education

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

In 2017, ICOS continued its collaboration with Irish Aid on the management of the Fellowship Programme, successfully bidding for a new contract for services to the end of 2018. 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, ICOS processed 131 applications for Irish Aid Fellowships across its seven different strands. Ultimately, 89 fellows were offered awards in Irish higher education institutions, and a further 23 candidates were offered awards in regional institutions. As part of our contract with Irish Aid, ICOS also manages a dedicated website for the Irish Aid fellowship programme, available at

irishaidfellowships.ie. This website greatly enhances the visibility of the fellowship programme and facilitates the transfer of information to all major stakeholders.

ICOS also supports the development of Irish Aid's growing fellowship alumni network, managing a database of 1728 (+20%) records and moderating a Facebook group which had 501 (+43%) followers at the end of 2017. A fellowship LinkedIn group was set up in 2017 and ICOS issued 2 alumni newsletters in July and December 2017.

ICOS provided administrative and welfare support for all new and continuing Irish Aid fellows and continues to receive very high satisfaction ratings (99%) for its services from fellows.

Outcomes

An analysis of results achieved by completing fellows carried out in 2017 highlights the success of the Fellowship Programme, and underlines the fact that Irish Aid is funding worthy candidates in a position to contribute significantly to capacity building upon their return home. 100% of fellows who completed in 2017 received honours grades in their final awards, with 30% achieving 1st class honours. ICOS completed three tracking studies of former fellows in 2017 with encouraging results regarding reported rates of either promotion on return or the assignment of additional responsibilities.



Minister of State for Overseas Development, Joe McHugh, TD, with 2017 fellow Naomi Molefe

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 & communications through dedicated website and case studies

Aliyu Usman, pictured right, is studying for an LLM/MA in Human Rights in Criminal Justice at UL and is one of the seven personal profiles provided to Irish Aid by ICOS for 2017.

Aliyu is the first recipient of the Roger Casement Fellowship in Human Rights for Nigeria. This is a new award commenced by Irish Aid in 2017, which will fund one student from Nigeria each year to study in the area of law and human rights.

All profiles are available online at irishaidfellowships.ie and help to illustrate the role of the fellowship programme in the context of Ireland's overall development aid effort.



Strategic Goal 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.

Governance

Strengthening ICOS' Board and following best practice in terms of governance of the organisation remains a priority for ICOS. Four new members were elected to the ICOS Board at the AGM in 2017, and a new Chairperson, Ben Finnegan (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick), replaced Suzanne Buckley (University College Cork) who had completed her term. Sally-Anne McIver (Griffith College) and Louise Kelly (NUI Galway) continued in their roles as Vice-Chairperson and Treasurer respectively while Audrey Byrne (Dublin City University) took up the role of Company Secretary.

ICOS' application for Charitable Status remained active in 2017 and ICOS had several communications with the Charity Regulator. The process is slower than had been anticipated but indications were positive at the end of the year with a decision expected early in 2018.

Communications

In 2017, ICOS continued to update its website, which provides important information in a number of areas, including on studying in Ireland for international students and on ICOS' services for members.

Tendering for major re-development work on a new website, which had been planned for 2016, was completed with development work due to start early in 2018.



5287 page likes (+13%)



773 followers (+53%)

ICOS' social media profile and activity grew steadily in 2017, and this will continue to be a strong arm of our communications strategy into the future.

Membership

ICOS had 32 members at the end of 2017, which is no change on 2016. One new member, ICD Business School, was admitted at the AGM in June, while one existing member, IT Sligo, decided not to renew its membership.

Staffing

ICOS enjoyed a relatively stable staffing situation in 2017 with just one staff change: the appointment of a new Programme Officer, Brian Hearne, in July to replace Shannette Budhai, who resigned. ICOS' full-time staff equivalent is just under 4.5.

National and International Networking

ICOS keeps up to date and maintains its international profile through membership of the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) and the European Association for International Education (EAIE). At national level, ICOS is involved in a number of networking forums including the Immigrant Information Network, which regularly meets with officials in the GNIB and INIS. ICOS is also a member of Dóchas and the Wheel.

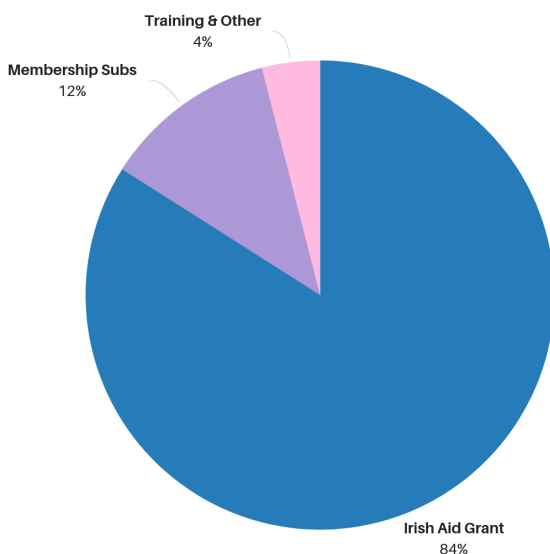
Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

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.

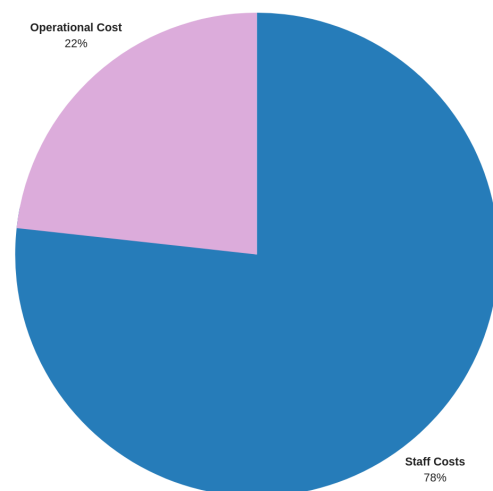
Balance Budget

In 2017, ICOS had income of €2,408,018 and expended €2,408,429 on the delivery of services, resulting in a deficit of just €411, which was comfortably below our planned deficit of €1,613. Our unrestricted income of €279,559 shows a continuing high reliance on our Irish Aid contact fee (83.6%) to support our operations. Direct programme costs (restricted to fellowship funding) accounted for 88% of our turnover in 2017.

Unrestricted Income 2017



ICOS' Expenditure 2017



Summary of Accounts at 31 December 2017

Statement of Financial Activities

	Restricted Funds 2017	Unrestricted Funds 2017	Total 2017	Total 2016
Income and Endowments from:				
Charitable activities	2,128,459	234,246	2,362,705	2,178,789
Other trading activities	-	45,300	45,300	47,480
Finance income	-	13	13	28
Total Income	2,128,459	279,559	2,408,018	2,226,297
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	-	-	-	-
Charitable activities	2,128,459	279,971	2,408,430	2,214,996
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditure	2,128,459	279,971	2,408,430	2,214,996
Net Income / (Expenditure)	-	(412)	(412)	11,301
Total funds brought forward	-	177,695	177,695	166,394
Total funds carried forward	-	177,283	177,283	177,695

Statement of Financial Position

	2017	2016
Non-Current Assets		
Tangible assets	1,055,684	1,058,759
Current Assets		
Receivables	78,372	56,628
Cash and cash equivalents	1,741,447	1,135,466
Payables: amounts falling due within 1 year	(1,778,354)	(1,153,292)
Net Current Assets	41,465	38,802
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	1,097,149	1,097,561
Funds		
Unrestricted funds	1,097,149	1,097,561
Restricted funds	-	-
Total Funds	1,097,149	1,097,561

Approved by the Board: 14 June 2018

Main Institutional Representatives & Individual Members

ICOS Council, December 2017

*ICOS Board member

Athlone Institute of Technology	Ms Mary Simpson	Manager, International Office
Ballsbridge College of Further Education	Mr Robert Griffiths	Head of EFL
Champlain College Dublin	Dr Stephen Robinson	Onsite Director
College of Computing Technology	Mr Neil Gallagher	College Director
Cork Institute of Technology	Ms Carmel Jordan*	International Officer
Dublin Business School	Mr Shane Mooney*	Head of Student Experience
Dublin City University	Ms Audrey Byrne*	Senior International Officer
Dublin Institute of Technology	Mr Arnaud Teyssou*	International Recruitment Manager
Dun Laoghaire IADT	Mr Denise McMorro	Student Experience Manager
Foundation for International Education	Mr Karl Dowling	Resident Director
Galway-Mayo IT	Mr John Joe O'Farrell	Director of International Engagement
Griffith College	Ms Sally-Anne McIver*	Office Manager, International Office
ICD Business School	Mr Vincent Barry	Director
IES Abroad	Ms Megan Markey	Centre Director
Institute for Study Abroad - Butler	Ms Maria Keane	Resident Director
International School of Business	Mr Francis Kelly*	Director
IT Blanchardstown	Ms Mairead Murphy	Marketing Manager
IT Carlow	Mr Eoin O'Brien	International Officer
IT Tallaght	Ms Stella Browne	International Office
IT Tralee	Mr Eddie Scully	International Education Officer
Limerick Institute of Technology	Ms Cliona Campbell	Marketing & Internationalisation Manager
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	Mr Ben Finnegan*	International Officer
Maynooth University	Ms Claire Doran	Director of Internationalisation
National College of Ireland	Ms Sheila Mahon*	International Officer
NUI Galway	Ms Louise Kelly*	International Student Officer
Royal College of Surgeons	Ms Corriena Brien	Student Services Manager
Trinity College Dublin	Ms Louise Staunton*	Global Office Coordinator
Union of Students in Ireland	Ms Síona Cahill*	Vice President for Equality and Citizenship
University College Cork	Ms Suzanne Buckley	International Student Support Officer
University College Dublin	Mr Colin Tannam	International Student Support Officer
University of Limerick	Ms Josephine Page	Director, International Education Division
Waterford IT	Ms Sinéad Day	International Affairs Manager

Individual (Honorary) Members

Ms Alice Grattan Esmonde

Professor Brian McMurry



41 Morehampton Road, Dublin 4, D04 AE28, Ireland.
Tel: +353 1 660 5233 | **Fax:** +353 1 668 2320
Email: office@icosirl.ie | **Web:** internationalstudents.ie
Registered Charity Number: 20101275

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