



**Submission to the Department of Further  
and Higher Education, Research,  
Innovation and Science on the Public  
Consultation on State Supports for PhD  
Researchers**

**March 2023**

## About the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)

This submission is made on behalf of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS). ICOS is an independent advocacy organisation whose mission is to protect and enhance the rights of international students in Ireland while championing their contribution in the places they study and in the communities in which they live.

ICOS has 26 institutional members, including all of the universities in the Republic of Ireland, and many of the Institutes of Technology and independent third level colleges. Our membership also includes the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). ICOS' values include: consultation, collaboration, learning, and accountability, and our goals are to influence policy and standards in international education; build the capacity of our members; empower international students to pursue their rights; and support and showcase the important contribution of international education to international development.

## Introduction

ICOS is pleased to make this submission to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on the Public Consultation on State Supports for PhD Researchers. We believe that the consultation is an important step towards achieving greater equity and equality for PhD researchers in Ireland.

### **1. What, in your view, are the primary challenges facing PhD researchers in Ireland at present and how are these affecting their educational experience and graduate outcomes?**

- PhD researchers in Ireland face many challenges, none more so than the lack of available financial supports. Currently, most PhD researchers receive a stipend, which vary greatly depending on the area of studies and higher education institute (HEI), that is insufficient to meet basic needs.
- PhD researchers make significant contributions to teaching and research at their respective HEIs, yet receive very little recognition, and are considered students.
- PhD researchers are often required to do unpaid work.
- There is a lack of opportunities for PhD researchers to progress into academia in Ireland, while temporary contracts and precarious working conditions are widespread.
- For non-EEA PhD researchers, the barriers they face are even greater due to the conditions attached to their visa (Stamp 2), including:
  - Incurring additional costs while studying in Ireland, for example, accommodation, health insurance, and immigration fees.

- Although some non-EEA PhD researchers are contracted on a Hosting Agreement, most are not, and this creates an added inequity for non-EEA researchers as Stamp 2 visa holders are only permitted to work 20 hours per week.
- The visa (Stamp 2A) granted to spouses of PhD researchers means that they are unable to work which inevitably puts pressure on many PhD researchers and their families.
- The eight-year visa limit for study purposes restricts some students, including PhD researchers, who have studied and made a considerable investment in their education in Ireland, from accessing their Third Level Graduate Programme.
- A lack of career opportunities, and favourable visa conditions, lead many PhD researchers to seek work elsewhere following completion of their studies. This is especially concerning given that Ireland invests in many of these skilled professionals through stipends and scholarships. It also raises questions about diversity and inclusion in the Irish higher education system.
- Non-EEA students have less opportunities to apply for scholarships.

## **2. How can these challenges be best resolved such that educational experience and graduate outcomes are enhanced?**

ICOS endorses the USI's Postgraduate Researchers' Rights Charter which encompasses 16 points:

1. Employee Status for all Postgraduate Researchers
2. Minimum Living Wage
3. Recognition and Payment of Work
4. Support for Teaching and Work
5. Access to Suitable Work Environment and Resources
6. Appropriate Supervision
7. Appeal and Grievances Procedures
8. Affordable and Suitable Accommodation
9. PGR Representation in Decision Making Bodies
10. Right to be Represented by Students, Teaching and Trade Union
11. Non-Discrimination
12. Rights of Non-EEA Postgraduate Researchers
13. Career Development Pathways
14. Equality of Opportunities
15. State Support for the Cost of Postgraduate Courses
16. Open Access

**3. Are there wider ramifications of your proposed solutions?**

N/A

**4. Are there any other issues facing PhD researchers in Ireland at present that are relevant in addition to the six review elements outlined on page 2 and the over-arching Impact 2030 strategy?**

N/A

**5. Is there anything else that you would like the co-chairs to consider?  
Maximum word count: 300**

N/A

**For Further Information Contact:**

Laura Harmon  
Executive Director  
[lharmon@icosirl.ie](mailto:lharmon@icosirl.ie)

Brian Hearne  
Policy and Communications Manager  
[bhearne@icosirl.ie](mailto:bhearne@icosirl.ie)