



New Strategic Framework 2017-2021

1. Introduction

The new strategic framework for 2017-2021 builds on the solid foundations laid out in the last strategy 2012-2016 and the lessons learned during its implementation. ICOS' ambitions remain largely unchanged and our members continue to strongly identify with the organisation's positioning as a national platform which advocates for the rights of international students. This role was strongly emphasised in ICOS' response to the school closure crisis during 2014-15 and will remain important in the context of the delivery of Ireland's new international education strategy, 2016-2020¹.

Our members also recognise the need for continuous self-improvement in their support of international students and look to ICOS to provide a forum for networking and learning opportunities and a source of advice and information on matters impacting on the student experience.

ICOS' ambition to provide the best possible service to Irish Aid in the management of the fellowships programme also remains intact. The fellowship programme is delivering impressive results with excellent candidates selected from Ireland's development partners returning to contribute to their organisations and communities on completion of their studies in Ireland. The fellowship programme also showcases the quality and diversity of programmes available at master's level in Irish higher education institutions.

2. Operating Environment

There have been a number of political and economic developments internationally which give cause for concern with many issues likely to influence international education in the coming years. At international level, members and stakeholders have identified Brexit as having a potentially significant impact on the mobility of students. This impact is likely to be both positive and negative. The increased attractiveness of Ireland to European students is already evident. However, this raises capacity and quality challenges. Brexit has already created uncertainty regarding tuition fees and visa requirements among students from both jurisdictions and it is clear that fewer Irish students will travel to study in the UK. The position of students who cross the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to study will also need to be clarified as the Brexit negotiations continue.

¹ [*Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020*](#)

Internationally we see mass migration of people including those seeking safety from conflict zones as well as others seeking escape from poverty and lack of opportunity in their own countries. Increased migration flows and fear generated by the threat of terrorism has also led to an unfortunate increase in islamophobia and racism generally. The Irish Government supported by private, public and community organisations will need to be proactive in addressing these challenges. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in September 2015, provide an important frame of reference for all those who wish to work towards a better, fairer and more sustainable future for all people across all continents.

The international economic environment is also rather unpredictable. Fortunately, Ireland is emerging from recession but the austerity measures introduced to respond to the banking crisis have left their legacy and many sectors in the economy remain grossly underfunded. Services are less than optimum in important areas such as health, education and housing all which have a direct impact on the experience of international students in this country. On the positive side, a growing economy means potentially increased Government funding for Development Aid and Education. More jobs in the economy may also mean more skills shortages thus creating more opportunities for international graduates in Ireland.

At a sectoral and policy level, Ireland's new International Education Strategy 2016-2020, *Irish Educated, Globally Connected*, calls for a more holistic approach to internationalisation but the focus on branding and the economic benefits to Ireland of increased numbers of international students is the predominant theme. The Cassell's report² on the future funding of higher education also sees international student fees as part of the funding solution. ICOS has a role in ensuring that the benefits that international students bring to our institutions and the country are not so narrowly defined and that there is greater public awareness of the educational value for all students of more internationalised and diversified campuses which are international in outlook as well as in composition.

In May, 2017 the Government published the heads of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill³ which, when enacted, will provide some necessary safeguards regarding the protection of learners as well as clearing the path for the introduction of the long promised International Education Mark (IEM). Members will expect ICOS to be vigilant on their behalf to ensure that the measures to be introduced will not be weakened and will be introduced in a timely manner. It will be important also that regulations are rigorously enforced such that all students, including international students, enjoy the quality of service and protection they deserve.

The national housing crisis of course impacts on everyone but there is a particular shortage of suitable and affordable accommodation for students in major university cities, with acute shortages especially being experienced in Dublin, Cork and Galway. International students are a vulnerable group when it comes to accommodation and unless they have adequate support, information and advice from their host institutions, they may easily be exploited. New purpose built student accommodation is being built but it will be several years before

[2 Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education, March 2016](#)

[3 General Scheme of a Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Amendment\) Bill, May 2017](#)

there is a substantial improvement in availability and in the meantime, the onus will be on all agencies to ensure that students who are attracted to study in Ireland and pay a lot of money for the privilege are not left without a safe and affordable place to live. In the medium to long term, we must encourage variety in the purpose build student accommodation market among planners and developers which reflects different abilities to pay and is not solely focused on the higher end of the market.

It is against this backdrop that ICOS lays out its strategic aims for the next 5 years as follows:

3. Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

- ICOS' vision is that all international students who come to study in Ireland achieve their educational aims and are valued and treated equitably by the institutions that host them and the wider society in which they live and work

Mission

- ICOS' mission is to protect the rights of international students and to contribute to a healthy and vibrant international education sector in Ireland which has the quality of the student experience at its centre

Values

- ICOS believes that better outcomes are achieved when students and those who support them are consulted in decisions which affect them;
- ICOS values the skills, experience and professionalism of staff working with and for international students in higher education institutions;
- ICOS believes in collaborative working and is open to co-operating with public and private sector organisations as well as NGOs and individuals who share our goals and share similar values;
- ICOS believes that it is most likely to achieve its goals if it adopts a learning culture and opens itself to change while also maintaining high standards of accountability and transparency

4. Strategic Goals: 2017-2021 – Summary



Goal 1

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

What will we do?	How will we do this?
Actively participate in debate and influence public policy and public opinion in favour of a more holistic and balanced view of the contribution of international education to Irish education and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ICOS' representation and input on relevant national policy groups such as the High Level Group on International Education• ICOS' representation on relevant regulatory and consumer forums
Engage with all relevant statutory agencies to ensure that regulations to support international education are fair, proportionate and transparent and that services to international students are delivered efficiently and respectfully	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lobbying, advocacy and media work providing commentary on matters impacting on international students' lives• Collaborate with other agencies who share our mission and vision and who will help to strengthen our message
<p style="text-align: center;">What will be the indicators of our success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of meetings and representations on national groups• Number of statements and policy papers released• Number of invitations to relevant forums and events• Level of engagement of our members in our activities• Our media profile	

Goal 2

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

What will we do?	How will we do this?
Provide networking and learning opportunities for our members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and enhance ICOS' training provision to members exploring new topics and delivery methods• Organise an annual seminar and networking opportunity for members
Provide easily accessible, up-to- date, information and advice to ICOS' members and international students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redevelop ICOS' website to ensure it is capable of delivering an enhanced information service• Provide regular e-bulletins and news updates to members• Continue to develop ICOS' social media presence to communicate key messages
Listen to international students and empower them to pursue their rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organise regular fora for international students and provide other opportunities for their voices to be heard• Collaborate with student organisations• Mediate on behalf of students in difficulty
<p style="text-align: center;">What will be the indicators of our success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New website and number of website visitors• Number, timing and quality of news updates• Number and range of training courses delivered• Attendance at ICOS' organised seminars• Social media activity and engagement• Level of demand for ICOS' information, mediation and advice services• Number of meetings/engagements with student organisations• Publications and reports	

Goal 3

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

What will we do?	How will we do this?
Collaborate with Irish Aid in the management of the Irish Aid Fellowships Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide professional services to Irish Aid as contracted to the end of 2017. Elements include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Support the selection, placement & completion of studies of high quality candidates➤ Manage database, website and online alumni infrastructure
Contribute to greater public awareness of the Irish Aid Fellowship programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successfully compete for a renewal of this contract from 2018• Produce and publish case studies, research, reports and other material which highlight the value of the programme and the contribution of international education to development
<p style="text-align: center;">What will be the indicators of our success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successful bid for new professional services contract from Irish Aid to manage the Fellowships Programme from 2018 onwards• Deliver all the commitments in our current contract and achieve high ratings in terms of service quality• Publish at least 7 case studies per annum which highlight the benefits of the programme• The Irish Aid Fellowships website is maintained and optimised to both manage and showcase the programme	

Goal 4

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

What will we do?	How will we do this?
Enhance our public profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and launch a new brand to replace the “ICOS” brand and logo• Develop a new communications strategy to include the launch of a new website• Plan early for 50 year anniversary celebration in 2020• Develop a specific strategy and tools to enhance engagement with our members• The Board takes a lead role in developing a new financial model for the organisation• Monitor and gather feedback on activities on an on-going basis• Annually report on achievements measured against objectives and make adjustments as needed• Meet the requirements of the Charity Regulator and the Code of Good Governance
Strengthen our engagement with members	
Diversify our funding base	
Meet the highest standards of good governance	

What will be the indicators of our success?

- A new website will be developed with enhanced functionality especially with regard to members’ area by the end of 2017
- The organisation will have a new brand and logo by 2018
- Complete the process , already started, to achieve Charitable Status
- Incrementally meet all requirements in Code of Good Governance
- Have a new funding model for the organisation in place with targets regarding income diversity
- Member retention
- Results of satisfaction surveys