

Public Consultation on Ireland's New International Development Policy

Response of The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)

Nature of Views: Organisational

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Freedom of information: ICOS agrees to the release of all of this response and does not require any part of this submission to be withheld from FOI requests.

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Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS). ICOS is an independent, non-profit network representing over 30 higher educational institutions (HEIs) interested in international education and working with Government and other agencies to promote good policies and best practice in relation to the recruitment, access and support of international students in Irish education. Since 1975, ICOS has collaborated with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the management of the Irish Aid Fellowship Programme.

ICOS is also a member of Dóchas and has contributed to discussion and fully associates itself with Dóchas' broader and more comprehensive response to the Public Consultation Paper and while we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion in our own right, we will focus our commentary on the role of education in development and the importance of leveraging Ireland's strength in higher education to contribute to the achievement of a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world. In this context, partnership building, further investment in research and mobility opportunities and a Government-wide approach are encouraged which will ensure coherence between Ireland's Aid programme and its wider international education policy objectives.

Questions

1. What elements of Ireland's international development experience should the new policy reflect?

ICOS very much supports Ireland's overall ambition in its new policy to play a leadership role in transforming our world and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are also heartened by and fully support the Government's commitment to incrementally increase the aid budget to reach the UN target of 0.7% GNI by 2030. To do this while maintaining the quality of our aid programme will require good planning and enhanced capacity within Irish Aid both at home and in key partner countries.

Ireland should continue to maintain the strong poverty-reduction focus as articulated in the 'One World One Future' Policy and, in so-doing, ensure that the commitment to an increased aid budget results in deeper engagement with countries and communities with the most need. ICOS welcomes the recognition of Ireland's continued commitment to untied aid and hopes that this policy will be reflected coherently across the whole of Government approach and through the use of bilateral and multilateral channels for the disbursement of aid, as well as trade and security considerations.

Role of Higher Education in Development

While ICOS fully supports the broad ambitions contained in the consultation paper, we take this opportunity to emphasise the important role of Higher Education (HE) in development, and in education for global citizenship and awareness, and feel that the new policy provides the opportunity to build on that potential.

As major contributors to the values, health and wellbeing of society, higher education institutions have a fundamental responsibility to teach, train and do research for sustainability¹.

¹ UNESCO : Educating for a Sustainable Future (1997)

http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_a/popups/mod01t05s01.html

There is clear rationale for this:

- evidence² that HE contributes to development in significant ways for example in: Developing leaders, critical thinkers and problem solvers who will be the future drivers of peace, stability and good governance in their countries; Training professionals to run essential systems including health and education; Developing business leaders who will create jobs and training the skilled workforce that will be needed to fill those jobs;
- HE also contributes to developing globally aware citizens who will see value in and recognise the universal relevance of the SDGs. This is articulated clearly in target 4.7 of SDG 4 which aims to “ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”³.

2. What are the implications of the changing global context for Ireland’s international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

Virtually all countries in the world are struggling to find the means to run their higher education systems to a level that meets the demands of modern globalised economies and increasingly knowledge-based societies. Ireland’s own HE system is grossly underfunded, but ICOS acknowledges that the funding and quality challenges that face HE systems are particularly pronounced in many developing countries in Africa which are the focus of Ireland’s ODA. Access to opportunities for quality higher education remains limited in many countries, and is impeding development as capacity in many sectors is below what is required to support the policy and systems changes and service improvements that are required to ensure “no one is left behind”.

Over the past few decades HE has also become increasingly internationalised, and this presents a threat as well as an opportunity. The threat lies in the commodification of HE such that it becomes more of a traded service than a public good, and access and international mobility opportunities become limited to those who can pay. The systemic inequalities both within and between countries requires a deeper consideration of ‘who’ is being left behind to ensure equal access to HE. Emerging markets in Africa, Asia and the Middle East have been identified for the economic potential that their students can offer to Ireland; however, this must be balanced with SDG target 4.B which identifies the need to globally expand the number of scholarships available in developing countries (with a focus on LDCs and SIDS) for enrolment in HE. ICOS therefore welcomes the commitment to expand Ireland’s Fellowship schemes and hopes that these will prioritise students from disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

*For years, international higher education has been something of an end in itself. In the context of a rapidly internationalising world, internationalisation has been essential to improving the relevance and quality of higher education. However, it is time to consider new purpose for internationalisation: creating a global sustainable society.*⁴

² Oketch, M., McCowan, T., and Schendel, R. (2014). Education Rigorous Literature Review: The Impact of Tertiary Education on Development London: Department for International Development. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/the-impact-of-tertiary-education-on-development-education-rigorous-literature-review>

³ UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

⁴ Aarts, Hans, GOOD IDEAS TRAVEL FAST: The evolving purpose of internationalisation – article from the EAIE Forum Magazine on The Sustainable Development Goals (Winter 2017)

The opportunity lies in the possibility to leverage international education to deliver awareness and action around the SDGs and to support global citizenship development. Irish Aid has an important role to play under its new policy, and can both help to coordinate and incentivise the HE sector to more fully embrace its leadership responsibility to address global challenges. There is a particular opportunity to stimulate and incentivise development related research and HE collaborations with the Global South and to encourage both inward and outward mobility of researchers. Support for research that is led by the Global South will be particularly important in developing research capacity and ensuring the relevance of the knowledge generated. The rationale for enhanced investment in research and innovation is clearly articulated in SDG 9 which includes as one of its targets to “substantially increase” the number of researchers and development workers per one million of the population by 2030 (ref SDG 9.5).

3. Do the proposed priorities respond to the changing context and contribute to the achievement of our vision of a more equal, peaceful, sustainable world?

The further expansion of the fellowship programme is specifically mentioned in the policy paper (p.14). Expansion of fellowships is also coherent with SDG 4.B which states:

- *By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries;*

Delivery of this ambition will require a clear vision for the fellowship programme (currently under review) and strong collaboration with Irish HEIs in the broader context of strong partnership, as already mentioned. Coherence across government departments will also be necessary in light of an expanded Fellowship Programme to ensure that fellowship recipients, as international students, have a positive experience in Ireland. Domestic challenges therefore, including underfunding in the HE sector, access to affordable accommodation and immigration issues, must also be considered.

For its part, ICOS continues to be proud of its association with the management of the Fellowship Programme on behalf of Irish Aid, and is keen to see that the Programme retains its focus on capacity building for development in Ireland's key partner countries, and continues to operate to high quality standards.

Scholarships Programmes have the potential to support broader policy aims – for example to expand Ireland's network of influence abroad for diplomatic and trade purposes – and to develop institutional linkages, but the Irish Aid Fellowship Programme, in ICOS' view, is most effective when it is clearly aligned with development priorities and focuses on capacity development in the least developed countries (LDCs). There are other Scholarship Programmes which already exist⁵, and indeed more could be created where necessary, which are specifically designed and more appropriate to support Ireland's international education strategy and global influence ambitions.

It is important that the priorities as articulated are carried through into the programmes implemented under the proposed interventions, and that a 'whole of government' approach does not have the effect of diluting or superseding the core development priorities of gender equality, humanitarian action, climate change and governance.

ICOS also welcomes the recognition in the Policy Paper that there is an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive Irish response to Protection which would identify the “synergies” between international development and other “instruments of foreign policy” (p 3.10). This comprehensive and coordinated approach can be reflected in engagement between Government agencies and the HE sector at national level – for example building on and helping to upscale HEI initiatives to facilitate the access of refugees and migrants to higher education

⁵ Government of Ireland Scholarship Programme managed by the HEA

in Ireland and generally to promote integration and inclusion in HE. In this context, it is heartening to see Irish HEIs becoming part of the City of Sanctuary movement and seeking designation as Universities of Sanctuary.⁶

4. How can we improve delivery of Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

The Public Consultation Paper touches on the main criteria for action. The particular criteria which thread through ICOS' response and which we take the opportunity now to highlight again are:

Capacity building

Irish Aid recognises its own need to build up its capacity to manage the planned growth in the ODA budget that is promised. Significant capacity and education expertise has been lost in IA in recent years with the general decrease in budget support for education, and also the ending of Programmes such as Programme for Strategic Co-operation in Research (PSC). With a renewed focus on education and skills development in the new programme, the architecture for that support needs to be put in place.

Partnership

There is a need to strengthen the partnership between Irish Aid and Irish HEIs in order to support existing policy and programming and develop new modalities for support. Partnership models are available from other countries and international forums exist from which Ireland can draw lessons as well as contribute ideas. Participation in these forums will require resources and commitment on the part of Irish Aid.

There is a need for funding mechanisms that incentivise quality research, as well as increased transparency of research funding streams. With an increase in the number of HE programmes specialising in international development, there is also an opportunity for greater partnerships between Irish Aid, the HEIs and Irish NGOs for collaborative research and advocacy initiatives. ICOS welcomes the recognition if the need to connect more effectively with Irish research institutions and the Irish Research Council.

Policy coherence

The SDG agenda cannot be isolated and should permeate through the whole of Government. Its relevance to education is particularly cogent and should influence education strategy at all levels. The opportunity to influence international education strategy is particularly important and the DFAT should leverage its position on the High Level Group which advises the Government on its International Education Strategy to ensure that Ireland's approach to international education is balanced, responsible and sustainable and guided by the universal principles and targets set out in the SDGs.

⁶ <https://www.iaa.ie/20th-june-2018-irish-universities-providing-sanctuary-through-education-to-refugees/>