

General Election Manifesto 2024

About the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)

The Irish Council for International Students (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 the communities in which they live.

ICOS has 27 institutional members, including all of the universities and technological universities in the Republic of Ireland, and many independent third level colleges. Our membership also includes the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), and we have a Student Advisory Group to help support and inform our work.

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

The benefits of international students to Ireland are multiple and far reaching. They enrich academia and Irish society bringing invaluable global perspectives and helping to drive innovation and foster diversity. From an economic perspective, their impact on the Irish economy has been estimated to be worth over €2 billion[1]. International students are also important contributors to the Irish labour market, both during and following completion of their studies, working in key areas such as healthcare, the service industry, business, and technology. Despite this positive impact, international students are a low political priority and have no voting rights, except for the local elections. ICOS believes that everyone residing in Ireland should be treated equally in relation to their economic, social, and human rights.

In this manifesto, we focus on 6 key policy areas that affect international students and our members:

- Housing
- Immigration
- Higher Education Sector
- English Language Sector
- Racism and Discrimination
- Employment

[1]<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3fac2-review-of-international-education-strategy-2016-to-2020/>

Housing

No.	Theme	Our Asks
1	Sex for Rent Exploitation	<p>ICOS' Accommodation Survey of International Students 2023 found that 5% of international students had either received an offer to rent a room in Ireland in exchange for sex, or had seen a room that was being advertised in exchange for sex.² Despite several commitments from Government to introduce legislation prohibiting sex for rent exploitation, nothing has been done to address this predatory behaviour.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgently pass legislation to clamp down on predators seeking sex in lieu of rent.
2	Purpose Built Student Accommodation	<p>There is an acute lack of affordable purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) throughout Ireland, ICOS calls on the next government to significantly increase efforts to provide more suitable student accommodation that is affordable and accessible to all, including international students.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding to universities and technological universities to build affordable Purpose-Built Student Accommodation.
3	National Student Accommodation Strategy	<p>In 2020, ICOS called on government to introduce a revised National Student Accommodation Strategy. Since then, we have reiterated our call to publish a new strategy with revised targets for the development of affordable student accommodation.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a new National Student Accommodation Strategy with revised targets focused on affordable student accommodation.
4	Strengthen tenant rights and increase enforcement of regulations	<p>The often sub-standard and poor housing conditions that international students live in have been well publicised by ICOS in recent years. Unscrupulous landlords and individuals taking advantage of the housing crisis for personal gain by sub-letting properties have left many students living in cramped, overcrowded, and often unfit</p>

² https://www.internationalstudents.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2023-11/ICOS_Accommodation_Survey_2023.pdf

		<p>for purpose accommodation. Figures released by Local Authorities in 2023 showed that 67% of private properties inspected did not meet the minimum standards.³</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce legislation for digs accommodation. • Increase the rights of licensees as they are not currently covered under the Residents Tenancies Act 2019. • Introduce an NCT-style system of certification to ensure minimum standards in the private rental sector are met. • Introduce a deposit protection scheme to safeguard tenants' deposits. • Amend the definition of overcrowding in the Overcrowded Housing Act 1966.
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Immigration

No.	Theme	Our Asks
5	Improve efficiency of immigration registration system	<p>ICOS welcomes the progress that the Department of Justice has made towards modernising the immigration system in Ireland including the introduction of a new website and extending the online visa renewal process to the entire country. However, we believe that further investment and resources are necessary to meet the demands placed on immigration services nationally. In particular, we are concerned that all non-EEA international students living in Cork and Limerick must now travel to Dublin to register with immigration for the first time.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in infrastructure and resources to facilitate timely registration throughout Ireland.

³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da3fe-private-housing-market-statistics/>

6	Working rights of students on a Stamp 2	<p>Recent statistics released by the Department of Justice showed that more than 60,000 non-EEA international students registered or renewed their Stamp 2 visa in 2023.⁴ In addition to undertaking studies in Ireland, many non-EEA students also work in key sectors including hospitality, service, and healthcare making a very meaningful contribution to the Irish economy and society. Notwithstanding, the current immigration regulations only permit non-EEA students on a Stamp 2 visa to work 20 hours per week except for the Christmas period and from June to September when they may work up to 40 hours weekly. Over the last several years, the cost of living in Ireland has placed international students under significant pressure to sustain themselves and fund their studies.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase normal working hours for holders of a Stamp 2 visa from 20 hours to 30 hours per week.
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Higher Education Sector

No.	Theme	Our Asks
7	Funding	<p>In 2022, the Government published its Future Funding report which highlighted an annual deficit of €307 million in core funding to publicly funded higher education institutions (HEIs).⁵ Since then, successive budgets have committed €100 million to HEIs, yet this is insufficient to addressing the gap in funding and meet the demands for higher education.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide investment in higher education to meet the growing demands being placed on HEIs.

⁴ https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-05-15/75/#pq_75

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/28c9d-funding-the-future-an-annual-options-paper-on-reducing-the-cost-of-higher-education/>

English Language Sector

No.	Theme	Our Asks
8	International Education Mark (IEM)	<p>ICOS acknowledges that there have been significant improvements to the English Language Sector in Ireland over the last decade; however, several English language school closures have occurred in recent times, and there is a complete absence of regulations for student recruitment agencies. We also continue to have serious concerns over the lack of monitoring and oversight of schools. The pending introduction of Trust Ed Ireland, a new international education mark for international education, is critical to protecting English language students' course fees, ensuring they have a quality educational experience, and enhancing Ireland's reputation as a world-class study destination.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roll out the Trust Ed Ireland quality education mark and ensure that it is fully implemented by end of 2025.• Regulate student recruitment agencies through Trust Ed Ireland.

Racism and Discrimination

No.	Theme	Our Asks
9	Address racism, hate crime, and hate speech	<p>ICOS is a member of the Coalition Against Hate Crime (CAHC) and the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR). We have been actively campaigning for the introduction of hate crime and hate speech legislation since 2019. Research carried out by ICOS into international students' experiences of racism in Ireland found that 63% of students reported had witnessing or being a victim of racism in Ireland.⁶</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enact and implement the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill (2022).

⁶ https://www.internationalstudents.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2023-03/Speak%20Out%20Against%20Racism_Final.pdf

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce legislation to address hate speech. • Develop and rolling out an action plan against hate and a public awareness campaign to address the root causes of hate and to tackle hate crime and hate speech beyond criminal law. • Implement Ireland's National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) and increase resources to deliver the plan. • Take a holistic approach to tackling hate and discrimination in Irish society.
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Employment

No.	Theme	Our Asks
10	Employment rights of international students	<p>In addition to undertaking their studies in Ireland, international students are important contributors to the Irish labour market working in frontline roles in the service and care sectors. Unfortunately, many of these jobs are often low-paid and precarious. For example, a large proportion of food delivery drivers working in Ireland via platforms such as Deliveroo and Just Eat are English language students working to fund their studies. While these platforms offer students flexibility to balance their work and studies, they have very little employment rights.</p> <p>Asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the implementation of the Platform Workers Directive to enhance the employment rights of people working for delivery platforms.



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