



FINE GAEL

International Horizons

Executive Summary

A Fine Gael Government will double market share and boost national revenue from the international education sector to €1.8bn within five years, creating an estimated 6,000 jobs. We will achieve this goal by implementing the following measures:

International Education Office

We will establish an International Education Office (IEO) within the Department of Education and Science. This office will drive the international education agenda and will produce a five year plan within six months of its establishment.

The IEO will facilitate a partnership approach between all agencies, departments and organisations working in the sector, to share information and resources and to adopt a uniform approach in developing the international education market.

Dedicated Minister of State

The development of the sector will be the direct responsibility of a Minister of State.

A new student visa procedure

A better visa system must be put in place. The IEO in conjunction with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) will create a user-friendly student visa information website without delay. This website will provide the international student with simple guidelines on how to apply for a visa, the cost involved and processing time. This information will be available in the languages of the key markets identified in the international education strategy.

Fast Track Visa System in Key Markets

The IEO will identify target markets as part of its five year plan for the sector. We propose such markets could include China, United States, India, Russia and Taiwan. Fine Gael will introduce a fast track visa system for international students in those key markets.

Part time employment

International students, in specified fulltime education courses of more than 18 months duration, will continue to be permitted to work here for 20 hours part-time basis for the duration of their stay.

Post Graduate Opportunities

Currently, PhD graduates are entitled to a six months residency permit following completion of their studies. A Fine Gael Government will issue green cards automatically to PhD graduates in sectors of the economy where shortages exist in such areas as sciences, engineering and technology.

We will establish an entrepreneurship programme for international graduates with strong entrepreneurial business ideas. This business support programme will support international students with start-up businesses in creating new jobs in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland will lead the development of this programme and work closely with the Department of Justice on any immigration reforms which are necessary to incentivise entrepreneurship.

Regulation of the International Education Sector

In order to raise quality and improve Ireland's reputation, Fine Gael will regulate the provision of education services to foreign students through a new licensing system. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland will become the licensing authority, taking a specific role in monitoring, inspecting and regulating international education.

As the licensing authority, the NQAI will ensure that provision is made by every school to guarantee that in the event that the institution the student is attending loses its licence for any reason, they can be refunded appropriately or accommodated at another school.

Quality and Standards

Fine Gael will also radically enhance standards and quality at third level by implementing our third level reform policy, *The Third Way*, which will radically improve standards and quality at third level by overhauling the quality assurance system in place and introducing a graduate contribution scheme for improving educational services. By implementing this policy, Fine Gael will establish Ireland as a leader in global educational standards.

Student Services Charter

We will develop a student services charter for all educational institutions, which will provide supports for international students while they are studying in Ireland.

International Scholarship Fund

Following on the success of the George Mitchell Scholarship Programme, we will develop a scholarship programme targeting key Asian markets. We will introduce an International Scholarship Fund which will pay for international students from key markets to study in Ireland. It will expose international students to the value of studying in Ireland and as a result, will enhance Ireland's global educational reputation. Fine Gael will commit €5 million to this fund initially.

Range of Language Courses

We will develop the range of English language courses available here to differentiate the Irish market from other international education destinations. For students hoping to study longer, fulltime academic third level courses, we will develop a greater variety of short term preparatory language courses to bring their level of English up to standard. There is huge potential for collaboration between the English Language Sector and third level institutions in the development of foundation English level courses, immersion programmes and pre-Masters programmes.

Training Centre of Excellence

Fine Gael will make Ireland a specialised centre of excellence for English language teacher training. We will do this by developing a dedicated English Language Training Centre of Excellence which will train teachers to the highest of standards.

Diaspora Education Initiative

We will develop a network with Ireland's Diaspora worldwide, led by Enterprise Ireland. This Diaspora Education Initiative will expand links with people of Irish descent abroad, both through education and business. The initiative will develop work

placements and exchange opportunities for students and graduates both in Ireland and abroad.

Educational Attachés

We will utilise Ireland’s diplomatic network and establish a dedicated ‘educational attaché’ in embassies in key markets who will focus on developing relationships with educational stakeholders and disseminating information about Ireland as an international education destination.

Ireland International Student Week

We will celebrate the international education student body by introducing an International Student Week each year, aimed at celebrating the presence of international students in Ireland and encouraging integration.

Targeted Marketing Plan

Fine Gael is committed to a marketing budget of €50m over five years to aggressively market Ireland as an international education destination. We will engage with industry to contribute to this marketing plan and envisage an all-island initiative, supported by Governments both North and South.

Introduction

During the boom years, Government narrowed its economic focus on the limited scope of the construction sector, while other countries were exploring niche areas which had huge longterm growth potential, such as the international education sector. In twelve years, Government has failed to bring about the reforms needed to harness this sector.

The international student market is expanding, with an estimated three million students studying outside their country of citizenship. In comparison to other English speaking countries, Ireland has not capitalised fully on this potential market and trails behind market leaders such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Ireland has huge potential to expand on the scope of this sector which currently generates €900m annually. It is estimated that each international student can spend up to €26,000 per annum while studying abroad, and an estimated 15 local jobs are created for every 100 students. While much has been achieved to date by institutions such as the Royal College of Surgeons and by the English Language Sector, we can do better. This is an economic, educational and cultural opportunity which should not be ignored.

Fine Gael believes Ireland should be ambitious in its strategy for the international education market. We believe that with real joined up thinking and political leadership, Ireland's market share could be doubled within five years. This will generate an additional €900m annually, bring the value of the sector to €1.8bn and create at least 6,000 jobs.

Capturing this potential requires a strategic approach with clear goals, objectives and above all, strong political will to drive Ireland to the fore of the international education market. Fine Gael in Government will provide this political leadership and will develop Ireland's reputation globally as a prime international education destination.

Brian Hayes TD
Education & Science

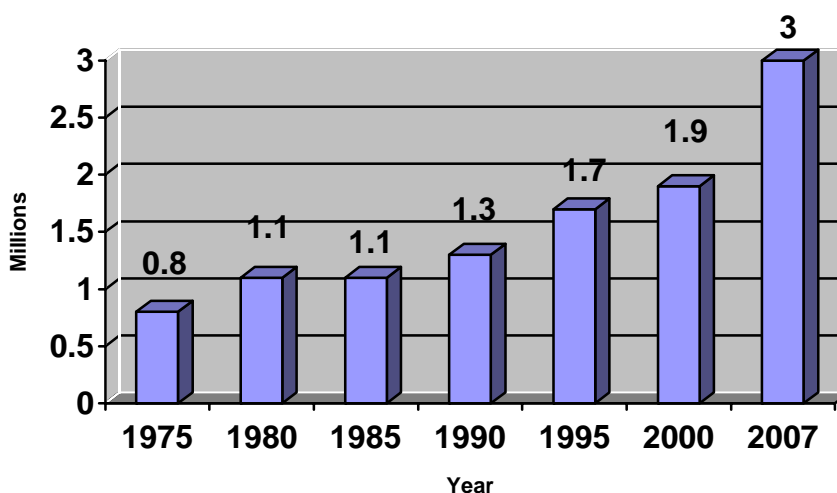
Denis Naughten TD
Immigration & Integration

The International Third level Market.

The OECD¹ estimates that over three million third level students were enrolled outside their country of citizenship in 2007. Five in ten students go to four countries to study, France (8% of the total market), Germany (9%), the United Kingdom (12%) and the United States (20%).

International students make up 10% or more of enrolments in tertiary education in Australia; Austria; New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States of America. Beside these destinations a significant number of foreign students were enrolled in Australia (7%); Canada (4%); Japan (4%) and New Zealand (2%). The growth in International Third level Education has been rapid over the past 35 years, as the graph below illustrates, with an average growth rate of 8.5% per annum.

Long Term Growth in the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship



2

There are several key factors in choosing destinations. They include:

- Language of instruction; where the dominance of English speaking destinations is notable.
- The impact of tuition fees and cost of living on foreign students destinations
- Immigration policy.
- Safety of students

Asian students form the largest group of international students enrolled in countries reporting data to the OECD with just under half of the total (48.2%). These are followed by Europeans (24.9%); Africa (10.5%) while those from North America account for just 3.8%. Students from South America represent 5.4% of the total.

¹ Education at a Glance. OECD, September 2009, pp 308 - 334

² Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2009, p 313

New Zealand - A Case Study

New Zealand currently generates 8% of its total foreign earnings from the sector. New Zealand has focused on developing an international third level sector over the past decade and is currently half way through The International Education Agenda; A Strategy for 2007-2012. There are just under 100,000 international students across all education sectors in New Zealand. In 2006, the New Zealand Government estimated that economic value added from the tertiary education sector amounted to \$1.2bn, and directly supported 94,000 jobs in the third level sector.

The New Zealand government has set four key goals for the International Education.

The four goals are:

1. *New Zealand Students are equipped to thrive in an inter-connected world*
2. *International students are enriched by their education and experiences of living in New Zealand.*
3. *Domestic education providers are strengthened academically and financially through financial linkages.*
4. *New Zealand receives wider economic and social benefits.*

In addition to the tangible benefits, there are intangible benefits – including the perception of the New Zealand brand, the ability to attract some of the brightest and the best to New Zealand shores and the ability to place ‘ambassadors’ for New Zealand back in key emerging economies.

United Kingdom - A Case Study

Relatively early on in his term as Prime Minister, Tony Blair established the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) for International Education. By 2009, international education generated an estimated £12.5bn per annum³ for the United Kingdom.

The UK uses the 70 international offices of the British Council to market its services in its target markets. The PMI has now moved onto its second phase – PMI2, which has four specific targets for 2011:

- An additional 70,000 international students in UK Higher Education and 30,000 in further education.
- Double the number of countries sending more than 10,000 students per annum to the United Kingdom
- Achieve significant growth in the number of partnerships between the UK and other countries.
- Achieve demonstrable improvement to student satisfaction ratings in the UK.

In developing their international marketing programme, the UK Government has committed £30m per annum.

³ Making it Happen: the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education 2009, British Council

The Opportunity for Ireland

Ireland currently holds 1% of the total global international education market share. Fine Gael believes this presents a huge growth opportunity for Ireland.

The drivers of market attractiveness which have been identified by other countries as key to their success in this sector are also present in Ireland.

They include:

- An internationally recognised third level sector.
- Education through English.
- Geographic location and access – particularly to Europe and North America.
- Membership of the European Union.

In addition, the downturn in the residential property market has created the opportunity to provide lower cost accommodation in close proximity to third level institutions.

Scale of Our International Education Sector

It is estimated that the international education market contributes in the region of €900m to the Irish economy annually. The higher education sector contributes €400m, with €500m generated by the English Language Teaching (ELT) sector. Ireland's market share is estimated to be 1% of the global international education market.

According to the most recent figures available from the Department of Justice, the total number of non-EEA (countries outside the European Economic Area) students registered in Ireland by October last year was 31,233.⁴ Assuming students continued to come to Ireland during the final months of the year, we estimate that this amounts to approximately 37,000 non-EEA students in total in 2009.

In addition, approximately 100,000 EU students attended courses in the English Language Teaching sector in Ireland in 2008 and a total of 3,840 EU students were enrolled in fulltime courses in Irish universities and Institutes of Technology in 2008/2009.⁵

Total Number of Non-EEA students registered in Ireland each year 2006 – 2009			
2006	2007	2008	2009 (to October)
33,056	39,720	44,942	31,233

Non-EEA students registered in Ireland as of 29 October 2009 by education sector				
English Language	Further Education	Higher Education	Other	Total
8,757	9,767	11,344	1,365	31,233

⁴ Department of Justice response to parliamentary question 28 January 2010

⁵ HEA Facts and Figures 2010

The ELT sector has been particularly successful to date in supporting the development of international education market in Ireland. This sector has received limited support from Government, yet accounts for €500m in revenue annually. This has been achieved in the face of an incoherent and inconsistent national strategy.

While 80% of the ELT business comes from within the EU, the non-EEA area is very important to the English language sector. This is comprised of second level students, undergraduates preparing for third level studies in Ireland and elsewhere, young professionals and senior decision makers in a wide range of disciplines, as well as practising teachers coming here to hone their language teaching skills.

However, as EU countries implement English language teaching strategies, it is also important to look to non-EEA markets to expand the ELT market. The commitment of Non-EEA countries to improving their competitiveness on the world stage is underpinned by their attempts to further the English language skills of their citizens.

Current Framework for Development of Sector

The Government document “*Building Ireland’s Smart Economy; A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal*” contains a commitment to seek to position Ireland as a location of choice for the International Education market. Little action has been taken to implement this document.

The current Government arrangements are as follows;

- A **High Level Group on International Education** has been established which is chaired by the Department of Education and aims to bring together relevant Departments, state agencies and stakeholders in the sector. This High Level Group has been tasked with producing a plan for the sector.
- **Enterprise Ireland** has responsibility for marketing and promoting the “Education Ireland” brand overseas and leads all marketing and promotion of international education
- **Fáilte Ireland** continues to have responsibility for the development and promotion of the English language sector
- **The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)** – which is due to be amalgamated with other qualifications bodies - will have responsibility for the regulation of the sector and will introduce a quality mark and code of practice for Irish providers of education to international students.
- As part of the arrangements, **International Education Board Ireland** is in the process of being wound up and resources transferred to the NQAI, the HEA and Enterprise Ireland.
- **The Advisory Council for English Language Schools** is also being wound up with resources transferred to the NQAI.
- **The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform** through the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) is responsible for issuing visas

to students from outside the EEA wishing to study in Ireland. The Department is currently reviewing its immigration procedures for international students.

Reaching Our Goals - Action Plan for Ireland

Our strategic goal is to double market share and boost national revenue in the sector to €1.8bn within five years, creating 6,000 jobs.

In order to reach this goal we have developed the following proposals:

Political Leadership - International Education Office (IEO)

The development of the international education sector relies on strong leadership and cross departmental co-operation. We propose the establishment of an International Education Office (IEO) within the Department of Education which would report directly to a Minister of State. The IEO would act as a central unit for the sector, pushing a coherent development plan, with set targets, implementation goals and regular reviews of progress made.

The IEO will act as a central point of contact for all stakeholders involved in the delivery of an international education plan.

The IEO will draft a strategic five year plan aimed at doubling Ireland's market share of the international education market and will oversee its implementation, in consultation with stakeholders.

Partnership Approach

The IEO will drive a partnership approach with key markets and educational providers to ensure the development of the Irish brand and reputation as a new, exciting player in international education. Many educational institutions have already pursued a partnership agenda, with more success in some institutions than others. The IEO will oversee the development of further partnerships such as;

- Stronger links between Irish education institutions and institutions in target markets
- Scholarships and cultural exchange programmes
- Greater communication and sharing of information between embassies, tourism bodies, Enterprise Ireland and other key players involved in promotion.

Overhaul of the International Student Visa System

Government failure to reform the visa system in line with a coherent strategy for international education has resulted in a malfunctioning visa system and concerns about bogus educational institutions. It is only with 'political buy in' that this system will change.

Student Immigration – The Challenges

One of the key considerations for a student choosing a country to study abroad is immigration procedure. Unfortunately, Ireland's immigration system has gained a poor reputation internationally.

Students are discouraged from applying for visas to Ireland because of excessive waiting times for visa processing, onerous application procedures and inconsistent rejection rates. In 2009 alone, 27% of student visa applications were initially rejected by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS).⁶

When compared with the UK, our rejection rates are extremely high and starkly highlight the need for a reformed and effective immigration policy towards foreign students. It is also worth noting from the table below the vast number of applications the UK receives. With a comprehensive strategy and adequate resources in place, there is massive potential for Ireland to tap into this.

2007	Ireland		United Kingdom	
Country of application	Total Applications	Refusal Rate	Total Applications	Refusal Rate
China	2074	37.9%	24,305	12%
Libya	25	72%	4,480	19%
Saudi Arabia	26	46%	5,955	7%
Turkey	128	46%	9,160	11%
Taiwan	12	30%	9,465	1%
Thailand	12	83%	5,785	12%
Russia	763	3%	23,810	5%
Vietnam	39	58%	1,685	15%
Iran	36	38%	240	0%

Fundamental to a sustainable international education sector is a responsive immigration policy. The crux of the problem lies with the Department of Justice and its failure to acknowledge the potential the international education sector has to offer. Presently, criteria for visa applications unclear, decisions are inconsistent and processing is slow. Priority needs to be given to resourcing the student visa section adequately; greater communication with prospective applicants so that they know what is required of them; and more joined up thinking between the Department of Justice and their immigration controls at our airports, the Department of Education, tourism bodies and Enterprise Ireland.

⁶ Department of Justice response to a parliamentary question 28 January 2010

Student Immigration – Time for Reform

Our immigration system is a serious obstacle to the growth of our multimillion international education sector. Fundamental to a sustainable international education sector is a responsive immigration policy. The recently published Innovation Taskforce report focused on the development of top tier international student sector. Fine Gael is taking a more comprehensive reform approach which will make Irish educational institutions more attractive to international students of all levels and ability.

A new student visa procedure

Fine Gael will radically overhaul the student visa system to bring about accelerated processing of visas for study. The introduction of improved procedures, coupled with effective regulation of the sector as outlined below will reduce processing times and rejection rates for visa applications.

1. Visa Guidelines

Simultaneous with the introduction of tough regulation and licencing of the sector, this will bring about accelerated processing of visas for study. The introduction of improved procedures, coupled with effective regulation of the sector as outlined below will reduce processing times and rejection rates for visa applications.

“..because of the lack of a compulsory and statutory registration system for educational institutions and the absence of a comprehensive system of monitoring standards in such institutions, there is no objective test which can be applied quickly by the immigration authorities to determine whether a school is genuine or not and this is compounded by the fact that new schools are being established on a regular basis to satisfy demand.” **Department of Justice, 2004**

As a matter of urgency, Fine Gael will task the Department of Justice publish set guidelines for visa staff and applicants alike to draw from. Guidelines will be published in user-friendly language, with a clear stipulation as to what criteria must be fulfilled to meet visa approval.

While a level of scrutiny is required for public security and confidence, a more responsive and streamlined system must be put in place.

2. Processing Time

Ireland lags behind other countries in the length of time it takes to process visa applications. As part of our reform of the visa system, we will benchmark Ireland’s processing procedures against international best practice and set targets for processing applications in line with the most efficient European visa regimes.

3. Dedicated web site

To reduce the initial rejection rate of student visa applications, Fine Gael will create a new, user-friendly dedicated website without delay. We will provide a one-stop-shop for international education students, making student visa information easily accessible. The website will provide details of the required data and will simplify the application procedure for the applicant. The website will also outline our customer service commitments. Most importantly, this information will also be available in the languages of the key emerging markets identified in our international education strategy.

4. Visa Agents

Visa agents act as an intermediary for educational institutions hoping to attract students from emerging markets. Such agents are essential to building our reputation in key emerging markets such as India. Agents advise students of their options and are often the first point of contact for a student hoping to study abroad. Currently, there is a perception amongst visa agents that Ireland is a difficult country to access for non-EEA students and therefore agents are less inclined to promote Ireland as an international education destination.

Fine Gael will ensure that Department of Justice officials engage with visa agents abroad to clarify and address common errors and misinterpretations.

Fine Gael also proposes that the tourism bodies in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland and our Embassies will organise a series of promotional events specifically aimed at visa agents in target markets, to advise agents of the changes to visa processing systems and improvements in processing times.

Fast Track Visa System for Key Markets

The IEO will identify target markets as part of its five year plan for the sector. Fine Gael proposes that this could include China, America, India, Russia and Taiwan. Fine Gael will introduce a fast track visa system for international students in these key markets, committing to an accelerated turnaround times for student visa applications, priority approval for valid applications and this approach will be communicated to students in those markets. Following a review of the target markets involved, Fine Gael will consider a visa free arrangement similar to that currently agreed with Taiwan.

Part-time Employment

Foreign students considering studying here on fulltime college courses are a crucial market that Ireland must encourage. However, concerns regarding reports of widespread abuse of student visas for the purpose of illegal employment should not be ignored.

Under the present immigration system, students coming to Ireland must prove they can keep themselves for their period in Irish education before they are issued a visa. Proof of access to at least €7,000 is required by the Department of Justice which is the estimated cost of living in Ireland for a student for one academic year.

As it currently stands, foreign students engaged in fulltime education of 12 months or more can work 20 hours per week during term time and full time during holidays.

However, Ireland's economic circumstances have changed dramatically since then and as a result, the current system demands an urgent review.

Fine Gael will permit foreign students, in specified fulltime education courses of more than 18 months duration, to work here for 20 hours part-time basis for the duration of their stay.

Post Graduate Opportunities

The Government's own Innovation Taskforce believes Ireland should incentivise highly-qualified students to remain in Ireland and facilitate them to work or establish their own company. However, current immigration rules state that they must leave Ireland on completion of their study or apply for a six month work permit to remain in the country.

Fine Gael will automatically issue visas (along the lines of the green card system) to PhD graduates in sectors of the economy where shortages exist in such areas as sciences, engineering, technology.

We will also create an entrepreneurship programme for international students. This programme will facilitate those who wish to set up businesses and create new jobs, to stay in Ireland, rather than hindering this kind of path after study. We will ensure that Enterprise Ireland leads the development of this programme and works closely with the Department of Justice on the immigration reforms which are necessary in this regard.

Quality and Controls

Regulation

As a State, we have a responsibility to ensure that foreign students receive a quality education when they come to Ireland, and that our educators are not impacted by other questionable operations due to a failure on the State's part to properly regulate and police this sector.

New Licensing System

Fine Gael will introduce international school regulation through a new licensing system. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland will become the licensing authority, taking a specific role in monitoring, inspecting and regulating international schools while working closely with the IEO and Department of Justice.

Quality and Standards

The regulation and licensing of the sector will encourage reliably high standards and quality.

As the licensing authority, the NQAI will ensure that provision is made by every school to guarantee that in the event that the institution the student is attending loses its licence for any reason, they can be refunded appropriately or accommodated at another school.

However, we must also ensure standards are also high in third level institutions.

Higher education must be repositioned and our global reputation improved if we are serious about increasing the number of international students studying in Ireland. The recent investigation into grade inflation in Irish educational institutions is a clear signal that significant reform is needed at third level to bring Ireland into line with international best practice.

Fine Gael has already produced a policy aimed at improving the third level sector called *The Third Way* which will facilitate this aim. *The Third Way* outlines proposals aimed at increasing levels of innovation and collaboration, bringing about improvements in quality and standards and vastly improving student support services which are fundamental to the successful integration of international students in our educational institutions.

Student Services Charter

At the heart of a strategy for the sector must be improvements in student support services. We will draw up an agreed Student Services Charter which is introduced in all educational institutions. This will significantly improve student care services for both Irish and international students.

International Scholarship Fund

Fine Gael believes one of the best ways of encouraging greater recognition of Irish education abroad is through scholarships and exchange programmes. Irish educational providers have already made some headway in establishing links with institutions abroad, providing Irish students with an opportunity to study abroad and international students to study here on a scholarship.

Fine Gael considers that creating more opportunities for top performing Irish students to study abroad will enhance Ireland's reputation as an international education destination. Allowing international students the opportunity to study here on the same basis will act as a marketing tool for the Irish education brand.

The IEO will encourage and facilitate stronger linkages between Irish and international education institutions to develop scholarship and exchange programmes.

We will introduce a new dedicated international education scholarship fund, which will be aimed at target markets identified by the IEO. We will commit €5m to this fund initially.

Range of Language Courses

In the context of its strategy for the sector, the IEO will differentiate Ireland as an international education centre through the development of expertise in specific language programmes which differentiate Ireland as an educational destination.

Fine Gael believes that there is huge potential for the development of new language programmes in educational institutions and for greater collaboration between the English Language Sector and higher education institutions in preparing students for longer, fulltime academic study here.

The IEO will work with educational institutions to ensure the further development of foundation level courses in English, immersion programmes, pre-Masters programmes or language programmes such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which is a method of teaching a curricular subject through other language mediums, to enhance graduate and post graduate courses already available.

Training Centre of Excellence

In addition to developing our potential as a destination for international students hoping to study abroad, Fine Gael will also develop and promote Ireland as a specialised centre of excellence for English language teacher training. An English language training centre of excellence will be developed as part of the broader international education strategy. This centre of excellence will be established in consultation with the ELT and third level sectors, aimed at attracting, training and retaining teachers trained to the highest levels and to build a reputation as a centre for international best practice for teacher training.

Student Accommodation

Fine Gael considers that the availability, security and location of high quality student accommodation is extremely important in attracting international students to a learning location.

It is our view that the economic situation has resulted in a great opportunity for higher education institutions and the sector generally to develop new student accommodation options, with a surplus of rental accommodation available at lower prices than in recent years. This opportunity should be harnessed by those involved in the sector to develop innovative accommodation options for international students in the vicinity of educational institutions.

Most importantly, the fact that accommodation is available at a better price is an attractive consideration for many parents and students who may have previously been under the impression that Ireland is a high cost destination and this should form part of any marketing efforts.

Information/Marketing

Diaspora Education Initiative

The potential of the Irish Diaspora to develop the reputation of the Irish educational system should not go untapped. There are an estimated 70 million people of Irish descent living outside of Ireland.⁷ Many of these people are both willing and in a position to help develop the Irish education brand worldwide.

We will introduce a Diaspora educational initiative, utilising available links and developing new contacts with businesses and citizens abroad in key markets to promote Ireland as an educational destination. We will work with the Diaspora to develop work placement and cultural exchange opportunities for Irish students overseas.

⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs Parliamentary Question 16th February 2010

This will, in tandem with the scholarship programme and other marketing initiatives, add to our marketing efforts internationally to develop the Irish brand. It will also instil a greater sense of cultural awareness in Irish students and graduates who participate in such exchanges, which will add to the integration of international students in Ireland.

Educational Attachés

Irish embassies in each target market overseas should designate a member of staff as an ‘educational attaché’, with a focus on developing relationships with education providers, policy makers, government agencies and stakeholders in that market. Educational attachés will be tasked with building the Irish brand through the distribution of information about the educational possibilities that exist in Ireland.

In tandem with broader marketing initiatives, maximising the potential that exists within the diplomatic network to develop Ireland’s global reputation as an international education destination is vital in a competitive market. Educational attachés will also work with Enterprise Ireland to arrange Education Missions, which actively promote both the ELT sector and the third level sectors and will act as a source of information for visa agents looking for clarification on the Irish system.

Ireland International Student Week

Key to the successful development of a winning international education strategy must be the successful integration of international students into the host city or country. A welcoming environment which celebrates the presence of international students should be at the heart of that approach. We propose that a celebration of this sector should take the form of a Irish International Student Week, involving a collaborative effort by the tourism bodies, local authorities and educational institutions as well as other interested stakeholders. The celebration will incorporate cultural events for the student body and the wider community, aimed at celebrating the cultural diversity that the international sector brings to Ireland.

Targeted Marketing Plan

Fine Gael will task Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to deliver a targeted marketing campaign in countries where market growth has been specifically identified by the new strategy for the sector by the IEO. Markets such as Taiwan, which now benefits from visa free conditions with Ireland should also be examined as a potential area of growth, in addition to countries where the presence of our diaspora has a strong presence.

We propose that the new marketing plan follows consultation with both the ELT and third level sectors, drawing on the experience on both sectors in targeting the international education sector to date. We will also engage with industry stakeholders on a contribution to the plan.

The marketing initiative will strongly emphasise Ireland’s reformed visa conditions and improvements in application procedures and new quality standards.

Fine Gael will commit a marketing budget of €50m over five years to support this initiative and we envisage that it may be carried out as an all-island collaboration between Governments North and South.

Conclusions

The international education sector offers real benefits for the economy and for society. It challenges the education sector to compete with its international peers. The improved performance as a consequence will benefit every stakeholder in the sector.

A thriving international education sector will also inject resources into the third level sector at a time when the primary source of funding – the Irish State – is under severe fiscal pressure. It will improve the standard of education for Irish students and will stimulate other sectors such as the tourism industry.

Developing Ireland as an international education destination will require strong political leadership, a co-ordinated approach to develop this fragmented industry and a more sensible approach to our student immigration policies.

Fine Gael is committed to delivering on our targets for the international education sector and in Government will lead an ambitious international education agenda forward with focused vision and ambition, doubling international education market share in five years.

APPENDIX

Figures compiled in March 2009, provided a sectoral breakdown of non-EEA students and their country of permanent residence at that time.⁸

Registered non-EEA Students by Sector (March 09)		
Sector	Number of Students	% of total
English Language	10374	30.02%
Further Education	8989	26.01%
Higher Education	13415	38.82%
Other	1774	5.13%
Grand Total	34557	100.00%

Non-EEA Higher Education Students by Nationality (March 2009)		
Chinese	4259	31.75%
American	2166	16.15%
Indian	1578	11.76%
Malaysian	1177	8.77%
Canadian	521	3.88%
Pakistani	488	3.64%
Nigerian	301	2.24%
Kuwaiti	246	1.83%
Bangladeshi	212	1.58%
Russian	154	1.15%
Rest of the world	2313	17.24%
Total	13415	100.00%

⁸ Department of Justice review of student immigration system 1 September 2009

Non-EEA Further Education Students by Nationality (March 09)		
Mauritian	2507	27.89%
Chinese	1650	18.36%
Pakistani	1557	17.32%
Indian	1062	11.81%
Brazilian	482	5.36%
Bangladeshi	481	5.35%
South African	296	3.29%
Mongolian	93	1.03%
Malaysian	85	0.95%
American	66	0.73%
Rest of world	710	7.90%
Total	8989	100.00%

English Language Students by Nationality		
Brazilian	4152	40.00%
Chinese	2770	26.69%
Mauritian	1026	9.89%
Korean	751	7.24%
Mongolian	456	4.39%
Malaysian	370	3.56%
Mexican	108	1.04%
Japanese	93	0.90%
Argentinean	82	0.79%
Venezuelan	50	0.48%
Rest of the world	521	5.02%
Total	10379	100.00%