



**Government
of Ireland**
International
Development
Programme

Ireland Fellows Programme - Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme 2026-27

STAGE 1 Guidance Note for Applicants

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STAGE 1 Guidance Note

Please read through this document carefully and in its entirety prior to completing the application form.

1 The benefits of studying in Ireland

Ireland has been a member of the European Union since 1973. Situated on the western edge of Europe, Ireland is a small, globally connected island. While Ireland, with a population of five million people has its own language and distinct cultural identity, English is the universal spoken language.

Ireland is a friendly, safe, deeply welcoming country, steeped in a rich heritage and culture.

A focus on education has been at the core of Irish government policy since the foundation of the State in 1922. Ireland has a longstanding international reputation for high-quality education, built on a solid foundation of commitment to excellence. Ireland's higher education system is in the top-twenty worldwide, offering globally recognised expertise, and at 65%, Ireland has one of the highest educational participation rates at third level in the world. Studying at postgraduate level in Ireland offers a unique opportunity to join programmes that are driving innovation and changing lives worldwide.

Education has been a driver of Ireland's economic transformation. Ireland is an open economy and our location, combined with our highly educated workforce, has served to attract significant inward investment over recent decades. Today, Ireland is a leader in the technology, biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors, with many leading international companies choosing Ireland for the location of their European headquarters. With some of the world's biggest and best companies locating their key strategic research facilities here, Ireland offers an unparalleled ecosystem that sees academic researchers working hand-in-hand with home-grown start-up companies. These work in partnership with some of the most innovative multinationals on the planet, through shared research projects and programmes, often supported by the Irish government.

For more information on studying in Ireland, please see: <https://www.educationinireland.com>

It takes independent thinkers and doers to succeed in today's world – and it takes a pioneering, creative and agile country to produce them. That country is Ireland: [Why Should I Study In Ireland? - Education in Ireland](#)

The Education In Ireland Student Ambassador Programme - Meet some of our students and read their latest blog posts: [Home](#) | [Study in Ireland](#) | [Education in Ireland Blog](#)

Hear from Ireland Fellows Programme awardees about their experiences and the benefits they gained studying in Ireland: [Ireland Fellows Programme \(irishaidfellowships.ie\)](#)

The Ireland Fellows Programme enables early to mid-career professionals from eligible countries, with leadership potential, to benefit from a prestigious, world-class, quality education contributing to capacity building. It offers selected students the opportunity to undertake a fully funded one-year master's level programme at a higher education institution (HEI) in Ireland. The award covers programme fees, flights, accommodation and living costs. Eligible master's level programmes in Ireland commence in August or September each year and, depending on the programme, will run for between 10 and 16 months.

The Ireland Fellows Programme promotes gender equality, equal opportunity, and welcomes diversity. Our Development Policy is aligned with SDG 16 on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and we are encouraging applications from the broadest possible base. The Programme welcomes applications from applicants with disabilities, and applicants who belong to a minority or disadvantaged group. We would like to increase the representation of female applicants and those whose gender identity does not align with the male/female gender binary.

The aims of the Programme are to nurture future leaders; to develop in-country capacity to achieve national SDG goals; and to build positive relationships with Ireland.

The Programme is intended to support graduates on their return home, through the skills they develop, to contribute to capacity building in their home countries and to become one of the next generation of leaders in their respective fields. It is also envisaged that they will contribute to building enduring positive personal and professional relationships with Ireland, promoting institutional linkages.

The Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme is a flagship programme of the Embassy of Ireland in South Africa offered to South African students. The Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme is targeted at early career professionals in South Africa with leadership potential. The scholarship broadly supports leadership for the Sustainable Development Goals, and supporting the development of women's leadership capacity and women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are key priorities. In addition, the Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme aims to support students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue Master's level education in Ireland, and graduates of Universities of Historical Disadvantage and Universities of Technology in particular are encouraged to apply.

The Ireland Fellows Programme is fully funded by the Irish Government and is offered under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The Programme aligns with the Irish Government's commitments under [Global Ireland](#) and the national implementation plan for the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), [The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World](#), [A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development](#), and [Global Citizens 2030](#) [Ireland's International Talent and Innovation Strategy](#), as well as [Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025](#); [Global Ireland Renewing our commitment to delivering in the Asia-Pacific region to 2025](#); [Ireland's Second Strategy for Partnership with Small Island Developing States](#); and [Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean to 2025](#). The programme is managed by the relevant Embassy responsible for eligible countries. Programme implementation in Ireland is supported by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS).

What we offer

Ireland Fellows Programme awards are fully funded. The award includes the payment of academic fees; visa application fees; medical and travel insurance; economy flights to and from Ireland; and the Irish residence permit fee. Allowances include the following:

- A settling-in allowance towards items needed on arrival in Ireland;
- A completion and departure allowance at the end of the study period;
- A monthly living stipend of €700 (subject to review);
- Student accommodation arranged and paid for trimesters 1 and 2 (normally September to May), and in trimester 3 a monthly accommodation stipend of €800-€1000 depending on location in Ireland (subject to review).

In addition, the Ireland Fellows Programme features many extracurricular, training and volunteering opportunities to help you make the most of your experience in Ireland.

Eligibility

To be eligible for an **Ireland Fellows Programme – Kader Asmal** award commencing at the beginning of the academic year 2026 applicants must:

- Be a resident national of South Africa
- Have a minimum of two years' substantial work experience that is **directly relevant** to your proposed programme(s) of study.
- Hold a bachelor's level academic qualification from an accredited and government-recognised higher education institution, with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 (4.0 scale) – i.e. a first class honour, or second class honour, Grade 1 (a second class honour Grade 2 may be accepted if the applicant has substantial directly relevant work experience). It must have been awarded in **2014** or later (i.e. within the last 12 years).
- Not already hold a qualification at master's level or higher. Not currently undertaking a programme at master's level or higher, or be due to start a programme at master's level or higher in the academic year 2025/26
- Be applying to commence a new course at master's level in Ireland no sooner than August/September 2026.
- Be able to demonstrate the following: leadership abilities and aspirations; a commitment to the achievement of the SDGs within your own country; and a commitment to contribute to building positive relationships with Ireland.
- Have identified and selected three programmes **relevant to your academic and professional background** from the [Directory of Eligible Programmes](#).
- Have a clear understanding of the academic and English language proficiencies required for both courses chosen.
- Must not have applied for the **Ireland Fellows Programme** on more than one previous occasion.
- Be in a position to take up the Fellowship in the academic year 2026/2027.

The Fellowship covers the recipient only. Financial support or visas for spouses or dependents are not included within the scope of the programme.

The **application process** consists of three stages:

- **Stage 1 - preliminary application:**

Opens 30 June 2025, closes 25 July 2025

A copy of the Stage 1 application form can be found below. This is a short application form which allows our selection panel to assess your eligibility under the various criteria of the Programme. You can download the Stage 1 application form at [Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme — Canon Collins Trust](#).

You will be contacted by the Embassy once final decisions have been made and informed whether you have been successful or unsuccessful at Stage 1. Please do not otherwise contact the Irish Embassy during this period.

- **Stage 2 - detailed application:**

Opens 22 September 2025, closes 17 October 2025

If your Stage 1 application is successful, you will be invited to move on to Stage 2 of the process, and complete a more detailed application form including the submission of all required documents. *(Please see note on page 9 which provides details of all stage 2 requirements.)*

- **Stage 3 -English language tests and interviews:**

(Please see note on page 10 which provides details of all stage 3 requirements).

3. Stage 1 Application - Detailed guidance notes for applicants

Please read through these notes fully before you submit your Stage 1 application.

Documentation required:

The Stage 1 process is a preliminary application which seeks information under the headings detailed below and requires you to submit a scanned copy of the following documents with your application form:

1. **Official identification:** either your passport (only the identity page is required), or other official identification document if you do not have a passport at this time;
2. **Your undergraduate degree award certificate;**
3. **Final degree academic transcripts.** Please also include the explanation of the grading system, where provided with your transcript or otherwise available.

Your application will not be valid unless copies of the above documents are included.

SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS

Please apply via the link to the application form available here: [Kader Asmal Fellowship Programme — Canon Collins Trust](#).

- **Copies of supporting documentation (listed above) should be in PDF format and**

should be submitted as separate attachments (i.e. the passport and transcript cannot be scanned into a single PDF file).

- Please use the following format when naming each of the documents to be attached:
 - *Your Name* – Passport
 - *Your Name* – Undergraduate degree certificate
 - *Your Name* – Academic Transcript

Q1. Personal information:

You will be asked to provide your name, gender, nationality, country of residence, date of birth and contact details.

The Government of Ireland supports equality of opportunity and welcomes diversity. It is important that you let us know if you have any accessibility requirements for completing your English language test, or for during your time in Ireland, should you be shortlisted following your Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3 application. These may include for specific learning difficulties, hearing difficulties and visual difficulties, or medical conditions. Accommodations may include braille papers, a lip-reading version of the listening test, or enlarged print.

Q2. Education:

This section requests information on your undergraduate qualification, the institution attended and the dates of study. This qualification must be accredited and have been awarded by a government-recognised university or college. It must have been awarded by **2014** or later (i.e. within the last 12 years).

Preferably your degree should be at first class honour or higher-second class level. A lower second-class degree will be considered if the applicant has sufficient directly relevant work experience.

Please include a scanned copy of your undergraduate degree award certificate **and, if available**, your undergraduate degree academic transcript indicating your final grade.

English language proficiency:

Irish higher education institutions require a high standard of English language proficiency and this will be verified by English language testing. This is necessary for admission to all Irish HEIs, with no exceptions.

English language testing is normally through the International English Language Test (IELTS-www.IELTS.org). IELTS examines competency in the English language across reading, writing, speaking and listening. Most HEIs require a score of 6.5 overall, but some require a higher overall score, or specific scores within each band. The [Ireland Fellows Programme Directory of Eligible Programmes](#) will indicate the levels required for each programme. It is the applicant's responsibility to be aware of the IELTS score required for all the programmes selected.

You can apply through Stages 1 and 2 of this process without having completed an IELTS test; however, you must have noted the IELTS score required for your selected programmes and considered whether you can achieve this grade.

If you have completed an IELTS test, provide full details as requested under question 2 of the application form and note that the test is **only valid if completed in September 2024 or later**.

If you already have an English language test result from an exam other than the IELTS exam, this may also be accepted. Please include details with your application.

Further details on English language testing are included in information on the Stage 3 Application Process below.

Q3. Work experience:

All applicants must have a minimum amount of two years' work experience that is **directly relevant to their proposed programme(s) of study**.

You will be asked to name your employing organisation, provide your job title and indicate (in years and months) how long you have worked with this organisation. You are also asked to provide details of previous work experience you may have. **This may include internships** – 1 year working as an intern will be considered equivalent to 6 months' work experience when evaluating applications. **If you are currently unemployed, please include your previous work experience here.**

You are asked to provide brief details of any leadership positions you hold or have held in the past. Leadership roles can include those held in work, in volunteer work, within social activism, in community organisations, as class/work representative, or college roles.

Q4. Master's programme choices:

Using the Ireland Fellows Programme Directory of Eligible Programmes (available at [Directory of Eligible Programmes](#)), you are asked to list details of the three master's programmes you would like to pursue in Ireland, ranked in order of choice (1, 2, 3). To maximise your chances of receiving a course place offer should you be selected to go forward as a Candidate, it is strongly recommended that the three programmes are in three different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), where available. In choosing these programmes, please take account of their relevance to your career aspirations and to achieving the SDGs in your country.

Please make sure that you have a clear understanding of the academic and English language proficiencies required for all programmes chosen. Please also ensure you have the minimum amount of work experience that is **directly relevant** to these programmes (see Q3). If you are selected to go forward as a Candidate and are invited to make programme applications to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ireland, the HEIs will consider your academic and work experience as part of your application, so it is important to keep this in mind when selecting the three programmes.

Q5. Why do you wish to be considered for a Fellowship in Ireland?

The final question provides you with an opportunity to show how your goals align with those of the Ireland Fellows Programme, which are to nurture future leaders; to develop in-country capacity to achieve national SDG goals; and to build positive relationships with Ireland.

The Programme aligns with the Irish Government's commitments under [Global Ireland](#) and the national implementation plan for the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), [The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World](#), [A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development](#), and [Global Citizens 2030 Ireland's International Talent and Innovation Strategy](#), as

well as [Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025](#); [Global Ireland Renewing our commitment to delivering in the Asia-Pacific region to 2025](#); [Ireland's Second Strategy for Partnership with Small Island Developing States](#); and [Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean to 2025](#). The programme is managed by the relevant Embassy responsible for eligible countries. Programme implementation in Ireland is supported by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS).

The quality of your statement will be a critical factor in how your application will be scored by the selection panel and whether you will be invited to the next stage of the application process.

Your response under the following three headings (no more than 150 words each) should explain your motivation for applying for this Fellowship:

- How the specific programmes of study in Ireland which you have chosen would assist you in your career aspirations;
- How they would help you work towards achieving your country's national SDG goals;
- How you would propose to develop links between your country and Ireland.

You are expected to demonstrate some knowledge of Ireland and Irish higher education.

Declaration

Please read carefully and acknowledge as requested.

***** FOR INFORMATION – STAGE 2 APPLICATION PROCESS*****

Stage 2 opens 22 September 2025 and closes on 17 October 2025.

If, following assessment of Stage 1 of the application process, you are invited to complete the Stage 2 application form, please note that you will be required to accompany that application with a number of important documents. Stage 2 applications and supporting documents are submitted by email.

Documents required:

- 1. One recent passport-sized photograph;**
- 2. A copy of the graduation certificate for all higher education qualifications you have completed;**
- 3. A copy of the academic transcripts for all higher education qualifications you have completed. Please also include the explanation of the grading system, where provided with your transcript or otherwise available;**
- 4. Letters from two academic referees on official letterhead with contact details for the referee and original signatures. These references must be from academics who have taught you personally;**
- 5. A copy of the identity page of your passport. If you do not have a passport at this time, another form of certified official identification must be provided;**
If you are shortlisted following Stage 2 and the interview process you will be required to submit a certified copy of the identify page of your passport. (If your existing passport expires before December 2027, you will be asked to provide a new passport if you are shortlisted after Stage 3.)
- 6. Your original IELTS score report, if available. Please note that this test must have been taken in September 2024 or later;**
If you already have an English language test result from an exam other than the IELTS exam, this may also be accepted. Please include with your application form.
If you are shortlisted following Stage 2 and the interview process and you do not have the English language certification required for your master's programme in Ireland, you will be required to take the examination and pass it to the standard required. Please see the following section on Stage 3 of the Application Process.
- 7. Your current C.V.**

***** FOR INFORMATION – STAGE 3 APPLICATION PROCESS*****

If, following assessment of Stage 2 of the application process, you are invited to Stage 3, please note the following:

- Stage 3 Applicants who do not yet have the English language certification required for their master's programmes in Ireland will be provided with a coupon in order to take the Duolingo English language test. This is an online test that can be taken at home. The [Duolingo website](#) has some FAQs, including on how to prepare for the test, and a practice test. In some cases the Embassy of Ireland may provide an alternative English language test for applicants;
- Stage 3 Applicants who either already have the English language certification required for their chosen master's programmes in Ireland, or who achieve a score of 110 on Duolingo, will be invited for interview. Interviews will take place in November and December 2025, and may take place either in person or remotely by video or telephone conference;
- Applicants who are invited to interview will be required to provide certified hard copies of their documents at, or prior to, the interview taking place. The submitted documents must bear the official stamp and signature of the certifying authority. Where original documents are not in English, certified true copies of official English translations must be provided. **Photocopies of certified documents will not be accepted.**

Applicants shortlisted following interview

Applicants shortlisted following interview, who have the English language certification required for their master's programmes in Ireland, will be notified whether they have been selected to go forward to the next stage of the process as either a Candidate or a Reserve Candidate.

Applicants selected to go forward to the next stage of the process as a **Candidate** will be notified that their application will be forwarded to the management agency for the Ireland Fellows Programme. Once their documentation is verified and in order, they will be provided with information on making programme applications to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around March 2026. Applications should not be made to HEIs in Ireland until invited to do so. Application fees will be paid by the Department of Foreign Affairs for shortlisted Candidates.

Those applicants placed on a **reserve list of candidates** will be contacted if a place becomes available, and at that point will be invited to commence applications to their chosen programmes of study in Ireland.

When Candidates are invited to apply to HEIs in Ireland, priority will be given to their choices in the order they have listed them in their application. Candidates will be invited to apply to **two** programmes, normally their top ranked programme and either their second or third choice. In the case of more than one offer being received from their programme choices, all candidates will be required, for logistical reasons, to accept the programme which they have ranked highest within their application.

Programme place offers are entirely at the discretion of the HEIs in Ireland. If a Candidate does not receive an offer from either of their two HEI applications, their Fellowship application will have concluded.

Candidates who receive a programme place offer will go forward to the last stage of the application process, which is the confirmation of the award of Fellowship places in June/early July 2026. The academic year in Ireland is from September/October 2026 to June-September 2027.

Please note that a medical form is required for successful Fellows before travel to Ireland so that, where appropriate, we can discuss with them any necessary supports.

Arrivals in Ireland for new Ireland Fellows Programme awardees is expected in August and September 2026, depending on commencement date of each master's programme. The academic year in Ireland will be from September/October 2026 to June-September 2027.