



**Government
of Ireland**
International
Development
Programme

Ireland Fellows Programme Africa 2026-27 Stage 1 Guidance Note

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 \(irishaidfellowships.ie\)](#)

2 Ireland Fellows Programme - Africa

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 Sustainable Development Goal (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 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 – Africa* award commencing at the beginning of the academic year 2026, applicants must:

- Be a resident national of one of the countries listed below:

Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

For Burundi, please see both this document and the [Courtney Fellowship](#) page.

For Nigeria, please see both this document and the [Roger Casement Fellowship](#) page.

For Namibia, please see the [Seán Mac Bride Fellowship](#) page.

For South Africa, please see the [Kader Asmal Fellowship](#) page.

For Zambia, please see both this document and the [Frank Ferguson Fellowship](#) page.

For African SIDS (Cabo Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sao Tomé and Príncipe), please see the [Ireland-SIDS Fellows](#) page.

- Have a minimum of two or three years' substantial work experience that is **directly relevant** to your proposed programme(s) of study, depending on the country (see Page 8 for details).
- 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 (*Note: Candidates from Senegal should contact the Embassy of Ireland in Dakar on this – see Page 6*). 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 programme at master's level in Ireland no sooner than August 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 all programmes chosen.
- Must not have applied to 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.

In addition, applications are **by invitation only** in the following countries: Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Eritrea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia. This means that fellowships in these countries are restricted to the staff of government departments and NGOs which work in partnership with Irish Aid, and to personnel of organisations that are aligned with Irish Aid's development strategy in their country which have already been identified by the Embassy of Ireland. **Applications from outside these partnerships will not be eligible.** To find out if you are eligible to apply, please contact [the relevant Embassy of Ireland](#) or your employer.

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. Our selection panel will assess your eligibility under the various criteria of the Programme. Eligible applications at Stage 1 will be scored by the selection panel. You can download the Stage 1 application form at: [Application Form](#) and for Nigeria and Ghana via the [Education in Ireland website](#).

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. Eligible shortlisted applicants who do not yet have the English language certification required for their master's programmes in Ireland will take the [Duolingo English Test](#). *(Please see note on page 10 for details of the Duolingo Test)*

- **Stage 2 - detailed application:**

Opens 22 September 2025, closes 17 October 2025

If your Stage 1 application and your English language test are 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 10 for details of all stage 2 requirements.)*

- **Stage 3 -Interviews: *(Please see note on page 11 for 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

Applications must be typed and submitted by email to the relevant Embassy of Ireland at the email address listed below except in the case of Nigeria and Ghana whereby applications are submitted online via the [Education in Ireland website](#).

- The application form can be submitted as a Microsoft Word (.docx) file or as a PDF.
- 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

Relevant Embassy of Ireland	Responsible applicants from:	for	Email address
Ethiopia	Ethiopia South Sudan Djibouti		ethiopiafellowships@dfa.ie
Kenya	Kenya Eritrea Somalia Sudan		nairobifellowships@dfa.ie
Liberia	Liberia		monrovia.fellowships@dfa.ie
Malawi	Malawi		malawifellowships@dfa.ie
Mozambique	Mozambique Eswatini		Mozambiquefellowships@dfa.ie
Nigeria	Ghana Nigeria		Applications for Nigeria and Ghana should be submitted online via – Education in Ireland website
Portugal	Angola		lisbonfellowships@dfa.ie
Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone		SierraLeoneFellowships@dfa.ie
Senegal	Senegal		senegalfellowships@dfa.ie
South Africa	Lesotho Zimbabwe		Applications for Lesotho and Zimbabwe should be submitted online via— Canon Collins Trust website
Tanzania	Burundi Democratic Republic of the Congo Tanzania		TanzaniaFellowships@dfa.ie
Uganda	Uganda Rwanda		UgandaFellowships@dfa.ie
Zambia	Namibia Zambia		Zambiafellowships@dfa.ie

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 honours or higher-second class level. A lower second-class degree will be considered if the applicant has substantial directly relevant work experience.

Please include a scanned copy of your undergraduate degree award certificate **and** 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 are shortlisted as a Candidate or Reserve Candidate and if you do not possess an IELTS certificate dated September 2024 or later and that meets the required standard for all your master's programme choices, you will be required to take the IELTS test, or in some cases another accepted English language test, in January 2026.

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 work experience that is **directly relevant to their proposed programme(s) of study**, but the minimum requirement varies by country. Please consult the table below:

Min. 2 years' RELEVANT work experience required	Min. 3 years' RELEVANT work experience required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghana • Kenya • Nigeria • Rwanda • Sierra Leone • Tanzania • Uganda • Zimbabwe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angola • Burundi • Democratic Republic of the Congo • Djibouti • Eritrea • Eswatini • Ethiopia • Lesotho • Liberia • Malawi • Mozambique • Senegal • Somalia • South Sudan • Sudan • Zambia

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](#), 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.

Please note: The order in which you list your master's programme choices is very important.

If you are shortlisted following Stage 2 and the interview process, and you are invited to apply to HEIs in Ireland, you will be invited to apply to two programmes. Priority will be given to your choices in the order you have listed them in your application, but this cannot be guaranteed. **In the case of more than one offer being received from your programme choices, you will be required, for logistical reasons, to accept the programme which you have ranked highest on your application form.** Your master's programme choices, or the order of your choices, can be changed at Stage 2 of the application process if you are invited to the next stage. No further changes to programme choices or the order of programme choices will be permitted after Stage 2 other than in exceptional circumstances.

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*****

Eligible applications at Stage 1 will be scored by the selection panel, and shortlisted applicants will be invited to the next stage of the application process.

Shortlisted applicants who already have an accepted English language certificate at the required standard for their chosen master's programmes will be invited to complete the Stage 2 application form.

Eligible shortlisted 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 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. Tests will take place in September 2025. Shortlisted applicants who achieve a score of 120 on Duolingo, with at least 105 in each sub-score, will be invited to complete the Stage 2 application form.

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

If 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:

- 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.**
- Interviews will take place in November and December 2025, and may take place either in person or remotely by video or telephone conference.

Applicants shortlisted following interview

Applicants shortlisted following interview 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**, and their application will be forwarded to the management agency for the Ireland Fellows Programme.

All Candidates and Reserve Candidates who do not possess an IELTS certificate dated September 2024 or later and that meet the required standard for all their master's programme choices will be required to take the IELTS test, or in some cases another accepted English language test, in January 2026. If they do not achieve the minimum English language requirements for their chosen master's programmes, their Fellowship application will have concluded.

Once their documentation is verified and in order, and they have achieved the minimum English language requirements for their chosen master's programmes, Candidates 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.

Candidates who would like to accept an Ireland Fellows Programme Award will need to complete and sign a Form of Undertaking and Award Acceptance in which they agree to abide by the Ireland Fellows Programme Terms and Conditions.

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 the commencement date of each master's programme. The academic year in Ireland will be from September/October 2026 to June-September 2027.