



Northside Partnership

Social Inclusion and Community
Activation Programme (2018 – 2022)

Case Study - Goal 2:
The Challenger Programme
Northside Partnership - Lot 2.3

 Northside Partnership

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The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020

Background

Northside Partnership

The Northside Partnership is a Local Development Company working with individuals and communities in North East Dublin to bring about positive changes in their own lives and in the community. Northside Partnership (NSP) is committed to working across Lot 2.3 to identify, develop and invest in the skills, capabilities and assets of the people we work with, whilst working to reduce structural inequality.

Purpose of the Challenger Programme

The purpose of the Challenger programme is to work with students and parents in the Dublin 17 and Dublin 5 area to raise aspirations for, and participation in, Third level education, while reducing the risk of early school leaving.

Origins of the Challenger Programme

Data emerging in the early nineties from studies on patterns of participation in higher education indicated a significant zone of low participation in the Dublin 17 postal area – the districts of Darndale, Priorswood/Belcamp and Bonnybrook – where the 1995 Clancy report revealed that levels of access to higher education were only 6%, against a national average of 44%. The Northside Partnership, in collaboration with some local schools, planned a response to this issue and the Challenger programme was initiated: the core purpose was to identify, at the end of 5th class in primary school, a cohort of students with the potential to achieve in education, then to support these students through to the Leaving Certificate and maximise their progression onwards into higher education.

The Current Challenger Programme

The Challenger programme has continued since its establishment in 1995, the original geographical area has been expanded slightly and two schools from the Kilmore West district are now involved. Challenger now works across five DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in schools). The programme was evaluated in 2000, and a further report was compiled in 2003. In 2015 the NSP undertook a

review of Challenger, to understand how well it meets its objectives and to provide a basis for determining whether changes in the initiative are required to suit the current context and take account of the changes that have taken place since 1995 in the world of education in Ireland and in the communities in which the Challenger students live and learn.

The suburbs that are located along the northern fringe of Lot 2.3 Northside contain some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country (Priorswood, Darndale, Kilbarrack, Kilmore West). These areas also rank highly in terms of the percentage of people in the lower social classes and early school leaving (Census 2016).

Predictions for future skills needs in Europe suggest that in the future, only 1 in 10 jobs will be within reach of an Early School Leaver (European Parliament, 2011). It is considered that student and family characteristics can explain approximately 80% of the variability in student achievement and the remaining 20% of the variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that students attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Drawing on this evidence, NSP believes that the Challenger programme occupies an important role in this area and works with students, parents and schools in the area to provide a holistic programme that involves parents every step of the way. As the landscape changes, the Challenger programme continues to grow and evolve and learnings gleaned from evaluations and reviews are implemented to ensure the continued relevance of the programme.

The Objectives of the Challenger Programme

The primary objectives of the programme are to:

- + Maintain young people in education
- + Enable them to achieve their full potential
- + Create a positive culture around education in the community and by doing so make Third Level education both attainable and achievable
- + Work in partnership with parents to achieve these objectives
- + Increase the number of young people from the Dublin 17 and 5 area progressing to third-level education

The Challenger Programme and SICAP

The following table locates the Challenger Programme within the SICAP 2018-2022 Programme Requirements.

Goal 2 -Working with Individuals

Thematic Area Preventative Supports for Children and Young People

Outcomes: G2 - 3:2 Children and their families are supported in education and personal development
G2 – 3:3 Young People at risk of early school leaving remain within the education system

Challenger is co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Education and Skills.

The SICAP programme under the Department of Rural and Community Development, also receives funding from the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

The Department of Education and Skills funds the Challenger Programme through the Higher Education Equity of Access initiative.

The Co-Ordinator of the Challenger Programme is funded under SICAP, however one of the limitations of the programme is that under the SICAP programme all of the students below the age of fifteen are not counted as case-load and therefore do not roll up to NSP key performance indicators and targets. This programme is of considerable benefit, as is evidenced from the outcomes, and it would be useful to explore solutions to this challenge under SICAP 2018-2022. These activities all take place outside of school hours.

Governance and Reporting

Challenger has a Steering Committee which oversees and is accountable for the project. Membership comprises representatives of local primary and post-primary schools (Home School Liaison), a past pupil, local parent, Northside Partnership Staff (Education Co-Ordinator and Challenger Co-Ordinator) and the D17 School Completion Programme and Dublin City University. The NSP Board of management oversee all reports on the delivery of the programme, a data and narrative report on the programme is uploaded to the IRIS system and monitored through Pobal and the Local Community Development Committee on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development. NSP also reports to the Department of Educational and Skills on an annual basis.

The Challenger Programme – what does it involve?

The Challenger programme involves three phases - with a number of activities under each phase.

Phase 1 - Selection and Readiness

Students: Challenger recruits forty primary school pupils each year through an application and interview process guided by specified weighted criteria including academic achievement, interview performance and a personal statement. All Challenger participants must be resident in the Dublin 5 and Dublin 17 catchment areas.

The students chosen are deemed to be at a point of readiness to avail of the programme and show a motivation to be involved. Sigma and Micro Scores, a Personal statement, an interview with a parent and student and recommendation from a designated teacher all form part of building the picture of readiness and informs selection.

Parents: The parents of prospective students are pivotal to the programme. At the interview there is a conversation held with parents to explain the importance of this and to let them know that their involvement is key to raising aspiration in their children. Challenger is also presented as an opportunity for the parents to participate in a personal development course and to explore their own pathways into education or training for the future.

This phase is important in raising expectations and building excitement about Third Level education and is a positive process where the skills and capabilities of the students and parents are named and pathways to education and training are opened up. In the event that a student is deemed not yet ready this is handled in a sensitive way and they are encouraged and referred to other opportunities.

Phase 2 - The Challenger Programme

Programme of activities for Challenger Students

Once selected the Challenger programme offers a range of cultural, educational and social activities for all participants. All these activities are provided outside of school hours and off school premises for groups, with a combination of evening, weekend and holiday-time events. These activities are arranged and managed by the coordinator after consultation with the steering group. See table overleaf for the range of activities that our students take part in during Phase 2 of the programme.

Class / Year between 2017-2018	Programme of Activities for Challenger Students
6th Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversational Irish, Dublin City University (6 sessions) Reading Club (4 sessions) Public Speaking / Debate (6 sessions) Cultural Events (4 day trips to Dublin museums) End of Year Trip (Day trip)
1st Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversational Irish, Dublin City University (6 sessions) Maths Club (4 sessions) Music / Rapping Workshop Public Speaking (6 sessions) Reading Club (4 sessions) Activity linked to Third Level College (Dublin City University)
2nd Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversational Irish, Dublin City University (6 sessions) Coding workshop (6 sessions) Music / Rapping Workshop Maths Workshop (4 sessions) Gaeltacht Scholarship, Co Mayo
3rd Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and Student Meeting on Subject Choices Extra Tuition / Grinds (Maths, Irish, French, English and more)
4th Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study Skills Education for All Fair Maths & Irish Classes
5th Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to Careers Access Tours to Third Level Colleges Irish & Maths Classes Study Skills (1 session)
6th Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third Level Information Meeting Guidance Meeting and One-to-One Session Extra Tuition / Grinds (Maths, Irish, French, English, Biology & more)
All Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of Year Graduation Ceremony in Dublin City University.

Programme of Activity for Parents of Challenger Students

Parent Involvement

In addition to the activity for students, parental involvement in the programme is pivotal. From the beginning, the parents of Challenger participants are expected to commit strongly to the programme and participate in the "Parents in Education Programme". Participation is required from at least one parent from each family.

The objective of the Parents in Education programme is to work with parents to:

- + Strengthen their commitment and understanding of their child's educational pathway.
- + Provide a supportive and encouraging educational environment at home.
- + Explain and demystify third level education.
- + Develop positive mind-sets to both their own and their children's learning.

As many of the parents involved had left school early, a key focus of the Parents in Education programme is to overcome their fears in relation to education. Parents of Challenger children are encouraged to take part in courses which will help them to support their child's education. In 2017/18, we offered the STEPS motivational programme to parents of all 6th class children on the Challenger programme. The STEPS programme (trademarked and run by the Pacific Institute) gives parents the tools to make any changes they want and works with parents to build positive mind-sets that can facilitate personal growth and development.

The STEPS programme is designed to help these parents to unlock their potential by encouraging them to take a fresh look at their lives and their family members. It actively encourages parents to better support their children through the journey of education, to make Third Level Education a reality. It helps parents to have greater control, to become solution focused and builds on a vision for achievement, which extends the range of

possibilities for improving the quality of life, both within the home and workplace.

STEPS is built around the core concepts of The Pacific Institute's knowledge base. It is delivered with a licenced qualified facilitator who helps participants to co-create their learning through a wide variety of activities. After participating in the programme, individuals have greater expectations of success and higher self-efficacy. Parents who take part in the programme have reported:

- + Higher levels of motivation
- + Increased self-belief
- + Improved ability to set goals
- + Raised levels of personal accountability
- + Insight into how their mind works.

One parent who participated in the Challenger programme when asked about the benefits responded

"it was the knowledge that I got- to help them go to college, all of it is in simple form"

Outcomes

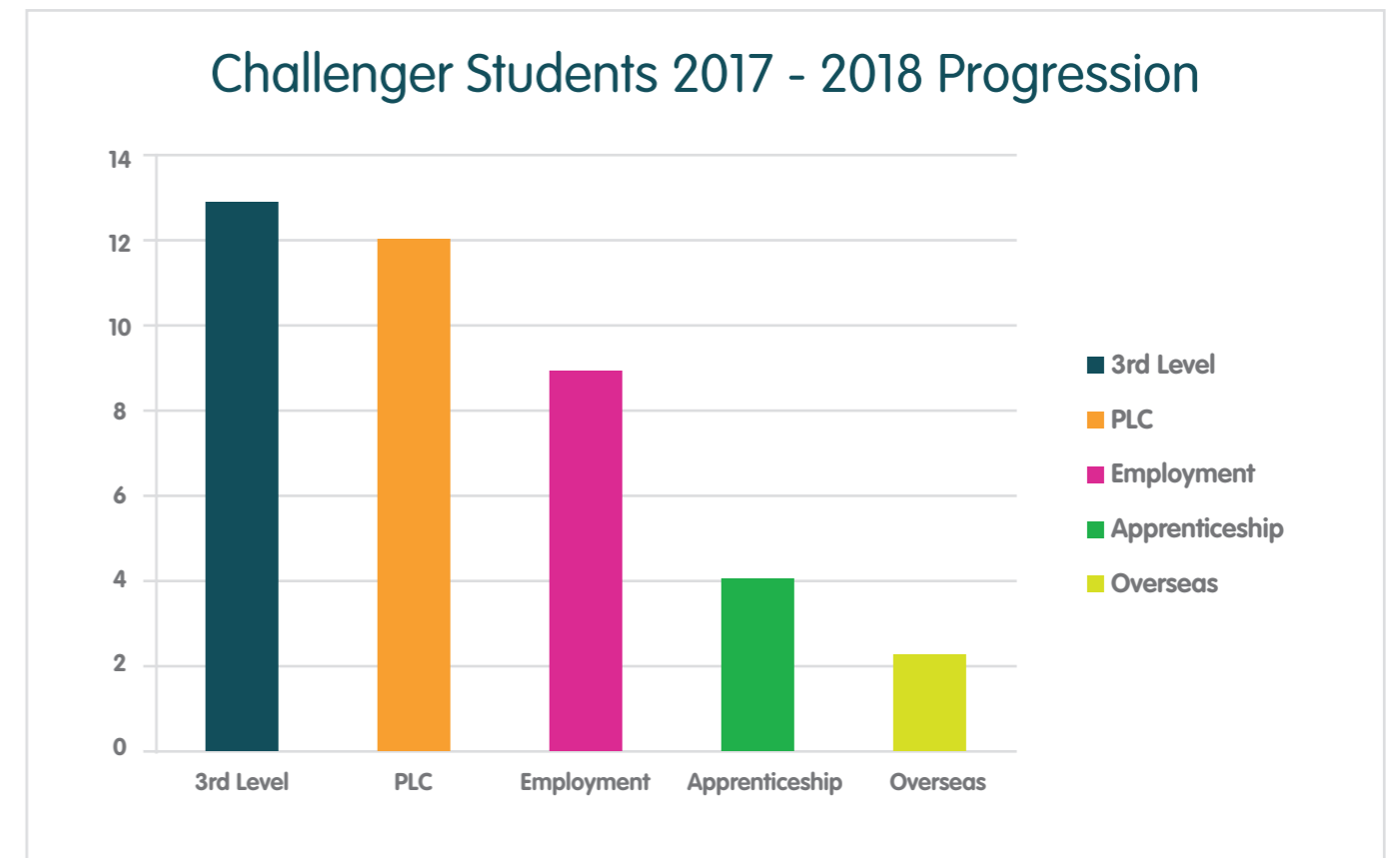
Students: Progression of 6th Year students 2017-2018

One of the main aims of the Challenger Programme is to help student's progress into Third Level Education. Of the forty 6th year students who have commenced the Challenger Programme, 36 of them achieved their Leaving Certificate. Currently we have thirteen students who have progressed into third level education in a range of Colleges from DCU, Trinity, ITB and National College of Ireland. A further twelve students progressed to Post Leaving Certificate Courses in Colaiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education, Killester College and Colaiste Ide. The students who progress onto PLC will in the next year or two will also be given guidance and advice

by NSP to consider their options to progress into further third level education. A further nine students have decided to take up employment. With the economy stabilising and more job opportunities in the North Dublin area some of our students have decided to take up employment before they embark on their educational journey. Some students have commented that they wanted to gain some

work experience before embarking on third level education. Four students have decided to take up apprenticeships in plumbing, logistics, electrician and car repairs. This year was the first year that Northside Partnership ran an Apprenticeship Fair and found lots of potential employers looking for apprentices. A further two students have decided to travel for the 17/18 academic year.

Please see the table below which summarises these findings.



Parents: Participation 2017-2018

The 2017/2018 Parents in Education Programme was very successful. Of the 38 parents who commenced in the programme, 31 completed and achieved their STEPS Programme Certificate presented at the graduation ceremony in DCU in May 2018.



Challenger Students

Phase 3 - Post Challenger

Students: Graduates from the programme are awarded certificates during a graduation ceremony in DCU at the end of the academic year. The Education Department in NSP continues to work with Challenger students to provide vocational and career guidance and to inform Challenger students about financial aid or other opportunities available to them.

Parents: Parents who successfully completed their programme are awarded certificates during a graduation ceremony in DCU at the end of the academic year. Each year both the parents and their children graduate at the same ceremony in DCU. Parents are then assisted to identify other courses available to them to progress their own educational pathways. Through the Challenger programme seminars for parents and students on educational topics are also arranged. All other NSP programmes and initiatives are also offered to parents.



Challenger Students 2017-2018 at the Graduation Ceremony in Dublin City University.

NSP is currently exploring involvement of Challenger alumni in the programme with the possibility of former students providing mentorship to current students, giving career talks or offering their skills and experience to develop the programme.

As one Challenger alumni reflected

"it encourages children to fulfil their potential".

Student Profile 2017-18

An example of a student's pathway

Conor completed the Challenger Programme in 2017. He attended Chanel College in Coolock Village where he achieved one of the highest leaving cert grades with 485 points. Conor comes from a lone parent family but always understood the importance of education and availing of the Challenger Programme. He completed the programme with excellent attendance in all activities throughout his seven year involvement. Conor was also linked in with other Northside Partnership programmes in Marino Institute of Education and the DCU Community Learning Hub. Conor received the Challenger student of the year in 2016 and has recently commenced his degree course in business in Dublin City University. Conor maximised the opportunities through the Challenger Programme to enable him to progress his education.

Conclusion

Challenger occupies a unique position within the communities of Dublin 5 and 17. NSP will continue to work with children and their families to build enhanced education and personal development opportunities. Evaluation will continue to ensure the programme's currency and continued development.



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