

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Lifelong Learning

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This article gives an overview of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme¹ and outlines how it provides education and training supports and engages with ETBs. After reading this article you should have a better understanding of the programme and how it can help you to meet your strategic objectives. Follow the link below to a short YouTube video² which is a good introduction to the programme. SICAP Origins and Outcomes

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is delivered locally by Programme Implementers across Ireland and it supports and delivers lifelong learning and training courses, engaging closely with ETBs in many counties. SICAP is a key tool for government to reduce poverty and strengthen communities. SICAP provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. The new national social inclusion programme was launched in April 2015. SICAP has specific parameters and targets to ensure value for money, but also has the flexibility to tailor actions to local need. In its first year of operation, the evidence has shown that SICAP has delivered positive outcomes and has been effective in targeting those in need.

Three-Pronged Approach

SICAP is a targeted, holistic programme for those who are most

disadvantaged and less likely to use mainstream services. A multi-faceted initiative, it assists both individuals and local community groups through a three-pronged goal approach.

Goal 1 is designed to support disadvantaged communities and groups representing specific issues or target groups to engage with stakeholders in addressing social exclusion. SICAP supports local community groups to set up or expand and in 2015, 2,500 local community groups were assisted by the programme. For example, Carlow County Development Partnership worked closely with a Lithuanian community development group to

help it meet more regularly and plan local events such as a Halloween party and a carol service.

Goal 2 supports people who have experienced educational disadvantage to engage with lifelong learning opportunities and progress using community development approaches. 16,700 individuals received Goal 2 educational supports in 2015, 81% of whom had Leaving Certificate level or below. Monaghan Integrated Development set up life-coaching workshops to support people in education by building their generic skills. It was targeted at people who had never worked and with mental health issues who



needed help in building up their self-confidence.

Goal 3 is employment focused.

It engages with those who are unemployed, economically inactive or in low paid jobs to improve their work readiness. It supports people to access jobs or become self-employed, or to explore social enterprise opportunities. 23,500 individuals received SICAP employment support in 2015. In one example, Westmeath Community Development designed a course to train local people for nearby job vacancies which included technical training and CV and interview skills preparation.

Programme Delivery and Funding

45 Programme Implementers (known as PIs) deliver SICAP across the country. Programme Implementers are primarily Local Development Companies – not-for-profit companies which provide a bottom-up approach to addressing community needs. Local Community Development Committees manage the programme in each local authority; they are the key decision-makers in terms of annual planning and monitoring. These committees were established in 2014 by government to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to local and community development and funding, and the majority include an ETB representative. SICAP is funded by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Pobal acts on behalf of the Department to provide ongoing management and oversight, and organises training and capacity building events. The 2016 programme budget is €35.8 million which includes co-funding from the European Social Fund and a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative.

SICAP Clients

SICAP has a large and diverse caseload and each client must be from a specific ‘target’ group to be eligible for assistance. Over the nine months of operation in 2015, 36,900 people registered with the programme. The programme is centred on:

- The unemployed (either on or off the live register) and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Those in work but who have a relatively low income or are living in households with a combined low income and at risk of poverty.
- People living in areas which have been classified as disadvantaged according to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, including children and families.
- People with specific circumstances or from particular groups: lone parents; new communities including refugees and asylum seekers; people with disabilities; Roma and Travellers.
- SICAP also works with children by running activities such as summer camps and after school clubs, with a specific focus on preventing early school leaving.

Accessing SICAP

Participation in SICAP is voluntary and people can walk into their local partnership office to enquire about SICAP and what is on offer. Alternatively they can be referred by another organisation such as an Intreo office, the Local Employment Service, or an ETB. In 2015, 40% of all clients were referred to SICAP from a state body, demonstrating its interconnectedness with other state services. SICAP can also refer people to other supports and services: almost 1,000 people were referred

from SICAP to lifelong learning and further education and training providers in 2015.

Some SICAP Lifelong Learning Statistics

SICAP clients are supported to access short and longer training courses but the majority of provision is short-term. Training might be provided by the PI using SICAP funding or funding is leveraged from other agencies such as ETBs or private providers. In most cases there is likely to be an element of co-funding whereby, for example, the PI covers the costs of course marketing and registration while the ETB provides the tutor or room costs. Below are some headline statistics from SICAP course provision for 2015 which show the scale of engagement and the types of programmes availed of:

- 18,972 people were assisted by SICAP onto a course. There was a slightly higher portion of women (51%) than men. There were 24,605 course placements.
- A course outcome was recorded for 77% of course placements and 90% of these placements were successfully completed.
- One fifth of course placements were categorised as general programmes courses (20%), followed by personal development (19%), and health and welfare (16%).
- 47% of course placements were on courses provided by the PI, while private providers supplied 22% and ETBs provided 9%.
- 23% of course placements were NFQ accredited and Level 5 was the most common NFQ Level. After participating in SICAP, almost 3,000 people gained a higher level qualification.

SICAP and the Education and Training Sector

The role that SICAP plays within the education and training space varies and to a certain extent is dependent on the local infrastructure and relationships. Engagement between SICAP implementers and ETBs is more developed and formalised in some counties than in others and where strong relationships are evident these tend to have developed over many years and pre-date both the establishment of ETBs and SICAP.

Some PIs and ETBs run joint initiatives which provide a more integrated and locally informed response to a particular need, and this co-developing and co-funding can create a greater synergy and symbiotic relationship on the ground and be a better use of national funding. SICAP has three broad strategic advantages in the education and training sector and these are mutually beneficial to the PIs and ETBs in helping them to meet their strategic objectives.

SICAP uses outreach to identify people who would benefit from training supports and helps them to access these, and these people tend to be more marginalised and less likely to be picked up by other training services. In this sense SICAP implementers act as recruiters for ETBs and this can lead to higher participation rates. This outreach and local engagement means they often have a more fine-grained knowledge of local needs and gaps on the ground, which in turn can influence the types of courses that ETBs roll out. The programme implementer maintains contact with clients during their time on a course, and through this ongoing engagement and follow-up work it is more likely that someone will enjoy their experience and successfully complete their course.

SICAP provision fills a gap by providing training opportunities for people who are not equipped to commence an ETB course and for whom a community education approach is more appropriate. They work in-house with more marginalised and isolated individuals by providing shorter, unaccredited programmes and over time this can serve as a stepping stone to ETB engagement. Anecdotally some PIs report that clients are reluctant to approach an ETB as a result of bad memories from their formal education years. Local development officers reassure the clients and assist them to take the first steps and participate in something locally, carrying out what is often very resource- and time-intensive pre-development work.

ETBs also engage with PIs to leverage broader community development expertise from Local Development Companies and link in with the wider array of programmes they offer such as Tús, the Community Employment scheme or local training initiatives. ETBs value Local Development Companies for the specific skills, knowledge and expertise they bring to providing community education supports. Local Development Companies can also be a good space to trial a new approach and pilot an initiative, with the objective that if successful, it could be picked up and mainstreamed by the ETB.

Examples of Joint SICAP – ETB Working

Collaborative working results in improved information exchange and better planning. Duplication in provision is avoided through ongoing communication between ETBs and SICAP implementers, perhaps via joint annual planning processes or on a more informal basis, checking in with their respective counterparts before launching a

new course. It is also common to have an ETB member on the board of a Local Development Company. The key to successful and lasting engagement is communication and both organisations being able to offer something and having a positive approach to co-working. Some examples of joint working are given below. They reflect a diversity and flexibility in approach and good partnership working:

In Limerick Ballyhoura Development Ltd. worked in partnership with Limerick and Clare ETB to deliver needs-orientated education and training initiatives. The SICAP staff and methodologies were found to be critical in identifying suitable people to take part in part-time, non-accredited education using an outreach approach in partnership with the ETB, and this was facilitated through the East Limerick Education and Training Network.

In Donegal, the Donegal Local Development Company leveraged Donegal ETB funding to provide a range of training programmes which were focused on specific rural-orientated supports including farm safety, pesticide spraying, and IT training for farmers. They found that many people were reluctant to commence an ETB course and preferred to learn initially in a community setting. According to Inishowen Development Partnership it could not have delivered its range of training supports without the support of Donegal ETB, which has been a very important partner and allowed them to develop programmes to meet the needs of learners.

Westmeath Community Development engaged with Longford and Westmeath ETB to provide English classes for the Roma Community in a RAPID area, a need which was identified through

SICAP engagement with this target group. Westmeath Community Development provided the room facilities and the ETB funded the tutor costs.

There is strong engagement between the Laois Partnership Company and Laois & Offaly ETB. The ETB has found it invaluable to work with the partnership which identifies the need locally while the ETB funds the tutor costs. One very successful programme has emerged from this collaborative approach (which also involves HSE and DSP funding) – the Birchgrove Programme. The programme works with parents whose children may have poor school attendance and provides training three times a week in areas they enjoy. There has been a major improvement in school attendance rates and many of the parents have progressed into other modules provided by the ETBs.



How can we work with SICAP?
The ETB Community Education Facilitator is often the best placed person to make the link with the Local Development Company and explore SICAP opportunities. The Adult Guidance Officer as well as the literacy and adult guidance services in your ETB may also have connections with the SICAP implementer. We encourage ETB staff to make contact with their local Programme Implementer and vice

versa to explore the potential for closer engagement with SICAP – you can download a full PI contact list³ from the Pobal website. If you have any questions please email SICAP@pobal.ie.

More information

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Pobal will be launching a consultation process in early 2017 to plan for SICAP

2018-2020. Relevant stakeholders, including ETB representatives, will be invited to participate in this process. The main programme information can be found on the SICAP Funding Programme page⁴ and the Supports and Resources page⁵. The SICAP 2015 End of Year Report⁶ provides more comprehensive programme analysis than the overview provided here, and you can also download the executive summary⁷.

Footnotes

- 1 The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017 is funded by the Irish Government and co-funded by the European Social Fund and includes a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative.
- 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BphJIOVzJMM>
- 3 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20PIs%20contact%20list%20for%20Web%20Sept%202016.pdf>
- 4 [https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20\(SICAP\)/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20(SICAP)/Pages/default.aspx)
- 5 <https://www.pobal.ie/Beneficiaries/SICAP/Pages/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme.aspx>
- 6 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20End%20of%20Year%20Report%202015%20FINAL.pdf>
- 7 <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SICAP%20End%20of%20Year%20Report%202015%20Executive%20Summary>.