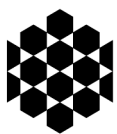


**Equality Impact Assessment for the Roll-Out
of
DARD Direct**

Consultation Document



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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) Customer Service Improvement Programme (CSIP) is a series of projects being introduced into DARD to address a number of areas identified as deficiencies in service as highlighted during a Customer Service Review conducted in 2004.

The projects within the CSIP include complaints handling, customer service standards, telephony, written communication, and a multi-channel access service delivery model or One-Stop-Shop (known as "DARD Direct").

DARD Direct seeks to improve customer service through the provision of equitable access to all DARD's main farmer focussed services from offices throughout Northern Ireland. This is proposed through the rationalisation of the current network of 31 offices, which offer varying and often limited ranges of services, to 10 offices offering a full range of farmer focussed services. It will also include the creation of flexible Unified Administration Teams (UAT), to provide administrative support across DARD's farmer focussed work areas and the improvement of office facilities for customers and staff. Rolling out the DARD Direct model across Northern Ireland will replace the current way in which frontline services are delivered to farmers.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) aims to examine the impact of this proposed change and its capability to implement policies which can promote equality of opportunity for identified Section 75 groups from both DARD customers and DARD Direct staff members.

1.2 Equality Impact Assessment Background

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, DARD is required to carry out its functions with due regard to promote equality of opportunity, between:

- persons of different religious beliefs;
- persons of different political opinion;
- persons of different racial group;
- persons of different age;
- persons of different marital status;
- persons of different sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;

- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

1.3 What is an Equality Impact Assessment

An EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, in order to:

- identify whether there are differences in the way a policy impacts upon nine statutory equality categories outlined above; and
- identify where there are means to better promote the equality of opportunity and good relations.

There are seven separate elements in the completion of an EQIA.

1. defining the aims of the policy;
2. consideration of available data and research;
3. assessment of impact;
4. consideration of measures that might mitigate any adverse impact and alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equal opportunity;
5. formal consultation;
6. decision by Public Authority; and
7. publication of results of the impact assessment and monitor for adverse impact.

This report documents elements one to four listed above.

Following publication of this document on the DARD internet site Step 5 'Formal Consultation' will begin. The feedback gained during the consultation period will help inform Step 6 'Decision by the Public Authority', and following this decision Step 7 'Publication of the results of the impact assessment and monitoring for adverse impact will commence'.

1.4 The DARD Equality Scheme

DARD has a comprehensive Equality Scheme which has been in place for several years and sets out how it fulfils its duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('The Act'). The DARD Minister, together with the Departmental Board are driving the implementation of the Equality Scheme within the Department in order to ensure that it is fully integrated in all aspects of DARD's business.

In 2007, DARD conducted a five year review of its Equality Scheme. Through the review DARD considered that, in the last 5 years equality

issues have become central to policy formulation in all business areas. The commitment has become clear in documentation such as the DARD Business Strategy and also the involvement of the most senior staff in forums such as the Equality Steering Group.

The review also stated that DARD's Equality Scheme has been the key driver for taking forward the equality training of staff. This remains one of the most effective ways of mainstreaming equality. Training has allowed staff to understand the different ways, through their work, in which they can better understand issues affecting Section 75 groups and promote better equality and good relations.

1.5 Consultation

The consultation programme for the DARD Direct EQIA has been split into two distinct phases, informal pre-consultation which has helped form this EQIA document and the consultation programme that we have planned in order to fully understand impacts and the mitigating actions we must take. The results of this planned consultation programme will be analysed and collated in the final document to be published in autumn 2008.

1.5.1 Pre-Consultation Programme

The DARD Direct team undertook a pre-consultation exercise to provide qualitative evidence to inform our thinking about equality impacts which may be caused by the DARD Direct programme. The exercise was undertaken with both DARD customers and DARD staff that are most likely to be impacted upon by DARD Direct.

Internal pre-consultation included a questionnaire that staff were asked to complete in order to understand their concerns. The questionnaire was available via the DARD intranet site allowing staff members to download a hard copy of the form and complete it anonymously. The questionnaire invited feedback and comments on the following questions:

1. the grade and working pattern of the individual
2. the location of the individual;
3. possible impacts of relocation;
4. the impact according to their inclusion in any of the Section 75 groups; and
5. any other issues they may experience due to the DARD Direct proposal.

External stakeholders were sent background information regarding the DARD Direct proposal and then offered the opportunity to meet with DARD to discuss the key issues. Seven of the 21 external stakeholder groups we approached availed of the opportunity to meet to discuss their concerns. Those with whom we met included:

- Northern Ireland Agriculture Producers Association (NIAPA);
- Ulster Farmers Union (UFU);
- Youth Action Northern Ireland (YANI);
- Rural Community Network;
- Age Concern;
- Equality Commission; and
- Rural Development Council

Feedback from the pre-consultation exercise indicated that staff and customers had a number of issues which centred on location of DARD Direct offices. As a result, the pre-consultation exercise was extended to allow consultation with staff, stakeholders and customers about the proposed DARD Direct locations. This involved further consultation with 3 DARD Direct Customer Focus groups, UFU, NIAPA and 8 staff focus groups. NIPSA were also invited to contribute, but reserved comment until they can consider a final draft.

We are extremely grateful to all the groups and individuals who took the time to give their views so constructively at this stage. The input received was considered in the completion of this document and accompanying questionnaire and has helped to identify the key impacts we needed to address.

1.5.2 Planned Consultation Programme

In accordance with Equality Commission guidelines, we have planned a period of consultation including active engagement with a number of stakeholder groups. This consultation period is proposed to take place over nine weeks. We will publish the consultation document on the DARD internet site as well as making it available in other formats.

1.6 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – DARD Direct Programme;

- Section 3 – Available Data and Research;
- Section 4 – Analysis of the Nine Categories and the DARD Direct Programme on Farmers and Farm Families;
- Section 5 – Analysis of the Nine Categories and the DARD Direct Programme on Staff

2. DARD DIRECT PROGRAMME

2.1 Current Service Delivery

At present, customers access the main DARD services, (Veterinary Service, Grants & Subsidies, Countryside Management, The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) Development Service, Quality Assurance and Rural Enterprise) through a network of local offices. A high percentage of the local DARD offices offer restricted opening hours for customers and limited access to DARD's main farmer focussed services. Only three offices (Omagh, Magherafelt and now Inishkeen House) offer access to services from all of the six main DARD business areas. Details of the locations of current offices and their opening hours can be found in Appendix I.

Of the current network of DARD offices, many are located in older buildings, with high utility and maintenance costs, poor energy efficiency and décor which is not consistent with a vibrant, modern workplace environment. In addition, the existing layout, alongside other structural impediments such as, limited disability access, location of public counters on floors other than the ground floor with narrow staircases leading to them, and lack of suitable parking is a major restriction to the accessibility of DARD services.

2.2 What is DARD Direct?

During 2003-2004, MORI MRC conducted a Customer Service Review on behalf of DARD, which showed that satisfaction levels were lower than some other public service organisations. As a result certain improvement actions were approved by the then Minister, Ian Pearson MP.

Following the review the Department developed a number of projects under the auspices of a Customer Service Improvement Programme (CSIP) with the aim of addressing these deficiencies in service. One of the strands of the CSIP has been the development of a new service delivery model called DARD Direct. It aims to provide better and more joined-up service delivery arrangements for customers through:

- providing equitable access to DARD's main frontline services for farmers from offices throughout Northern Ireland;
- providing a more professional and effective interface with customers by creating flexible Unified Administration Teams (UAT), capable of working across the farmer focussed DARD frontline work areas; and
- optimising the use of new technology.

An evaluation of the DARD Direct pilot in Enniskillen has shown increases in customer satisfaction with the delivery of services, quality of staff, communication and the resolution of queries. While it was identified that there was further scope for improvement, the positive evaluation has led to the Departmental Board accepting DARD Direct as the model through which future farmer focussed services will be delivered.

In parallel with this decision an economic appraisal of the DARD Direct model was conducted to examine a number of different options for roll-out. Using indicative locations (see Appendix II), options were considered that took into account:

- the degree to which equitable face-to-face service delivery can be provided;
- minimising staff disruption;
- the ability to cope with disease outbreaks;
- public perception of the agri-food industry; and
- financial considerations.

The preferred option was that DARD Direct should be rolled out to ten strategically located offices.

The DARD Direct principle involves bringing together all of the main farmer focussed services including Veterinary Service, Grants & Subsidies, Countryside Management, CAFRE Development Service, Quality Assurance Branch, Rural Enterprise and Customer Service Improvement Branch. Therefore under this proposal, regionally based staff from these branches would be headquartered at one of ten locations and remaining local offices would close.

Information from DARD databases has shown that this model would result in the vast majority (>90 per cent) of farm businesses being within a 16 mile radius of a DARD Direct Office. (See Appendix II)

Rivers Agency and Forest Service have been excluded from DARD Direct as both are agencies of DARD. Fisheries and Portal staff also were not included as these staff need to continue to be situated at their current specific locations. Rural Development staff accommodation requirements may be aligned to this model at a later date, when the Review of Public Administration (RPA) recommendations have been implemented.

The desired building specification for the proposed ten DARD Direct offices includes (but is not exclusive to) the following features:

- locations with easy road access;
- ample and convenient car parking;
- professional & technical staff located with administrative staff;

- public areas, including private interview rooms;
- hot desk facilities for staff who spend a significant proportion of their working time in the field;
- suitable appropriate workspace and storage available;
- conference / training rooms;
- general staff kitchen; and
- good mobile phone coverage.

The pilot DARD Direct Office is situated in Inishkeen House in Enniskillen. This office will continue to deliver services in County Fermanagh, leaving further office locations to be decided.

While decisions on the remaining locations have not been taken, DARD intends to adopt the DARD Direct management approach at interim locations. This arrangement is simply to ensure that DARD begins to deliver an improved service to its customers faster, during the transition period.

This management approach is being introduced at interim locations in 3 phases:

Phase 1 – Omagh and Dungannon offices from October 2007;

Phase 2 – Ballymena, Coleraine and Newry from January 2008; and

Phase 3 – further offices from Autumn 2008.

2.3 Aims and Objectives

The aim of DARD Direct is to provide equitable, improved access to all DARD's farmer focussed services and to improve the efficiency of these transactions through a range of channels.

In order to achieve this aim, DARD plans to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery via a "one-stop-shop" to its customers/service users – predominantly farm businesses. DARD Direct seeks to achieve this by providing customers with more choice of how, when and where they access DARD services whilst ensuring that the majority of their enquiries (over 80 per cent) are satisfactorily resolved at the first point of contact: whether by telephone, online, e-mail, post or in person at a DARD Direct office.

The objectives of DARD Direct are focussed on providing increased customer satisfaction through:

- improved accessibility to DARD services;
- different enquiries resolved at a single point of contact;
- more efficient and joined up services;
- reduced transaction time;
- greater openness and transparency enabling better management of customer expectations; and
- greater accuracy when capturing information;
- consistent, high quality customer experience across the DARD Direct office network;
- providing staff with the skills and tools to deliver improved services; and
- more customer focussed accommodation.

It is recognised that while this new delivery model is aimed at improving customer satisfaction, it will mean changes for staff involved in the delivery of these services. In addition to the aims and objectives stated above for improving customer service, objectives have been created specifically for DARD Direct staff in order to increase job satisfaction and motivation. These include:

- administration staff better equipped to deal with enquiries;
- improved telephony, information systems and communication;
- better training and information;
- broader awareness of DARD services;
- Professional & Technical staff with more time to focus on professional/technical work with customers;
- improved accommodation working conditions; and
- dedicated line management structures for administration and professional & technical staff.

3. AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH

3.1 Data Collection and Research

When completing this EQIA document we have considered both quantitative and qualitative information from a variety of internal and external sources. This includes face-to-face consultation, surveys and research of a number of documented information. Information sources referenced within this document include:

- The Agricultural Census in Northern Ireland (2007);
- Economic Appraisal for Roll out of DARD Direct (2007);
- Attitudes and Opinions of DARD's External Customers on Current Customer Service Provision by MORI MRC (2004);
- DARD Direct Pilot Focus Group Feedback (2006-2007);
- DARD Direct Pilot Evaluation Report (2007);
- Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (2007);
- Farms and Families in NI – Social Survey 2001-2002;
- DARD Direct pre-consultation findings, produced from pre-consultation questionnaires and meetings (2007);
- DARD human resource and Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) community background information for staff. (2007).
- Northern Ireland Census (2001) ; and
- EU Farm Structural Survey (2007).

Where possible, information on both the Section75 groups and DARD staff has been collated and analysed for staff within the affected DARD offices. In addition, other statistical information has been gathered for DARD customers and the Agricultural Community as a whole.

3.2 Breakdown of Section 75 Groups for Farmers and Farm Families

Information gathered from both the Agricultural Census (2007) and the Farms and Families in NI Social Survey 2001-2002 has been used to gain an insight into the customer groups impacted by the DARD Direct proposal.

The Farms and Families in NI Social Survey information illustrates that the farming industry in 2001 involved 6.5 per cent of the Northern Ireland's population.

Statistics within this report stated:

- there were approximately 26,500 family farms;
- those farms supported over 29,000 households; and
- these households were comprised of over 107,000 people.

Of this group, 35,150 household members considered themselves to be a farmer or a partner of the business, with 73 per cent of farmers receiving some income on that basis. In addition, of the 46,920 adult household members residing on farms, 60 per cent contributed to the running of the farm with over 40 per cent working on a full-time basis. Over 30,000 people received a form of income from farming, with nearly 19,000 (23 per cent) receiving most of their income from this source.

The Agricultural Census of 2007 has since shown that the total number of farms has fallen slightly since 2001 from 26,500 to 26,146. The overall number of full and part time farmers has also reduced by 11 per cent over the same period, reducing the number of total farmers from 35,150 to 31,207. The information in the sections below shows the trends within this group.

3.2.1 Religious Beliefs / Political Opinion

Through the Farm and Farm Families NI Social Survey (2001) a question about religious affiliation was asked of the head of each household. The answers indicated that 56 per cent of households were Protestant and 43 per cent Roman Catholic.

Only in one per cent of cases was the household of another religion or no answer was given.

Religious beliefs	Farming Households (%)
Protestant	56
Roman Catholic	43
Non Determined	1

No specific information is available about the political opinion of the Farmers and Farm Families. However, since political opinion is perceived to be linked very closely to religion in Northern Ireland, for the purpose of this impact assessment, it will be considered that the differential impacts identified and conclusions made in respect of the Catholic and Protestant religions are similar to the main political groups.

3.2.2 Racial Groups

- figures estimate that less than one per cent of the Northern Ireland population is from a minority ethnic community;
- figures from the 2001 NI Census indicated an ethnic population in Northern Ireland of 14,279 individuals. Minority Ethnic group representatives have suggested that the non-indigenous population of Northern Ireland is closer to 45,000. (OFMDFM Race Equality Strategy). A 2003 study by the Institute for Conflict Research, “Migrant workers in Northern Ireland” indicated that during 2003 there were 304 migrant workers employed in the agriculture sector with work permits or under The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme; and
- notably the Farmers and Farm Family’s Social Survey 2001/2002 states that the farming population is “overwhelmingly white.”

3.2.3 Age and Gender

- the farming industry in Northern Ireland is dominated by older males, with the average farmer age being 55 years according to the Farm and Farm and Farm Family Social Survey and recent findings from the EU Structure Survey finding that the median age for farmers is 57 years old
- the 2007 Agricultural Census indicates that over 90 per cent of farmers and farm workers are male;
- the Farming and Farm Families Social Survey (2001) indicated that approximately 85 per cent of farmers and business partners are male and 15 per cent female; and
- an increasing age profile of existing farmers identified through census data is indicative of a decline in the numbers of young people entering the industry.

Farmer and Business Partners	
Age (Years)	Percentage (%)
35 or under	12
35 – 65	64
Over 65	21

- there is male dominance at every age group apart from 40-<45 years where there is an even distribution.

3.2.4 Marital Status

- findings from the Farmers and Farm Family's Social Survey 2001/2002 shows that 59 per cent of the farming community are married and living with their spouse; and
- of the remaining individuals six per cent are separated, divorced or widowed and the remaining 35 per cent are single and have never been married.

Marital Status	Percentage (%)
Married and living with husband/wife	59
Single, never Married	35
Separated, divorced or Widowed	6

3.2.5 Sexual Orientation

- data is not available specifically for the sexual orientation of farmers and farm families; and
- according to figures from Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), formerly Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), six per cent of the population are lesbian or gay; this figure does not include those people who identify as bisexual. Information provided by the Rainbow Coalition has stated that an estimate of 10 per cent of the Northern Ireland population being lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) is generally accepted as a reasonable estimate.

3.2.6 Disability

- the Farming and Farm Families NI Social Survey (2001-2002) showed that there is a higher level of disability among farmers than the general population in Northern Ireland. Disabilities specified in the survey included difficulties with learning, reading, writing, hearing, sight and speech impairments and mobility; and
- the survey indicated that 26 per cent of farmers reported that they had a long-term illness or disability.

Disability	Population NI (%)	Farmers NI (%)
Yes	20	26
No	80	74

3.2.7 People with Dependents

Findings from the Farmers and Farm Family's NI Social Survey 2001/2002 illustrated that of the 29,360 households supported by family farms:

- thirty-nine per cent had children under 16, or 16-18 in full time education;
- fourteen per cent had a family member claiming a disability related benefit;
- thirty-two per cent had a family member aged 65+; and

Type of Dependant	Percentage of Households (%)
Children under 16, or, 16-18 full time education	39
Claiming Disability Benefit	14
Aged 65+	32

3.3 Breakdown of Section 75 groups for Staff

We have analysed the staff information for 732 DARD staff members working in DARD regional offices (excluding Inishkeen House) (Appendix I) who will be affected by the roll-out of the DARD Direct proposal.

3.3.1 Religious Beliefs/Political Opinion

- fifty-two per cent of those staff affected by the DARD Direct proposal are perceived as Roman Catholic, forty-four per cent are perceived as Protestant and the remaining four per cent are undetermined.

No specific information is available about the political opinion of staff affected by the DARD Direct proposal. However, since political opinion is perceived to be linked very closely to religion in Northern Ireland, for the purposes of this impact assessment, it will be considered that the differential impacts identified and conclusions made in respect of the main religions are similar to the main political groupings.

Religious Beliefs	Percentage (%)
Protestant	44
Roman Catholic	52
Non-determined	4

3.3.2 Racial Groups

- the majority of DARD Direct staff (89 per cent) are white; and
- the remainder (11 per cent) are undetermined.

Racial Group	Percentage (%)
White	89
Undetermined	11

The undetermined category also includes incomplete data for this section.

3.3.3 Age Structure

- the largest proportion of staff potentially affected by the DARD Direct proposal are aged 25-49; and
- the lowest proportion of staff fall into the youngest age category of 16-24.

Age	Percentage (%)
16-24	7
25-49	66
50+	27

3.3.4 Marital Status

- Sixty-three per cent of DARD staff potentially affected by the roll-out of the DARD Direct initiative are married;
- Thirty-two per cent are single; and
- the remaining five per cent are co-habiting, divorced, separated or their status is unknown.

Marital Status	Percentage
Married	63
Single	32
Co-habiting / Divorced / Separated / Widowed / unknown	5

3.3.5 Sexual Orientation

- The sexual orientation of DARD staff potentially affected by DARD Direct is not known at this stage. According to figures from Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), formerly Department for Trade and Industry

(DTI), six per cent of the population are lesbian or gay; this figure does not include those people who identify as bisexual. Information provided by the Rainbow Coalition has stated that an estimate of 10 per cent of the Northern Ireland population being lesbian, gay or bisexual (LSB) is generally accepted as a reasonable estimate.

3.3.6 Gender

- a greater number of staff potentially affected by DARD Direct are male rather than female.

Gender	Percentage (%)
Male	59
Female	41

3.3.7 Disability

- DARD human resource statistics have shown that eight per cent of staff potentially affected by DARD Direct classify themselves as having a disability;
- however, this figure may not reflect all disability groups as many individuals don't understand what is classified as a disability according to Section 75 guidelines and therefore do not self declare.

Disability	Percentage (%)
Yes	8
No	92

- statistics gained from the staff pre-consultation covering 123 potentially affected staff showed different results;
- of this sample, 26 per cent viewed the prospect of having to travel further to work at a DARD Direct location as an issue due to health problems; and
- the sample also had 12 per cent who classify themselves as disabled.

Disability Status	Staff from Pre Consultation (%)
Health issues inhibiting travel	26
Disabled	12

3.3.8 People with Dependants

The exact number and proportion of DARD Staff with dependants is unknown at this stage, however the following information could be observed for this Section 75 group.

- the large percentage of married staff suggests that there is a higher likelihood that these staff will have young dependants; and
- the staff pre-consultation had a response from 123 staff, of which 54 per cent had dependants.

3.3.9 Work Grade and Work Pattern

The composition of the staff by grade and work pattern potentially affected by DARD Direct shows that:

- sixty-six per cent of staff are classified as mobile grades and 34 per cent as non-mobile grades;
- eighty-seven per cent of staff are employed on a full time basis; and
- thirteen per cent of staff are employed part time.
- Feedback from staff focus groups about proposed DARD Direct locations would indicate that a high proportion of non-mobile grades and staff working part-time are female and have responsibilities for dependants.

Work Grade	Percentage (%)
Non-mobile Grades	34
Mobile Grades	66

Work Pattern	Percentage (%)
Full-time	87
Part-time	13

Source: DARD human resource statistics

A breakdown of mobile / non-mobile staff for offices potentially affected by DARD Direct is shown in Appendix III.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE NINE CATEGORIES AND THE DARD DIRECT PROGRAMME ON FARMERS AND FARM FAMILIES

The proposed changes will impact to some degree on all farms and farm families in Northern Ireland. We have summarised the issues likely to arise a result of these changes. These are:

- accommodation;
- travelling time and associated costs;
- customer service delivery; and
- office opening hours

We have then examined issues related to each of the nine categories to assess the impacts to each group. In addition to identifying the possible impacts, we have also highlighted the mitigating actions we intend to consider.

This section also includes the questions we wish you to consider during consultation, and which will be summarised in Appendix IV entitled 'Consultation Questionnaire'.

4.1 Religion / Political Opinion

No specific issues were highlighted during the pre-consultation exercise in respect to religion and political opinion. We have however highlighted some impacts which may be experienced by farmers or farm families due to their religion or political opinion for discussion during the consultation period.

4.1.1 New Location

Farmers or farm family members of different religious beliefs/political opinions may perceive some locations as less or more welcoming than others.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

4.1.2 Mitigating Action

When deciding the final locations of the DARD Direct offices, the perception of each location to welcome DARD customers of every religious background and political opinion will be taken into consideration.

In addition staff members will be trained on a tailored customer service training programme. This course is designed to enable all DARD Direct staff members to deliver the highest level of customer service and will highlight the need to treat all customers equally and fairly regardless of their religion or political views. DARD also has strict disciplinary policies which will be put into action should it be proven that any member of staff has acted in a disrespectful or discriminatory way to a DARD customer.

4.2 Racial Group

During the pre-consultation exercise the Rural Community Network raised possible impacts in relation to non-Northern Ireland / migrant workers. We have included all concerns discussed below, along with other possible impacts which we aim to consider during the planned consultation period.

4.2.1 Customer Service Delivery

Feedback gained during pre-consultation discussions with the Rural Community Network and during previous consultations with the Animate Project for Migrant Workers (sic), has highlighted impacts faced by migrant workers in accessing public services. Those without English as a first language may find accessing services through DARD Direct difficult as there are no interpreters within the DARD Direct Offices.

Another possible impact which has been highlighted during previous consultations with the Chinese Welfare Association is racism from public service staff members when attempting to access services.

4.2.2 Mitigating Action

An action taken to mitigate impacts which may be faced by racial groups due to lack of interpretation skills is the creation of service level agreements between DARD and a service which will provide access to interpreters.

In addition all UAT members will be trained on the customer service training programme. This course is designed to enable all DARD Direct staff members to deliver the highest level of customer service and will highlight the need to treat all customers equally and fairly regardless of their race or nationality. DARD has strict disciplinary policies which will be put into action should it be proven that any member of staff has acted in a disrespectful or discriminatory way to a DARD customer.

4.3 Age

Meetings took place with representatives from Age Concern Northern Ireland and with Youth Action Northern Ireland (YANI) during the pre-consultation period during which a number of DARD Direct factors were discussed; any impacts identified during this consultation have been set out below.

4.3.1 Travelling Time and Associated Costs.

In previous DARD consultations with Age Concern Northern Ireland (sic), it has been highlighted that older people living in rural and isolated areas experience particular problems in terms of the availability and accessibility to public transport. The possibility of increased travelling distance to a DARD Direct office will therefore affect older people dependent on public transport in order to gain access to the facilities.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

4.3.2 Mitigating Action

During the selection of final locations of the DARD Direct offices, consideration will be given as to whether access to the location is available via public transport.

DARD is committed to the provision of services through a number of different mechanisms, e.g. the ability to carry out transactions via telephone, post and on line can minimise the requirement for an individual to have to physically access a DARD office. Advice and support in relation to all DARD matters is also available via the website and telephone.

In order to increase the ability of customers to use on line channels Customer Service Officers in DARD Direct offices can offer a service where they can use an interview room to show customers how to use the DARD website in order to carry out transactions in this way in the future.

4.4 Marital Status

Findings from the pre-consultation exercise did not highlight any specific adverse impacts which would be experienced by farmers or farm families by reason of their marital status (related impacts for gender and dependants have been covered in the relevant sections). We would be happy to discuss any possible impacts and the mitigating actions we can

take when consulting with the relevant groups during the consultation period.

4.5 Sexual Orientation

No specific issues were highlighted during the pre-consultation exercise within this Section 75 group. We are aware that some customers may be concerned about issues relating to sexual orientation in how the DARD service is delivered in our offices.

4.5.1 Customer Service Delivery & Accommodation

In previous consultations DARD has held with groups such as the Lesbian Advocacy Initiative Service (LASI) and the Rainbow Coalition (sic), it has been stated that the issues for rural people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) include homophobic behaviour towards individuals and their families as well as confidentiality issues when accessing locally delivered services.

We are aware that it is possible that there could be homophobic behaviour of staff towards LGB individuals, or the inability to have adequate access to services and confidential discussions with Departmental representatives when visiting DARD Direct Offices.

4.5.2 Mitigating Action

All proposed Unified Administration Team (UAT) members will be trained using a tailored customer service training course. This course will be designed to enable all DARD Direct staff members to deliver the highest level of customer service and will highlight the need to treat all customers equally and fairly regardless of their sexual orientation. In addition to this preventative measure, DARD has strict disciplinary procedures which will be put into action should it be proven that any member of staff has acted in a disrespectful or discriminatory way to a DARD customer.

In addition the DARD Direct office model will provide a number of private interview rooms available upon request of customers, allowing confidential conversations to take place.

4.6 Gender

Meetings took place with the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA) during the pre-consultation period during which a number of impacts of the DARD Direct proposal were discussed, the impacts identified in respect to gender during this consultation have been detailed in the section below.

4.6.1 Customer Service

Although the majority of farm owners in Northern Ireland have been identified as being male, the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), UFU and NIAPA have highlighted the large number of women who contribute fully to the work of the farm business despite not being formally recognised as the business owner. In past consultations with DARD, NIRWN articulated the need for DARD to provide appropriate and consistent support in managing the paperwork associated with farming, given that its often women who carry the responsibility for this task.

4.6.2 Mitigating Action

Improvement to customer services is core to the key aims of the DARD Direct proposal. A number of different measures are being put in place to allow customers to have access to a range of different DARD Services (including Veterinary, Grants and Subsidies and Countryside Management Schemes) at a single point of contact. This will entail the provision of services through a number of different mechanisms, e.g. the ability to carry out transactions via telephone, post and on-line can minimise the requirement for an individual to have to physically access a DARD office. Advice and support in relation to all DARD matters is also available via the website and telephone.

In addition, staff will receive training on the wider range of service areas and improved processes in order for them to be able to provide standardised and consistent support to all those who will use the DARD Direct services in the future.

4.7 Disability

4.7.1 Accommodation

If the facilities and accessibility of the accommodation of the DARD Direct locations is not to at least the standards of the current office locations a negative impact will be faced by those DARD customers with a disability.

4.7.2 Mitigating Action

All of the DARD Direct offices will be fully accessible for customers and staff and will aim to deliver better facilities for disabled customers than the current DARD Offices.

Of particular benefit will be the availability of private meeting rooms to facilitate customers with special needs. Where customer facilities

are not located on the ground floor of DARD Direct facilities, they will be accessible by lifts.

4.7.3 Travelling Time and Associated Costs

During past consultations between DARD and Leonard Cheshire Northern Ireland¹ (sic) reported that an issue experienced by disabled people within rural communities is a lack of accessible transport. People with a disability have a higher reliance on public transport, but we recognise that a lack and infrequency of public transport in rural areas leads to a higher spend of available income on private transport which is a factor in the increased risk of living in poverty within this group. Taking this fact into consideration. A negative impact may be experienced therefore by disabled individuals if an increase in travelling time and therefore travelling costs is caused by the relocation of a DARD Office

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

4.7.4 Mitigating Action

During the selection of final locations of the DARD Direct offices, consideration will be given as to whether access to the location is available via public transport.

DARD is committed to the provision of services through a number of different mechanisms, e.g. the ability to carry out transactions via telephone, post and on line can minimise the requirement for an individual to have to physically access a DARD office. Advice and support in relation to all DARD matters is also available via the website, telephone and textphone.

In order to increase the ability of customers to use on line channels Customer Service Officers in DARD Direct offices can offer a service where they can use an interview room to train customers on how to use the DARD website in order to carry out transactions in this way in the future.

¹ Leonard Cheshire Northern Ireland provides over 400 people with physical and learning disabilities with support through its services in Northern Ireland.

4.8 Dependants

Meetings took place with the UFU and NIAPA during the pre-consultation period during which a number of gender focussed impacts of the DARD Direct proposal were discussed. Additionally information taken from past consultations with the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), has been used to identify the impacts in respect to those with dependants during this consultation have been detailed in the section below.

4.8.1 Travelling Time, Associated Costs & Accommodation

As highlighted by NIRWN, NIAPA and the UFU during the pre-consultation exercise it is often women who carry the responsibility for managing the paperwork for the farm business, and research has shown that females continue to be those primarily with family and carer commitments. This group may be adversely affected by increased travelling time between home and their nearest DARD Direct office, as increased travel time may impact upon caring arrangements including increased cost.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

4.8.2 Mitigating Action

Consideration will be given to the impacts on travelling times for customers when confirming the final locations for the DARD Direct Offices.

In addition DARD will investigate the possibility of including small play areas in the DARD Direct offices. These areas would allow customers to avail of the DARD Direct services with their children in attendance. This facility may also allow customers to combine a visit to a DARD office with other care activities (e.g. the school run).

Q1. Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on farmers and farm families for each of the Section 75 categories?

Q2. What other impacts do you feel may be experienced by farmers and farm families through the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal?

Q3. What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider minimising any impact on farmers and farm families?

5. ANALYSIS OF THE NINE CATEGORIES AND THE DARD DIRECT PROGRAMME ON PROPOSED DARD DIRECT STAFF

The DARD Direct proposal will impact upon the staff held in the regional DARD office network. Details of the staff in relation to the Section 75 categories can be seen in section 3.3 of this document entitled 'Breakdown of Section 75 groups for Staff'. We have summarised the issues likely to arise as a result of these changes. These are:

- relocation
- accommodation;
- travelling time and associated costs;
- organisation restructuring;
- standardisation and consistency of service; and
- office opening hours

The following section details which of the issues identified will impact directly onto the Section 75 groups.

In addition to identifying the possible impacts we have also highlighted the mitigating actions we intend to consider.

Also included in this section are the questions we wish you to consider during consultation, and which will be summarised in Appendix IV entitled 'Consultation Questionnaire'.

5.1 Sexual Orientation

Findings from the pre-consultation exercise with staff did not highlight any specific adverse impacts which would be experienced by staff members by reason of their sexual orientation. We would be happy to discuss any possible impacts and the mitigating actions we can take when consulting with the relevant groups during the consultation period.

5.2 Racial Group

Findings from the pre-consultation exercise with staff did not highlight any specific adverse impacts which would be experienced by staff members by reason of their race. We have however highlighted some impacts which may be experienced by staff members from different racial backgrounds for discussion during the consultation period.

5.2.1 Accommodation

Changes in working location may impact differentially on this group as people from some racial groups could perceive some areas less welcoming than others.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

5.2.2 Mitigating Action

When confirming the final locations of the DARD Direct offices, the perception of the capability of each location to welcome staff members of every racial background will be taken into consideration.

5.3 Marital Status

5.3.1 Travelling Time and Associated Costs

Research has shown that the majority of staff potentially affected by DARD Direct are married (63 per cent). Increased travelling time may impact negatively upon this group as it will increase the time away from home as well as increase costs for travelling for this group.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

5.3.2 Mitigating Action

There are relatively few staff based at sub-offices (those offices most likely to be closed). According to standard NICS policies, staff incurring additional travel costs as a result of relocation under the DARD Direct initiative, will be entitled to excess fares for any additional travel costs between home and office.

One of the assumptions of the DARD Direct model is that DARD will align with a NICS home working policy once one has been determined. The ability to work from home on occasion for the field / technical staff members will mitigate against extended travel times caused by relocating to a new office.

In line with standard NICS policies, an option exists for DARD staff to apply for a transfer to a DARD or other NICS office which is closer to the individuals home than the office to which they have been relocated.

Additionally, consideration will be given to travelling times for relocated staff when confirming the final locations for the DARD Direct offices.

5.4 Religion / Political Opinion

5.4.1 Relocation

Changes in headquarters for staff may impact differentially on people from different religious beliefs as some locations could be perceived as less or more welcoming than others.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

5.4.2 Mitigating Action

When confirming the final locations of the DARD Direct offices, the perception of the ability of each location to welcome staff members of every religious background and political opinion will be taken into consideration.

5.5 Gender

Findings from the pre-consultation exercise did not highlight any specific adverse impacts which would be experienced by staff members by reason of their gender. We have however highlighted some impacts which may be experienced by staff members by reason of their gender for discussion during the consultation period.

Feedback from staff focus groups about proposed DARD Direct locations would indicate that a high proportion of non-mobile grades and staff working part-time are female and have responsibilities for dependants.

5.5.1 Office Opening Hours

It is generally accepted that females are more likely than males to work part-time or have an alternative flexible working pattern. As such the new standardised office opening hours may impact upon

staff's ability to continue with their current flexible working arrangements.

5.5.2 Mitigating Action

When determining the management and staffing arrangements within the proposed DARD Direct offices, consideration will need to be given to the current flexible working arrangements of staff.

In addition to the impacts listed above, it is generally accepted that it is females who continue to be those primarily with family and carer commitments, and so impacts may be faced by females in respect to their having dependants. These have been recorded in Section 5.8 entitled 'Dependants'.

5.6 Age

Findings from the pre-consultation exercise did not highlight any specific adverse impacts which would be experienced by staff members by reason of their age. We have however highlighted some impacts which may be experienced by staff members from different age groups for discussion during the consultation period.

5.6.1 Travel Time and Associated Costs

It is generally accepted that younger people tend to have less access to private transport and are usually concentrated in lower grades with lower pay scales. For this reason increased travel time and costs may impact upon this group in a greater way than it would older staff members.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

5.6.2 Mitigating Action

There are relatively few staff based at sub-offices (those offices most likely to be closed). According to standard NICS policies, staff incurring additional travel costs as a result of relocation under the DARD Direct initiative, will be entitled to excess fares for any additional travel costs between home and office.

One of the assumptions of the DARD Direct model is that DARD will align with the NICS home working policy once one has been determined. The ability to work from home on occasion for the field / technical staff members will mitigate against extended travel times potentially caused by relocating to a new office.

In line with standard NICS policies, an option exists for DARD staff to apply for a transfer to a DARD or other NICS office which is closer to the individual's home than the office to which they have been relocated.

Additionally consideration will be given to travelling times for relocated staff when confirming the final locations for the DARD Direct offices.

5.7 Disability

5.7.1 Accommodation – Noise Levels

In line with the Workplace 2010 standards the new accommodation for the DARD Direct Offices will be open plan in nature. Feedback from the DARD Direct pilot evaluation has commented on the increased levels of background noise which are experienced under these working conditions. This increased background noise may pose an impact to those with a hearing disability.

Mitigating Action

In the design of the new accommodation consideration must be given to the provision of sound proof areas which staff members can use when they need a quiet working environment. This may take the form of break out rooms for concentrated working, or areas in which staff can make sensitive phone calls.

Additionally, in response to feedback gained from the DARD Direct pilot evaluations a number of workplace protocols will be developed and agreed for staff in order to help ensure disruptions to the working environment are minimised. These protocols will be implemented across all DARD Direct offices.

5.7.2 Accommodation - Access

DARD Direct offices may have an impact on a member of staff with disabilities should they not meet the standards to which the staff members are currently accustomed.

5.7.3 Mitigating Action

All DARD Direct buildings will meet the highest standards with regards disability access. DARD will ensure that all offices will be DDA compliant.

Consideration will also be given to the provision of disabled parking spaces in close proximity when selecting the locations for the DARD Direct locations.

In addition to the mandatory legislative requirements, those individuals with an identified disability will be given the opportunity to undergo an ergonomic assessment of their new workspace ensuring that DARD can introduce the necessary measures to increase comfort and effectiveness within their new working environment.

5.7.4 Travelling Time and Associated Costs

A specific issue raised during the pre-consultation exercise with staff was the inability to cope with long journeys given the reduced mobility and specific disabilities of certain staff members. Increased travelling time may cause additional discomfort and therefore be noted as a negative impact for this group.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

In addition, past consultations between DARD and Leonard Cheshire Northern Ireland reported that an issue experienced by disabled people within rural communities is a lack of accessible transport. People with a disability have a higher reliance on public transport, but a lack and infrequency of public transport in rural areas leads to a higher spend of available income on private transport which is a factor in the increased risk of living in poverty within this group. Taking this fact into consideration, a negative impact may be experienced therefore by disabled individuals if an increase in travelling time and therefore travelling costs is caused by the relocation of a DARD Office.

5.7.5 Mitigating Action

There are relatively few staff based at sub-offices (those offices most likely to be closed). According to standard NICS policies, staff incurring additional travel costs as a result of relocation under the

DARD Direct initiative, will be entitled to excess fares for any additional travel costs between home and office.

One of the assumptions of the DARD Direct model is that DARD will align with the NICS home working policy once one has been determined. The ability to work from home on occasion for the field / technical staff members will mitigate against extended travel times potentially caused by relocating to a new office.

In line with standard NICS policies, an option exists for DARD staff to apply for a transfer to a DARD or other NICS office which is closer to the individuals home than the office to which they have been relocated.

Additionally consideration will be given to travelling times for relocated staff when confirming the final locations for the DARD Direct offices.

5.7.6 Organisation Restructuring and Standardisation & Consistency of Service

In order to facilitate new organisation structures and standardised and consistent services, training needs have been identified for staff. Those with learning difficulties may face an issue when training to understand and adapt to the new processes and ways of working.

5.7.7 Mitigating Action

This issue will be taken into consideration when designing and delivering training, taking care to use training delivery mechanisms which will minimise the impact of training on this group.

5.8 Dependants

5.8.1 Travelling Time and Associated Costs

Staff with dependants may be adversely affected by increased travelling time between home and their home office. The increased travel time may impact upon caring arrangements including increased cost and an extended response time if they are a nominated emergency point of contact for dependants.

A map of indicative locations used in the economic appraisal to establish the best delivery option and a summary of comments from staff and customers about the proposals can be found in Appendix II.

5.8.2 Mitigating Action

Consideration will also be given to the impacts on travelling times for employees when confirming the final locations for the DARD Direct Offices.

5.8.3 Office Opening Hours

The new standardised 9am – 5pm opening hours for the DARD Direct offices may impact upon the ability of staff members to use flexible working hours. This factor may impact upon those caring for dependants that may need to utilise flexible working conditions in order to meet their care needs.

5.8.4 Mitigating Action

Consideration should be given to those staff with dependants when designing working schedules and rotas to meet the customer service needs during the new opening hours.

5.8.5 Organisation Restructuring and Standardisation & Consistency of Service

As part of the new organisation structure and the standardisation of services a number of training needs have been identified. If the training takes place at a time and location that is outside of standard working hours and a distance from the headquarters location, it will impact upon those members of staff with dependants. Impacts may include alteration to caring arrangements including increased cost and an extended response time if they are a nominated emergency point of contact for dependants. In some cases it might be necessary for staff to reduce their working hours in order to maintain current care arrangements.

5.8.6 Mitigating Action

Consideration will be given to the impact that would be faced by those with dependants should training be delivered out of standard working hours and a significant distance from the office location of the impacted staff, when selecting the training location and schedule. The larger Unified Administration Teams (UAT) located at each location should provide a larger pool of staff to service the extended public opening hours. This may also be beneficial in allowing staff who require flexible working hours to avail of this opportunity.

In addition we will aim to tailor courses to allow them to be delivered during the standard working hours of staff to minimise their time away from home.

Q4. Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on DARD staff for each of the Section 75 categories?

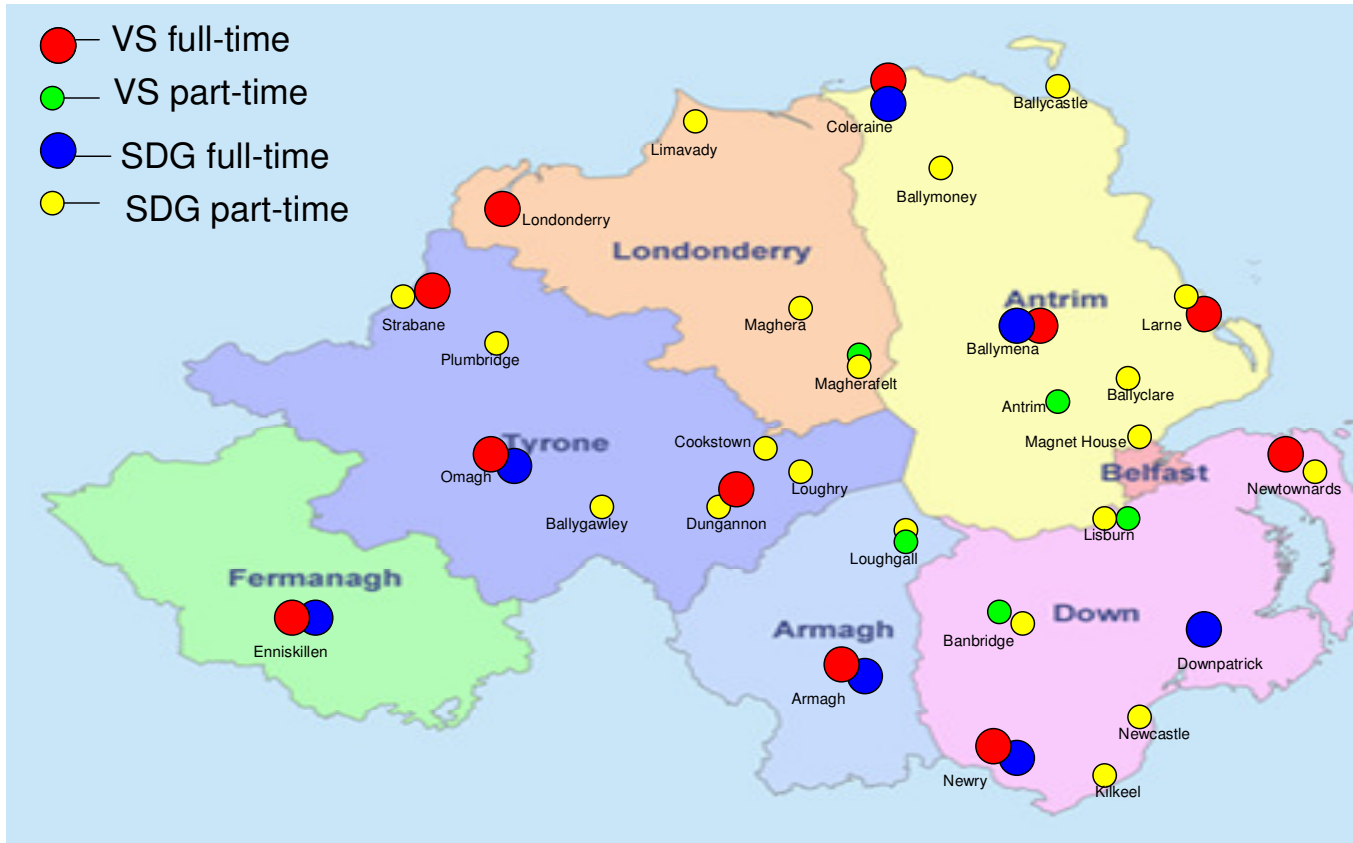
Q5. What other impacts do you feel may be experienced by DARD staff through the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal?

Q6. What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider to minimise any impact on DARD staff?

Appendix I

**Map and List of Current DARD Offices affected by the
proposed Roll-Out of DARD Direct and Hours of Business**

Map of Current DARD Offices likely to be affected by the proposed Roll-Out of DARD Direct



VS = Veterinary Service. SDG = Service Delivery Group and includes CAFRE Development Advisers, Countryside Management, Grants & Subsidies, Quality Assurance and Rural Enterprise. Not all SDG services are available at each office.

DARD Offices

Location		Opening Hours (2007)
City/Town	Address	
Ballymena	Kilpatrick House 38-54 High Street	Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9.00 – 4.00 (Wed 10.00 – 4.00)
Larne	Crown Buildings Pound Street	SDG - Wed am 9.00 -12.30 VS Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9.00 – 4.00 (Wed 10.00 – 4.00)
Antrim	Crown Buildings Castle Street	No public opening hours.
Ballyclare	50 The Square	Mon am (9.30 - 12.30) Tues - Fri by appointment
Ballycastle	5a Fairhill Street	Wed am (9.30 - 12.30)
Ballymoney	Crown Buildings John Street	Tues am (9.00 - 12.30)
Belfast (QAB staff only)	Magnet House 81-93 York Street	Mon - Fri (9.00 – 5.00)
Lisburn	4 Batchelors Walk	Tues am (9.00 - 12.30)
Armagh	2-4 Newry Road	Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri 9.00 – 4.00 (Tues 10.00 – 4.00)
Armagh	Mall West	Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri 9.00 – 4.00 (Tues 10.30 – 4.00)
Portadown (Loughgall)	12 Manor Farm	Mon - Fri 9.00 – 4.00
Newry	Glenree House Carnbane Ind Estate	Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri 9.00 – 4.00 (Thurs 10.00 – 4.00)
Downpatrick	Rathkeltair House Market Street	Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri 9 - 4 (Thurs 10 - 4)
Newtownards *	9 Robert Street	Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9 - 4 (Wed 10 - 4)
Newtownards	2B Portaferry Rd	Mon am (9.00 -12.30)
Banbridge	8 Scarva Street	Mon am (9.30 -12.30)
Kilkeel	3 Bridge Street	Wed am (9.30 -12.30)

Newcastle	127 Main Street	Not open
Coleraine	Crown Buildings Artillery Road	Mon - Fri 9 - 4
Magherafelt	31 Station Road	GSIB Wed am (9.00 -12.30) VS Mon - Fri 9.00 - 12.30
Londonderry	Crown Buildings Asylum Road	Mon - Fri 9 - 4
Limavady	4-6 Killane Road	Mon am (9.00 - 13.00)
Maghera	12 Coleraine Road	Tues am (9.00 - 12.00)
Omagh	Sperrin House Sedan Avenue	SDG Mon - Fri 9 - 4 but open to 5 if staff there VS Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9 - 4 (Wed 9.00 - 3.30)
Dungannon	Crown Buildings 36 Thomas Street	SDG Wed 9.30 -12.30 VS Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri 9 - 4 (Tues 10.30 - 4.00)
Ballygawley	2 Church Street	Tues am (9.30 - 12.30)
Cookstown	14 Fairhill Road	Fri am (9.30 - 12.30)
Plumbridge	32 Dergbrough Road	Thurs am (9.30 - 12.30)
Strabane	Orchard Rd Ind. Est. Orchard Road	SDG -Tue am (9.30 -12.30) VS Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9 - 4 (Wed 9 - 3)

Newtownards DVO, Roberts Street is closed and relocating later in 2008 to temporary premises in Newtownards until final locations for DARD Direct offices are known. DVO staff are temporarily located in 2B Portaferry Road and the Stormont Estate.

With the adoption of the DARD Direct management approach in Ballymena, Coleraine, Dungannon, Newry and Omagh – opening hours are 9.00 – 4.00pm daily

SDG = Not all SDG Branches represented at this particular office

VS = Veterinary Service

GSIB = Grants & Subsidies Inspection Branch

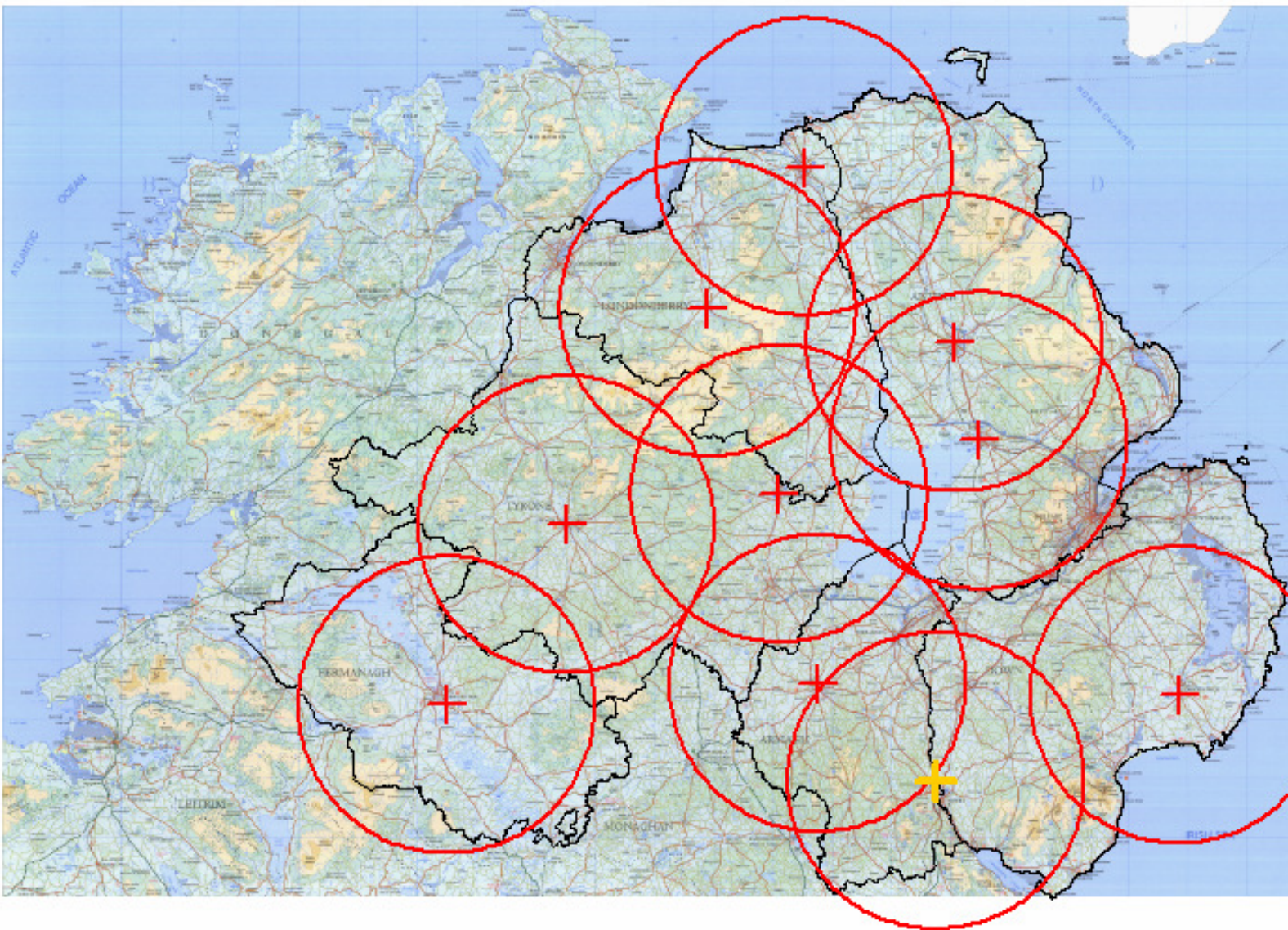
Appendix II

**Map of Indicative Locations used in appraising the 10
Location Delivery Model for DARD Direct**

And

**Summary of feedback from staff and stakeholder groups on
proposed DARD Direct locations**

Map of Indicative Locations used in appraising the 10 Location Delivery Model for DARD Direct



Enniskillen, Omagh, Dungiven, Coleraine, Ballymena, Antrim, Cookstown, Armagh, Newry & Downpatrick

The circles around each of the indicative locations in the map above illustrate the geographic coverage within a 16 miles / 25 kilometre radius of each indicative location. While all farm businesses would be covered by this 10 location model, statistics indicate that over 90% of farms are located within a radius of 16 miles / 25 kilometres of an indicative DARD Direct office location.

Summary of feedback from staff and stakeholder groups on proposed DARD Direct locations

10 Office Network Proposal

An economic appraisal which considered options for how DARD Direct could be rolled out across Northern Ireland, identified a 10 office model to be the most favourable. The general consensus expressed by staff and stakeholders is that bringing together all the farmer focussed services onto single sites should facilitate the effective delivery of farmer focussed services. Some changes to the indicative locations were recommended. Delivery and accessibility of services may also be enhanced by increasing the number of locations to 11.

Locations

The pre-consultation exercise highlighted accessibility, travel time and costs as issues for both staff and customers. These are directly linked to the location of the DARD Direct offices.

Only one of the 10 locations (Inishkeen House, Enniskillen) indicated on the indicative locations map is a confirmed site. The others are proposed locations and both the final number and location of DARD Direct offices have yet to be confirmed.

A summary of comments provided through staff focus groups and individual responses and stakeholders groups about each proposed location is outlined below.

Antrim

The broad consensus expressed by staff and customer stakeholders was that Antrim was not a favourable location for a DARD Direct office due to its close proximity to Ballymena. Some felt that there were not particularly good public transport links between Larne and Antrim. There was also a general consensus for a need for an office further south that could enable better coverage of East Antrim / Lagan Valley / North Down / Lower Ards Peninsula.

Armagh

Armagh is seen by those participating as a good location for both staff and customers, although comments were raised about accessibility limited due to siting of the existing offices. Parking was also raised as an issue, particularly for staff and customers of the Divisional Veterinary Office. Armagh has good public transport links. Some felt that re-siting of a potential DARD Direct office in Armagh is likely to be necessary to improve accessibility. There some differing views on the need for an office in Armagh due to the close proximity of other DARD offices.

Ballymena

Those attending generally accepted Ballymena as a good location for staff and customers for delivery of services. Some stated that there may potentially be significant disruption for staff if relocating from Larne. This focus group also commented on the number of agri-businesses located in and around the town. It was recognised that the town has good public transport links, but accessibility and parking was identified as a major drawback for both staff and customers. Relocating to a new site in or close to Ballymena would be a preferred option.

Coleraine

Comments were made that Coleraine is not ideal in relation to lack of parking for customers and staff at particular times of day. It was noted that Coleraine is already the main centre for Veterinary Service and GSIB staff in the North East and the favoured option of most staff due to the proximity to public transport and suits those working part-time and with dependants. Some believed that Ballymoney is a more central location for delivery of services.

Cookstown

Cookstown was not regarded as a favoured location with those attending commenting that it is currently located on the northern extremity of the current DVO area and this could lead to increased travelling for staff and customers. Staff and customers indicated in the focus groups that retention of Dungannon and Magherafelt would be the favoured options for business purposes. Some commented that Dungannon in particular is located close to substantial food processing and meat plant infrastructure.

Downpatrick

This location was seen by those attending as having good accessibility and parking for customers and staff. It was felt that this location provides good business coverage for east, mid and south Down, but not Lagan Valley, North Down, Lower Ards Peninsula areas. Some stated that the proposal would potentially create substantial personal disruption to staff, if relocating from Newtownards. It was argued that alternative consideration could be given to moving the location further north to Saintfield / Ballynahinch as these are more central for delivery of services. However it was also stated that this would potentially create significant disruption for a number of staff headquartered in Downpatrick.

Dungiven

There was discussion about Dungiven being central to a large farming area and located on a main arterial route. This would be an entirely new location and could potentially mean disruption for customers and DARD staff – particularly office based administration staff. Accessibility of Dungiven may be an issue during winter months. Some advised that a number of Londonderry Divisional Veterinary Office administration staff are non-drivers and the public transport links are limited. Customers / stakeholders indicate there is not a natural business linkage between Dungiven and much of the proposed catchment area. A potential alternative that should be considered is relocating the office further North West e.g. the outskirts of Londonderry. This it was felt, could increase accessibility for customers and allow existing staff access via public transport if necessary.

Omagh

Omagh is generally accepted as a good location by staff and customers for delivery of services. It also has a number of agri-businesses located in and around the town. The town has good public transport links, but a major drawback with the existing office is accessibility and parking for both staff and customers. Relocating to a new site in Omagh would be a preferred option.

Newry

Newry is generally accepted as a good location by staff and customers for delivery of services. The existing site provides good facilities. Accessibility and ample parking are particularly valued by customers.

Points Common to All Locations

Buildings

It is the aspiration that DARD Direct offices will meet the building specification outlined in paragraph 2.2 of this document. Feedback from customers and staff indicates that a number of existing DARD buildings do not meet, and are unlikely to be able to meet, the desired specification. This is particularly the case in relation to accessibility by private and public transport and availability of parking.

Availability of suitable buildings is an issue that may prevent siting of DARD Direct offices in what might appear to be more user friendly locations.

Feedback from staff focus groups and individual staff members highlighted that relocation from existing main DARD sites / locations could potentially cause considerable personal disruption for some members of staff. It was noted that this may particularly be the case for female administration staff, as feedback indicated that substantial numbers in some offices have to make arrangements for the care of dependants, particularly children and may also work part-time.

DARD Direct offices should be accessible by public transport, both for access of staff and customers.

It was stressed in discussions that staff need to be made aware of the final location decisions well in advance of implementation to allow, those that need to, the opportunity to make alternative arrangements or seek transfer opportunities where locations are not accessible or convenient.

It was discussed at staff and customer focus groups that improved accessibility to DARD offices and enhanced customer service provision of a full range of farmer focussed services at each site should mitigate against additional travel distances for customers in many cases.

Appendix III
Breakdown of Mobile / Non-mobile DARD Staff
by Location

Breakdown of Mobile / Non-mobile* DARD staff (VS opps, GSIB, CMB, CAFRE, QAB, Rural Enterprise and OIB) by Regional HQ office – (Jan 07 Staff In Post)

DARD Office	No of Mobile Staff	(%)	No of Non-Mobile staff	(%)
Omagh	53	54	45	46
Ballygawley	4	100	0	0
Newry	48	59	34	41
Banbridge	7	87	1	13
Kilkeel*	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	24	44	30	56
Ballymoney	10	91	1	9
Downpatrick	12	55	10	45
Newtownards - Portaferry rd.	7	78	2	22
Newtownards - Robert St.	24	46	28	54
Newcastle	3	100	0	0
Cookstown	1	100	0	0
Dungannon	32	48	35	52
Loughry	11	69	5	31
Armagh – Newry road	15	58	11	42
Armagh – Mall West	27	53	24	47
Loughgall/Portadown	2	100	0	0
Ballycastle**	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	53	61	34	39
Antrim	5	83	1	17
Ballyclare	4	67	2	33
Lisburn	7	88	1	12
Magnet House	6	86	1	14
Larne	11	33	22	67

Magherafelt	22	71	9	29
Maghera	2	100	0	0
Limavady	8	89	1	11
Londonderry	13	52	12	48
Strabane*	0	0	0	0
Plumbridge*	0	0	0	0

* Non-mobile grades are staff in the AA/AO and analogous grades and Part-time staff.

* * While these are DARD offices, they are not headquarters for DARD Staff.

Note

There is a minor difference between staff complement as indicated from DARD Human Resource and Community Background data in Section 3 of this document and this table indicating numbers of mobile and non-mobile staff in the various offices. The Human Resource and Community Background data was compiled in September / October 2007, while the data in the table above was compiled in January 2007. The difference is due to changing staff in post numbers in various locations over this period of time.

Appendix IV
Consultation Questionnaire

Q1. Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on farmers and farm families for each of the section 75 categories?

Q.2. What other impacts do you feel may be experienced by farmers and farm families through the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal?

Q3. What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider to minimise any impact on farmers and farm families

Q4. Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on staff for each of the section 75 categories?

Q.5. What other impacts do you feel may be experienced by staff impacted by the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal?

Q6. What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider to minimise any impact on staff impacted by the implementation of DARD Direct proposal?

Appendix V
Glossary

Glossary

<u>BERR</u>	<u>Department for Business Enterprise, and Regulatory Reform</u>
<u>CAFRE</u>	<u>College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise</u>
<u>CMB</u>	<u>Countryside Management Branch</u>
<u>CSIP</u>	<u>Customer Service Improvement Programme</u>
<u>DARD</u>	<u>Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</u>
<u>DDA</u>	<u>Disability Discrimination Act</u>
<u>DFP</u>	<u>Department of Finance and Personnel</u>
<u>DTI</u>	<u>Department for Trade and Industry (as for BERR above)</u>
<u>DVO</u>	<u>Divisional Veterinary Office</u>
<u>EQIA</u>	<u>Equality Impact Assessment</u>
<u>GSIB</u>	<u>Grants and Subsidies Inspection Branch</u>
<u>LGB</u>	<u>Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual</u>
<u>MORI</u>	<u>Market and Opinion Research International</u>
<u>NIAPA</u>	<u>Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association</u>
<u>NICS</u>	<u>Northern Ireland Civil Service</u>
<u>NIRWN</u>	<u>Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network</u>
<u>OFMDFM</u>	<u>Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister</u>
<u>QAB</u>	<u>Quality Assurance Branch</u>
<u>RPA</u>	<u>Review of Public Administration</u>
<u>SDG</u>	<u>Service Delivery Group</u>
<u>UAT</u>	<u>Unified Administration Team</u>
<u>UFU</u>	<u>Ulster Farmers Union</u>
<u>VS</u>	<u>Veterinary Service</u>
<u>YANI</u>	<u>Youth Action Northern Ireland</u>



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AN ROINN
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MÁNNYSTRIE O
**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**
