

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: National Beef Association
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Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on farmers and farm families / DARD staff for each of the section 75 categories?

- Impacts on farmers and farm families have been reasonably accurately captured.
- The proposed Downpatrick location disadvantages farmers and farm families in the Ards / North Down area due to the distance and quality of route to Downpatrick. Consideration needs to be given to other options. These could be relocating the proposed office further north to Ballynahinch or Saintfield. These options might be limited due to accessibility of suitable premises at an appropriate location and suitable access. Moving further north disadvantages farmers in the south of the county by giving them further to travel. Locating a DARD Direct office in the North Down area is a further option.
- If DARD can deliver a high quality service, distance to offices will become less important. If having to travel further the customer will expect a high level of service.
- New offices should be located in recognised centres.
- DARD should not discount the need for more than 10 offices.
- DARD Direct offices need to provide facilities to allow customers to transact business in private if necessary.
- Administration staff will require a high level of expertise to give the customer confidence in the service provision.
- Scheduled office days should still be considered if farmers want to speak to technical staff.

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

- Many farmers /farm families are not able to access DARD offices during normal opening hours due to off-farm work or other family commitments.
- Currently many farmers are familiar with the staff providing services in the local offices. It is important that this staff / client relationship is maintained / fostered.
- The age profile of farmers tends to mitigate against large uptake of online service delivery.

What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider to minimise any impact on farmers and farm families / DARD staff?

While 9-5 opening for DARD Direct offices is welcome, consideration to opening one evening a week or on a Saturday should be considered if there is a need. Opening one evening is potentially the most suitable option and might be more cost effective.

Other Points

- No information on the number of farmers visiting local DARD offices is available.

