

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: National Sheep 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?

- The proposed locations for offices on the Ards Peninsula may prove a problematic choice due to the distances that farmers and farm families in the area would have to travel.
- Two of the office location options in the area are Downpatrick and Newtownards, both have farmers/farm families in their immediate vicinity. If one site is chosen over the other e.g. Downpatrick, then this will result in significant distance having to be travelled to access services in this office by people who were making use of the Newtownards office. The opposite is true should the DARD office locate in Newtownards. The road routes between the two areas are less than ideal.
- The level of service required in each office is substantial in order for DARD Direct to prove successful. If the service provision is high, the distances that customers travel to get to the office site becomes a secondary issue
- The high average age and low computer literacy of the farmers/farm families suggests that online transactions may not be a viable option. Also, a number of DARD transactions cannot be carried out online as they need original documentation which can't be used in this way
- Religious or political background or farmers will not affect the running of DARD Direct. The same can be said for ethnicity.

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

- Client relationships have been developed through interaction with current DARD offices, the roll out of DARD Direct – and subsequent closing of some offices - may affect this.
- Opening hours may be important to those farmers who operate part time, or those attend evening sales. There may be potential to extend trading hours on a particular day of the week (the day itself could vary between office locations). This may be more viable than opening on a Saturday.

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

- The possibility of using vacant schools/factory buildings as options for locating DARD offices, this could increase the options available for potential office locations and therefore provide more comprehensive coverage.
- The relationship based nature of the service should not be lost, farmers spend a lot of time alone. Using the DARD office can be a welcome break, and familiarity builds trust.
- It is important that new office locations are able to provide adequate disabled access.

