

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: NIAPA
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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 choice of the locations for the DARD Direct offices is going to affect farmers and farm families in terms of accessing their nearest premises. Current map of indicative locations shows Cookstown as an option for locating an office. This is questionable and Dungannon/Magherafelt may be more suitable as they have more availability of adequate buildings.
- In terms of accessibility, the Newry office is an ideal case study – outskirts of city, plenty of parking.
- The average age of farmers in the region is increasing, which has led to a growing proportion carrying minor personal disabilities such as back injury. As such, the DARD Direct offices will need to have good accessibility and ample parking.
- Additional access to DARD information could be provided in literature form in local library's and community centres in regional town and villages as an alternative to travelling to the DARD Direct office itself.
- Gender is not an issue in terms of farming practice. Oftentimes a female will run the administration side of things; this gender equality needs to be maintained.
- Provision for dependants/children is not a main issue within this phase of roll out of DARD Direct. The addition of a play area within each office is not necessarily a bad idea but at this stage is not as important as some other issues. Also, provision in this way will involve a lot of legislation.

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

- Out of hours trading might need to be offered in some of the DARD Direct offices to cater for evening activity such as sales and marts. This would also provide a time for part time farmers to access the services.
- Manual transactions (with paper and pencil) are more prominent than online services partly due to the numeracy and literacy issues within the farming community. This will need to be taken into consideration with the roll out of DARD Direct. Complex paperwork and legislation needs to be simplified and training will need to be provided to encourage online service provision and uptake by farmers.

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

- The demand for out of hours operation of DARD Direct could be ascertained once the offices locations are decided, by assembling a small focus group in each area.
- The staff in each of the DARD Direct offices must have adequate ability to solve the problems provided by the customer. This will help provide a consistency of service across the office network. Also, the processes within each office need to be uniform – staff compliment at each office, the role

of each staff member of the team, aimed towards quality of service.

- Information used and provided by DARD Direct needs to be clarified to reduce misinterpretation by the customer. This will help aid the productivity within the offices of DARD Direct and increase the likelihood that the customer receives a satisfactory service. An example would be the new DARD modernisation application form – not as straightforward to complete as first thought.