

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: NICCY
Contact: Patricia Lewsley
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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?

- Children of DARD staff and customers could potentially be affected by the roll out of DARD Direct.
- There may be an increased need for childcare provision as parents may have to travel further to access the service/go to work.
- The opening hours of the DARD Direct offices could impact on both staff and customers:
 - By opening later in the evening may allow customers with dependant children to access DARD Direct services if they are unable to do so during the day.
 - DARD will need to consider the impact of longer opening hours on staff who have childcare responsibilities.

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

- In terms of fully assessing the impact on children as a result of the roll out of DARD Direct, it could worthwhile to implement a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA). This could add value to the information already gathered.
- The DARD Direct office itself and the locations that are chosen are not the only variables to consider. DARD should consider the possibility of some home working as a means to limit the impact faced by parents and children if additional time is required for travel to and from work. Not all DARD Direct staff may be able to do this due to the nature of their work.
- Consideration should be given to how staff can access flexible childcare arrangements if necessary. An element of this is provision of childcare vouchers for staff – which benefits the employer and employee in terms of National Insurance contributions.
- In DARD's upcoming customer survey it could be beneficial to try ascertain the number of customers who do not access the office due to that fact that they have young dependant children. From here, assess the likelihood that these customers would use an office if it more accessible and child friendly.
- It is important to maintain appropriate communication channels. High levels of usage of online services is unlikely given the average of farmers is in the late 50's. This is coupled with a proportion suffering basic numeracy and literacy issues as well as dyslexia. Also, despite high number of farmers with computers onsite at their farm, there will also be some who cannot afford one.
- High average age coupled with low computer literacy is symbolic of a generation that has missed out on familiarity with IT. It is important that the upcoming farming demographic is not impacted in this way.
- It is important for the farmer that when farmers or farm family members make contact by telephone that they are able to speak to an appropriate person and that the service is not merely automated.

- It is important for DARD Direct customers to try and maintain, as well as build new relationships with staff that they come in contact with. This gives the customer a degree of confidence and comfort in the service.

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

- As a way to address the limitations of section 75 in terms of addressing the needs of children as mentioned above, DARD could implement a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA).
- DARD should assess possibility of some staff roles being able to be performed from home.
- DARD Direct could consult with Northern Ireland Child Minding Association (NICMA) to determine the possibility of increasing the child minding provision in some areas, and in doing so address any possible increased childcare requirements faced by staff and customers.
- Internet based service uptake could be promoted by trying to incorporate voice activated programmes to be used in farmers homes to carry out DARD Direct transactions. This may help where there are literacy or numeracy issues. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) could be contacted to advise on this, as they currently use such technology.
- Effort should be made to reduce the stigma that is carried by numeracy and literacy issues, towards providing a comprehensive range of options for DARD Direct service uptake.