



1 September 2008

FROM THE PRESIDENT

John McKee
DARD
Organisation Improvement Branch
Room 559B, Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Dear John

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON THE ROLL-OUT OF DARD DIRECT

I am writing in response to the consultation document on the above issued at the beginning of July.

The UFU have already provided our initial thoughts on the DARD Direct 'model' in December of last year as part of the 'pre-consultation' phase and we have also been involved in several meetings with DARD officials over a period of time on this issue. UFU representatives have also been involved in a number of 'Customer Focus Group' meetings held by DARD at several venues across Northern Ireland and some have visited the existing DARD Direct Office in Enniskillen to see this proposed 'one-stop-shop' approach operating first hand.

The UFU has now fully considered these proposals within the Union's Committee structure and our response to this consultation is attached

We are prepared to meet with you if you wish to discuss or want additional clarification on any of the points which we have made.

I trust that the UFU's views will be fully considered as this process is further progressed.

Yours sincerely

GRAHAM FUREY

Enc.



ULSTER FARMERS' UNION

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR THE ROLL-OUT OF DARD DIRECT

- UFU RESPONSE

1 September 2008

DARD Consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment on the Roll-Out of DARD Direct

- The concept of DARD Direct is fully supported.
- 'Gaps' were identified in the geographical coverage of the proposed approach. The number of offices and indicative locations need to be re-examined to ensure equitable readily accessible NI-wide service delivery - with the proposed 10 office model, only 90% of farms would be within a 16 mile radius of a DARD Direct Office.
- Sufficient dedicated car parking facilities and building accessibility for disabled people in particular but others generally are seen as absolutely essential.
- Flexible office opening hours are necessary – lunchtimes; evenings; weekends (although not seen just as important); – to facilitate the large number of 'part-time' farmers and farmers' spouses who need to access these offices.
- An 'appointment' system must be available to improve 'time efficiency' for farmers.
- 'Seasonal' flexibility with the provision of staff resource must be incorporated to minimise farmer 'waiting' times e.g. SFP application submission.
- Sectoral – specific services e.g. apples/mushrooms/vegetables must be located in relevant geographical locations.
- Relevant DARD staff must be fully trained to ensure that they have necessary skills.
- Specific office 'user groups' should be established to ensure that more localised issues can be addressed.
- While meeting staff requirements are important, decisions taken on the 'roll-out' of DARD Direct must first and foremost be based on service delivery for farmer customers.