

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: Youth Action NI
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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 in the consultation document and appear clear.
- The direction of DARD Direct will need to be determined in terms of the department's plan moving forward – does the scheme have short/medium/long term aims and objectives.

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

- Impact of female trying to complete business in the DARD Direct office needs to be assessed, as currently this is a predominantly male environment in terms of the customer.
- Accessibility – need to determine how often people access the DARD Direct service, and to determine what elements of service are available onsite versus what is available online – promote these elements appropriately.
- Provision of a flexible service to meet customer demands in terms of availability requires further consideration.
- Opening hours – need to balance the needs of customers and staff in assessing demand for 'out of hours' service. Provision of an 'out of hours' service while not suiting some staff may enable others to lead more flexible working lives – off during the day – working evenings and parts of weekends etc.
- Transport to office locations is an important factor, especially due to the limited nature of public transport in rural areas.
- Disability is a factor in terms of accessing the DARD Direct offices, ranging from wheelchair access, to appropriate seating for people with back problems/farming injuries.

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

- Increased online service provision– customer training to allow for aging farmer population, pilot scheme to encourage telephone and online transactions
- DARD Direct Staff training and attitude to customers is important– the key element of DARD Direct is customer satisfaction this will only occur if staff can cater for needs efficiently and in a timely manner. This will also go some way to reducing the inconvenience factor if a customer is forced to use a different office.
- The interpersonal skills of staff will also be significant in creating a welcoming atmosphere within the offices. This will be complimented by the office lay out with appropriate seating and private meeting rooms as necessary.
- Customer seating areas could be used to promote DARD Direct services, as well as the other formats that exist beyond office visits – leaflets

regarding online provision, telephone services and other DARD Direct services.

- Opening hours – the demand and viability of extra office opening hours could be assessed by running a series of pilot schemes within the first roll out of offices. There will need to be support for staff if they have to be relocated as well.
- Learn from existing Civil Service offices as a form of good practice in terms of change management.