

2008

Rural Childcare



Investing in the Future

RURAL CHILDCARE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

A group of children and adults are gathered outdoors, holding a large, circular sign that reads "Rural Childcare". The sign is white with the text in a stylized font. The children are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a building with a stone wall and a fence.

“Investing in early childcare can have a very significant economic return. It can be as high as 15-17%.”

Professor James Heckman; The Economics of Investing in Early Childhood, University of Chicago

“Get it right and you can turn rural decline into rural revival.”

Parent and community activist (Eskra, Co. Tyrone)

“Parents have expressed to us that they would not be able to increase work hours or return to work if our facility was not available and located locally.”

Afterschool provider (Ardboe, Co. Tyrone)

The Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group wishes to acknowledge the contribution of all those who participated or contributed in the completion of this report. In particular the group acknowledges those who took the time to complete questionnaires as part of developing case studies; to the groups visited (*Gold Surestart, Ardboe; Playtime Day Nursery and Play Group, Eskra; Stepping Stones, Belleek; Glendurragh Childcare Ltd, Kesh*) and to the Information Officers & staff of the four HSS Boards for their help and assistance in providing the data for the mapping of provision.

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Foreword

Across the European Union the issue of rural childcare is increasingly seen as an important service which enables rural families to effectively participate in rural economic, political and social life. It is also seen as having an important part to play in combating rural decline and promoting rural economic and social development. A recent Danish study has shown that investing in rural childcare is the most important factor above housing, transport, schools and recreational facilities for economic investment in rural areas.

It is for these reasons and an understanding of the particular challenges rural communities have in setting up rural childcare services that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA set up a Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group.

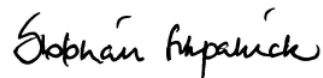
As stakeholders we were absolutely delighted to be part of this group, tasked with producing a report that outlines the challenges and identifies solutions to the issues facing rural communities in providing adequate rural childcare. The group comprising of representatives from rural development, agriculture, community development, academia and childcare have met since July 2007.

It quickly became apparent that rural areas do face particular challenges when it comes to childcare provision and it is these particular '*rural*' challenges that this report seeks to highlight and address.

Underpinning the report is the importance of rural economic and social development and the value of the countryside and rural way of life for our youngest citizens and their families. We need a childcare provision that is flexible and responsive to the needs of rural children, parents, families and communities and this calls for innovative solutions and increased financial investment in rural childcare services.

The report is set within the wider policy context for children in Northern Ireland and also within the framework of a possible Rural White Paper. Therefore, while the report highlights a specific role for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in driving specific rural childcare issues, it also highlights the need for actions to be integrated across other key Departments with responsibility for children and children's issues.

The report concludes with a view that an investment in rural childcare will be good for the children of Northern Ireland, will be good for their families and will show an excellent return on investment for the rural economy.



SIOBHAN FITZPATRICK

CHAIR, ON BEHALF OF THE RURAL CHILDCARE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Executive Summary

Summary: -

- Since taking up office as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in May 2007, Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA has moved quickly to champion rural childcare issues. The Minister has made clear the important value she places on rural communities and in promoting a thriving and sustainable countryside and environment for all in Northern Ireland. Rural childcare is seen as having an important part to play in achieving this.
- A Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group was established in July 2007 challenged with preparing a report to examine rural childcare issues. The group brought together representatives of those with an interest in rural development, agriculture, community development, academia and childcare (see annex 1).
- The outcome is this report. The report takes a specific look at rural and childcare and presents a picture of rural circumstance. The findings draw upon the statistical data and information available on rural and childcare combined with a reality of rural life. Qualitative sources were obtained through a range of case studies developed for the purpose of this study together with information from project visits and stakeholder participation in community consultation events (see annex 4).
- The report is set in the context of wider policy developments.

The report has confirmed: -

- Rural areas do face particular and distinct challenges in relation to the delivery of and access to rural childcare services.
- There is a need for specific and targeted rural solutions to include:-
 - The development of multi-functional centres providing for the care and education needs of children and families but also able to meet other needs such as sport, recreation, culture, training information, health and a place for parents and other care givers to meet. Multi-functional centres can be developed in purpose built buildings or in local underutilised rural primary schools but need to have transport arrangements built in as part of service delivery. Such models can be built upon a social economy model or as a Charity or Company Limited by Guarantee.

- The development of community registered childminding networks supported by a Childminding Coordinator and linked to other forms of childcare provision.
- Clustering of small rural primary schools for nursery, childcare and afterschool provision with flexible use of the school transport system.
- A mobile outreach service equipped and staffed by qualified staff able to go to isolated areas to provide educational and childcare opportunities or seasonal facilities at particular times of the year.
- Childcare as part of a farm diversification programme. This model is provided as a private business with opportunities to create fun farm activities and childcare allowing for the utilisation of farm buildings and the employment of farm families.
- Childcare as part of a rural economic development such as Tele Community Cottage developments.
- A national Sitter Service providing childcare for children with special needs or for parents who work atypical hours. This service is also linked to other childcare services.
- The creation of a network or consortia of services within a geographical area allowing for a number of different services to meet a range of local needs. This model is particularly but not exclusively relevant within SureStart designated areas.
- The development of rural out of school services linked to local primary schools and/or other forms of childcare provision.

The report has concluded: -

- That an investment in rural childcare is an investment in a rural future.
- A specific 'stand alone' rural childcare strategy is not required but DARD, working in partnership with others, should establish a rural childcare funding programme with the aim of addressing rural specific need and circumstance.
- A needs led approach to rural childcare promoting opportunities for providers, communities, the statutory and private sector to work together is recommended

The report has identified a number of ongoing challenges: -

- There is a lack of rural specific research on issues such as childcare.
- Competing departmental policies and the subsequent impact of these on rural development, e.g. planning policies and farm diversification objectives.

The calls for: -

- A need to develop and resource a rural evidence base.
- An overall vision for rural Northern Ireland within the framework of the proposed Rural White Paper with a clearly established evaluation framework.
- Properly integrated strategies and action plans that take account of rural circumstance (adequate and monitored rural proofing).

The report has a number of recommendations, for DARD: -

- DARD, working in partnership with others, should establish a rural childcare funding programme with the aim of addressing rural specific need and circumstance with particular focus on Rural access; Early years integration; Quality & safety; Affordability & sustainability issues (see annex 5 for indicative programme)
- Rural childcare funding should support: -
 - Communities to identify and respond to change in need quickly.
 - Locally based transport solutions where no other transport is available.
 - Extended childcare solutions in areas of identified need.
 - Farm diversification schemes creating opportunities for home based childcare businesses.
 - Rural women in general and farm females in particular to develop opportunities for rural enterprise including rural childcare.
 - The development and expansion of childcare services in areas of identified need including support for childminders.
 - Development staff to assist providers to develop the necessary skills and infrastructure to address sustainability.

- IT solutions to training, access to information and networking.
- Sustainable and practical cross border childcare solutions.
- Opportunities for integration and building community relations recognising that childcare is often the first base for socialisation and integration.
- The management and administration of the funding needs to be kept simple with clear and robust criteria that encourages better use of schools, shared resources and collaborative actions.
- DARD should work in partnership to maximise funding by identifying other potential opportunities to secure match funding.
- DARD should create a rural evidence hub as a means of developing a rural evidence base enabling future trends and comparisons to be made on rural circumstance to meet a wide range of policy and delivery needs.
- DARD should commission research to better understand who lives in the countryside (including urban and rural outmigration) and the implications for providing services.

For Other Government Departments: -

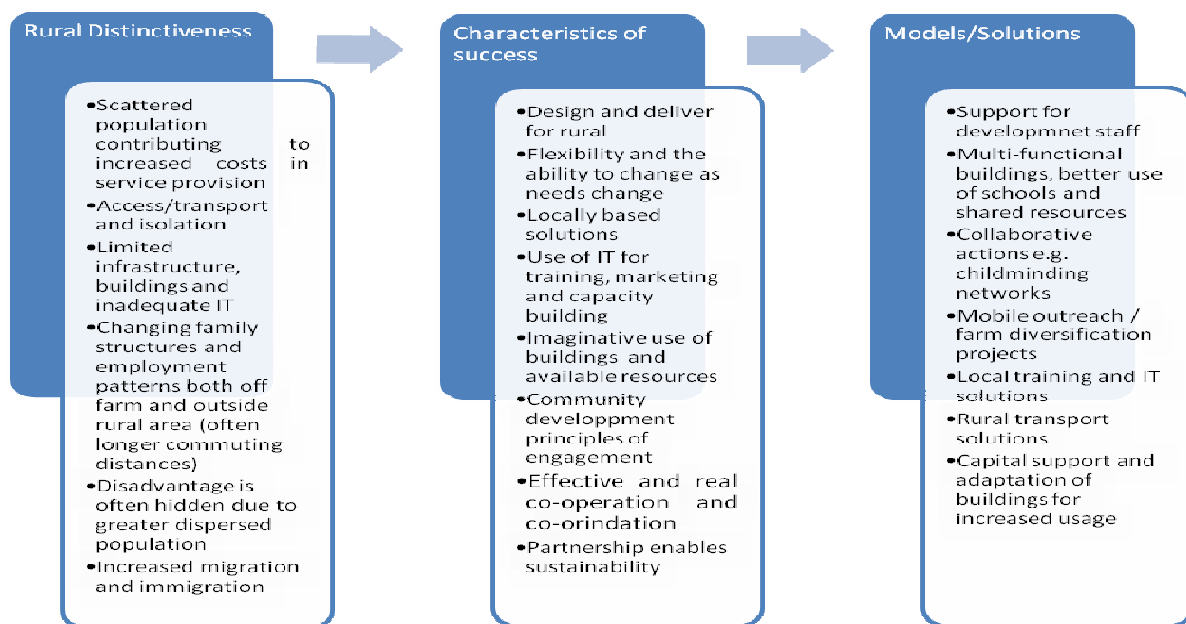
- DE should reassess school transportation to identify/scope out creative transport solutions for rural childcare and how services could be better integrated in meeting rural childcare need.
- DOE Planning Policies need to be reviewed to support rural childcare developments including farm diversification options.
- The extended schools model needs to be promoted for uptake in rural areas and/or options for the delivery of the extended model to go beyond the school gate to other service providers.
- DETI should address Broadband issues in rural areas in light of the objective to achieve 100% coverage.

For Policymakers in general: -

- Population size as a means of defining rural should be viewed as a starting point when designing projects and programmes to meet rural need. Flexibility of application is important.

- There is a strong need to ensure cross departmental targets take account of rural need.
- Government needs to address the pay inequalities between men and women.
- Incentives for employers to introduce and maintain flexible/family friendly work practices.
- Government policy on the relocation of public sector jobs should take account of and recognise the opportunities that exist in rural areas as employment centres.
- Support should be offered to encourage more men to work in childcare.
- Providers need access to relevant up to date information on local need and demographics to enable appropriate childcare solutions to be planned and delivered
- An accurate computerised database of registered childminders in all 5 Health Trust areas would support a better understanding of need (relevant government department)

Diagram 1: Think Rural: Distinctiveness of Rural and Characteristics for Success in Rural Childcare



Introduction

In July 2007 the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA established a rural childcare stakeholder group to look at and consider the particular issues, challenges and opportunities for rural childcare provision in Northern Ireland.

The stakeholder group brought together the thoughts and concerns of both those involved in childcare services and those with an interest and knowledge in rural development, agriculture, academia and community development (see annex 1).

The group were asked to prepare a report and present key findings to the Minister by January 2008.

Given the timescale and the breadth and complexity of childcare the report is designed to offer a preliminary analysis of the current challenges and opportunities in childcare provision specific to 'rural' and make recommendations on how current and future provision can be informed and improved.

In particular the study set out to: -

- ❖ Identify the main factors in rural areas that affect access to childcare and consider ways to improve any identified needs

- ❖ Explore existing strategies and reports relating to childcare provision in Northern Ireland
- ❖ Examine models of best practice
- ❖ Assess how a new rural childcare strategy complements/adds value to existing policies

The main focus of the study is on the 0-12 year old age group and the recommendations and principles presented in this report apply mainly to this sector.

However there is an inevitable connection to childcare services beyond the age of 12 and as such many of the issues and possible solutions presented may also apply beyond the study age group, and or present opportunities for future research in relation to access to services and rural young people.

Studies would show that children benefit from having their needs met closer to where they live, play, learn and have social networks.

Immediately this has implications for 'rural' as scattered populations and a focus on economies of scale often present challenges to the number and location of services available.

Delivering services to children and parents of those with additional needs in rural areas are also vitally important and likely to present their own challenges

which merit specific consideration outside the scope of this study.

Similarly, the specific childcare needs of new migrant families to rural Northern Ireland requires further investigation.

Although not the primary focus of this study, rural childcare solutions need to be mindful of, and cater for, the wide and diverse range of needs in a changing cultural society.

The report itself is broken down into a number of sections. Each section is designed to identify the challenges and opportunities for rural childcare and highlight key recommendations on how future provision can be informed or improved from a rural perspective.

Section one establishes the scope of the study defining the parameters in terms of rural, age and childcare provision.

Section two looks at the wider policy context and in particular government targets for early years provision. Underpinning this report is the need to ensure integration with existing strategies and action plans. It therefore recognises the work of the relevant departments involved in childcare services and highlights some of the key developments currently taking place. It also explores existing literature and details key findings.

Section three takes a specific look at rural. It takes the statistical data and information available and combines this

with the reality of rural life to present a picture of rural circumstance. It draws out the meaning of the data and its relationship to, or implications for, accessing rural childcare provision. It looks at rural demographics; transport; employment; commuting patterns; farm incomes and childcare provision.

Section four considers models for rural childcare services taking into account the learning from local, regional, national, European and international studies. It recognises the distinctiveness of rural areas and makes suggestions for rural childcare solutions.

Finally, section five draws together the key conclusions and makes recommendations for addressing the childcare needs in rural Northern Ireland.

The report offers a snapshot on rural childcare needs. To be effective however it is important that this snapshot is repeated so that trends can be determined and comparisons made with rural areas in the UK and the Republic of Ireland and not least within the border corridor of Northern Ireland where there may be further opportunities for collaborative actions in tackling cross border rural childcare services.

The stakeholder group identify a series of different outputs from this report. There are areas where funding is needed to support projects and programmes that sustain or improve the access to, or the provision of, rural childcare services; there are other areas where action is needed to improve integration and co-ordination with other strategies and make changes to fit rural circumstance and finally there are areas where more research would help to support a developing rural evidence base enabling future trends and comparisons to be made that ultimately contribute to the DARD vision of a 'thriving sustainable rural community and environment in Northern Ireland'.



*Glendurragh Childcare Ltd., Kesh,
Co. Fermanagh*

Section one: Scope of the Study

1.1 DEFINING RURAL

This is important on two fronts. One, on the basis of location and geography in terms of where is, or what constitutes rural and how it is to be applied for the purpose of this study and two, in relation to the rationale for the study and the relationship with DARD.

1.1.1 Rationale

It is easy to suggest childcare is not a DARD issue but one that fits better with others. In situations and, in particular, in relation to policy development this is arguably the case and the report aims to draw out any such policy implications as a means of encouraging other departments to 'think rural' when applying and designing their relevant policies.

The primary purpose of this study however, is to look at **rural circumstance** and demonstrate what would make a difference to the lives of rural families and children.

It ultimately seeks to support and contribute to the social and economic growth of rural areas to benefit those who live there and seek employment, training and business opportunities. This underpins the report and establishes a clear rationale for DARD intervention.

1.1.2 What is Rural?

There are many perceptions and interpretations of the term 'rural'.

In an attempt to address the need for a clear and robust means of defining 'rural' the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published a Report by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group in February 2005 which considered this question in depth.

The report recommended that government departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways that are appropriate to the specific programmes and projects under consideration.

In the absence of a programme specific definition it proposed that settlements with a population of 4,500 or less should be defined as rural (see annex 2 for the statistical classification of settlements (NISRA)).

On the basis of this definition, approximately 35% of the Northern Ireland population live in rural areas. This equates to just under 600,000 peopleⁱⁱ.

The report however stressed that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and that policy makers need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies.

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) in its Rural Baseline Reports (2002, 2003 and 2005) identified a diversity of rural area types in Northern Ireland. It concluded that there is no single definition of rural but a pattern of areas with similar characteristics.

The reports found that the different circumstances in these areas require different responses. Some rural areas, for example, are close to cities and large towns and are subject to different pressures than those that are more remote.

Responses to DARD consultation exercises on the 'Study of Rural Policy' and the draft 'Rural Strategy' did not arrive at a consensus on the issue of rural definition, although there was a broad support for a flexible approach, with the definition dependent on the context in which it is to be used.

There are clear challenges therefore in defining rural and findings support a clear need for flexibility. This means that often tailored solutions need to be found supporting the argument that 'one size fits all' policies to address rural needs are inappropriate.

Policy Pointers:-

- **Population size as a means of defining rural should be viewed as a starting point**
- **Flexibility of application is important**
- **Consideration of location and beneficiaries in terms of service provision should be applied**

That said, it is important for the purpose of reporting to establish a starting point, a usable definition which outcomes can relate to and so the NISRA definition of settlement size with a population of 4,500 or less is used in this instance.

1.1.3 Distinctiveness of Rural Areas

Another important consideration in looking at rural is its distinctiveness with particular reference to what makes rural different

and why it is important to take account of rural circumstance especially when it comes to delivering services.

The tendency to idealise rural living and to make inaccurate assumptions about what it is like can, in itself, be a barrier to recognising particular rural circumstances and more importantly in the development of effective responses to rural need.

Rural areas face particular and distinct challenges associated with scattered populations; higher unit costs for service delivery; disadvantage and access to goods, services and activities. For example, disadvantage is often not concentrated into particular geographical areas as is the case

with more urban areas. This makes it harder to identify and to measure, particularly if the measurement tool is based on geography since rich and poor can be living side by side in the same community.

Something to note: -

There is an inevitable connection to childcare services beyond the age of 12 and as such many of the issues and possible solutions presented in this report may also apply beyond the study age group, and or present opportunities for future research in relation to access to

1.2 DEFINING AGE

An important consideration in any childcare study is age. For the purpose of this report the age group 0-12 years old has been established.

1.3 DEFINING CHILDCARE

Childcare services are provided by a range of providers including the public and private sectors as well as by communities themselves. In looking at rural childcare provision this study attempts to look at the widest possible range of childcare services rather than focusing on who provides them. It covers crèche facilities, pre-school playgroups, nursery schools, childminding, sure start, afterschool and extended schools provision.

1.3.1 Reasons for Childcare

It is also important in the scope of this study to reflect on some of the reasons childcare is needed.

Availability of childcare can enable parents to work either on a full or part time basis helping to bring additional income into the household; it can enable parents to take full

advantage of training, educational and personal development opportunities; it can provide social experiences for children to assist them to develop skills in relating to other children; it can be the first base for socialisation, integration and

building community relations particularly for children of foreign nationals; it can provide care in emergency situations, for example, if a parent was sick and it can support new and stay at home parents by offering opportunities for interaction and communication combating feelings of isolation and exclusion. Whatever the reason, it provides opportunity and choice.

Childcare also plays an important part in economic development offering opportunities for self-employment and community enterprise locally. In small rural communities the provision of childcare, in itself, can be a major employer.

In the three community based projects visitedⁱⁱⁱ as part of this study, the average employment was 23 staff. One presentation in particular highlighted the economic benefits by saying:-

“In economic terms our annual turnover is £244,295, we employ 25 staff and our total wage bill for the year is £163,997. Almost all of this will go back into our rural economy.”
(Provider, Co. Tyrone)

Locally based childcare was also seen as a key part of rural sustainability with those groups visited citing local childcare solutions as having a key role to play in rural regeneration, contributing to the likelihood of families staying in the area and making use of other key services such as the primary school.

“I started childminding because it was not paying me to work and pay for my 2 children’s childcare. So I took the decision, which was a difficult one at the time – to leave work and look after my own children and start childminding as a business. Since I started childminding I have never looked back.” (Registered Childminder, Co. Down)



Opportunities for training – Newry Confederation of Community Groups

Section two: Policy Context

2.1 POLICY

Underpinning this report is the need to ensure integration with existing strategies and action plans. This section provides a summary of the international and national policy perspectives related to the study area as well as providing some of the justification for investing in childcare. (More detail on the policy context can be found in annex 3).

2.1.2 International

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child identifies a whole range of rights for children including the right to education, to a reasonable standard of living, and to relax and play. Article 12 of the Convention pays particular attention to the rights of children with regards to voice and participation and their ability to form and express their opinions. The implementation of the Convention reflects a global commitment to the principles of children's rights. The standards and principles articulated by the Convention can only become a reality when they are respected by everyone – within the family, schools and other institutions that provide services for children, in communities and at all levels of administration. Investing in the provision of childcare helps in part to ensure the principles of the Convention are met.

The OECD report “Starting Strong, early Childhood Education and care” reviewed

early childhood education and care in twenty OECD countries and describes the social, economic, conceptual and research factors that influence early childhood policy. These include increasing women's labour market participation; reconciling work and family responsibilities on a more equitable basis for women; confronting the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries; and in particular, addressing issues of access, quality, diversity, child poverty and educational disadvantage. Some of the recommendations, specifically for the UK include: - improving the quality and affordability of childcare; reducing fragmentation of service providers for childcare; reviewing the situation of special needs children and ensuring inclusion particularly where there has been community conflict and/or isolation.

The EU has adopted a range of social and economic policies relevant to childcare. The Council of Ministers at their meeting in March 2002 supported action to create more and better jobs and to reform employment and labour market policies. This included actions to remove barriers to female labour force participation involving the greater provision of childcare.

2.1.3 National

The position in *England and Wales* is clearly set out in the Government's "Every Child Matters: Change for Children" and "A Ten Year Strategy for childcare – Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children".

The Strategy set out the key themes of:

Choice and flexibility - parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life

Availability - for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances

Quality - high-quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce, among the best in the world

Affordability - families to be able to afford flexible, high-quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs

In **Scotland** in May 1998 the Government published "Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland" - one of a number of measures aimed at supporting families and in particular raising children out of poverty. The Strategy recognised that good quality childcare has benefits for children by promoting their development and learning, and benefits for parents, by enabling them to work.

In the **Republic of Ireland** the Childcare Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children has responsibility for

implementing the National Childcare Strategy 2006 - 2010. The strategy aims to further develop the childcare infrastructure to meet the needs of children and their parents for quality early childhood care. €575 million has been allocated to the 5-year programme, including €358 million for capital investment. It is anticipated that the programme will create up to 50,000 new childcare places, with the objective of assisting parents to access affordable, quality childcare.

In **Northern Ireland** the Office of The First and Deputy First Minister have published the '*Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge*' – *A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016*.

Contained within it are a number of targets specifically relating to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) specifically, that at least 5% of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (axis 3 quality of life measures) is directly targeted at children and young people in rural areas.

'Lifetime Opportunities' – The Government Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland has identified as one of its stated overall objectives to **'End child poverty by 2020-based on the estimate of approximately 135,000 children in Northern Ireland in relative income poverty in 1998/99, this means lifting 67,000 children out of poverty by**

2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.'

The Executive has a statutory obligation within Section 16 of the Northern Ireland St Andrews Agreement Act 2006 to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need. The process to obtain Executive Committee agreement on an anti-poverty strategy has begun. Proposals are currently being cleared at official level, with a view to the Executive Committee considering the adoption of 'Lifetime Opportunities' later this year.

In addition a Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Lone Parents was established in September 2006 in recognition of the fact that lone parent families make up around a quarter of all families with dependent children and are more at risk of being in poverty than any other household type. It is estimated that between a third and half of lone parent families in Northern Ireland are living in poverty affecting around 46,000 children. Recommendations arising from this work are near completion with childcare emerging as one of the major barriers impeding lone parents from entering/returning to work.

DARD has a significant contribution to make to Government under '*Lifetime Opportunities*' the *Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland*. Specific targets include: -

Early Years Targets

Provide opportunities for young children in rural areas to benefit from projects and schemes such as accessible rural transport, day care provision, crèches and initiatives that also support their parents as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

By 2020, government will support every local authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for Early Years children in rural area

Children and Young People (5 – 16)

Provide opportunities for children and young people of all ages in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Development Programme through projects and schemes, such as improving access to ICT and increasing accessibility through rural transport routes and positively benefiting the lives of farm families as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

In addition '*The Early Years Strategy*' (Department of Education (DE)) seeks to ensure the well-being and holistic development of children in Northern Ireland from 0-6 years.

DE have sought to provide an integrated approach to policy and service delivery for children and their families and have involved other government departments, including DARD, in the formation and discussions surrounding the development of this Strategy. The report itself is due out for consultation in September 2008. The Rural Childcare agenda will play an important part of this process.

The specific objectives of this Strategy are:-

- To ensure that every child has a chance to develop his/her potential
- To promote each child with a safe, stable, health and stimulating age appropriate environment which allows the child to thrive and develop confidence and self-esteem to face future challenges
- To provide access to quality day-care provision that is affordable and allows parents to balance the demands of parenthood and working life
- To provide high quality public services for young children with targeted support for those with additional needs

2.1.3 Shared Future

Another important consideration in the context of this report is the government's commitment to a shared future agenda.

Early years provision and childcare can act as a contrast to the segregated education system. It is often the first base for socialisation, integration and building community relations both within and between communities in Northern Ireland and amongst foreign nationals.

Collectively these policies, strategies and plans establish a framework for investing in childcare. Whilst recognising the need to complement these and avoid duplication there is

also a strong need to ensure targets established take account of rural need.

DARD has outlined specific targets within the 'Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland' as detailed. This report, with its specific focus on rural childcare, is a signal of DARD's commitment to rural children and the role of early years.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature relevant to rural childcare provision in Northern Ireland identified limited information. Although there are many valuable reports and evaluations of various different aspects of childcare, there is an overall lack of 'rural' specific research.

Of the 29 research reports reviewed 11 were relevant to Northern Ireland of which 4 had a specific rural focus and identified key recommendations for rural childcare provision. This is in comparison to other countries where information on rural services and childcare is largely a matter of regular review.

The Cross Border Rural Childcare Project (1997-2000)^{iv} was identified as the most significant piece of research carried out on rural childcare within Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland.

Conducted over a 4 year period the project supported six rural cross border communities to engage in the planning

and developing of services to meet specific rural need.

The concluding report identified recommendations for the development and management of childcare in rural areas.

The report highlighted a very low level of childcare provision in rural Northern Ireland and Ireland in comparison to urban areas and to the levels in other regions of Europe.

It suggested a lack of choices outside the immediate family unit for seeking childcare in rural areas, and the particular difficulties in providing these choices include poor transport links, lack of suitable buildings, low incomes in many families in rural areas, scattered communities and the low density of population.

Other research has shown that lack of childcare adds to the stress of farm families. Faced with falling farm incomes, many farm families could not afford childcare even if it was available. Children are minded on the farm which is a place of work, or in some cases young children are minding younger children. Parents are mindful of the unsuitability of these arrangements but have no other options^v. More recent research has indicated that parents have concerns about the amount of farm work done by young children and the health and safety issues this presents^{vi}.

A report carried out by the Northern Childcare Partnership on 'Childcare Issues Affecting Families in Rural Areas'^{vii} presents continuing challenges associated with access to rural childcare.

In addition to transport the report also highlights a need for increased funding to help sustain childcare in rural areas because of the additional costs for parents associated with lower numbers of children accessing services. It also identified a need to increase the number of registered childminders in rural areas.

An evaluation report by the Magherafelt Childcare Alliance^{viii}, although not rurally specific, does highlight a number of key considerations in funding childcare services in general.

It identifies, particularly in short term projects that urgent issues such as funding and other crises facing individual groups have the potential to take up the worker's time and leave less time for development across a range of areas. It recognises the value of the social economy model within the community childcare sector and recommends further exploration and development in this area as appropriate.

Research into the specific childcare needs of new emerging communities in rural Northern Ireland is also limited.

One particular report on issues facing migrant workers and their families in Northern Ireland^{ix} highlighted the lack of

affordable and accessible childcare as a barrier to the labour market.

The report suggests that it likely that half of the new migrant worker and families population are women and the issue of childcare, coupled with the greater likelihood of fewer or no family support networks disproportionately impact on women.



Discovering Kids, Loop Co. Tyrone

Key Finding	There is a lack of rural specific research on issues such as childcare
Action	This needs to be addressed through specific thematic studies; action research and rural analysis
Recommendation	DARD should create a rural evidence hub as a means of developing a rural evidence base

Section three: Rural Analysis

3.1 PICTURE OF RURAL

This section takes the statistical data and information available and presents a picture of rural circumstance. It draws out the meaning of the data and its relationship to, or implications for, accessing rural childcare provision.

It combines the secondary data with some key insights into rural life by using the real life experiences of those living in rural areas with childcare needs. These experiences were captured through the use of case studies developed for the purpose of this study (see annex 4 for models of engagement).

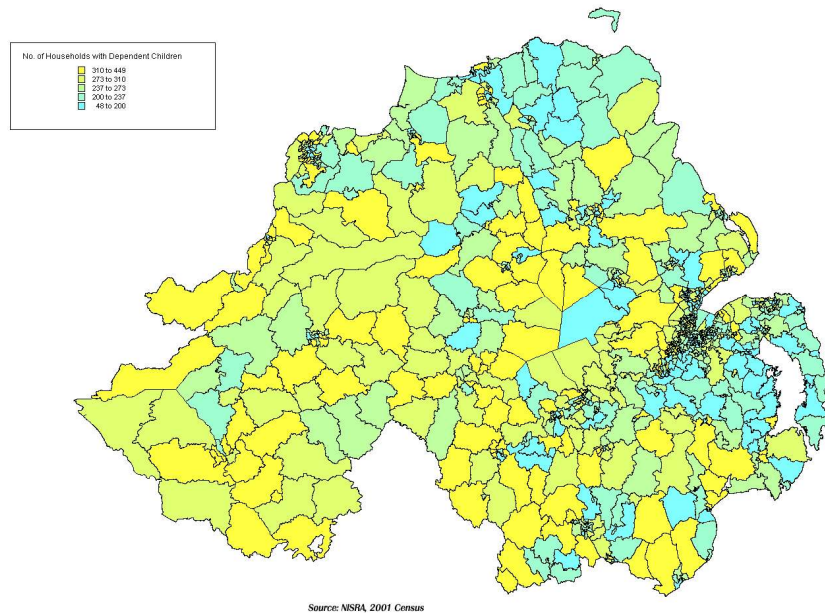
3.2 EXAMINING DEMOGRAPHICS^x

In analysing demographics for the purpose of this study we look firstly to the number of households with dependent children and then to population projections with particular interest in the 0-12 year old age group and rural areas in general.

3.2.1 Households with Dependent Children

Map 1 depicts the number of households with dependent children showing those areas with a higher dependency as yellow and green. Higher concentrations are found in the West and South of the region (predominately rural wards).

Map 1 Numbers of Households with Dependent Children

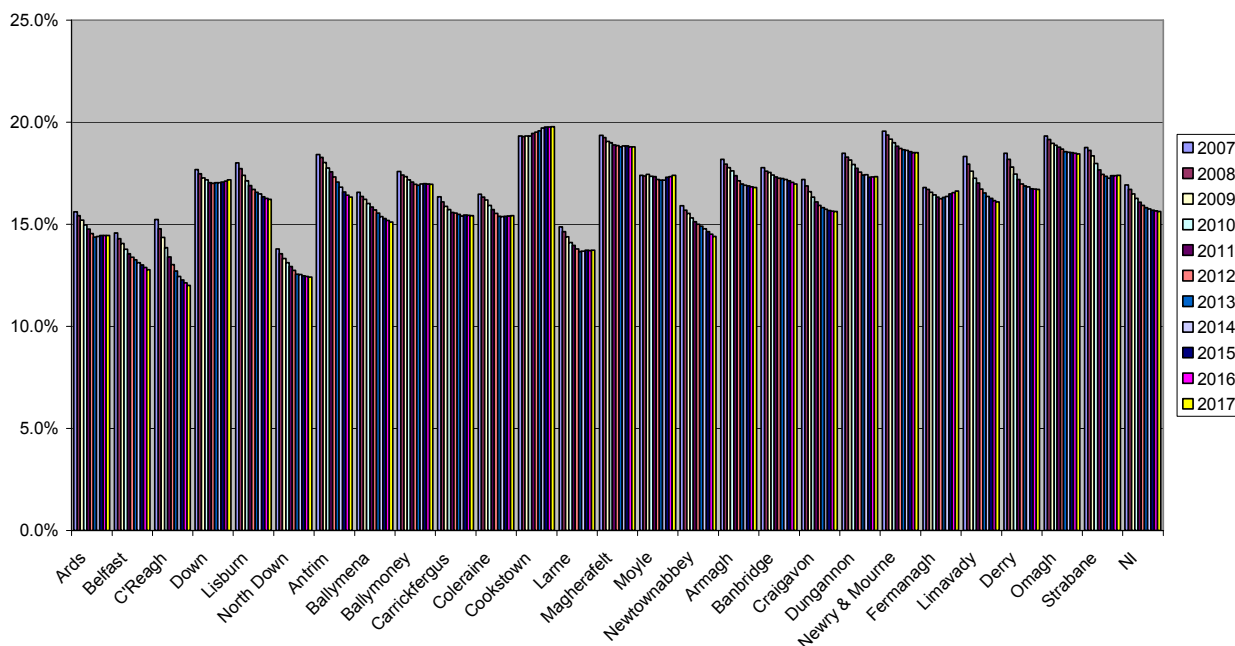


3.2.2 0-12 year Olds

NISRA population projections 2007-2017 predict an overall decrease in the 0-12 year old age group across Northern Ireland as a whole.

The chart below shows the projected change in this age group at District Council level over this period.

Chart Showing NISRA Population projections 2007-2017 for 0-12 year olds as percentage of total population



Based on these projections the 0-12 year old age group represents 16.9% (=292,406 persons) of the 2007 population estimates and 15.6% (=279,540 persons) of the 2017. This represents an estimated 4.4% decrease in the number of 0-12 year olds across Northern Ireland as a whole.

How generalised is this fall and what, if any, are the implications for rural childcare provision?

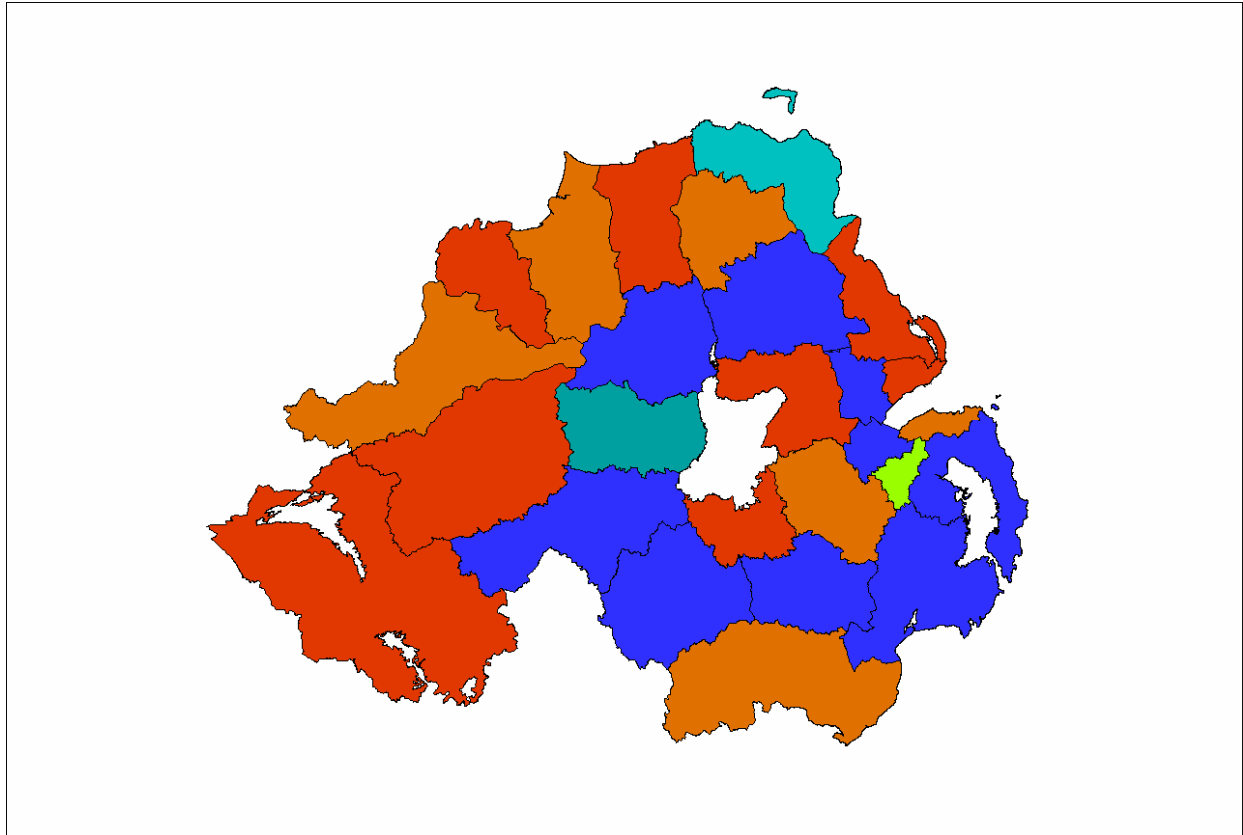
On closer inspection of population estimates per District Council, predicted

increases in the 0-12 year old age group can be seen in Cookstown, Fermanagh and Newry & Mourne^{xi}.

This suggests the broad trends of decline need to be looked at more carefully within different areas. Three other data sources help to illustrate this.

Patterns in Birth Rates – Map 2 shows the results of an analysis of birth rates over a 4 year^{xii} period since the 2001 census. The colours represent different overall trends in birth rates over the period as detailed in the table below the map.

Map 2 Birth Rates 2001-2005 (Register Generals Office)



Trend	Colour
Continuously upward	N/A
Upward overall but with variations	Blue
Stable	Turquoise
Continuously downward	Green
Downward overall with variations	Orange
Variable	Red

The map shows that downward but variable trends in birth rates are a characteristic of some districts in the rural west, and in districts around the eastern shores of Lough Neagh. There are however also some districts with an unstable but generally upward trend in birth rates shown in dark blue. Whilst there are some cases where birth rates are declining, on the whole the data is not clear cut and it will be important to continuously monitor trends.

Urban Outmigration – The pattern of District Council areas showing an increase in 0 to 5 years illustrated in Map 2 could be explained in part by a trend for urban outmigration amongst families with young children to areas proximate to Belfast. Urban outmigration to rural areas is not yet properly researched, however a number of data sources point to it being a significant issue to take into consideration.

The overall population estimate figures from NISRA^{xiii} for example, show a reduction in population in Belfast, which is primarily associated with outmigration^{xiv}. Population growth of three times or more of the Northern Ireland average is estimated in Banbridge, Omagh, Ballymoney and Newry and Mourne. In these districts, and in Fermanagh, migration contributes significantly to growth. Growth of two and half times the Northern Ireland average is attributed to Cookstown, Magherafelt and Limavady.

The traditional notion that informal care networks i.e. family and friends are more prevalent in rural areas can no longer be assumed.

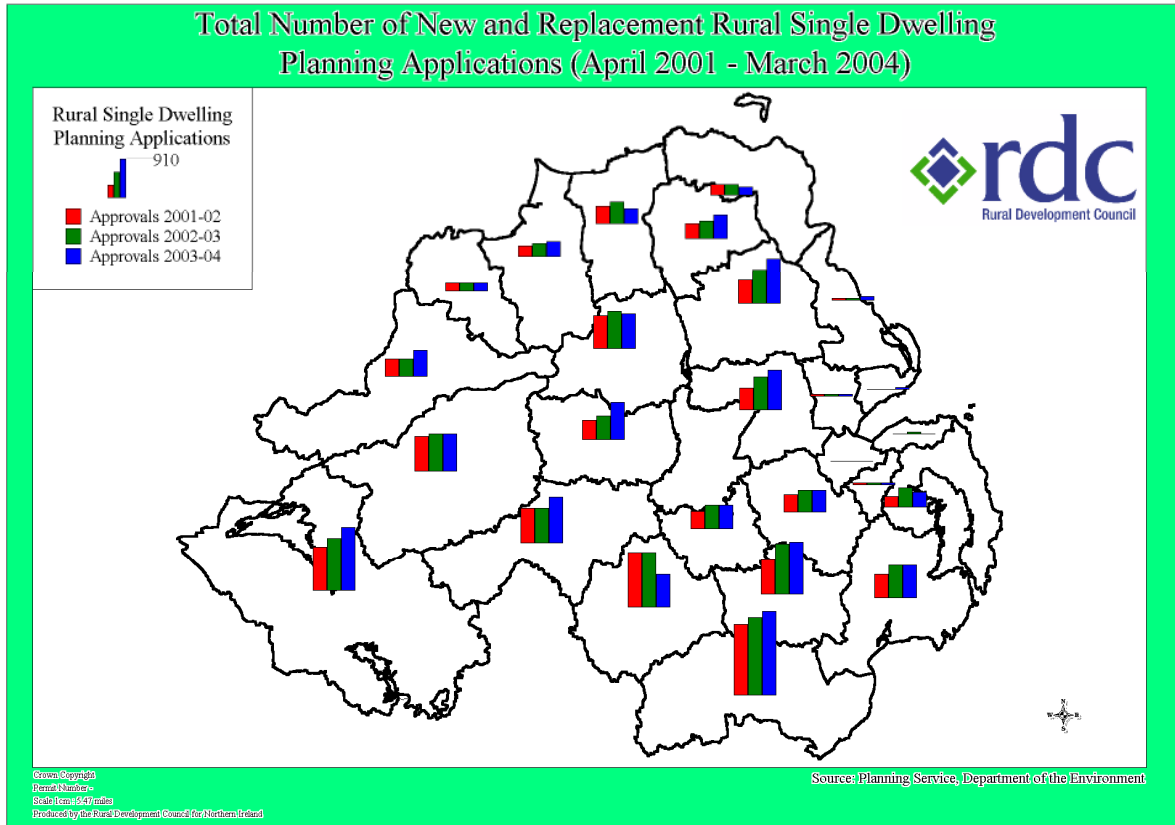
Tom and Jane have recently moved to rural Mid-Ulster. Both parents are in full time employment in Belfast. Jane

works as a nurse. A typical work day usually starts by leaving home at 6.30 a.m. and returning 8.45 p.m. having completed 80 miles to and from work. They have no family close by. Tom transports the children to and from his parents' home in Crumlin for childcare. (Family, 2 children, Mid-Ulster)

Planning Applications - Department for Regional Development figures show that the number of new single dwellings approved in the countryside for 2002/03 increased by over 170% on the 1990/91 figures, and is 23% higher than the year before (2001/02). Approvals for replacement dwellings (new build for old) also increased by 130% during the same period. Applications for new dwellings over the period 2003 to 2005 were substantially higher again, with 9,500 approvals being granted in the 2004/05 period alone.

Map 3 shows the pattern in successful new and replacement single dwelling applications across the region to March 2004. Applications continued to grow in districts such as Newry and Mourne, Fermanagh, and Dungannon in the South, and Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney in the North. Demand has remained relatively low in the North West, however.

Map 3 Total Number of New and Replacement Rural Single Dwelling Planning Approvals (April 2001-March 2004)



A key influence in the number of planning applications during these periods could be a direct result of new area plans and a rush to submit applications before the change in regulations such as that of Planning Policy Statement 14. Whatever the motive the figures clearly identify a growing demand for housing in the countryside which in turn is likely to place greater demand on and for services.

There is also evidence to suggest a substantial increase in families and children from different countries within

the European Community and elsewhere^{xv}.

What the full extent of this influx of people and the trend of outmigration means for population levels (and indeed the age profile) in rural areas would need further research however it would be a fair assumption that rural populations are, by and large, growing.

3.3 TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY

Clearly one starting point in considering access to rural childcare is the level of mobility experienced by those who require the service.

3.3.1 Car ownership

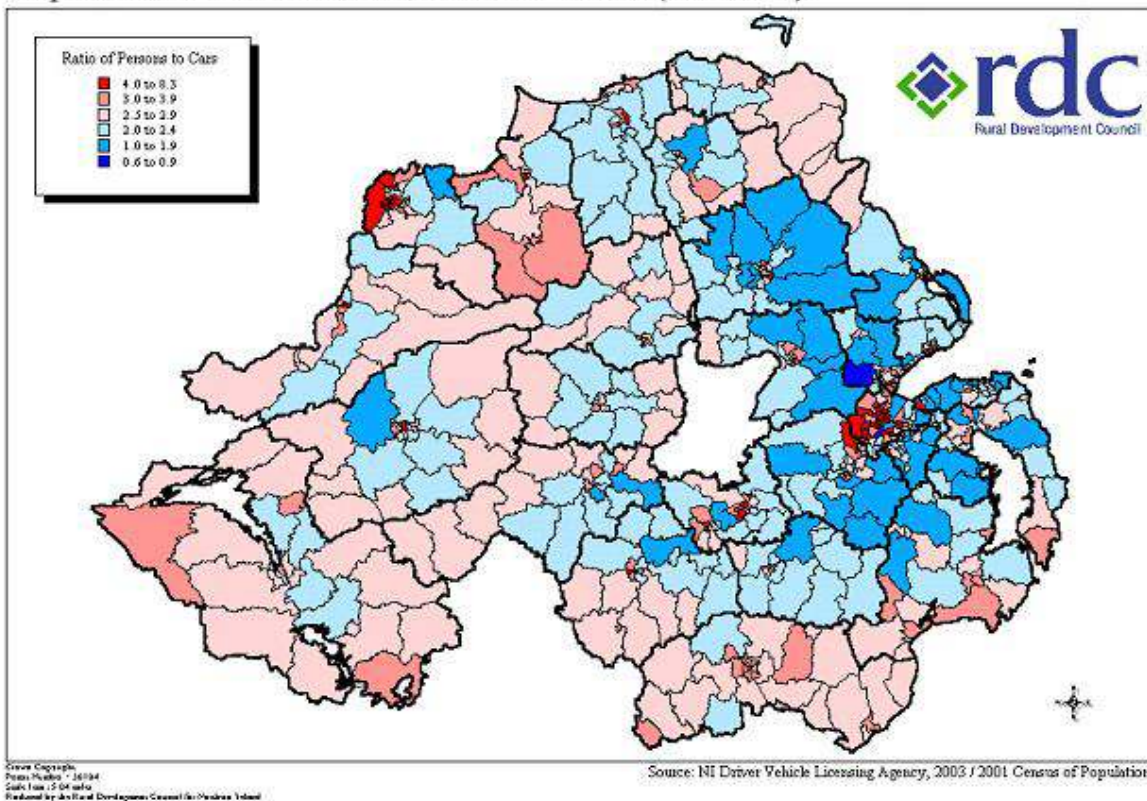
Census data shows that there is a continued trend to increasing numbers of cars across the region which inevitably enhances mobility in terms of accessing employment and services especially for people living in rural areas. Car ownership however should be considered as only one aspect of mobility.

For those households with more than one adult living in them access to only one car can present as many difficulties for individuals, particularly women and young people, as where there is no car^{xvi}

Map 4, taken from the RDC Rural Baseline Report (2002), shows the ratio of people to cars at ward level and highlights where there may be more limited access to a car.

The pink and red areas are where there are higher ratios of people to available cars indicating more limited access^{xvii}. Such areas are concentrated mainly in the West, far North and South of the region largely identified as rural areas.

Map 4 - Ratio of Persons to Cars in Northern Ireland (2001/2003)



This has clear implications for accessing services and puts a greater emphasis on finding an alternative means of transport.

For those without access to a car, public transport can be vital in reaching key services.

3.3.2 Public Transport

Greer et al^{xviii} looked at the issues relating to public transport in detail as part of a study looking at services in rural Northern Ireland. They identified a number of key problems. They confirmed the difficulties faced by many in accessing increasing centralised services, and the poor access to training and jobs experienced in particular by women and young people.

The research, which was based on quantitative and qualitative evidence^{xix}, found that only 20% of rural households are within 13 minutes of a bus stop. Furthermore poor routing and information makes it difficult to access the services when needed.

Respondents in a survey^{xx} voiced higher levels of dissatisfaction related to public transport (78%) than any of the other services listed. One respondent commented:

“There is no public transport through daytime shopping hours and no bus service after 4 p.m. to bring children home from school. The bus drops them off in the town.” (Services in Rural Areas questionnaire respondent)

3.3.3 Rural Community Transport

There has been a growth in rural community transport schemes in Northern Ireland. The Rural Transport Fund (RTF) was established in 1998 and to date 19 rural community transport partnerships operate across the region.

Many of these partnerships provide transport solutions to and from childcare services, mainly out of schools hours, transporting children from school to after school care.

Partnerships surveyed^{xxi} report higher levels of demand than provision as illustrated by one respondent:-

“The difficulty is that all schools and parents require the service at the one time, we only have two 16 seaters and therein lies the problem.” (Community Transport Worker)

The social car scheme was quoted as a particular effective way to meet individual tailored needs in rural areas. With many partnerships now operating such schemes (reliant on volunteers) they are widely regarded as one of the best methods to counter deep rural inaccessibility.

3.3.4 The School Bus

When considering transport associated with access to rural childcare, particularly out of schools, there is an immediate connection to the school bus.

Although not subject to any form of detailed statistical analysis it is worth noting.

School buses are, by and large, the main mode of transport to and from school for many rural families.

Difficulties arise however when trying to co-ordinate services with employment or training needs, after school care or indeed for families with more than one child at different stages of schooling and subsequent different finishing times.

“Lack of transport is the number one issue preventing the growth in numbers in our Out of Schools Club, as children and families are unable to reach our service. There have been an increasing number of families enquiring about our services; however their children are unable to attend due to lack of transport to facilitate school pick-up services.” (Out of Schools Provider, Co. Tyrone)

“I look after 4 children. This causes an issue for my husband as he is elderly and has to drive 2 miles to pick the children up from school. Since there is such a variety in ages he has to make three trips to the town to pick them up. I would under no circumstances have the children walk home as this is so dangerous nowadays.” (Grandparent, 67, carer)

In the ‘Services in Rural Areas’ report Greer et al highlighted that legal,

insurance and institutional obstacles to flexible transport options and integration of bus services were regarded as major obstacles to tackling deep rural isolation.

As the quotation^{xxii} below demonstrates, more effective use could be made of existing transportation infrastructure especially by linking together services already operating in rural communities.

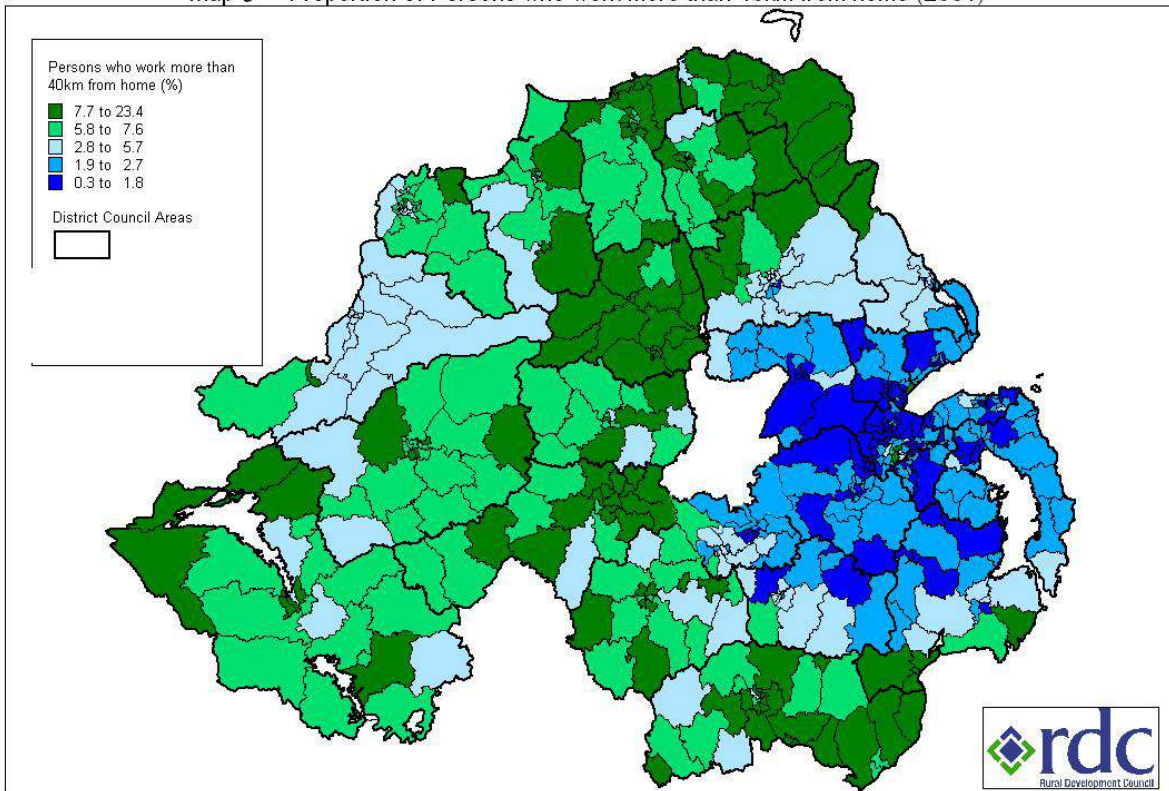
“The yellow bus (ELB) comes in with a few kids on it, the white bus (HSS) comes in with some older people, the blue bus (Ulsterbus) has no one on it and then in comes the community transport bus in the middle of it all” (Community Transport Worker)

3.4 EMPLOYMENT, GENDER AND COMMUTING PATTERNS

Women are more likely to be in intermediate or semi routine occupations. Those in intermediate occupations are likely to travel further to their place of employment, and in general, those in higher level occupations show little difference to men in travel distances^{xxiii}.

Map 5 shows the proportion of persons (male and female) who work more than 40Km from home. The green areas depicting longer travel distances which largely mirror rural areas.

Map 5 - Proportion of Persons who work more than 40km from home (2001)



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Source NISRA 2001

For rural Northern Ireland the census data suggests that women are more likely to work less than 30 hours per week and more likely to work within 2 km of home^{xxiv}.

Research carried out by Moss et al^{xxv} looked at employment location and associated commuting patterns for individuals in disadvantaged rural areas in Northern Ireland. It concluded that despite having higher educational attainment on average than males, rural women (farm and non-farm) constitute a less mobile workforce compared to males, mainly reflecting family responsibilities. In addition women also require a greater degree of flexibility i.e. part-time/term-time employment.

“It will be at least 10 years before I can consider training or employment opportunities, I cannot see in the short-term any opportunities to have childcare facilities that suit our family in place in our area. This is sad as I would like to have a choice even to consider part time work.” (Stay at home mother, 5 children (1 with disability), Fermanagh)

“I live approximately 25 miles away from my place of work. I have not flexible working conditions and from time to time I have had to stay on later in my work and have had to send children to a friend or neighbour until I got home.” (Mother, 41, separated, 4 children)

3.4.1 Farm Females

In looking at economic activity of farm females Moss et al identified that farm females were less likely to engage in employment than their non-farming female neighbours.

The main constraints cited were transport availability, inadequate childcare provision and the need to maintain a presence on the farm.

Farm females, because of the physical tie of the farm business, were vulnerable to the location of off-farm employment opportunities.

With farm males usually travelling long distances to employment and using what was sometimes the

sole household vehicle, a proportion of female members in the farm household seemed unable/reluctant to access employment, even at a local level.

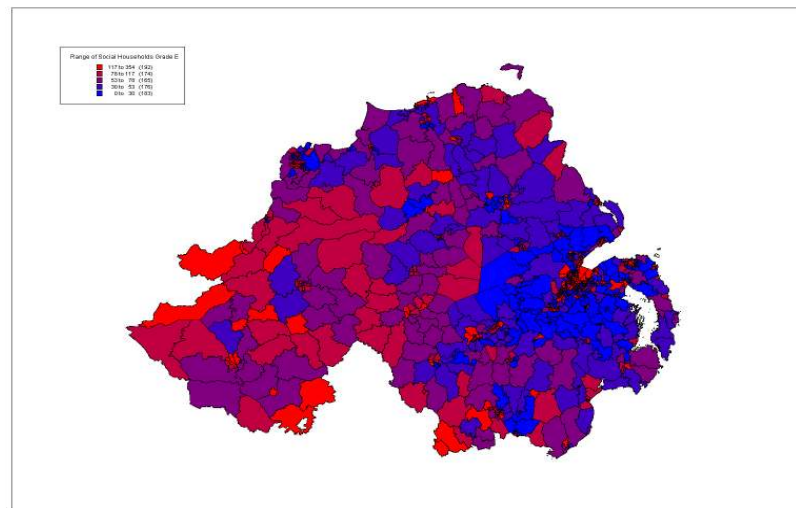
The 2005/06 DARD report on Farm Incomes in Northern Ireland showed an increase in the number of farm families engaging in off-farm employment.

3.4.2 Socio Economic Groupings & Income

Data used by market research and marketing industries on socio economic groupings show a higher level of low socio economic classification in rural areas as depicted in the Map 6 below (red and purple areas).

"I want to return to work, I recently took up a part time job advised that I could work up to 16 hours per week and retain benefits, I have 5 children, 2 weeks into my job and my housing benefit has been cut. Apparently I can work up to 16 hours but can only earn £20 before it impacts on benefits. This makes it very difficult to return to work and make it viable."(Mother. 5

Map 6 Socio Economic Classification



A recent report by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland^{xxvi} shows that, after thirty years of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 and the Equal Pay Act 1970, differences in pay still exist between male and female genders.

The report also states that difficulties in accessing affordable, quality childcare further exacerbates the difficulties experienced by those (predominately women) who wish to re-enter the labour market. Despite a 7% increase in the number of places available since 1996, Northern Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of childcare provision within the UK with only 92.5 day nursery places per 1,000 children 0-4 years (based on 2005 mid-year estimates), compared with 195.5 in England in 2006^{xxvii}.

“Crèches in this area do not provide flexible care to support my employment and are expensive.”
(Mother, 27, 1 child and 1 on the way, Co. Down)

3.5 PROVISION

Using data from each of the Health and Social Services Boards the table below shows the number of childcare providers across Northern Ireland broken down into playgroups, afterschools, crèches and nurseries (*childminding is considered separately in section 3.5.1*). This shows the total number of providers as 1,248. Playgroups account for the highest percentage of these providers at 49% of the total followed by afterschools

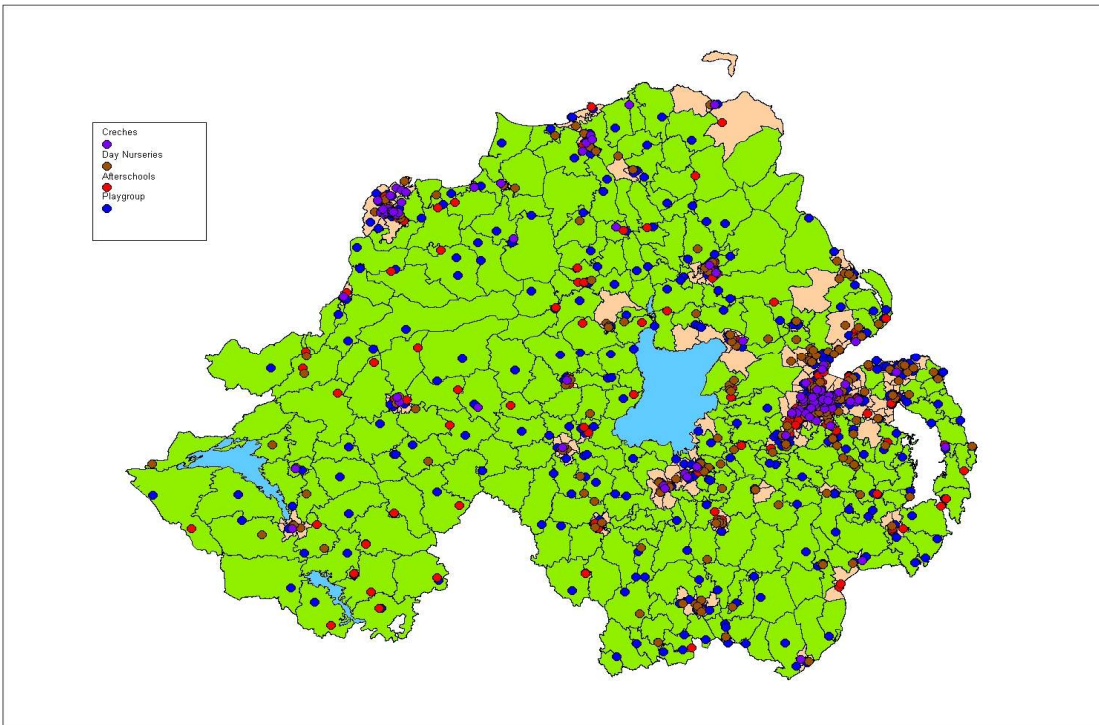
Map 7 Geographic spread of providers

(21%), nurseries (19%) and crèches accounting for the lowest level of provision at just under 10%.

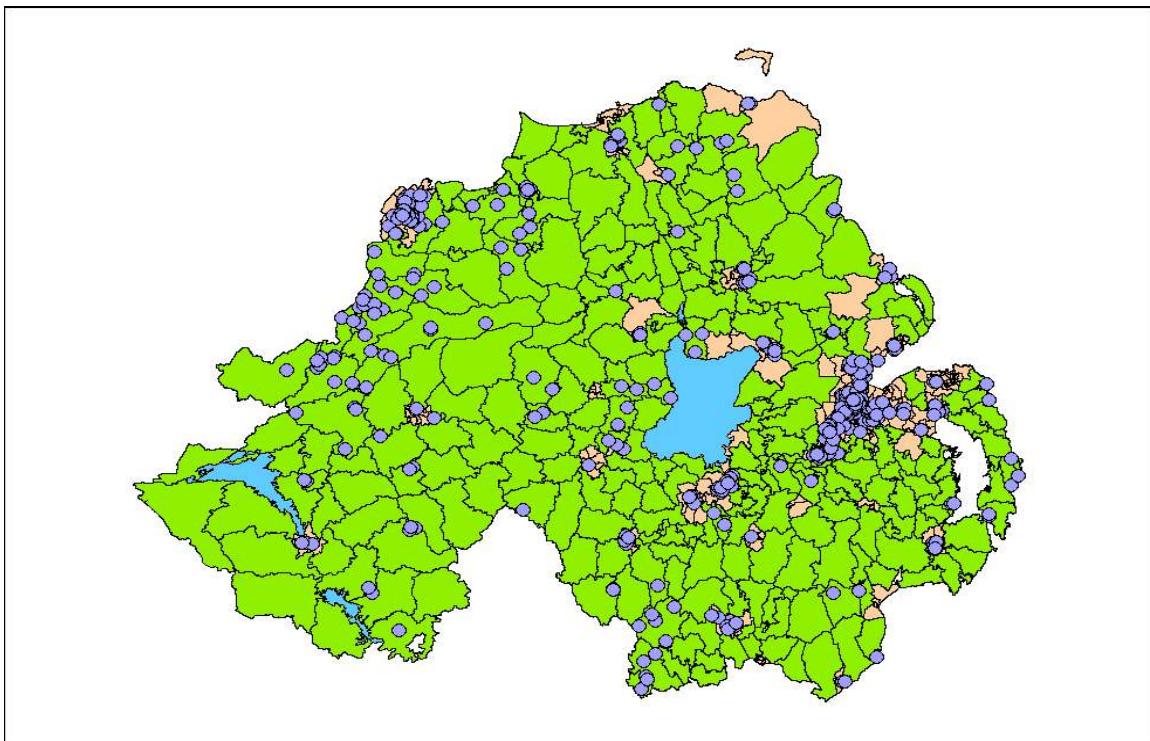
Type of Provision	Number
Playgroups	613
Afterschools	268
Nurseries	243
Crèches	124
TOTAL	1248

Map 7 shows the geographic location of these providers highlighting a mixed picture in terms of the different types of provision and between different rural areas. The overall picture however is one of under provision in comparison to urban areas. This is particularly evident with regard to crèches. Of the 124 crèches 10 are rurally located representing 8% of the total provision in comparison to urban areas which benefit from 92% of the provision. Thirty eight per cent of playgroups are located in rural areas followed by 26% nurseries and 25% afterschools.

Such data however cannot be viewed in isolation of the number of childcare places relative to population density. On an initial inspection evidence would suggest only a small variation between urban and rural, with rural fairing slightly less with regard to nurseries, afterschool and crèches in particular.



Map 8 Geographic spread of Extended Schools



It is important that future policies relating to provision and places do not act to widen the gap between urban and rural provision but act to offer the appropriate level of provision, be that in urban or rural areas, that meet the required needs of communities.

3.5.1 Childminding

Childminders are an important part of childcare services offering flexibility and the potential to meet specific, tailored and often, individual needs.

“There are a number of parents who need children cared occasionally for hospital appointments or 1 day a week. Parents find it very hard if they don’t have family to get childcare for these occasions.” (Registered Childminder, Co. Down)

There are challenges in the review of data relating to childminders given the mix of registered and non registered services that exist coupled with a difficulty in accurately assessing registrations in relation to active and non active.

That said, the most recent statistics^{xxviii} (March 2006) available show a total of 3,627 registered childminders in Northern Ireland between them providing 17,100 places for children in the 0-12 year age group.

According to NICMA, the Northern Ireland Child Minding Association, childminding provides over 74% of the total childcare provision in Northern Ireland.

Recognising the shortcomings in the available data an initial inspection would suggest a higher proportion of childminders are located within urban areas (approximately 67%). This would concur with the NICMA view that there is currently an acute shortage of registered childminders particularly in rural areas.

3.5.2 Extended Schools

In June 2006 the Department of Education (DE) revealed how £10 million allocated as part of the ‘Children’s and Young People Funding Package’ would be allocated to develop extended schools across Northern Ireland.

Although there is no single model of an extended school, the DE has set out what it has identified as a shared understanding of what ‘extended’ means and how schools and their partners could cover a range of services and activities. Extended Schools are essentially about making better use of the school building as a community resource at the same time providing a range of services to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community.

Map 8 shows the geographic location of extended schools across Northern Ireland. From a rural proofing perspective it is important that the current extended schools policy is actively promoted for uptake in rural areas as well as being part of urban neighbourhood renewal.

RDC in its study on Education in Rural Northern Ireland (2006) explored the idea of extended schools with principals and teachers interviewed as part of its study. Whilst not a representative sample, comments made illustrated a range of attitudes and understanding of the extended school model.

Visits as part of this study also raised comment, with one respondent highlighting: -

“While it is great progress that the government has committed money to services to children, the extended schools programme allows schools to offer lower rates for extended school hours as they have received funding, a service which we already provide.”
(Childcare worker)

3.5.3 Sure Start

Sure Start is a key part of Government strategy to end child poverty. It was established in 1998 following the comprehensive spending review of provision for young children. In April 2006 Government announced a six million pound investment package which included a programme for 2 year olds. This programme was designed, among other things, to provide an alternative to nursery school for this age group.

Sure Start as a model benefits from parental involvement, with a key focus on consultation and working in partnership to improve local services. The primary focus is on disadvantaged areas/neighbourhoods. This has implications for rural delivery often

favouring urban centres as the location for services.

Some of the challenges of operating a rural Sure Start include addressing the lack of suitable facilities and ensuring accessibility.

“Sure Start offers opportunities for collaboration between communities and statutory organisations. It is delivered within a community development ethos and helps breakdown isolation experienced by some young families in rural areas.”
(Gold Sure Start, Ardboe, Co. Tyrone)

3.5.4 Primary Schools

RDC in its study of Education in Rural Northern Ireland (2006) highlighted that changes in the aspirations for the delivery of a high quality education, new investment opportunities, struggling school budgets and declining pupil numbers have all acted to increase the pressure on small schools. Whilst some small schools are located in urban areas, the majority are found in rural areas. Small schools then, are also, typically rural schools.

Statistics show a total of 895 primary schools across Northern Ireland with 484 (54%) in rural areas and 411 (46%) in urban.

Although it is not the focus of this study to analyse rural schools or school closures it was considered an important aspect in the delivery of solutions.

Rural school buildings offer great potential for the delivery of a range of services including childcare and at the same time the provision of locally based childcare within a school can often help determine future educational decisions on which school to send a child. In this case increased collaboration and partnership offer potential for rural sustainability.

3.5.5 Employment, training and staff

So far this section has considered provision in terms of type, location and places. Another additional aspect to provision is the role it plays in providing local employment.

Childcare can play an important part in economic development offering opportunities for self-employment and community enterprise development.

In the three community based projects visited^{xxix} as part of this study, the average employment was 23 staff.

Key findings from these visits included the recognition of childcare as an employer but also highlighted a number of barriers in relation to training and staff retention.

Particular rural issues relate to limited, or in the case of one group, no access to broadband preventing online training and restricting access to information; the location of training, largely based in Belfast, was also cited as a specific

access and rural issue as demonstrated by one case study group: -

“Unfortunately the training was not available outside the Belfast area, which did have an impact. Staff were not prepared to travel and we subsequently lost the bursaries.”(Provider, Glenuilin Co. Derry)

More general concerns were aired on the length of time it takes to acquire POCVA^{xxx} clearance and the poor pay structure within the childcare sector which contributes to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

Concern was also raised around the amount of time spent on funding applications which often detracted from the core reasons for wanting to work in childcare.

Taking into consideration PROVISION with the earlier sections on TRANSPORT, MOBILITY, EMPLOYMENT, COMMUTING and POPULATION, the evidence suggests that rural areas do face particular and distinct challenges in relation to the delivery of and access to childcare

3.6 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL CHILDCARE

The table below summarizes the key findings from this section and presents a number of possible recommendations for consideration: -

Data	Trends	Implications	Recommendations
Population	<p>Although population estimates predict a decrease in the 0-12 year old age group other data sources show signs of a growing rural population :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of out migration • Increase in the number of families from different countries within the European Community and elsewhere • Growth in demand for planning applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase pressure/demand for services ➤ More socially diverse rural community with a wider set of needs to be catered for ➤ Less likelihood for extended families nearby to assist with childcare ➤ Availability of untapped workforce potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ DARD should commission research to better understand who lives in the countryside (including urban and rural outmigration) and the implications for providing services ✓ Rural childcare funding should support and assist communities to identify and respond to changes in need quickly
Transport	<p>Although there is an increase in car ownership levels the ratio of people to cars highlight mobility issues in some parts of rural Northern Ireland</p> <p>Only 20% of rural households live within 13 minutes of a bus stop</p> <p>There is a growth in the number of rural transport schemes with a total of 19 rural partnerships operating across the region</p> <p>Social car schemes are identified as a particular effective way to meet individual tailored needs in rural area</p> <p>School buses are contracted to provide a statutory service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Poor routing and information makes any available public transport difficult to access childcare services when needed ➤ Difficulties arise when trying to co-ordinate school bus services with employment, training and childcare ➤ Rural Transport Schemes offer the greatest potential to deliver flexible responsive services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ DE should reassess school transportation when possible in order to provide a more responsive and co-ordinated transport service ✓ DARD, DRD and DE should commission a piece of work to identify/scope out creative transport solutions for rural childcare and how services could be better integrated in meeting rural need ✓ Rural childcare funding should support locally based transport

			solutions
<p>Employment</p>	<p>Women are more likely to be in intermediate or semi routine occupations</p> <p>Rural women are more likely to work less than 30 hours per week and more likely to work within 2 km of home</p> <p>Despite having higher educational attainment on average than males, rural women (farm and non farm) constitute a less mobile workforce compared to males</p> <p>Farm females, because of the physical tie of the farm business, are vulnerable to the location of off-farm employment opportunities</p> <p>There is an increase in the number of farm families engaging on off-farm employment</p> <p>Rural areas show a higher level of low socio economic classification</p> <p>Inequalities in pay still exist between male and females</p> <p>Northern Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of childcare provision within the UK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There are cases of longer travel to work distances in rural areas placing additional demands on childcare outside normal work hours ➤ Issues of affordability associated with pay and availability of local jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rural Childcare support solutions in areas of identified need should be extended in areas of identified need ✓ Farm diversification schemes should assist in creating opportunities for home based businesses ✓ Rural women in general and farm females in particular should be encouraged to develop opportunities for rural enterprise including rural childcare ✓ DOE Planning Policies need to provide opportunities for and scope to develop rural enterprises including farm diversification options ✓ Government needs to address the pay inequalities between men and women ✓ Incentives for employers to introduce and maintain flexible/family friendly work practices

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Government policy on the relocation of public sector jobs should take account of and recognise the opportunities that exist in rural areas as employment centres ✓ Support should be offered to encourage more men to work in childcare
<p>Provision</p> <p>Variations between urban and rural provision exists with regard to nurseries, afterschool and crèches in particular</p> <p>There are more registered childminders in urban areas (67%)</p> <p>Sure Start offers a model of practice in relation to community involvement and participation</p> <p>There are more primary schools in rural areas than urban</p> <p>Childcare can play an important part in economic development offering opportunities for self-employment and community enterprise development</p> <p>Despite assumptions there are still gaps in Broadband provision in rural areas</p> <p>Training for childcare staff is predominately</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Availability of choice – less choice can contribute to a higher potential of not meeting specific community need and restrict work and training opportunities ➤ Flexibility of service and the ability to change as needs change is important ➤ Rural school buildings offer great potential for the delivery of a range of services ➤ Lack of available local training impacts on ability to retain and develop staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A needs led approach to rural childcare promoting opportunities for providers, communities, the statutory and private sector to work together ✓ The extended schools model needs to be promoted for uptake in rural areas and/or options for the delivery of the extended model to go beyond the school gate to other service providers ✓ Rural childcare funding should support the development and expansion of services in areas of identified need including support for childminders ✓ Rural childcare funding should support development staff to assist providers to develop the necessary 	

<p>located in Belfast</p> <p>Issues of sustainability detract from core reasons for wanting to work in childcare</p> <p>Reliability of data with regard to childminding makes it difficult to obtain an accurate picture of provision</p>	<p>➤ Limited or no access to Broadband restricts access to information, networks and training</p> <p>➤ Sustainability and funding issues have the potential to take up staff time</p>	<p>skills and infrastructure to address sustainability</p> <p>✓ Providers need access to relevant up to date information on local need and demographics to enable appropriate childcare solutions to be planned and delivered</p> <p>✓ An accurate computerised database of registered childminders in all 5 health trust areas would support a better understanding of need (relevant government department)</p> <p>✓ Rural childcare funding should support IT solutions to training, access to information and networking</p> <p>✓ DETI should address Broadband issues in rural areas in light of the objective to achieve 100% coverage</p> <p>✓ Rural childcare funding should place emphasis on multi-functional buildings, better use of schools, shared resources and collaborative actions</p>
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Section four: Models of Rural Childcare

4.1 LEARNING FROM OTHERS

In “Childcare Services for Rural Families” the European Commission Network on childcare highlights the importance of services which enable rural families to effectively participate in economic, political and social life. Childcare services in particular are seen as having an important role to play within European and national strategies for combating rural decline and promoting rural development. A significant factor for inward investment and employment opportunities in rural areas is the availability of childcare services. A study in Denmark has shown that investing in childcare is seen as the most significant factor above housing, transport, schools and recreational areas as an incentive for commercial investment in rural areas.

However the distinctiveness of rural areas presents particular challenges in terms of creating appropriate, sustainable models of childcare.

Issues such as those presented in section three of this report relating to access and transport, also higher unit costs, infrastructure and buildings, scattered population of children and families, changing family structures and relationships within rural communities demand imaginative and creative solutions.

As well as the distinctiveness issue, the importance of community development principles and practices has been identified as an important consideration in overcoming rural disadvantage and access to services. In relation to childcare the following principles have been highlighted: -

Community Development Principles	Needs led planning, review and analysis
	Flexibility and choice
	Participation, collaboration and partnerships
	Sustainability
	Social Justice

The characteristics of successful rural childcare models have been cited in many national and international studies on rural childcare solutions. The following issues have been highlighted:

- ✓ Flexibility and the ability to meet changing needs and expectations over time
- ✓ Ability to move resources or change programmes as community needs change
- ✓ Creativity in both the use of resources and obtaining resources from a variety of sources within a framework of a stable base of core funding

- ✓ Having transport solutions to overcome the barrier of distance
- ✓ Ability to use Information Technology to support training, capacity building and information requirements
- ✓ Sufficient well trained staff with opportunities for ongoing professional development
- ✓ Strong governance arrangements
- ✓ Phased approaches to the development of services allowing for the gradual development of a range of services under one organisation
- ✓ Marketing and information for parents and potential users
- ✓ Having strong support from central and local government who assist providers overcome problems rather than rigid interpretation of regulations

4.2 RURAL SOLUTIONS

Taking into account the issue of rural distinctiveness and the characteristics of successful rural childcare models, there is recognition that if rural communities are to develop and sustain quality rural childcare services then specific initiatives are required in rural areas. These could include the following solutions:

- (a) **The development of multi-functional centres providing for the care and education needs of children and families but also able to meet other needs such as sport, recreation, culture, training information, health and a place for parents and other care givers to meet. Multi-functional centres can be developed in purpose built buildings or in local underutilised rural primary schools but need to have transport arrangements built in as part of service delivery. Such models can be built upon a social economy model or as a Charity or Company Limited by Guarantee**
- (b) **The development of community registered childminding networks supported by a Childminding Coordinator and linked to other forms of childcare provision**
- (c) **Clustering of small rural primary schools for nursery, childcare and afterschool provision with flexible use of the school transport system**
- (d) **A mobile outreach service equipped and staffed by qualified staff able to go to isolated areas to provide educational and childcare opportunities or seasonal facilities at particular times of the year**
- (e) **Childcare as part of a farm diversification programme. This model is provided as a private business with opportunities to create fun farm activities and childcare allowing for the utilisation of farm buildings and the employment of farm families**
- (f) **Childcare as part of a rural economic development such as Tele Community Cottage developments**
- (g) **A national Sitter Service providing childcare for children with special needs or for parents who work atypical hours. This service is**

also linked to other childcare services

- (h) The creation of a network or consortia of services within a geographical area allowing for a number of different services to meet a range of local needs. This model is particularly but not exclusively relevant within SureStart designated areas
- (i) The development of rural out of school services linked to local primary schools and/or other forms of childcare provision

The information from local, regional, national, European and international studies suggest that there are a number of ways of moving forward and achieving rural solutions to rural childcare needs. They call for imaginative ways of: -

➤ Funding development posts to build capacity and provide advice and support	➤ Using buildings more flexibly and providing capital support for adaptations and multifunctional design	➤ Bringing local providers together in consortia arrangements to ensure maximum use is made of resources	➤ Providing subsidies for service costs in community and private childcare services including start-up costs and business training
➤ Providing opportunities for local training and ongoing professional development using innovative technological solutions	➤ Extending existing services through the use of outreach or satellite schemes	➤ Providing subsidies for travel costs and maximising rural transport solutions	➤ Providing technological support to aid the development of marketing and information solutions

Key Finding	Rural childcare has a key role to play in rural regeneration and sustainability. This calls for imaginative and creative solutions in addressing rural childcare needs and circumstances
Action	There are areas where funding is needed to support projects and programmes that, sustain or improve access to, or the provision of, rural childcare
Recommendation	<p>DARD should create a specific rural childcare funding stream with the aim of addressing rural specific need and circumstance</p> <p>Taking into consideration the examples above together with the analysis of section three, (which highlights that rural areas do face particular challenges when it comes to childcare provision), an indicative rural childcare programme is attached in annex 5</p>



*Access to play –
Fivemiletown
Outdoor Play
Provision*

Section five: Conclusion

This report set out to look at the particular issues, challenges and opportunities for rural childcare provision in Northern Ireland. It was only ever intended to provide a preliminary analysis of the key issues and challenges that face rural communities, with the primary aim of establishing whether or not challenges do exist and if so, what changes or solutions would facilitate an improvement in service delivery or access.

The main conclusions drawn from the report are:-

- Rural areas do face particular and distinct challenges in relation to the delivery of and access to rural childcare services.

These include:-

- Issues of accessibility due to lack of public transportation; mobility issues (car access); varying work patterns; and on farm ties
- Scattered population contributing to the likelihood of increased costs in service provision
- Limited infrastructure, buildings and inadequate IT reducing opportunities for training; access to information and networking
- Changing family structures and employment patterns both off farm and outside rural areas (often longer commuting patterns)
- Disadvantage is often hidden – unlike those in urban areas, the more disadvantaged families in rural areas often live amongst those better off

The report also raises a number of key generic issues relating to the need for an improved rural evidence base. The lack of information can in itself be a barrier to recognising particular rural circumstance and more importantly in the development of effective evidence based responses. It is hoped that this can be addressed as part of the planned Rural White Paper and enhanced rural proofing function.

Another general theme that emerges from the study, in particular through the case study and community consultation analysis, is that local social context matters and any attempts to develop services without the community involvement and participation are more likely to fail. It is also important to recognise the voice of children and young people in these processes.

Early on in the report reference is made to the 'one size fits all approach'. It is clear from this preliminary analysis that flexibility is needed for rural service delivery and an ability to adapt to local circumstance. There is also a need to be imaginative and creative in identifying solutions.

Improved and real co-ordination and co-operation of service providers, communities and within and between Government is also important particularly in rural areas where solutions of shared resources, clustering and partnership offer great potential for sustainability.

Finally the report does recommend a number of potential and practical solutions designed to improve the access to; quality, safety, sustainability and affordability of rural childcare, recognising that an investment in rural childcare is an investment in a rural future.

APPENDICES

Annex 1: Rural Stakeholder Group

Chair

SIOBHAN FITZPATRICK, EARLY YEARS (PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS NIPPA)

Stakeholders

MARY DUGGAN, GOLD SURESTART ARDBOE/COOKSTOWN / NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

SIOBHAN DOHERTY, NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

KARIN EYBEN, RURAL COMMUNITY NETWORK (RCN)

TERESA CANAVAN, NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (RDC)

GILLIAN CHEATLEY, ULSTER FARMERS UNION (UFU)

ESTHER ERVINE, ULSTER FARMERS UNION (UFU)

ANN ORR, WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

BRIDGET NODDER, NI CHILD MINDING ASSOCIATION (NICMA)

PATRICIA MULLAN, MAGHERAFELT CHILDCARE ALLIANCE

MICHELE BAIRD, SOUTH ANTRIM RURAL NETWORK (SARN)

GRAINNE CLOSE, TADA RURAL SUPPORT NETWORK

MAURA MASON, WESTERN HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD

MARY MCCOLGAN, UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

DR SALLY SHORTHALL, QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST

CHARLENE MCGRATH, MSc STUDENT

Government

PATRICIA McVEIGH, DE

CAROL CARSER, OFMDFM

ANNE DORBIE, DARD

KEITH MORRISON, DARD

CATHY MOORE, DARD

Annex 2: NISRA Statistical Classification of Settlements

Urban-Rural Definition Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements

Label	Name	Settlement population size (2001 Census)	
Band A:	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA)	c580,000	URBAN
Band B:	Derry Urban Area (DUA)	c90,000	
Band C:	Large town	18,000 or more and under 75,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)	
Band D:	Medium town	10,000 or more and under 18,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)	
Band E:	Small town	4,500 or more and under 10,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)	
Band F:	Intermediate settlement	2,250 or more and under 4,500 (outside BMUA and DUA)	RURAL
Band G:	Village	1,000 or more and under 2,250 (outside BMUA and DUA)	
Band H:	Small village, hamlet and open countryside	Settlements of less than 1,000 people and open countryside (outside BMUA and DUA)	

In the absence of a programme-specific definition, Bands A-E can be defined as urban and Bands F-H as rural. This reflects the broad consensus of past departmental usage that the divide between urban and rural lies among settlements whose populations are between 3,000 and 5,000. Under this definition, approximately 65 per cent of the Northern Ireland population live in urban areas and 35 per cent in rural areas. **It is stressed that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and policy-makers will need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies.**

Annex 3: Policy & Strategic Context

UN Convention of Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights that must be realised for children to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. The near-universal ratification of the Convention reflects a global commitment to the principles of children's rights. By ratifying the Convention, governments state their intention to put this commitment into practice. State parties are obligated to amend and create laws and policies to fully implement the Convention; they must consider all actions taken in light of the best interests of the child. The task, however, must engage not just governments but all members of society. The standards and principles articulated in the Convention can only become a reality when they are respected by everyone—within the family, in schools and other institutions that provide services for children, in communities and at all levels of administration.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a set of guiding principles that shapes the way in which children are viewed:

Guiding principles: general requirements for all rights

Non-discrimination (Article 2): The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Best interests of the child (Article 3): The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers.

Right to life, survival and development (Article 6): Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

Respect for the views of the child (Article 12): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. This does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making – not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with parents' right and responsibility to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenager's greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

Requirements placed on Government and Government Departments are:

- (i) Government: The Convention should be used as a guide in policy making
- (ii) Government Departments should: -
 - Ensure all legislation is fully compatible with the Convention;
 - Make children visible in the policy development process by introducing child impact assessments;
 - Analyse spending to determine the portion of public funds spent on children and if these are being used effectively;
 - Ensure relevant data is being collected and used for evaluation and review.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Economic development and rapid social change have significantly modified family and child-rearing patterns across OECD countries. The OECD report “Starting Strong, early Childhood Education and care” reviewed early childhood education and care in twenty OECD countries and describes the social, economic, conceptual and research factors that influence early childhood policy. These include increasing women’s labour market participation; reconciling work and family responsibilities on a more equitable basis for women; confronting the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries; and in particular, addressing issues of access, quality, diversity, child poverty and educational disadvantage. How countries approach such issues is influenced by their social and economic traditions, their understandings of families and young children, and by accumulated research on the benefits of quality early childhood services.

Recommendations specifically for the UK were:

- Reduce fragmentation of service providers for childcare
- Improve quality of childcare
- Improve affordability
- Review situation of special needs children
- Ensure inclusion particularly where there has been community conflict and/or isolation

National Framework

The position in ***England and Wales*** is clearly set out in the Government’s “Every Child Matters: Change for Children” and “A Ten Year Strategy for childcare – Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children “. The Strategy set out the key themes of :

Choice and flexibility - parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life

Availability - for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances

Quality - high-quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce, among the best in the world

Affordability - families to be able to afford flexible, high-quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs

In **Scotland** in May 1998 the Government published "Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland" - one of a number of measures aimed at supporting families and in particular raising children out of poverty. The Strategy recognised that good quality childcare has benefits for children by promoting their development and learning, and benefits for parents, by enabling them to work. Although there was already a diverse range of childcare provision in Scotland, action was needed to fill gaps in the formal childcare sector which enables parents to take up employment or training. The overall aim of the Childcare Strategy was therefore to make high quality, accessible and affordable childcare available in every neighbourhood. The Strategy highlighted four key problems

- The quality of care could be variable
- The cost of childcare was high
- There were insufficient places in many areas and
- Access was hampered by a lack of information for parents on what was available within their local authority area.

In the **Republic of Ireland** the Childcare Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children has responsibility for implementing the National Childcare Strategy 2006 - 2010. The strategy aims to further develop the childcare infrastructure to meet the needs of children and their parents for quality early childhood care. In addition The National Childcare Investment Programme 2006 - 2010 is a major programme of investment in childcare infrastructure. €575 million has been allocated to the 5-year programme, including €358 million for capital investment. It is anticipated that the programme will create up to 50,000 new childcare places, with the objective of assisting parents to access affordable, quality childcare. The National Childcare Investment Programme will seek to:

- create 5,000 after-school and 10,000 pre-school education places;
- support childcare facilities for disadvantaged parents and their children;
- support quality measures for childminders and parent and toddler groups;
- provide education measures for children and adults in areas of disadvantage.

In **Northern Ireland** the Office of The First and Deputy First Minister have published the "Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge" – A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016. Contained within it area number of targets specifically relating to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

“To ensure that at least 5% of the NIRDP Axis 3 funds are directly targeted at children and young people in rural areas with the specific outcome of experiencing economic and environmental well being as well as contributing positively to the community and society”.

To date the Rural Development programme has been spent over £2 million on projects including childcare and play facilities.

‘Lifetime Opportunities’ – Government’s Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland launched by the then Secretary of State Peter Hain MP on Monday 13th November 2006.

One of the strategy’s stated overall objectives is to **‘End child poverty by 2020-based on the estimate of approximately 135,000 children in Northern Ireland in relative income poverty in 1998/99, this means lifting 67,000 children out of poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.’**

The Executive has a statutory obligation within Section 16 of the Northern Ireland St Andrews Agreement Act 2006 to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need. The process to obtain Executive Committee agreement on an anti-poverty strategy has begun. Proposals are currently being cleared at official level, with a view to the Executive Committee considering the adoption of ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ later this year.

In addition a Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Lone Parents was established in September 2006 in recognition of the fact that lone parent families make up around a quarter of all families with dependent children and are more at risk of being in poverty than any other household type. It is estimated that between a third and half of lone parent families here are living in poverty affecting around 46,000 children. Recommendations arising from this work are nearing completion with childcare emerging as one of the major barriers impeding lone parent from entering/returning to work.

DARD has a significant contribution to make under ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ Government’s Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland as follows:

Early Years Targets

Provide opportunities for young children in rural areas to benefit from projects and schemes such as accessible rural transport, day care provision, crèches and initiatives that also support their parents as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

By 2020, government will support every local authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for Early Years children in rural areas.

Children and Young People (5 – 16)

Provide opportunities for children and young people of all ages in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Development Programme through projects and schemes, such as improving access to ICT and increasing accessibility through rural transport routes and positively benefiting the lives of farm families as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

In addition “The Early Years Strategy” by the Department of Education (DE) seeks to ensure the well-being and holistic development of children in Northern Ireland from 0-6 years.

DE have sought to provide an integrated approach to policy and service delivery for children and their families hence the involvement in the Strategy development by DARD. The report itself is not due for consultation until September 2008 and the issue of Rural Childcare will be fed into that process.

The specific objectives of that Strategy are to:

- To ensure that every child has a chance to develop his/her potential
- To promote each child with a safe, stable, health and stimulating age appropriate environment which allows the child to thrive and develop confidence and self-esteem to face future challenges
- To provide access to quality day-care provision that is affordable and allows parents to balance the demands of parenthood and working life.
- To provide high quality public services for young children with targeted support for those with additional needs.

Annex 4: Models of Engagement

A number of activities helped to inform this study, designed to bring the real life experiences of those living in rural areas with childcare needs into consideration. These include: -

- The development of a range of case studies (facilitated by the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, Women in Agriculture, SARN Rural Support Network ,TADA Rural Support Network and NICMA) with the aim of providing qualitative information to help inform the study
- Hosting of stakeholder meeting on location of rural sure start project, Ardboe Co. Tyrone (17th October 2007)
- Stakeholder attendance at the launch of the Magherafelt Childcare Alliance Evaluation (6th November 2007). Attended by Minister Gildernew (Keynote address); Karin Eyben; Teresa Canavan (Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group); Patricia Mullan (Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and Event Organiser)
- Stakeholder involvement in a community consultation event, 'Bee on your Bonnet' organised by TADA Rural Support Network entitled '*My Child's Care, Who Cares? Access to Rural Childcare*' (Maghera Community Hall 8th November 2007). Attended by Minister Gildernew (Panelist); Siobhan Fitzpatrick (Chair of Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and Panelist); Teresa Canavan (Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and Panelist); Karin Eyben (Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and Participant); Grainne Close (Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group and Event Organiser)
- Stakeholder visits to three community based projects offering a range of pre-school, afterschool and rural childcare solutions including Playtime Day Nursery and Play Group, Eskra Co. Tyrone; Stepping Stones, Belleek Co. Fermanagh and Glendurragh Childcare Ltd, Kesh Co. Fermanagh (14th November 2007)

Annex 5: Rural Childcare Programme (Indicative)

Programme Aim:

To provide accessible, high quality, affordable, sustainable and flexible childcare in rural areas as a means of enabling and supporting individuals, families, communities and business to achieve full economic and social potential.

Priorities for Action:

Evidence suggests three priorities for action:

- Access
- Early Years Integration
- Quality & Safety
- Sustainability and Affordability

Action 1: Access

The task is to ensure that childcare provision is accessible to all rural families who need it^{xxxi}.

This action seeks to address identified gaps in rural provision; support improvements in transportation; and address out of hours service needs associated with rural living and employment commuting patterns.

This action seeks to:

- Increase the geographic distribution of childcare provision in rural areas
- Increase the provision of all types of childcare particularly out of hours; after school; weekend and during holiday periods
- Increase access to transport for childcare provision
- Increase the number of childcare workers particularly rural childminders (registered) and promote efficient use of existing childcare workers
- Support (increase) female participation in training, employment and enterprise development through flexible childcare solutions & incentives
- Increase access to information (including the use of information technology) to ensure that childcare staff, families and communities have access to information & training with regards to early years provision

Action 2: Early Years Integration

The task is to maximise opportunities for integration and building community relations at an early age.

Many rural communities reflect the demography of their locality and so are dominated by one tradition that experience little contact with similar groups from the other tradition. Lack of contact or exploration of diversity in this context limits the ability to address conflict and division, and also hinders the rural regeneration process in that locality.

This action seeks to address the segregation and separation of rural service delivery by encouraging and creating opportunities for shared childcare facilities and resources to be developed.

This action seeks to: -

- Increase opportunities for cross community and cross border childcare solutions
- Encourage better and shared use of community buildings, resources and collaborative actions

Action 3: Quality & Safety

The task is to ensure a high quality rural provision is available.

This action seeks to address the number and quality of trained childcare workers and volunteers in rural areas and the quality of provision including the suitability of venues for childcare. In rural areas childcare services are often set up in community halls which may require adaptations, dedicated outdoor space and play areas area also often restricted. Safety is another key consideration particularly in supporting home based childcare facilities including those based on or within the farm.

This action seeks to:

- Increase the number and range of quality childcare services available
- Improve facilities and the quality of childcare settings (indoor and outdoor) available for childcare
- Support volunteer schemes and quality standards in delivering rural childcare including training and quality assurance programmes
- Improve the safety of childcare settings

Action 4: Sustainability & Affordability

The task is to ensure that rural childcare is both sustainable in the long term and affordable to those seeking to access it.

This action seeks to address issues of sustainability and affordability. Rural areas by their very geography do not always offer economies of scale. The challenge is therefore to provide an affordable, sustainable service with often smaller numbers and greater overheads associated with additional transportation and extended hours.

This action seeks to:

- Improve the business management skills of providers & volunteers
- Ensure families & providers are aware of all assistance available
- Encourage/promote community private partnerships encouraging businesses & employers to contribute to rural childcare services
- Provide development assistance to support sustainability action plans including the identification of suitable models of childcare practice that offer viable rural solutions

Notes: -

As well as supporting practical projects it would be important to create space for piloting/developing innovative models which look at new ways of delivering childcare in rural areas across all three priorities of access, quality, sustainability & affordability. Practical projects will allow/enable “quick wins”. Pilot projects will require more developmental time and produce/support longer term policy changes and impact. For example a practical project under access could be a combined application from a childcare provider/rural school and rural community transport scheme for the purchase of a shared vehicle. A pilot project could be to work with the education authorities to look at a model of extended use of the school bus service.

References

ⁱ DARD Strategic Plan 2006-2011

ⁱⁱ Calculated on the NISRA Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements February 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ Playtime Day Nursery and Play Group Eskra, Co. Tyrone; Stepping Stones, Belleek, Co. Fermanagh and the Glendurragh Childcare company, Kesh Co. Fermanagh.

^{iv} A multi-agency partnership led by NIPPA (now known as Early Years) and IPPA and including representatives from the 4 health agencies – Western and Southern Services Boards (NI) and North Eastern and North Western Health Boards (ROI)

^v Shortall, S and R. Kelly (2001) Gender Proofing CAP Reforms. Rural Community Network, Cookstown.

^{vi} Shortall, S., Porter, S., and R. Nugent (2007) Health and Safety on Farms: A Research Report. Queens University Belfast, Belfast.

^{vii} March 2007

^{viii} August 2007

^{ix} Daniel Hoder, 2007 Animate: Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council/South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP):Issues facing Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland

^x This section is largely supported by analysis carried out by RDC as part of its rural schools study entitled Striking the Balance: Toward a Vision and Principles for Education in Rural Northern Ireland : A Rural proofing Study 2005/06

^{xi} Cookstown is estimated to increase by 10%; Fermanagh by 4.3% and Newry & Mourne by 2.5%

^{xii} Data obtained from the Registrar General's Office Quarterly Reports for 2002-2005

^{xiii} NISRA Projected Population estimates 2002-2017

^{xiv} Migration figures are updated annually and estimated from a number of sources. As a move often requires a change of GP and hence, transfer of an individual's medical card which must be reported to the GP, this is one key source of data but survey data may also be used.

^{xv} Southern Childcare Partnership: Summary of Southern Area Article 20 Review 2004

^{xvi} RDC 'A Picture of Rural Change' 2003

^{xvii} RDC, Striking the Balance: Toward a Vision and Principles for Education in Rural Northern Ireland: A Rural Proofing Study (2005/06) pg 28

^{xviii} Services in Rural Northern Ireland Report for the Rural Development Council Greer,J., Houston, D., Murray, M and Murtagh,B (2003)

^{xix} In order to inform the baseline research on services in rural areas a questionnaire was conducted. The questionnaire survey reached a population of 500 members (via RCN) and succeeded in generating a response of 155 (31% return).

^{xx} Carried out by Greer and Murray as part of their report into Services in Rural Northern Ireland(see note xv)

^{xxi} A sample of RDC funded rural community transport groups were surveyed as part of this study

^{xxii} Services in Rural Northern Ireland Report (see note xv)

^{xxiii} NISRA Census see table S399

^{xxiv} See, for example, NISRA Census table S397 (RDC Rural Policy Perspectives: Assessing Rural Sustainability and Change (2005))

^{xxv} Moss, J.E., Jack, C.G and Wallace, M. "Employment location and associated commuting patterns for individuals in

disadvantaged rural areas in Northern Ireland”
Regional Studies. Volume 38 No.2 April 2004

^{xxvi} Statement on Key inequalities in Northern
Ireland, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland,
Conference Edition, October 2007

^{xxvii} Equality Commission for Northern Ireland –
internal data

^{xxviii} Children Order Statistical Bulletin 2006
[dhsspsni.gov.uk/children-order]

^{xxix} Playtime Day Nursery and Play Group Eskra,
Co. Tyrone; Stepping Stones, Belleek, Co.
Fermanagh and the Glendurragh Childcare
company, Kesh Co. Fermanagh.

^{xxx} Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

^{xxxi} Applicants will need to demonstrate the need
and demand for services as part of the
application process

Notes