Equality Organisations

Contents

71. Age NI

Evidence based policy making

Age NI has an interest in rural ageing given the ageing rural demographic (the average age of farmers in Northern Ireland is 57 years and only 5% of farmers are under the age of 35[1]), the considerable social and economic changes in rural areas; changing local infrastructures; challenges associated with providing public services in changing rural contexts; and on-going weaknesses in the research evidence base for rural areas. We know from the limited available research that ageing in a rural area is a qualitatively different experience to ageing in an urban area, and indiscriminately applying policies to rural areas without considering the rural context could be ineffective. The rural context needs to be considered in policy development.

Age NI, in collaboration with CARDI, recently held a rural roundtable event on the with rural policy makers, academics, and other rural stakeholders.

The event was attended by the following individuals:

- Roger O'Sullivan, Director CARDI
- Paul McGill Strategic Research Officer, CARDI
- Vanessa Burholt Centre for Innovative Ageing Swansea
- Thomas Scharf, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology at NUI Galway, Ireland

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[1] EU Farm Structure Survey, 2010

- Dermot O'Reilly, Centre for Public Health, Queens University
- Louise Coyle, Policy Officer NIRWN
- Sharon Fitchie, DARD Equality Branch
- Janet Cooper, DARD Equality Branch
- Paul Donnelly, DARD Rural Development Programme
- Sheelah Connolly, Research Fellow, Trinity College Dublin
- Amy Veale, Research Manager, Age NI
- Bernadette Maginnis, Strategic Policy Adviser, Age NI

Through discussions it became clear that our understanding of ageing in a rural environment is very limited, with implications for evidence based policy making. The International Rural Ageing Project (IRAP) which ran between 1997 and 2001 had an objective of reviewing and integrating information on rural ageing (Burholt). At an Expert Group Meeting in 1998, members stated that rural ageing had been neglected. Despite significant demographic, and economic changes that have reshaped rural populations, they found that most countries had not addressed these changes in policy, and that policy was not being effectively informed by research based evidence. Without a strong evidence base *'societies can squander scarce resources pursuing untested or ineffectual programmes'.*

Of particular concern is the fact that research and policy agendas have not tended to recognise the potential future or existing contributions of older rural dwellers. The life experience of older rural dwellers can be a considerable intellectual resource in policy and service development, and this is not currently being exploited; *'Rural elders have not been recognised in terms of the contributions that they could (or do) make to societies; effective planning and policy development could allow communities to potentially tap into intellectual and other resources for older citizens'* Burholt.

Age NI would therefore like to begin this response by stating that rural policy development, for the most part, has not been informed by evidence based research in Northern Ireland, nor has it reflected the changing ageing rural demographic. A key factor in the absence of a focus on older rural dwellers, and an evidence based approach, has been a lack of rural data and research here. Age NI would like to see that steps are taken to ensure that the new Rural Development Programme

acknowledges the ageing demographic in rural areas and makes the collection of data on rural ageing a key priority for the development of the programme.

Proposals

We are pleased to see that proposals for the new Rural Development Programme have been set out in line with European priorities that include the promotion of social inclusion, equality, poverty reduction and economic development, and that key targets for the 2014-20 programme include the provision of targeted support and pro-active measures to tackle existing inequalities; deprivation and access to key services. There appears to be a large focus on developing rural business and job creation as key methods of addressing these issues. We would highlight however that many rural dwellers are past retirement and will not directly benefit from these measures.

We welcome the acknowledgement of the need to consider other existing policies and strategies in the development of this programme. We would however welcome greater clarification about the links with the Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion Framework 2011-15, and the anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland, Lifetime Opportunities, and what the Rural Development Programme will contribute to the promotion of social inclusion and poverty reduction over and above these strategies. What will be the added value of the proposed Basic Services Scheme in terms of tackling these issues? What targets will exist within this scheme and what is the associated budget? We would welcome greater clarity in terms of how the scheme intends to uniquely address these problems.

We are encouraged that the Department is fully committed to meeting its statutory equality duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). In terms of proposed schemes detailed for the Rural Development Programme, we would be interested to learn what steps will be taken to ensure that these schemes are actively promoted to older rural dwellers. For example, the Farm Family Key kills Scheme will cover training in the value of ICT in terms of farm management. We know that older individuals are less likely to have well developed skills in this area. So what steps will the Department be taking to ensure equality of opportunity in this regard? Likewise, how will Farm Exchange Visits be promoted to older farmers? Older farmers will have a wealth of experience that others could potentially benefit from. We would like to see this scheme promoted with older farmers in mind. We would also welcome

details of how the Department intends to record and monitor take-up of such schemes in terms of age breakdown, with a view to ensuring that older individuals are encouraged to benefit from the various schemes available. There is a focus in the document on young farmers. As highlighted previously however, a significant proportion of farmers are older, and as such, steps must be taken to ensure that these individuals have equal opportunities to avail of schemes and that schemes are promoted/ targeted with the older age cohort in mind.

Amy Veale
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October 2013

71. Children and Young People Thematic Working Group

BACKGROUND
Demographic change and declining rural communities greatly influences the economic performance of many rural areas. Supporting the continued presence of young people in rural areas is therefore a high priority for EU rural development policy. To examine and support good practices in terms of catering for the needs of children and young people in rural areas, a Children and Young people"s Thematic Working Group (TWG) has been set up, facilitated by the Rural Network. *(See annex 1 for membership details)*
The purpose of the TWG is to consider how RDP (both now and future programmes) can improve the quality of life and support service delivery, jobs and growth in rural areas through supporting Children & Young People"s initiatives.
The overall aims of the group are to:
To provide & promote **information exchange** in relation to services, programmes and needs of rural children and young people. Including **mapping** what supports currently exist.
To **raise awareness** – consider and promote the issues and challenges facing children and young people in rural areas.
To **capture potential** – demonstrate how inclusion of Children and Young People can benefit rural development through a range of case studies looking at practice in Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK and other EU regions
To **identify solutions** – look at what RDP can do to support Children & Young

People in terms of rural quality of life and also in fostering their contribution to a vibrant rural society.

To share and pilot techniques for **engaging** young people in rural areas.

Thematic Working Group members facilitated a specifically targeted and creatively designed consultation session on the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 on the 2nd October, 2013. See Annex 2 for agenda. This event was attended by 25 young people aged approximately from 15 – 25 from a wide range of interests and backgrounds from across rural Northern Ireland. See Annex 3 for complete list of attendance. This report, and accompanying video, (link below), details their views.

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/hciveh5s8smw1ne/au2AvvogVb

KEY POINTS FROM CONSULTATION EXERCISE:

Rural Isolation & access to transport are still key issues for rural young people;

Lack of transport is a barrier to accessing work and services, this in turn can have a knock on effect in terms of mental health and well-being, financial strain, work experience and other social / development opportunities.

Access to the internet is considered an absolute need to stay connected and for educational purposes.

Access to work experience & part-time job opportunities is lacking as these tend to be limited in rural areas or over-subscribed.

Perceived lack of support for local businesses and a view that rural businesses struggle, this in turn puts young people off thinking of rural business as an opportunity. Most reported to be afraid of considering business as an option and did not know where they might go for support or help.

Young people are concerned with how others in the community perceive and portray them in their areas and feel that they need to be consulted and engaged more, and valued for what they can contribute.

Responses against each of the identified themes (below) are outlined in the following pages:

Health and Wellbeing
Access to Services
Environment
Villages and Community Life
Jobs and Enterprise

Introductory Exercise

On arrival the young people were tasked with activities named, *My Rural*, giving them an opportunity to express themselves. These exercises set the tone for the consultation event to be creative and engaging. Using visual aids, each person was asked to tell:

the group about themselves
what rural means to them
what they would need for a good life

Those attending come from various backgrounds and interests and participated well in the activities.

Some of the key issues which young people highlighted in terms of what they would need for a good life were:

Support of family and friends
Good internet/communications connection
Somewhere to go
Good educational opportunities
More outreach work in rural areas
More cross community work
Good Transport
Business support

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

HEALTH AND WELLBEING
The group were asked two questions – „*What factors do you need to contribute to a healthy life?'* and *'what are the negative influences on health?'*
The first thoughts in most of the groups were around

exercise, **fitness** and **physical health** and **services** in the community – they talked about GP, fire stations etc.
They talked about **the social isolation** for young people with no way of getting anywhere and no buses and no late opportunities to go places or access services.

Responses to 'what improves or adds to your health'

Supportive family and friends
Safe spaces
A physical lifestyle
Places to "hangout"
Money
Cross-community events
Services e.g. opticians, leisure centre, sports facilities – rugby, hockey club,
Things to do, to meet new people e.g. sport, youth club
Work
Education
Open spaces
Mental health support

Responses to 'What are the health dangers for you'
Drugs, alcohol, smoking lack of knowledge about other religions sectarianism
Exam stress and pressure to succeed in school
Peer pressure, bad influences
Negative media portrayal of youth
Transport – Isolation
Bad diet
Anti-social behaviour
Lack of services
Social media pressure

THE ENVIRONMENT

Participants were asked what they felt was needed for a healthy rural environment into the future. There was a general consensus that we need to be respectful of the environmental resources that already exist. There was some discussion of energy, resources and the exploitation of natural resources for commercial gain. The issue of fracking was raised with some concern raised about how the environment can suffer when we push the interests of people and science too far in one direction. These discussions were the backdrop for some of the other themes, with global issues and/or their environment as background for the more immediate day-to-day issues to be explored further.

Important elements suggested for the future rural environment:

Renewable energy
Organic farming
Reuse, recycle, renew
Tidy community
Clean / no pollution
No fracking
Healthy plants/livestock
Better rural transport
For a community to work together for a good environment
Plenty of farming
Brown bin
Gritting services in snowy weather
Bike paths for people who don't drive or enjoy riding
Protecting our eco systems from manmade factors e.g. deforestation, pollution

JOBS AND ENTERPRISE
Young people were asked to write a letter/postcard to the minister (of their choice) regarding jobs, enterprise and industry relevant for them in their rural areas. The main issues raised included:

Lack of paid work experience; majority felt that the unpaid work experience offered through schools was valuable, but often too short a period (generally 3-5 days) and you only got the chance to do it once and therefore to try 1 „career"

Very difficult to get part-time employment as they don"t have any work experience and they are competing for jobs with people who have experience – even jobs in local shops or retail positions are difficult to get without experience

As based in a rural area, it"s difficult to access employment – rely on parents to drive them to work and this means that the hours and locations have to also suit parents – or they would be spending wages getting to and from work.

Volunteering useful in getting experience and gaining access to a paid position

Lack of entrepreneurial spirit and knowing what it takes to move towards setting up a business; concerned about cost and risks and not really sure how they would go about it.

The following are sample of the responses of the young people with their direct pleas to the Minister.

'I use the local Costcutter before ASDA a lot before and after school and on the weekends if I need something. If I didn't have the cost costcutter a couple of miles away, life would be harder.'

'More experience, Better public transport, More opportunities to get employment'

'Dear minister I believe that there should be a better transport service in my local area of Galbally. There is the school time table for the buses and we have to rely on out parents a lot to leave us places'

'There are a shortage of jobs in rural areas it would be a benefit if there was better transport facilities to towns or other areas as it is hard to get to and from these areas where most of the jobs are.

'Providing a location and incentive to start up business in local areas. More green environment jobs. More support for young people, advice. Maybe tax breaks for small companies to develop in rural areas.'

I think the local shops are needed in my rural area because some people in the community can't drive or they are not fit to drive and the transport is very poor in my area so they can't get to the big shopping centers. Also it provides a few jobs to the local community and if they got support they could employ more.
'
Small local business need help to start up. Asda Tesco have taken over the towns and made it harder for small business to survive. Need more chances of work experience in school'

'As a young person I feel that I need more opportunities to get a job. I feel there aren't enough jobs employing young people, more work experience would be helpful.'

'There needs to be more local shops and businesses open so that employment can be available for young people. Free transport or cheeper transport to and from main towns where people always need to travel to some people don't drive.'

VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY LIFE

There was a lot of talk **about closures of small single businesses**, where young people felt that some of their villages were going to be left with nothing and that bigger towns would be the only place for shopping. They liked to support local shops but with more competitors in the retail market and the current economy, they realise that people are looking out for money and value for money.

Derelict areas and land that was run down was a feature of local life, with places closing, waasted buildings and wasted spaces. These could be used or re-vived.

Nothing to do for young people, especially in the smaller towns. There was maybe lots on one side or the other, with activities through the orange hall or the GAA, **but little or nothing that was mixed and for everybody**.

Where there was some stuff for young people the hours didn"t work. If the club closed at 10pm, young people might hang around until 12 so why not have **facilities opened late.** The youth club could provide a bus to run young people home at 12, rather than parents worrying about transport.

Transport system causes major issues for village life with one young person stating „Translink is a joke".

When asked „If there was one thing in your area you would change what would it be?" they talked about a **space to go, where you could hang-out** – supervised in a casual way, but a comfortable easy space – with stuff on sometimes but not all the time. It is not always easy to go to people"s houses to hang-out, so this would be neutral place outside the home.

But overall, the young people wanted to have **something to do,** but still wanted to be in touch with their own community and **not lose that small town or rural identity.** They did not necessarily want large commercial facilities that might take over the town, but somewhere in keeping with the community life.

Summary responses of community life included:

Provide safe, neutral, reasonably priced places to go so young people can relax and enjoy themselves
Organise more events for young people in rural areas e.g. trips away, sports, cinema
Many shops and business closing which is impacting on community life
Support for local shops and local produce
Poor transport links and a high cost of transport
Provide services such as youth club, swimming club, community centres
Education on different cultures
Good mobile signal a necessity
More local farmers markets to sell produce
Cross border links
Consult with young people and listen to their views
Utilise empty buildings for community activity

ACCESS AND SERVICES
Most discussions centred around **transport and the continuous struggle of getting to and from places especially in the evenings.** Young people did not have access to social acitivies and to meeting up with friends from outside a very close geographical area. They were clear that lack of contact with friends outside school can be isolating and that this can have very negative effects on mental health. **Access to community and village life was something that they wanted more of**.

Young people talked about places in villages that they could have better access to, but again the lack of transport conspired against them.

Empty buildings in villages or local communities was mentioned, but there was a reluctance for young peopel to take on a „massive" project such as re-energising or re-vamping a local venue. But they wanted to be able to go to somewhere like this and saw some of these derelict buildings as a **wasted opportunity**.

Young people were animated in discussions around **youth-led grant-making activities**. Many young people said they would love to do something youth-led which would fund other groups of young people. They didn"t want large amounts of money but something that would motivate other young people and give them the skills to build on and plan for something bigger in the futyure.

Broadband was an issue in some places, but not in others – highlighting the **sporadic coverage** of broadband speed and access.

Access to doctors and GPs was not a pressing issue, but the young people were interested in **access to sports events and activities and fitness activities.**

Responses against what services are important to young people include:

Access to youth clubs, sporting activities

Transport, bus services (later bus services)

Places to meet up with friends

Better broadband

More footpaths/cycle paths

Street lighting

The Journey

The various groups of young representatives were asked to form into their own area groups in order to complete this part of the consultation process.

Each group was issued with a large time-line map in the form of a linear representation of the 2014 -2020 Rural Development Programme.

Having already been made aware of the main elements of the consultation document and the proposed priority headings they were asked to consider how they felt that their local needs could be best served over the next programme. They were asked specifically to consider the needs of young people living and working in their own respective rural areas.

They were invited to use the time-line to locale their views and recommendations and place them along the route of The Journey, with the most pressing needs, requiring urgent action being placed in order along the route.

To assist them in visualising the process each group had access to Clipart, Glue and Pens.

Their action plans were as follows:

Group 1. (Galbally, Co Tyrone)

Major priorities:

2014

Improvement and enhancement of Mobile Signal Strength / High-speed Broadband and WIFI availability, with a more acceptable service throughout the area.

Development of sources of Renewable Energy, thus causing less harm to the environment and enhanced benefits / profit to those introducing it for personal

use.
Need for increased opportunities for part-time and full-time job opportunities for young people.
Creation and support of opportunities allowing young people from different areas to meet.
Setting up "Chill-out" areas for young people and run by young people

2015
Lack of affordable child care facilities discourages people from working or seeking employment.
Action must be taken to sustain local schools, primary and post primary. Too many schools have recently been closed.
There should be an improvement in the development and availability of programmes for older people which would greatly enhance their quality of life

2016
Better Public Transport for convention access to and from towns and cities.
General, widespread availability of "Brown Bins".
Sufficient resources to clear roads in snowy / icy conditions thus not leaving so many people and animals isolated.
Development of Tree Planting Programmes to improve the environment.

2017
Better access to affordable homes in rural areas.
Increase in numbers of Farmers" Markets
Support for Young Farmers

2018
Provision of educational opportunities for young and old

2019 / 20
Development of improved networks to enable contact with other European Countries

Group 3 (Fermanagh)

2014
Allocate Funding to allow maximum impact on rural needs
Address problem of increase in school closures
Provide adequate late night Public Transport for rural areas
Develop Cross-Generational Activities / Opportunities to increase awareness and understanding
Put an end to FRACKING. It destroys the environment (as does careless waste disposal / litter)
Greater support for local village activities and initiatives
Greater access for small rural businesses on the move
Invest in villages to encourage them to help themselves
Greater provision, affordable childcare

2015

Farming / Agriculture are inter-connected. Greater Investment in agriculture, better development of effective supply chains / networks
Better Farmers" Markets
Enhanced Support and Encouragement leads to markets / work / carreers.

2016
Make connections with other European Countries
Much better access to Higher Education
Better Career Structures and opportunities
2017
Better affordable housing

2018
Programmes put in place to preserve buildings and protect and peomote local heritage

2019/20
Greater selection of choice in leisure facilities, such as equestrian centre.
Many of these need to be re-programmed as they are not fully used.
Young people in rural areas need to have better and more convenient access to such facilities and services if they are to gain maximum benefit from them.
Steps taken to counteract the negative influences of climate change to protect our future and the environment.

Group 4 (N'abbey, Carrick, Antrim.....1)

2014
Make plans that are easy to execute and implement.
Actions should have immediate effect and be value for money to ensure best use is made of the funding.
Highest priority actions:
Accessible Public Transport
Better Leisure Facilities
Building relationships
Building career opportunities

2015
Encourage good practice in agriculture and farming methods
Develop better supply chains to encourage the rural economy
Connect and Network with other European Communities and share knowledge and cultures
Support Rural Village Community Initiatives and events
Provide for older members of the community to enhance quality of life

2016
Better access to a more widespread, good quality mobile phone signal / 3G
Give support to young people making careers in agriculture / farming
Make greater effort to combat climate change
Widespread access to WIFI in rural areas

2017
Development of effective methods of renewable energy and encourage greater percentage of the population to use it.

2018
Priority to make better access to affordable housing

2019/20
Plant New Forests to benefit the whole environment and reduce CO2
Promote the preservation of old buildings and the protection of local heritage
Better childcare
Promote and support programmes to improve the environment.

Group 5 (N'abbey, Carrick, Antrim.....2)

2014
Increased Public Transport at nights
More bus routes and stops
Better Mobile Signal, Broadband speed and WIFI access.
Increase in local University choices and places with local campuses
Better communication with other European Communities. This is essential for young people to broaden their horizons and to experience other cultures
Campaigns should be funded to clean up local rural areas, especially from litter carried by the wind or arising from illegal tipping.
Development of better more suitable leisure facilities for young people.

2015
Support for the increased development of organic farming
Support for young people who choose farming as a career
Heritage protection. Important to conserve towns/buildings but also many derelict buildings are now causing "visual pollution". They should be cleaned up as they are a danger to the community.

2016
Increase planting through woodlands and forests
Care and protection of wildlife
Reduce causes of climate change
Increase supply networks

2017
Provide ICT Training skills throughout the community
Support Renewable Energy Initiatives
Promote more widespread recycling

2018
Greater support for farming and agriculture

2019/20
Support for provision for better and affordable housing in rural areas
Stop school closures in rural areas. This damages community structures

Projects which provide for opportunities for older people should be supported. Older people can become isolated in rural areas without an adequate transport network to allow them to make use of essential services.

Group 2 (Thematic Working Group members)

2014
Funding levels need to be set and maximised
Support for young working mums
Better access to all services / education etc.
Acceptable Broadband/mobile signal quality to enhance opportunities in employability/ business / enterprise
Greater awareness of best practice and EU Programmes
Easier access to education

2015
Building relationships
Expanding / raising awareness of farming and rural community
Future sustainability
Sustainability / skills / experience
Relationships / diversity activities / Safe environment

2016
Promoting career opportunities
Work experience / Taster sessions
LAGs should promote this
Building vibrant communities

2017
Environmental programmes
Trees / Wildlife / Recycling

2018/2019/2020
Environmental health / Well-being
Renewable Energy
Leisure activities
Organic farming
Access to affordable homes
The Journey process entailed much discussion but regardless of the areas represented by the groups there was a similar trend throughout when selecting the major priorities for action throughout the next RDP

Annex 1: Membership of Thematic Working Group:

Chairperson:
William Lamrock, ARC North West

Membership:

Cllr Jennifer Coulter, Lagan Rural Partnership

Cllr Dermot Nicholl, ARC North West
Ms Margaret Martin, ARC North West
Cllr Frances Burton, SWARD
Mary Duggan, SWARD
Loraine Griffin, SWARD
Bob Adams, GROW South Antrim
Emma Stubbs, GROW South Antrim
Caroline Redpath, YouthAction
Michael Reid, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster

Annex 2 - Outline Event Format
6.00 pm Arrival, Participation in „**My Rural'** creative exercise
6.30pm Introductions to background, focus and format of evening
6.40pm Split into groups & work around creative exercises based on the identified themes

Future proof Themes:

Access (e.g. services, transport, information, it, broadband etc)

Environment (e.g local use, assets, protection, climate change, recycling, energy etc)

Jobs & enterprise (e.g. opportunities, training, supporting businesses, getting into employment, fair pay, emigration, brain drain, innovation)

Villages & community life (e.g. opportunities, attractiveness, dereliction, activities & services available, inclusion, support & sense of belonging etc)

Health & wellbeing (e.g. stress, mental health, access to services and information, activity etc)
8.00pm „**The Journey'** – what young people would like to see in terms of their themes in the next RDP 2014 – 2020 including practical examples of schemes and ideas
8.50pm Final comments / discussion, & close

Annex 3 - List of Attendees

Name	Where have you travelled from	Tick (✓) to allow your photograph/recording to be taken	Other
Christopher McNeilly	Ballyclare	✓	
Lorraine Cotton	costra.	✓	
~~signature~~ .	GROW	✓	
Allen Danney .	NNI	—	
Christopher Allen	Enniskillen	✓	
Sean McCusker	Enniskillen	✓	
Mark Robinson	Enniskillen	✓	
Naomi Mohen	Whitehead	✓	
Cliodhna McGivern	whitehead	✓	
Karl Milligan	Carrick	✓	

Name	Where have you travelled from	Tick (✓) to allow your photograph/recording to be taken	Other
Emma Stubbs	GROW	✓	
Sinead Mc Closkey .	Galbally	✓	
Roisin Clarke	Galbally	—	
Maire Kane	'' ''	✓	
Alana Mckeown	'' ''	—	
Órlaith Donnelly	'' ''	—	
Grainne Hallon	Galbally	✓	
Brenda McElroy	YouthAction NI	✓	

Name	Where have you travelled from	Tick (✓) to allow your photograph/recording to be taken	Other
Ryan Johnston	YMCA Londonderry / University of Ulster	✓	
W. Lambrock	Londonderry YMCA	✓	
Teresa Coaum	Cookstown.	✓	
Eliz McArdle	Lisburn	✓	
Ca Redpch.	Ashalee.		
William Love	Ballynure	✓	
Colleen Kennedy	Antrim	✓	
Maria McCann	Randalstown	✓	
Andrew Reid	Crumlin	✓	
Lauren Cloke	Ballyclare	✓	

Name	Where have you travelled from	Tick (✓) to allow your photograph/recording to be taken	Other
Sam Crawe	Carrickfergus	✓	—
Roisin McElhony	Enniskillen / Irvinestown	✓	
Lyne of Frederick	Enniskillen / Youth Action	✓	
Samantha Tinkington	Ballyclare.	✓	
Victoria Cole	Ballyclare	✓	
Shauna Conway	Randalstown	✓	
Artdie Martin	Dromore	✓	
James Moore.	Dungiven		
Kie for Blewill	Limerds	✓	⌐
Conor Burns	Derry	✓	—

73. Community Relations Council

RE: Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on DARD's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

CRC has a specific interest in the development and strengthening of relationships within and across our communities – both urban and rural. Council's contribution to this consultation will primarily focus on how the Rural Development Programme (RDP) can contribute to the area of good relations and reconciliation.

CRC has responded to a number of DARD consultations in the past with the aim of highlighting the role the department and its policies can play in promoting and supporting the development of good relations in rural communities. CRC also works with a range of rural stakeholders in the development of this work, and has collaborated to develop thematic papers and reports which specifically examine good relations themes from a rural point of view[2]. These papers are available upon request.

CRC has also engaged with departmental officials regarding practices that would support the development of good relations, both within the department as well as its external programmes.

It is within this context that CRC makes the following comments.

Policy Context
CRC views the RDP as a policy tool that can help the department do more regarding good relations. The consultation document highlights the department's current commitment to progressing community relations within the current RDP 2007-2013. Axis 3 commits to 'regenerating villages and their surrounding areas by improving their economic prospects, improving community relations and the quality of life'[3]. In fact the mid-term report of the RDP acknowledges that NIRDP funded schemes that help improve community relations will be an important contributor to an inclusive rural society[4].

The department's Audit of Inequalities also makes a commitment to "encourage suitable applications which are likely to improve community relations, addressing sectarianism and conflict issues' and has a connected outcome of an 'increase in funding applications that will improve community relations, address sectarianism and conflict issues'; and its Equality Scheme commits DARD to further promoting equality and good relations and ensure that S75 is at the core if its decision and policy making processes.

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[2] Sharing Over Separation - Rural Perspective 2006; Beyond Belfast Report; CRC & RCN 2010;
[3] Axis 3 - Improving the quality of life through diversification of economic Activity, RDP 2007-2013.
[4] NISRA, Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the RDP (2007-2013) November 2010.

A number of non-departmental policy developments and interventions are also important and need to be considered carefully. The consultation refers to a number of national strategies and CRC welcomes this recognition as well as the importance of interlinking the final RDP to these strategies. However one strategy not mentioned is OFMDFM's *'Together Building a United Community'* (T:BUC) - it is important that all new strategies and policies emanating from the Executive should give due consideration to this new community relations policy. Moreover the future Peace IV programme will also solidify the strategic direction for peace building over the coming years, and it is therefore critical that the RDP adds value and complimentarity to these policy interventions.

General Comments
Given the recent engagement between DARD and CRC on community relations issues, as well as the Executive's announcement for TBUC it is disappointing that the draft RDP does not contain an explicit objective or identifiable actions that would support this wider Executive policy goal for promoting and developing community relations.

CRC is aware of competing priorities within any strategy. However community relations should not be concealed or assigned as an urban problem, or simply dealt with via an 'Open to all' statement. Available research highlights issues such as sectarianism, segregation, contested spaces, acts of avoidance and denial, co-existence, and minority communities.

The *Beyond Belfast – Contested Spaces in Urban, Rural and Cross Border Settings* research undertaken between CRC and the Rural Community Network (RCN) looked at the existence of communal barriers in rural communities and concluded that 'they have real effects in constraining and shaping the behaviour and attitudes of both individuals and communities'[5].

Furthermore RCN's *Lost in Translation* report (2006) highlighted 'that Minority communities, whether they are Protestant or Catholic, are playing a minor role in wider community life, availing of services and recreation elsewhere. This situation of communities within communities is not conducive to community activity or the building of social inclusion and community cohesion'[6].

Given the evidence it is critical that the new RDP examines how it can reduce barriers and minimise chill factors that can influence levels of participation and cohesion.

Moving Forward
Whilst it is unfortunate that our engagement has not influenced this current draft of the RDP, CRC is hopeful that the comments set out in this response, as well as continued engagement with the Department will secure a change.

Therefore, it is CRC's opinion that the RDP must better place itself as a policy mechanism that can make an active contribution to better community relationships.

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[5] Beyond Belfast – Contested Spaces in Urban, Rural and Cross Border Settings; Community Relations Council & Rural Community Network. 2010.
[6] Lost in Translation; Rural Community Network. 2006.

CRC recommends the including of the T:BUC vision with the RDP *of a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.* The inclusion of such a vision would ensure that community relations is grounded within the future programme thereby securing its delivery in the implementation stage of the programme. CRC would welcome the opportunity to support DARD in this area of work.

In the meantime, and by way of supporting this discourse, we have included further suggestions that would help cement good relations within the draft Programme in line with Section 75(2) and the T:BUC vision. These actions are particularly relevant for Priority 6, but are not exclusive:

- Funded groups and/or programmes should be supported to identify any potential negative impact their applications may have on good relations and how their applications could be adjusted/amended to include opportunities to promote/deliver good relations;
- Projects relating to community development and capacty building should incorporate a good relations element, and identify how applications can assist cross-community approaches i.e. capacity building, awareness raising, relationship building and sustaining community relations;
- Villages plans should be used to encourage shared spaces and the development of shared facilities. Village Renewal criteria should include an examination of a needs analysis regarding local community relations, and could draw upon the local district council's good relations audits. This would help identify possible barriers and chill factors that impact on a strong and cohesive village community. The *Beyond Belfast – Contested Spaces in Urban, Rural and Cross Border Settings* publication would be especially helpful in relation to this;
- DARD should enhance the criteria weighting on Good Relations in basic services/ village renewal;
- Officials devising training and mentoring activities should engage with those taking forward the United Youth Programme in TBUC, and look for ways to support cross-community engagement/activity.

Issues of governance, capacity and strategic planning are key elements that can help build and sustain inter-community partnerships. In order to maximise opportunities for community cohesion we have the following suggestions for those who will be responsible for the delivery of the programme:

- Values such as open, welcoming, safe and accessible spaces should underpin the usage of all facilities;
- Proposals for programmes/projects located in 'contested spaces' should clearly demonstrate how they will contribute to the development and maintenance of community relations;
- Infrastructure that helps develop good relations partnerships should be supported;

- Competencies of the group/organisations developing and managing projects should include a knowledge of community relations, as well as a willingness to promote and develop relations and partnerships;
- Community organisations should be encouraged to form partnership consortia which take advantage of the competence and capacity that has been built up by those involved in peace building activities via cross-community partnerships;
- Economic, social and environmental benefits should be shared by all in the area. Applications should clearly demonstrate what positive impact the transfer will have on the local community;
- Management boards should be encouraged to bring together key players at local level to engage in a process of long-term planning for each asset;

Underlining this draft Programme should be a commitment to develop capacity within delivery structures to ensure equality and good relations implications and opportunities are recognised and understood. DARD should offer support, direct, or through a partnership approach with strategic rural good relations institutions to develop this capacity. These joint ventures could also be used in an advisory capacity to help develop interventions which promote good relations approaches at local level.

Monitoring
CRC is also keen to see the development of a process that evidences good relations outcomes and impacts. DARD should:
- Request applications to demonstrate how their bid will improve good relations?
- Consider an incentive for cross community collaboration;
- Explore how they will signpost/make targeted interventions/support applications that exist in contested spaces;

Finally, it would be useful for the RDP team to consider how the review of the Good Relations Indicators (within OFMDFM) could feed into the proposed development of a standardised reporting mechanism/form. Complimentarity would benefit the two.

Other considerations
We have alsready mentioned a few cross-cutting strategies that should be read alongside the development of this furture RDP. DARD should review DSD's final Community Asset Transfer Strategy when it is published.

Post consultation
CRC is aware that the post-consultation phase will involve the designing of programmes and schemes. CRC would be especially keen to contribute to this dialogue and support the department in identifying practical actions that would have a positive impact on rural community relations.

EQIA
Good Relations issues have been identified within the EQIA documentation but again there is little evidence that they have influenced the draft RDP. CRC feels this is a missed opportunity.

The EQIA refers to research relating to good relations in the rural context. There is additional research that has not considered e.g. CRC's & RCN's publication *Beyond Belfast – Contested Spaces in Urban, Rural and Cross Border Settings* (2010). It would also have been useful to consider research highlighted in the Department's own Audit of Inequalities.

Furthermore, the Peace III programme and the District Council's Good Relations Programme supports good relations activity in rural communities. It is unclear if those conducting the EQIA engaged with these programmes - this data would have strengthened the EQIA documentation as well as emphasisng the need to develop and incorporate appropriate actions in the draft RDP.

Finally, there is no specific mention of sectarianism in either the RDP or the EQIA, the latter refers to 'the past conflict has indeed led to a high degree of segregation and 'single' identiy rural communities. These difficult and negative issues must not be ignored.

Conclusion
The cost of rural division is potentially detrimental to the sustainability of rural communities and the rural way of life, therefore CRC considers that community relations work in a divided rural context is a necessity and wholly interdependent to creating vibrant, sustainable and resilient rural communities. The RDP offers an opportunity to enhance this work, an opportunity to link with existing and future interventions that could add value and strengthen the Executive's commitment to building a united community. This ultimately requires all departments to keep good relations to the fore of policy development and devise programmes/schemes that have multiple impacts. Peace building and reconciliation is not the job of one particular department – it requires the collaboration and communication within and between them all. CRC hopes that these comments support DARD in finalising the forthcoming RDP and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further any aspect of this response with the RDP team.

74. Early Years

Rural Development Programme 2014-2020
Consultation response: Early Years – the organisation for young children
Early Years welcome the opportunity presented here to offer the following commentary on key selected priorities and associated delivery mechanisms and implementation arrangements for the next Rural Development Programme relevant to our operational remit.
Shaping the next programme for everyone in rural communities
In the Ministerial Foreword to the consultation document Minister O'Neill rightly outlines the Department's desire to shape the next Programme into one that delivers the best outcomes for everyone living and working in our rural communities.
In recognition of the role our youngest children and those who care for and educate them can and must play within thriving and sustainable rural communities we would recommend that this commitment be slightly altered to shaping the next Programme into 'one that delivers the best outcomes for everyone **learning**, living or working in rural communities'.

This message will represent a consistent theme throughout the present response. Early Years1 is the largest organisation in Northern Ireland working with and for all young children. It is a non-profit making organisation and has been operating since 1965 to promote and develop high quality, evidence-informed early childhood services for young children, their families and communities. Our vision is that children are strong, competent and visible in their communities; physically and emotionally healthy; eager and able to learn; and respectful of difference.

1 For more see http://www.early-years.org/

Early Years has been a longstanding advocate at all levels of decision making domestically and internationally for the sound, long-term economic and social relevance which major investment in our youngest children from birth and in associated early childhood services, will make as a critical measure in:

☐ Improving social, educational and economic outcomes for our youngest citizens from the earliest opportunity, their families and carers and the communities of which they form a vital part; and

☐ Ensuring the continued educational, social, emotional and cognitive development of our present and future generations.

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Proposed priorities
We see particularly the areas of promoting social inclusion and combating poverty and of investing in education, skills and life-long learning as being of vital importance to development and growth in this region. Therefore, given the above context, whilst all of the proposed priorities are perceived to be relevant and necessary, we are particularly keen to emphasise the importance of the following two priorities to which the majority of our commentary will relate:
 Priority 1 - Fostering Knowledge Transfer and Innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas (cross-cutting)

 Priority 6 - Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas

Early Years continues to build upon a significant knowledge base derived from practical experience and evidence-based research relating to diversity and inclusion with our youngest citizens, their carers and families and the communities in which they live. We have successfully worked in some of the most divided urban and rural interface areas of Northern Ireland (this is further outlined later in the response). To this effect we have developed a considerable track record, both directly and through the extensive membership network which we represent, of successful partnership working at international, national, local authority and agency level, in the delivery of a variety of projects and activities relating to:
 Peace-building and reconciliation

 Community health and education

 Working with immigrant families and young Traveller children and their families

 Community development

 Shared spaces; and

 Respecting difference in its many forms.

Across the priorities within the present consultation document a considerable focus is placed on the agri-food and forestry industries.
We stress here that it is vital that the Department also continue to as equally focus on developing and supporting the broad range of industries and services extremely important towards successful, sustainable rural communities. We particularly emphasise the role of high-quality, adequately resourced and supported early childhood services in establishing vital links between *rural employability*, *educational and health attainment*, *economic development*, *farm diversification measures* and *social inclusion*. This is elaborated more fully in the following sections below.

Priority 1 - Fostering Knowledge Transfer and Innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas (cross-cutting)
The proposed focus within this priority of fostering innovations and the knowledge base in rural areas is supported and also that this priority has been identified as a cross-cutting measure. Areas of relevance here include supporting investment in research and development and securing collaborative projects and knowledge transfer partnerships. 3

The consultation document identifies the potential in such sector areas agri-food and forestry. However particularly within the respects of collaborative projects and knowledge transfer partnerships Early Years would also strongly recommend more explicit reference to, and wish to highlight, the vital role and impact of the voluntary, community and independent sectors towards the development of a future knowledge based economy in rural communities. This is especially so concerning the area of development of high quality early childhood rural services.

Early Years rates evidence based excellence and innovation highly amongst our organisational values and behaviours. We feel that it is vital that practice is informed by impact based evaluations of previous initiatives and through international and local best practice and partnerships. We support the development of such measures and see this as vital in the growth of a future knowledge based economy. Services and projects provided by our organisation also extend to the Republic of Ireland, through HighScope2 and other cross-border initiatives, and beyond through a number of international partnerships and projects designed to 'export' knowledge and best practice. Some examples of this include:

2 http://www.early-years.org/highscope/
3 http://www.early-years.org/international/
4 http://www.early-years.org/netq6/
5 http://www.tacso.org/doc/PRECEDE%20corrected.pdf

☐ An *International Network on Peace Building*3 project leading the sharing of best practice across countries experiencing conflict and post-conflict situations through the use of programmatic tools and ongoing implementation of a Masters Programme on Applied Peace and Conflict Studies with early years, in partnership with the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at the University of Ulster

☐ Participation in the *Network for the Quality in Early Childhood Education from 0-6 years (NetQ6)*4, which is a cooperative network with educative and training institutions in Europe. The project aims are to compare, analyze and face the socio challenges that arise in the growth of early childhood and compile the best practices in the field to find solutions for the new realities and special needs found in a range of education systems

☐ Contribution to the work of the *Partnership for Reconciliation through Early Childhood Education and Development in Europe (PRECEDE)5* which aims to support civil society influence over reconciliation process and cohesion through education in early years in the Balkan region and Europe. It will develop a sustainable Balkan Region Network of civil society organisations concerned with young children and promoting acceptance of others and respect for diversity; develop sustainable country level networks of civil society organisations promoting acceptance of others and respect for diversity through early childhood education (ECD) in the Western Balkan region countries; and will link country level networks and the PRECEDE Network of civil society organisations with the International Network for Young Children in Conflict and Post-conflict Countries

☐ Supporting the delivery of pre-school programmes within Serbia and Turkey with significant opportunities to support major job creation in this area.

☐ Hosting annual Service Learning Trips in partnership with Wheelock College, Boston to allow students from the College undertaking disciplines in

4

psychology and early childhood development a unique opportunity to experience the work that is currently underway in Northern Ireland and study exemplary peace building efforts in early childhood settings; and

☐ Hosting a visit in 2012 by Turkish delegates from the Ministry of Education and UNICEF to view models of good practice, visit settings and participate in round table debate.

Such activity enables Early Years to both consolidate and extend its international relationships and to continue to work to develop practice materials, training, advocacy tools and strategies on reconciliation and peace building through early years programmes to the benefit of local and international service providers.

Schemes proposed to deliver knowledge transfer and innovation actions

European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups

The consultation document outlines that support will be provided for EIP groups made up of farmers, researchers, businesses and other interested bodies to advance innovation in the agriculture sector through project-based approaches and that support will also be provided for innovation brokers to develop projects and bring together the relevant people to form an EIP. Further clarification and detail would be requested here regarded the form and extent of support anticipated for these measures by the document. Furthermore, as evidenced by our own activity highlighted above, we would stress that EIP Operational Groups could also be established to advance innovation in wider areas pertaining to rural communities.

Role of innovation broker6 - The role of the innovation broker is outlined to include bringing the EIP group together, acting as a go-between to connect those involved, collecting relevant information and stimulating a bottom-up initiative by provided support for finding partners and funding.

6 Consultation question 2

7 http://www.early-years.org/committee-mgt/

The considerable capacity building in the initial phases and on-going support elements of this role should be enhanced more explicitly in the programme document. The work of Early Years has always been underpinned by a strong community development ethos focused on helping communities to assess the need for, develop and manage their own Early Years setting7 Here we would advocate reference to many of the required principles and skill-sets for the innovation broker as reflected in the work of a Community Development Team within our organisation which works directly with independent and voluntary organisations in the sector by building capacity and empowering local communities and services; providing start-up support and information and ongoing training, coaching and mentoring in governance, leadership and management to develop quality sustainable childcare services. The Community Development Team also provides an in-depth range of training sessions, ongoing support and advice and publications to parents and communities covering such issues as Management Committee skills, leadership skills, team building, maximising fundraising opportunities, managing difficult situations and recruitment and selection.

Cooperation Groups, Networks and Clusters

Here too we request further information be included in the final programme document as to how and the extent to which the Department would provide support for the setting up and operation of cooperation groups, networks or clusters (other than EIP). 5

We also query why the document stipulates the Cooperation groups may be established in the other Priority areas and not Priority 6 concerning social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development. The considerable potential benefit of cooperation measures to Priority 6 areas is outlined further below as part of commentary under Priority 6.

Priority 6 - Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas

Early Years supports and endorses the following areas within this Priority and perceive these to be of vital importance, if developed appropriately, towards successful outcomes associated with this programme8:

8 Consultation question 31

9 Consultation question 32

10 *The Science of Early Childhood Development.* (2007); National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. http://www.developingchild.net

11 http://www.early-years.org/misc-docs/early-years-iReach.pdf

☐ Rural business development

☐ Rural business investment

☐ Combating poverty and social isolation

☐ Provision and accessibility of welfare, health and social care, education and training and transport services

Community development based approaches, for reasons already stipulated, are very much welcomed and supported. We believe that a significant development towards progress across each of these schemes9 would be incorporation of measures to enable the effective partnership working and capital and infrastructure investment towards high-quality, adequately resourced and supported early childhood services in establishing vital links between rural employability, educational and health attainment, economic development, farm diversification measures and social inclusion.

It is regrettable that the present consultation document does not reference either initiatives towards a childcare strategy or the Department of Education Learning to Learn Framework within the Northern Ireland national strategy contextual analysis outlined within Section 2. Clear linkages with these initiatives must be established.

"The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. Stated simply, today's children will become tomorrow's citizens, workers, and parents. When we fail to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives, we put our future prosperity and security at risk."10

We strongly advocate for the role of the voluntary, community and private early childhood sector to be acknowledged. The economic and social significance of these sectors must not be underestimated. A recent iReach Market Research independent study11, commissioned by Early Years to provide the first comprehensive and representative assessment of the contribution of the voluntary and independent childcare and education sector to the Northern Ireland economy and society, found that even The voluntary and independent members of Early Years support the needs of almost 32,620 children and an estimated 12,500 families in Northern Ireland. In employing over 6,540 staff directly, the sector also makes an important social and financial contribution by generating £55m in salaries with a further £14m spent in the wider economy on overheads, annual running costs and capital investment programmes.

6

The voluntary, community and independent early years sector in Northern Ireland is a vibrant, committed, well organised sector prepared to meet the needs of children and their families in the region. The sector however needs a supportive policy and funding environment so that the aim of achieving affordable, accessible, high quality care and education is achieved. Providers in the voluntary and independent sector indicate a flexible attitude and willingness to increase the number of places, diversify the type of provision offered, increase flexibility for parents and improve the quality of experience for children, given appropriate capital investment in the sector.

The aforementioned iReach Market Research study also highlighted that, although 13% of respondents undertook any form of capital investment during the assessment period, the 72 projects making this up were estimated to be worth in the region of £3.6m. The study also found that 79% of members would like to develop their services further and, on this basis, the study was able to equate this to a potential **further capital investment of £21.9m**. The need for capital investment to invest in facilities and improve buildings and space is critical. Such investments have a knock on effect for the wider economy in creating employment for those who are carrying out the work, supporting working families and ensuring that facilities are delivering quality services to children and supporting the needs of parents, families and the wider community.

The UK Country Specific Recommendations, published by the European Commission on 6th December 2012, made this particular link between employability and social inclusion by recommending that in order to reduce the risk of social exclusion, CSF Funds should focus on enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, *in particular childcare, as well as* on integrating into the labour market people from workless households, low-skilled and inactive people moved off benefits into the labour market, disadvantaged individuals, especially those facing multiple disadvantages, lone parents with caring responsibilities, and certain ethnic minorities.

In February 2011 the European Commission released its communication in the area of early childhood education and care entitled *'Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow'12*. The Communication is important for a number of reasons in the context of this present consultation including outlining the variety of wide ranging social, economic and educational benefits that can be achieved through the provision of high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care across the EU and highlighting the significance of investment in early childhood education to facilitate curriculums going beyond cognitive learning so essential non-cognitive skills, essential for all future learning and successful social engagement, (perseverance, motivation, ability to interact) can also be acquired.

12 European Commission**,** Brussels, 17.2.2011 COM (2011) 66 final

However, relating to the Department's desire to align the next programme with objectives of EU 2020, this communication also identified that high quality early childhood education and care can make a strong contribution, through enabling and empowering all children to realise their potential, towards reaching two key Europe 2020 Strategy targets of reducing early school leaving to below 10%, and lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

This message at a European level was reinforced in February 2013 by a further release by the Commission of the Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking 7

the cycle of disadvantage'13 The European Commission Recommendation provides helpful guidance to Member States on how to tackle child poverty and promote children's well-being. It calls for a children's rights approach and integrated strategies based on the following three pillars:

13 C(2013) 778 final.

14 For more information see http://www.rdc.org.uk/download/1/pub_RuralChildcare.pdf
☐ Access to adequate resources;

☐ Access to affordable quality services; and

☐ Children's right to participate.

Importantly it also links to the implementation of Europe 2020 and the EU financial mechanisms to ensure progress and monitoring and encourages Member States to adopt national targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion.

There is much to be gleaned from the issues proposed for policy co-operation among Member States by the Communication and the Recommendation relating to using ECEC to support inclusion and reduce early school leaving; widening access to quality ECEC; adapting provision to needs of families; designing efficient funding models; balancing public and private investment; promoting professionalisation of staff; developing policies to attract, educate and retain suitably qualified staff; improving gender balances; facilitating transition of young children between family, care and education and ensuring quality assurance through designing coherent, well-coordinated pedagogical frameworks, involving key stakeholders.

Across the European Union the issues of rural childcare and early childhood education are increasingly seen as important services which enable rural children and families to effectively participate in rural economic, political and social life. They are also seen as having an important part to play in combating rural decline and promoting rural economic and social development. Rural areas face particular and distinct challenges in relation to the delivery of and access to rural early childhood education and care services. In terms of rural childcare provision Early Years had a lead role, with the previous DARD Minister, in the development of the Department's Rural Childcare Programme14 which produced a number of recommendations and solutions which still of considerable relevance to Priorities 1 and 6. Some of these included:

☐ The development of multi-functional centres, making use of purpose built or local underutilized schools or settings and having transport arrangements built into service delivery, which provide for the care and education needs of children and families but also able to meet other sport, recreation, health, training or social needs. Such models can be built upon a social economy model or as a Charity or Company Limited by Guarantee.

☐ The development of a resourced rural evidence base

☐ 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.

In the above respects proposals around a Local Community Grant Fund aiming to provide a support grant of up to £10,000 to help communities address need in line with local area plans are supported.

Promotion of tolerance, good relations and inclusion in rural communities

In addition to schemes already stipulated within the draft programme document under Priority 6 areas we also recommend the addition of measures which seek to promote tolerance, good relations and inclusion in rural communities. Many communities in rural regions can encounter invisible community division lines with fewer opportunities for rural interfaces and have high levels of new immigrants in the area due to employment opportunities. A greater level of detail and focus is required in these respects to promote social inclusion, equality and respecting difference in the areas of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

Over recent years our organisation has been involved in a range of success initiatives and projects in this area including delivery of the Media Initiative for Children (MIFC) Respecting Difference Programme[15] through the Fermanagh Shared Education Programme, to schools in Co Fermanagh to provide a vital foundation for teachers, boards of governors, parents, children and local communities to successfully engage in the provision of shared education and also implementation of a 'Faces and Spaces' project, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies/OFMDFM's Contested Spaces programme, in schools and early years settings in five contested/interface communities in Northern Ireland including urban interfaces in Belfast and Derry and rural contested spaces in Castlederg and Newtownstewart

15 http://www.early-years.org/mifc/
16 http://www.early-years.org/coral/mifc.php

In further reflection of the significance of such issues in and for rural communities earlier this year our organisation, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council and the Border Counties Childhood Network implemented a new Rural Respecting Difference Programme part-funded under the PEACE programme, based on the MIFC Respecting Difference Programme. The MIFC Respecting Difference Programme has been externally evaluated though a randomised controlled trial[16] and found to have a positive affect on young children's attitude towards and respect for others who are different. This project brings another dimension to the MIFC Respecting Difference Programme as it gives Early Years an opportunity to engage with harder to reach families in rural areas through an innovative approach to inclusion and diversity related work. The Rural Respecting Difference Programme is aimed at rural-based primary schools and afterschool clubs in a number of geographic areas along the border in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland across counties Armagh, Cavan, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Tyrone. The Programme includes workshop based training delivered by Early Years Specialists; comprehensive curriculum resource packs containing persona puppets, cartoon/media messages, CD of songs and rhymes, age appropriate jigsaws and games; a Teacher/Leader Service Design Manual; ongoing on-site support from an Early Years Specialist to assist programme implementation; Support for Board of Governors or Management Committees in practical delivery of equality opportunities and anti-bullying policies and opportunities 9

to participate in good relations workshops and develop tailored good relations plan for school or after school.

The programme links into the foundation stage curriculum by addressing equal opportunities through a range of resources and activities. Children need opportunities to discuss and acknowledge the similarities and differences between themselves and others. They also need to be able to express more effectively feelings associated with similarities and differences, including those of exclusion and inclusion. It is hoped that young children will begin to understand the meaning of acceptance and respect for others, and will be more likely to include others who are different from themselves.

In all of the above areas Early Years looks forward to working with the Department in the further development of this next Rural Development Programme in order to emphasise the wider implications involved in a greater focus on young children, their families and those who care for and educate them towards improved education, health and well-being; a sound economy and a culture of respecting difference in rural communities

Yours sincerely

Noel McAllister
Policy Officer

76. Youth Action

European Union - Priority 6

Promoting Social Inclusion Poverty Reduction and Economic Development in Rural Areas

Question 31

How effective do you think the proposed priority 6 sc

hemes (Rural Business Development, Rural Business Investment, Rural Tourism, and Combating Poverty and Social Isolation – Basic Services, Village Renewal) will be in meeting the needs of the sector? Please provide reasons / evidence to support your views.

Comment

The proposed schemes will meet rural young people's needs if they provide opportunities for young people especially in relation to accessing part-time employment and opportunities to volunteer. Rural young people we consulted felt they were unable to compete with their urban counterparts in trying to secure employment as they had no work experience.

'*We can't get jobs because we can't get work experience because we can't get jobs.*'

In order to promote social inclusion and address poverty schemes need to particularly tailored across themes and age groups whether this includes older or younger people, unemployed men for instance. These schemes would also need to developed in consultation with them to ensure are tailored to their needs.

Question 32

How might these schemes (Rural Business Development, Rural Business Investment, Rural Tourism, and Combating Poverty Social Isolation – Basic Services, Village Renewal) be improved upon to meet the needs of your sector? Please provide reasons / evidence to support your views.

Comment

As previous comment, if young people have the opportunity for part-time employment. Also young people recognised the benefits of volunteering to improve employability skills and felt volunteering needed to be encouraged.

A predominant theme in consultations was also lack of transport, which hindered young people from securing employment alongside adding to rural isolation in not being able to socialise with their friends. Young people felt there needed to be a much more integrated approach from all sectors providing transport including Translink, community transport, education and health transport and taxis to help better meet their needs.

Young people felt if DARD were serious about providing services for them they should be lobbying on their behalf with other Departments and providers who have greater influence over local transport services to enable them to access other services available. This is noted in the DARD strategic plan 2012 – 2020.

'*There are a shortage of jobs in rural areas and it would benefit if there were better transport facilities to towns or other areas as it is hard to get to and from these areas where most of the jobs are.*'

'*There is only a school timetable for buses and we have to rely on parents for lifts.*'

This was also the case with cycling which young people felt wasn't encouraged as rural roads are not seen as 'safe places' to cycle on and there were no facilities to safely park bicycles if wanting to access public transport alongside lighting.

Within these programmes young people also felt there needed to be more information and awareness about setting up a business alongside nurturing entrepreneurial skills. This needed to happen at different levels;
  ➢ As part of school curriculum for young people to see that setting up their own business is a viable option and nurture entrepreneurialism.
  ➢ As part of a range of community activities with events hosted in local halls that involved local employers. These could involve local employers offering volunteeeing opportunities, part time work and also running workshops on setting up your own business. YouthAction has had great success with

employers running Get Set to Go events for young people who are outside of employment, education and training. Employers have been very willing to share their skills and expertise albeit on one off events but they have proved very useful and significant for young people in helping them identify next steps on a path to employment .

Recognising the need to take responsibility for their health young people talked about access to leisure facilities citing the need for local businesses to be encouraged and supported to provide leisure facilities, classes etc.

Young people also expressed the need for local facilities to meet up with their friends to combat rural isolation and improve their mental health, find out local information and access internet facilities. It was highlighted that this could take the form of a social enterprise providing opportunities for young people to volunteer and get part-time employment. This might also provide a venue to test out business ideas. It could also bring derelict areas back to life and contribute to a more vibrant village life.

Supporting local business was also a predominant theme with support and training required alongside start up schemes for local young people.

Young people expressed their willingness to support local businesses but felt they needed support to compete with larger enterprises.

'We need incentives to start up businesses in local areas and support for companies who are more local.

Question 33

On which issues should the proposed All Island Co-operation scheme focus in order to address deprivation and disadvantage in rural areas most effectively? Please provide reasons to support your views.

Comment

Innovative transport services should be encouraged with transport providers 'encouraged to pilot local schemes on particular journey by joining up and synchronising each other's services.

Other issues important to young people included access to the internet which young people now cite alongside food, family and friends as essential for a good life.

Young people we consulted along the border area highlighted their willingness to travel north and south if more opportunities were available.
Access to local facilities for leisure, information, courses and support were highlighted.

Question 34

Should a scheme to address deprivation and disadvantage through North/South Co-operation focus only on those regions in the north adjacent to the border, or should it cover all rural areas in the north? Please provide reasons to support your views.

Comment

Although there is benefit to all areas being included young people felt this should be targeted at those areas adjacent to the border as they would benefit the most. With greater access from border roads young people felt there were greater opportunities for them for employment and social activities.

'*It is easier for us now, we feel we can go where we like. My mum and dad lived right beside the border and never went across it.*'

DELIVERY MECHANISMS

Question 36

Which measures/schemes should be delivered through the LEADER approach, and why?

Comment

Under Priority 6 and through Schemes 4 and 5 a small grant scheme could be made available to enable young people themselves to both manage and access funding to contribute to village renewal and combat poverty and social isolation.

This would contribute greatly to increasing young people involvement in the programme and also nurture business and management skills in local young people. There are existing models through YouthBank run by CFNI and the Big Deal Lottery schemes alongside a scheme run through the Irish Youth Foundation sponsored by Starbucks were an audit trail has been properly tested to ensure robust financial procedures and accountability.

Question 37

Which measures/schemes should DARD deliver itself and why?

Comment

DARD should deliver pilot projects that don't fit easily into a particular theme and to encourage creativity and innovation e.g piloting a young people's small grants scheme with a small number of LAG's to enable processes to be tested, developed and implemented.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020

If you would like to put forward any additional comments on the Rural Development Proposals 2014 – 2020 please use the following section:

Comments

The programme should at a minimum ensure 5% of its funding is allocated for young people. This needs to be a planned process from the start of the programme and reviewed on a regular basis.

To help ensure this happens DARD need to directly engage with young people to seek their views and ideas and enable them in creative ways to contribute to programme delivery. This could in one way be achieved as suggested through a small grants scheme that young people are supported to administer themselves.

This will nurture and develop leadership in rural communities and contribute to overall sustainability.