

Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) – Revised Guidance - On the use of Mobile Phones
in Schools and EOTAS Centres in Northern Ireland

**SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural
Needs Act (NI) 2016 -**

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Education

**1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the
Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.**

Development of Revised Department of Education Guidance on the use of Mobile phones in
Schools and EOTAS Centres in Northern Ireland

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☒	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☐		

**1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service
document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.**

**GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN SCHOOLS AND EOTAS CENTRES IN
NORTHERN IRELAND**

**1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan
or Public Service.**

The purpose of the guidance is to set out the Department's expectations for schools and EOTAS centres in regard to mobile phones and provides the evidence base, principles and practical guidance to support implementation. It supersedes Circular 2024/14 *Guidance for Schools on Pupils' Personal Use of Mobile Phones and Other Similar Devices During the School Day*. The guidance states that Schools and EOTAS centres should be mobile phone-free environments by default. Pupils should not have access to personal mobile phones or other similar devices during the school day. This includes smartphones, smartwatches and any personal device with communication, recording or internet-enabled functionality. Any departure from this position should be exceptional, supported by a clear educational, safeguarding or medical rationale, formally documented, and subject to regular review

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

☐

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The plan guidance will apply to all schools and EOTAS centres situated in rural areas.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

N/A – the guidance is not likely to impact on schools/pupils in rural areas differently from schools/pupils in urban areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	☐
Rural Tourism	☐
Rural Housing	☐
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	☐
Education or Training in Rural Areas	☐
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	☐
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	☐
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	☐
Poverty in Rural Areas	☐
Deprivation in Rural Areas	☐
Rural Crime or Community Safety	☐
Rural Development	☐
Agri-Environment	☐
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The Policy is not likely to have a specific or disproportionate impact on people in rural areas because the guidance applies uniformly to all educational settings across Northern Ireland, regardless of location. The guidance does not introduce any location-based criteria, does not change service availability in rural communities, and does not alter access to provision differently for rural populations. As a result, while rural schools will benefit from the strengthened protections and clarity provided, the Policy does not place additional burdens on, or create different outcomes for, schools/pupils living in rural areas compared with those in non-rural areas.

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☐ No ☒ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☐	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☐

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

N/A

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

N/A

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

The guidance on applies to schools and children and young people in education.

The main focus of the guidance is to set out the Department's expectations for schools and EOTAS centres in regard to mobile phones. The guidance will be applicable to all schools and as such those pupils who attend these schools from either urban or rural communities will be impacted equally.

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Not applicable

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

☐

No

☒

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The guidance applies to all educational settings irrespective of location.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled. ☒

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Michael Leonard
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch	Additional Educational Needs Team
Signature:	Michael Leonard
Date:	12/8/2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Claire McClelland
Position/Grade:	Grade 5
Division/Branch:	Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning
Signature:	Claire McClelland
Date:	12/8/2026