

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

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.

Repeal of the Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances (SDC) criterion legislation, namely the [Pre-School Education in Schools \(Admissions Criteria\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1999](#)

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.

Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended as related to Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances)

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

The repeal of the legislation will apply equally for all pre-school aged children including those in urban and rural areas. No differential, 'neutral', impact is anticipated as pre-school education has been universal for over a decade meaning there is a place for every target aged child whose parents want it. The repeal will remove the outdated statutory criteria providing greater flexibility for pre-school education to select admission criteria that best reflects the needs of local communities, placing them on a par with compulsory education in primary and post-primary schools

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.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

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

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.

Since 1998, the statutory criterion legislation has required pre-schools to prioritise children from SDC in their admission criteria. The primary reason for establishing this priority criterion in law was due to the availability of pre-school places at that time. In 1998, there were approximately 11,100 funded pre-school education places available, which meant that only 45% of children in their immediate pre-school year could access a funded place and the statutory criterion ensured that those children most in need were afforded priority. The Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) launched in 1998 and aimed to expand the number of pre-school education places available. The final year of the expansion phase of the programme was 2002/03, by which time a net total of over 9,000 additional funded places had been created. Pre-school provision has now been universal for well over a decade making the original intention of the statutory criterion legislation redundant. There are enough funded places in every area of Northern Ireland to accommodate every target-aged child whose parents want a pre-school place for them. The prioritisation of children from 'socially disadvantaged circumstances' can no longer be considered necessary to fulfil its original purpose of providing access to a limited number of pre-school places.

The repeal of the legislation will remove the **requirement** for all pre-schools to apply the same admissions criterion to all applications. It will not remove the ability for settings to apply the same or similar criterion where it is appropriate to do so. The change will apply equally for all pre-school aged children including those in urban and rural areas. No differential, 'neutral', impact is anticipated as pre-school education has been universal for over a decade meaning there is a place for every target aged child whose parents want it. The repeal will remove the outdated statutory criteria providing greater flexibility for pre-school education settings to select admission criteria that best reflects the needs of local communities, placing them on a par with compulsory education in primary and post-primary schools.

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.

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)	The impact has been identified as neutral, so none of the above are applicable

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.

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.

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

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 repeal of the legislation will apply equally for all pre-school aged children including those in urban and rural areas. The repeal of the legislation will remove the **requirement** for all pre-schools to apply the same admissions criterion to all applications. It will not remove the ability for settings to apply the same or similar criterion where it is appropriate to do so.

No differential, 'neutral', impact is anticipated as pre-school education has been universal for over a decade meaning there is a place for every target aged child whose parents want it.

The repeal will remove the outdated statutory criteria providing greater flexibility for pre-school education settings to select admission criteria that best reflects the needs of local communities, placing them on a par with compulsory education in primary and post-primary schools

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.

There are already provisions in place to support rural communities which will not be impacted by the repeal of the legislation whereby pre-school education settings with no other provision within a 5-mile radius (rural settings) will have the Pupil Allocation Number (PAN) increased to accommodate all first preference applications up to a maximum of the registration number.

The PAN determined by the Education Authority (EA) Pre-School Education Programme team is the number of funded pre-school places allocated to a particular non-statutory setting per academic year. For the majority of settings, the provisional PAN will be based on the uptake of funded places as reported in October of the previous year. For settings that were not allocated a PAN in the previous year, PSEP will base their calculation on the average of the three most recent PANs allocated over the past five years.

The repeal of the legislation will remove the **requirement** for all pre-schools to apply the same admissions criterion to all applications. It will not remove the ability for settings to apply the same or similar criterion where it is appropriate to do so.

The repeal of the legislation will apply equally for all pre-school aged children including those in urban and rural areas. No differential, 'neutral', impact is anticipated as pre-school education has been universal for over a decade meaning there is a place for every target aged child whose parents want it. The repeal will remove the outdated statutory criteria providing greater flexibility for pre-school education settings to select admission criteria that best reflects the needs of local communities, placing them on a par with compulsory education in primary and post-primary schools

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.

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 repeal of the legislation will apply equally for all pre-school aged children including those in urban and rural areas. The repeal of the legislation will remove the **requirement** for all pre-schools to apply the same admissions criterion to all applications. It will not remove the ability for settings to apply the same or similar criterion where it is appropriate to do so.

No differential, 'neutral', impact is anticipated as pre-school education has been universal for over a decade meaning there is a place for every target aged child whose parents want it. The repeal will remove the outdated statutory criteria providing greater flexibility for pre-school education settings to select admission criteria that best reflects the needs of local communities, placing them on a par with compulsory education in primary and post-primary schools

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.

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Date:	04 August 2026