



# **Equality Impact Assessment on the Review of Childcare Provision**

## **Consultation Report**

**June 2009**

To receive this document in an alternative format  
please contact Equality and Diversity Services on  
028 903 68137 or email [j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk)

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## Executive Summary

The University supports the provision of childcare services for the children of staff and students across our four campuses in a variety of ways. The University remains committed to providing support for childcare services and undertook a review of provision to ensure the most effective support for the widest range of students and staff.

Currently, at the Jordanstown and Magee campuses, childcare is provided in purpose built buildings, owned by the University and staffed by University employees reporting directly to Student Support Services. At the Coleraine campus the University provides space in the Cave Hill Building (free of charge) to an independent voluntary organisation that operates the service. At the Belfast campus financial support is provided for those who need to avail of childcare services and the service is provided by organisations independent of the University.

Professor Allen, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information and Student Services) chaired a Working Group to review current arrangements and advise on future models. As part of this process the Working Group carried out an equality impact assessment (EQIA) to consider the possible alternatives to the current arrangements and their impact on the Section 75 Groups. Work commenced on the EQIA in February 2009. This report has been made available as part of the formal consultation stage of the EQIA.

We would welcome any comments you may have about this EQIA and our preliminary recommendations with regard to the future provision of childcare at the University. If as a result of the review, there are recommendations for changes to current provision, no action will be taken in relation to these until 1 August 2010.

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats, please contact: Equality and Diversity Services on 028 903 68137 or email Janine Smyth at [j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk) The Consultation Report and a response pro forma are available to download at <http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html>

The consultation ends on **28 August 2009**.

# 1 The University of Ulster

- 1.1 The University of Ulster's Vision is to be *a university with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement*. The University makes a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Northern Ireland as a region within a national and international context and plays a key role in attracting inward investment. Core business activities are teaching and learning, widening access, research and technology and knowledge transfer.
- 1.2 The Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Accounting Officer of the University. Professor Richard Barnett is the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by five Pro-Vice-Chancellors who are appointed by Council.
- 1.3 The Pro-Vice-Chancellors are responsible for Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, Information and Student Services, Communication and External Affairs and Strategic Projects. Four Directors<sup>1</sup> are responsible for the administrative functions of the University. In addition, two Pro-Vice-Chancellors are Provosts (with responsibility for Magee campus and for the Jordanstown and Belfast campuses) and there is also a Provost for Coleraine. The University is academically organised within six faculties<sup>2</sup> and each faculty is headed by a Dean.
- 1.4 The University's student population is currently in the region of 23,800 full-time and part-time students. The scale of academic provision makes Ulster the largest of the universities on the island of Ireland. The University currently provides a range of courses from sub-degree to doctoral level and provides study opportunities in a range of modes of attendance.
- 1.5 The University employs approximately 3,450 staff, including academic, academic-related, technical, secretarial, clerical and manual and crafts staff.

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<sup>1</sup> The Directors have responsibility for Finance; Human Resources; Physical Resources & Corporate Planning and Governance.

<sup>2</sup> The six faculties are Arts; Art, Design and the Built Environment; Ulster Business School; Computing and Engineering; Life and Health Sciences and Social Sciences.

## **2 Section 75**

### **Section 75 Duties**

- 2.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the University of Ulster in carrying out its functions, relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
- Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
  - Between men and women generally;
  - Between persons with a disability and person without; and
  - Between persons with dependants and persons without.
- 2.2 In addition, and without prejudice to its obligation above, the University must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

### **Equality Scheme**

- 2.3 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland approved the University's Equality Scheme in July 2002. The Scheme outlines the University's commitment to fulfil its Section 75 obligations. The Equality Scheme also acknowledges the commitment to carrying out equality impact assessments and policy reviews on existing policies and to develop new policies as required.

### **Purpose of the EQIA**

- 2.4 The Working Group has carried out this Equality Impact Assessment to consider:
- The available data;
  - The impact of the Review of Childcare Provision on the nine equality categories;
  - Consultation responses on the EQIA findings; and
  - What further data might be required and would be appropriate, to assist future monitoring of facilities.

- 2.5 The Working Group will report on the outcome of the EQIA to the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group, Senior Management Group and other University committees as appropriate.

### **Relevant Legislation**

- 2.6 In the operation of this review and EQIA the following legislation is also relevant:
- The Sex Discrimination (NI) Orders 1976 and 1988;
  - The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended);
  - The Disability Discrimination (NI) Act 1995, including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005;
  - The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended);
  - Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003; and
  - Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006.

### **Stakeholders**

- 2.7 The main stakeholders who are affected by the review of childcare provision and the EQIA are:
- Those persons with children as dependants including students, staff and members of the local community who use or intend to use the University's childcare facilities at Magee and Jordanstown;
  - Students, staff and members of the local community who use or intend to use the Stepping Stones crèche at Coleraine;
  - Staff employed in the Day Nurseries at Magee and Jordanstown and the Stepping Stones crèche at Coleraine; and
  - The children currently in the nurseries/crèche.

### **3 Background to the Review**

- 3.1 The University supports the provision of childcare services for the children of staff and students across the four campuses in a variety of ways. Currently, at the Jordanstown and Magee campuses, childcare is provided in purpose built buildings, owned by the University and staffed by University employees reporting directly to Student Support Services.
- 3.2 At the Coleraine campus the University provides space in the Cave Hill Building (free of charge) to an independent voluntary organisation that operates the service. However, it is now recognised that these buildings are no longer fit for purpose. At the Belfast campus financial support is provided for those who need to avail of childcare services and the service is provided by organisations independent of the University.
- 3.3 In September 2008, a paper was presented to the Vice Chancellors Advisory Group (VCAG) proposing a review of University childcare provision based on the budget deficit of approximately £140,000 for 2007/08 (these figures do not include any costs incurred by the crèche at Coleraine; nor do they take account of University support provided by Human Resources and Finance nor the estimated £85,000 contribution from Physical Resources); and the recommendation that a review was necessary to ensure the most effective use of funding for childcare provision. VCAG approved the recommendation that University childcare provision should be reviewed taking full account of:
- the economic impact of the current provision and its viable alternatives;
  - an Equality Impact Assessment of the possible options;
  - an assessment of the risks associated with the different options; and
  - appropriate consultation with both internal and external stakeholders and other agencies on the different options.
- 3.4 The overall aim of the review is to ensure the most effective support for the widest range of students, staff and children. In February 2009, a Working Group was established chaired by Professor Allen, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information and Student Services). The other members of the Working Group are:

- Professor Alan Sharp, Provost, Coleraine campus
- Mr Gareth Kennedy, Head of Residential Services;
- Ms Sue Steging, Head of Student Support;
- Ms Sara Hunter, Head of Equality and Diversity Services;
- Ms Sinead Coyle, Development Accountant;
- Ms Nora Duncan, Students' Union Representative;
- Ms Roisin Cowan, Representative from Human Resources; and
- Mr Paul Cassidy, Executive Assistant (Student Support)

3.5 The Group has also received support from Maria McGilloway (Equality and Diversity Officer) in Equality and Diversity Services and Karen Harrison (Administrative Officer) in Information and Student Services.

3.6 The terms of reference of the Working Group are to carry out a review of the full range of support for childcare within the University and to consider alternative means of providing support for childcare with the overall aim of ensuring the most effective support for the widest range of students and staff and with the following objectives:

- To consider the quality and range of support for childcare on offer;
- To respond to changing statutory regulations;
- To respond to the changing needs of an increasingly diverse student body; and
- To take account of the financial implications of maintaining or changing the current position.

3.7 Within these terms of reference the Working Group must also ensure:

- That consideration is given to the need to ensure value for money;
- That the provision is cost effective and which is linked to the relevant income streams; and
- That the risk(s) associated with the current arrangements and proposals for alternative support are assessed according to University procedures.

3.8 If as a result of the review, there are recommendations for changes to current provision, no action will be taken in relation to these until 1 August 2010.



## **4 Consideration of Available Data**

4.1 In conducting the EQIA, the Working Group considered a wide range of data including existing quantitative and qualitative institutional data, childcare surveys, data gathered from information meetings with nursery staff, letters from interested parties and information from local private day nurseries.

4.2 In conducting the EQIA, the Working Group took account of data and research from the following sources:

- data on the number, type of and occupancy rates of the childcare facilities available on campus;
- equality monitoring data on the staff and students using the University's childcare facilities in 2009;
- equality monitoring data on the staff employed in the University's childcare facilities in 2009;
- equality monitoring data on staff and students and staff employed in the independent voluntary day nursery 'Stepping Stones' at Coleraine;
- data collected as a result of a previous review and 2005 childcare survey ;
- data from the University's staff and student childcare survey in March 2009;
- data collected as a result of meetings with nursery staff and letters from stakeholders;
- information on provision and costs from local private day nurseries;
- meetings with the 'Stepping Stones' committee, and
- information in an independent survey undertaken by parents of children attending the Magee nursery.

### **QUANTITATIVE DATA**

#### **University of Ulster Day Nurseries**

##### **Occupancy Rates**

4.3 The Day Nurseries employ 32 staff with 84 childcare spaces (34 places at Magee and 50 places at Jordanstown). 17 staff are employed in the Magee Nursery with 8 places in the baby room, 12 in the toddler room and 14 in the preschool room. At

Jordanstown 15 staff are employed with 15 places in the baby room, 20 in the toddler room and 20 in the preschool room.

- 4.4 In February 2009, the Day Nurseries at Magee and Jordanstown were utilised by 26 students, 36 members of staff and 21 parents from the community. At Magee the Day Nurseries were utilised by 14 students, 12 staff parents and 19 parents from the community (community parents include 8 ex students who have graduated). At Jordanstown the nursery was utilised by 12 students, 24 staff parents and 2 from the community.
- 4.5 The childcare application form enables staff and students and parents in the community to choose childcare sessions on a part-time or full-time basis. A snapshot of childcare occupancy rates at Jordanstown and Magee Nurseries was taken in 2005 and 2009 and these are illustrated in the tables below. There are a number of reasons why spaces/sessions may be unused including the type of childcare contract (i.e. mostly part-time) and availability of staff to meet statutory requirements.

**Table 1 Summary of occupancy rates for UU facilities as a percentage of total occupancy in 2005**

User Group	Jordanstown	Magee
Students	31%	25%
Staff	27%	22%
Community	3%	20%
Unused	39%	33%

**Table 2 Summary of occupancy rates for UU facilities as a percentage of total occupancy in 2009**

User Group	Jordanstown	Magee
Students	16.9%	17.7%
Staff	21.5%	23.9%
Community	18.8%	29.9%
Unused	42.8%	28.5%

### Profile of Users

- 4.6 The University collects monitoring data from staff and students with regard to gender, religion, disability, ethnic origin, age, marital status and persons with

dependants. The University does not currently monitor on the basis of political opinion or sexual orientation, and therefore no quantitative analysis is available for these groups.

### **Staff**

- 4.7 Staff using the Day Nurseries at Jordanstown and Magee were reviewed against the HR and equal opportunities databases. The majority of staff using the facilities are female, married, aged between 25 and 44 years and Catholic. The majority are ethnically white, and none have a disability. The majority of staff work full-time. An analysis of salary levels show the majority of staff earn over £33,452.

### **Students**

- 4.8 The profile of student users at Jordanstown and Magee has been reviewed against the Student Records System. The majority of students using the facilities are female, single, aged over 25 years and Catholic. The majority are white and two have a disability/long term health condition. The majority are full time students.

### **Costs**

- 4.9 The overall costs of University managed childcare provision at Jordanstown and Magee for the past three years are summarised as follows:

**Table 3**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Recurrent expenditure</b>	<b>Cost to the University</b>
2005/06	(270,661)	324,404	17,413	71,156
2006/07	(265,309)	358,591	23,986	117,268
2007/08	(301,843)	413,909	25,467	137,533

- 4.10 The costs exclude a subsidy to the University of Ulster Day Nurseries of between £17k and £20k on an annual basis. Rent is not charged to either University of Ulster or Stepping Stones Crèche and utilities are also provided free of charge to both by the University. The annual costs of these services are estimated by Physical Resources to be £37,000 at Jordanstown and £20,000 at Magee per annum). It is estimated that the running costs of Stepping Stones Crèche are £28,000 per annum. These notional charges do not include depreciation costs; nor

do they take account of University support provided by Human Resources, Physical Resources and Finance.

## **Income**

- 4.11 Fees income to the University for Day Nurseries over the past 3 years is shown in Table 3 above. University of Ulster childcare provision costs £15 per half day and £25 per full day. The cost for a week (Monday to Friday) is £115; this includes a £10 discount. While not allocated to the Day Nurseries, the Childcare voucher scheme offers a saving to the University of 9.3% of NIC for staff in pension and 11% if not in pension. The total saving to the University amounts to between £2305 and £2702 per month, income equivalent to the current level of subsidy.

## **Financial Support for Students**

- 4.12 The majority of undergraduate students now qualify for the means tested Childcare Grant amounting to £148.75 per week for one child and up to £255.00 per week for two children or more (85% of costs up to a maximum of £175.00 and £300.00 per week respectively). Hardship funds are available to supplement the unmet 15% of costs for those in need. The number of students receiving the Student Support Fund for childcare responsibilities in April 2009 is shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

<b>Campus</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
Belfast	5
Jordanstown	39
Magee	33
Coleraine	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>

- 4.13 The Students' Union's policy on subsidy has changed so that they do not subsidise students in receipt of bursaries or in receipt of the Childcare Grant unless they receive less than 40% of their costs. Non-funded students will still receive 40% of charges made by Ulster facilities and 20% if using external providers. Because of the closure at Belfast campus, subsidy is provided to all students at the maximum rate.

- 4.14 Postgraduate students and students in receipt of vocational bursaries are not eligible for the childcare grant as it is assumed that their funding is sufficient to cover costs. Evidence suggests that this poses problems for many students who apply for assistance from the Support Fund or other hardship funds according to eligibility.

### **Financial Support for Staff**

- 4.15 As part of the Childcare Voucher salary sacrifice scheme, staff members using a range of external registered childcare providers, are entitled to exchange a part (up to £55 per week, equivalent to £243 per month) of their gross salary for Childcare Vouchers. This part of their salary is exempt from tax and national insurance contributions, which means that they can make savings of up to £1,196 per year on their childcare costs. Staff using the workplace Day Nurseries on campus at Magee, Jordanstown and Coleraine are eligible to join the 'in-house' Salary Sacrifice Scheme. In this Scheme no tax or national insurance is payable on the sacrificed portion of the salary used to pay for the nursery provision, delivering a considerable financial gain to those taking part. Moreover there is no limit to the amount of salary which staff can spend on vouchers and therefore on the savings they make.
- 4.16 The major charge to the Day Nurseries is the cost of staff (see Table 3 above). In Ulster Day Nurseries all staff are paid for all sickness absence and are supported in continuing professional development which is a requirement for registration. Shorter periods of leave are covered by agency staff, in order to maintain staff/child ratios. Over the past three years it has been necessary to employ additional staff to cover maternity leave for 4 staff totalling 24 months and sick leave totalling 17 months.
- 4.17 As a large employer governed by fair employment legislation, Ulster staff are employed on terms and conditions which may differ to external providers. For example staff employed in external childcare provision may not be paid for the first three days of sickness absence, some staff may be on the minimum wage and generally leave entitlement is 15 days, supplemented by unpaid leave during slow

periods. University staff employed in the nurseries have more generous leave entitlement than would be the case in the private sector.

- 4.18 The profile of staff employed in the Day Nurseries at Jordanstown and Magee was reviewed against the HR database. All of the staff are female. The majority are single, and aged under 44 years. There is a fairly even distribution of staff from the Protestant and Catholic communities. The majority are white, and two staff are known to have a disability/long term health condition.

### **Stepping Stones Crèche**

- 4.19 Stepping Stones Crèche was established at the Coleraine campus in 1974. It operates as a separate company with charitable status, run on a voluntary basis by parents. In April 2009 the Crèche employed 15 female staff with 48 childcare places, including 12 preschool places funded by the Department of Education. The Crèche serves students, staff and community parents and operates a near full capacity with a waiting list for each room.
- 4.20 19 University of Ulster staff use the Stepping Stones Crèche at Coleraine. The majority of staff using the facilities are female, married and aged between 25 and 44 years. For those staff for which a community background can be determined, the majority are Catholic. All are ethnically white, and none have a disability. The majority of staff work full-time. An analysis of salary levels show the majority of staff earn £36, 553 and above.
- 4.21 16 University of Ulster students use the Stepping Stones Crèche. The majority of students using the facilities are female, single, and aged over 25 years. The majority are white and one student has a disability/long term health condition. For those students for which a community background can be determined, the majority are Catholic.

## Data on Local Private Day Nurseries

4.22 The Working Group looked at data on local private day nurseries and considered the key differences between the charging rates and opening times of the University Day Nurseries with those of three local private day nurseries (see table 5). The key differences are:

- The University operates a 37 week contract for students and 48 week contract for staff/community users in contrast to the 51 week contract operated by most private day nurseries;
- The University does not charge for bank holidays, days that the University was closed or any emergency closure days;
- The minimum number of sessions for a part-time place at a University Day Nursery was six; the minimum number of sessions in a private nursery was significantly higher than this and was charged at a much higher rate;
- The University Day Nurseries operated a shorter working day than private day nurseries; and
- The University Day Nurseries daily and full hourly week rates are less than private day nurseries.

**Table 5**

	University Day Nursery	Local Private Day Nurseries		
		Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3
<b>Cost Per Week (£)</b>	115	140	150	130
<b>Cost Daily (£)</b>	25	32	34.5	30
<b>Cost Half Day (£)</b>	15	26	27.5	20
<b>Contract (Average)</b>	47 weeks	51 Weeks	51 weeks	50.5 weeks
<b>Opening Times</b>	0830 - 1730	0800 - 1800	0730 - 1800	0815 - 1800
<b>Hours Per Day</b>	9hrs	10hrs	10.5hrs	9.75hrs
<b>Hourly Rate: Full Week</b>	2.56 per hour	2.80 per hour	2.86 per hour	2.67 per hour
<b>Hourly Rate: Daily</b>	2.78 per hour	3.20 per hour	3.29 per hour	3.08 per hour

## **QUALITATIVE DATA**

4.23 The Working Group considered the results of two childcare surveys. The methodology and results of each survey are given in the following sections.

### **2005 Childcare Survey**

- 4.24 All parents/guardians using University childcare facilities were surveyed in 2005; 20 responses were received from Jordanstown and 12 from Magee. At Jordanstown, 12 respondents were staff, 7 were students and 1 was a member of the local community. 15 of the respondents reported they used the facility for 47 weeks or more and 5 used it between 28 and 30 weeks. Almost all respondents cited proximity to place of work or study as the most important factor in choosing the Day Nursery with reputation of the facility as the second priority. Cost features between priority 3 and 7 out of 8 options and in the majority of cases appears to be one of the least important factors, with continuity of care, presence of siblings or flexibility of sessions having higher priority. 5 students and 5 staff respondents said that the presence of the childcare facility was a factor in their taking up a place at Ulster.
- 4.25 At Magee, 3 respondents were staff, 4 were students and 5 were members of the local community. All except 2 used the facility for the maximum number of weeks. All student respondents said that the presence of childcare was a factor in their taking up a place as did one member of staff. Proximity to place of work or study was again the most significant factor in choice and the reputation of the facility was also very important. Cost was again a relatively low priority.
- 4.26 This survey provided the University with an indication of the motivations and interests of parents/guardians and suggested that there might be room for further discussion of charging policies. It is reassuring to note that the reputation of childcare services and parent/guardians' satisfaction with them was at a very high level.



## **2009 Staff and Student Childcare Survey**

- 4.27 At its meeting in February 2009, the Childcare Review Working Group agreed to design questionnaires for staff and students in order to gather recent information about their childcare support needs and preferences. Parents/guardians with children requiring childcare were invited to complete an online questionnaire. Requests for paper copies of the questionnaire were also made available. The questionnaire was anonymous and participation was voluntary. The closing date for responses was 18 March 2009. The data were then collated and analysed using Keypoint software.
- 4.28 211 staff completed the questionnaire (of these 79% are full-time and 21% part-time), including 19 at the Belfast campus, 62 at the Coleraine campus, 93 at the Jordanstown campus and 37 at the Magee campus. 126 students completed the questionnaire (of these 86% are full-time and 14% part-time), including 4 at the Belfast campus, 28 at the Coleraine campus, 53 at the Jordanstown campus, and 41 at the Magee campus. The majority of students who responded were undergraduates (82%). 54 staff (26%) and 19 students (15%) reported that they used University's childcare facilities.
- 4.29 The majority of staff and student respondents are white, female, aged 25-39 years and did not have a disability or long term health condition. Most of the staff and students selected Christian as their religious background. Similar numbers of Catholic and Protestant staff responded to the questionnaire; whilst the majority of student respondents were Catholic. The majority of staff who responded are married and the majority of students are single.
- 4.30 The most common types of childcare used by respondents are family members or friends (44% staff) (56% students) and full-time registered crèche/nursery provision (21% of staff) (25% students). 22% of staff also reported that they used part-time registered crèche/nursery provision. Approximately two thirds of staff (61%) and students (63%) said they would not use the childcare facilities at the University if it was only offered on a full-time basis.

- 4.31 From the survey results, it was clear that cost factors were more important to students than to staff. The most important factors for students when deciding to use their current childcare were cost (37%), proximity to place of study (29%) and reputation of childcare facility (29%). For staff the most important factors were reputation of childcare facility (46%), proximity to place of work (38%) and cost (36%).
- 4.32 With regard to proximity, of the respondents who used a crèche/day nursery, a majority of staff (59%) reported that they needed this to be close to their campus whilst a majority of students (58%) reported that they needed this to be close to their home.
- 4.33 65% of staff and 46% of students reported they are paying for childcare from personal funds. Nearly half of students (46%) are accessing student bursaries, grants or loans. Only one fifth of staff (21%) who responded reported they were using the childcare voucher scheme. However, this low figure may be explained in part by the fact that the scheme could not be used if childcare was being provided by an unregistered provider and also that there may have been some confusion in the questionnaire between the childcare voucher scheme and the University salary sacrifice scheme. The University has just committed to the Busy Bees Voucher scheme for a further period of four years; and there will be a marketing campaign to highlight the Busy Bees Scheme among staff. There will also be a separate voucher scheme available for children up to the age of 16 years who participate in summer schemes.

#### **2009 Magee Crèche Parents' Committee Survey**

- 4.34 In March 2009, the Magee Crèche Parents' Committee conducted a survey among parents whose children are currently attending, or have previously attended, the crèche at Magee. Parents were asked to provide their views and experiences of the crèche based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 35 parents; this represents a response rate of approximately 62%. 32.4% of respondents were current students and 32.4% current members of staff.

- 4.35 In terms of quality of provision respondents rated this as either 'Excellent' (88.2%) or 'Very Good' (11.8%). When asked if fees were increased, only 20% of parents said they would not use the crèche, 50% said they definitely would continue to use the crèche and the remainder did not know or felt the question was not applicable.
- 4.36 If parents had to sign a full year contract 17.7% said they would not use the crèche. 14.7% said they would use an outsourced crèche facility and a greater proportion said they definitely would not use it (38.2%). However 41.2% said they didn't know at this stage. The childcare subsidy enabled student parents to make use of the facility.
- 4.37 23.5% of respondents said they would definitely continue to use the crèche if it operated during semester time only and 53% said they would not use the crèche in these circumstances. A majority of respondents would use Breakfast/after school provision (83.4%); school holiday provision (81.8%) and Nursery School provision (i.e. with Board-funded pre-school places) (64.5%) if it were offered at Magee.
- 4.38 In the comments section, respondents reported that they would have to give up their studies or work if the facility was not available. The main reason given was the lack of good quality affordable childcare in the area. One comment was: "the current standard of care in Magee crèche is much higher than at other privately run day care centres". Many respondents also suggested that the charging system should be moved to weekly or monthly direct debit as this would be beneficial both for themselves and the University.

### **Meetings and Letters from Stakeholders**

- 4.39 A representative from each of the Day Nurseries received a copy of the minutes of the meetings of the Review Group. The Head of Student Support also met with staff from the Day Nursery at the Jordanstown campus and the Magee campus. The Provost (Coleraine campus) had been in regular contact with representatives from Stepping Stones Crèche at the Coleraine campus and had a meeting with Stepping Stones Crèche in April 2009.

4.40 In addition three letters were received by the Provost (Magee campus), Provost (Coleraine campus) and Head of Student Support in relation to the Childcare Provision Review. One letter was from the Stepping Stones Crèche Committee and two letters were from students at Jordanstown commending the service provided and stating the importance of the provision for their studies.

## 5 Assessment of Impacts

5.1 The Group re-examined the aim and objectives of the Review which were:

### **Aim**

- to ensure the most effective support for the widest range of students and staff and

### **Objectives**

- To consider the quality and range of support for childcare on offer;
- To respond to changing statutory regulations;
- To respond to the changing needs of an increasingly diverse student body; and
- To take account of the financial implications of maintaining or changing the current position

5.2 It agreed that the qualitative data which it considered reinforced the need to distribute the financial assistance more effectively and to match the provision to the real needs of students and staff, as identified in the surveys undertaken by both the University and the Magee Parents' Support Group. Both the surveys clarified a variance in priorities between staff and student parents/carers in relation to cost and location. Taking all this into account the Group agreed that it would be important to establish baseline criteria in order to identify viable options. The following criteria were agreed:

#### **1 Work life Balance**

To support the University's Work life Balance policies.

#### **2 Diversity of Provision**

To ensure the provision of the most appropriate support for the widest range of stakeholders, within resource restraints (giving priority to members of the University).

#### **3 Children's Needs**

To recognise the need for a secure predictable environment for children and therefore to ensure that any proposed revision takes into account the need for a proper transitional period and uninterrupted provision if possible.

#### **4 Comparability**

To offer, as far as possible and within resource restraints, comparable support at all campuses, and

#### **5 Reputation**

To maintain the good reputation of the University in relation to its support for staff and students parents.

- 5.3 On this basis the following options are included in this consultation document for consideration:

##### **Option One**

**Provision of a Financial Support Model for Staff and Students (Closure of existing on- campus facilities).**

##### **Staff**

- 5.4 The University currently operates a Childcare Voucher Scheme, which can be used for children aged from 0 to 16 years old. The Scheme enables staff to give up part of their salary in exchange for vouchers which can be used to pay for a wide range of registered childcare provision. Within specified government limits these vouchers are non-taxable and exempt from National Insurance contributions. For further information on the scheme see Appendix I.
- 5.5 Currently only 21% of staff who responded to the University's Childcare Survey use the childcare vouchers. As the University has recently committed to a further four years with Busy Bees, there are plans for a marketing campaign to increase awareness and uptake of the scheme. Additionally, there is now a separate scheme which is available for children up to the age of 16 years who participate in summer schools.
- 5.6 The University believes this is an appropriate way to support staff as it gives them maximum flexibility in relation to their childcare choices. It will however require the

closure of the existing facilities which will result in redundancies /redeployment of staff employed in the nurseries.

- 5.7 Given the major savings that would result from this option there may be opportunities to enhance the financial support available to staff parents.

### **Students**

- 5.8 The surveys indicated that the major priorities for students were:
- Location of childcare being close to home, and
  - Costs
- 5.9 As previously stated, the majority of students qualify for the means tested childcare grant (as detailed in paragraph 4.12) which is payable by the Department for Employment and Learning. As with childcare vouchers these monies must be used for registered childcare. The University currently tops this up or provides partial support to students who are not eligible for the childcare grant on a means-tested basis via the hardship funds.
- 5.10 The resulting savings from the closure of the loss-making crèches would allow the University to supplement discretionary funds from the Hardship fund which would allow for non means-tested support to students who are ineligible for the childcare grant, by diverting expenditure currently allocated to day-care facilities. This would increase the number of students receiving non means-tested financial support for childcare.
- 5.11 In considering this option, a survey of alternative facilities close to the Jordanstown and Magee campuses was undertaken, which indicated that there were equivalent facilities in the area. No survey of registered childminders has been undertaken.
- 5.12 More flexible childcare arrangements, available to a wider and more diverse range of students will enhance the University's commitment to supporting student parents in combining family responsibilities with study and training. It may also feed

positively into the University's Widening Participation Strategy. As previously stated, it will involve the closure of the existing facilities.

## **Option 2**

### **Provision of Accommodation for Day Nurseries with External Providers**

#### **Commercial Providers**

- 5.13 This option would invite external commercial operators of childcare facilities to consider taking on the existing facilities without any interruption to the existing service. Because of TUPE Regulations this would entail assimilating the current staff on their existing salary scales and conditions of services. Generally nursery staff in the private sector are paid at a significantly lower rate than University staff, with less advantageous conditions of service. In the past, discussions with private providers have failed to result in any of them wishing to undertake these responsibilities. However there has never been any formal tendering process and this is an option which might be pursued. In the process of the consultation exercise the University will specifically contact local providers to discuss this option.
- 5.14 Given that this would be a commercial enterprise, it is likely that charges would increase. It is also be unlikely that the University would have any direct control over the quality of provision. This option therefore would fail to take into account the evidence from the surveys which indicates that quality is a priority for parents. Nor would it make any contribution to the aspiration to match the real needs of parents or to distribute the finances more effectively. Indeed it is likely that in view of the probable increase in charges, that fewer student parents would actually use the nurseries.

#### **Voluntary Organisations**

- 5.15 This would resemble the arrangements currently in place on the Coleraine campus. There are a number of difficulties associated with this option, namely:



- There is no appropriate accommodation available at Coleraine, and the existing accommodation is no longer fit for purpose;
- The University would either have to find an existing voluntary organisation at Jordanstown and Magee to take on the existing staff under TUPE Regulations or would be required to make these staff redundant and close the facilities for 6 months;
- This therefore does not comply with Criterion no3, and
- As it is unlikely that one voluntary organisation would be willing or able to take on all three existing facilities, this does not meet Criterion 4.

### **Option 3**

#### **Review Current Operational and Contractual Arrangements to Increase Financial Viability**

##### **Jordanstown and Magee**

- 5.16 Current contracts between parents and the nurseries privilege use by students, in as much as they are highly flexible and allow for part-time and term-time attendance. This pattern is not reflected in the private sector where parents are obliged to buy into full year contracts at a significantly higher sessional rate. Given the results of the surveys it is clear that staff parents in particular would be happy to pay higher charges in order to retain access to a facility on campus and it would be possible to increase the subsidy to students who form the lower proportion of users.

##### **Coleraine**

- 5.17 One disadvantage of this option is that it would not be possible to replicate it Coleraine where (a) the University has no control over the management of the crèche, and (b) there are significant capital costs involved in retaining this facility. It has long been recognised that Cavehill Buildings are reaching the end of their useful life. A number of options for alternative accommodation have been explored, including the ex-drama laboratory, but none of these has proved possible.

- 5.18 This option also requires the University to continue to subsidise the cost of utility bills and accommodation when these monies could be directly used to address criterion 2.

### **Belfast and North West Development**

- 5.19 Given that the Belfast development plans are at a very early stage it is not possible to comment on the options which might become available. Within the North West Development Plan it is anticipated that student numbers will increase at the Magee campus from the current figure of 3800 to approximately 6000. This review is timely as the increase in student numbers may increase the number of students requiring childcare and the current nursery provision at the campus may not be sufficient to meet increased demand. Therefore more flexibility in relation to childcare support may be advantageous for student parents at Magee.
- 5.20 Table 1 assesses each option against the agreed criteria.

### **Option 4**

#### **Maintaining the Status Quo**

- 5.21 In considering the potential adverse impacts it should be noted that the current arrangements have an adverse impact on students who are in receipt of a vocational non means-tested bursary, who are predominantly female. In addition, other groups are not eligible for childcare grants, including international students, who are mainly from minority ethnic and racial groups.

## **6 Summary of Options**

The attached table (appendix II) summarises the options. Consultees are asked for their views on these options.

Following the review and EQIA there may be different childcare provision on each campus depending on the campus circumstances. Consultees may therefore only wish to make comments in relation to one campus, in which case they should specify which campus this is.

## 7 Consultation

7.1 In accordance with its Equality Scheme and the requirements of Section 75, the University now wishes to consult on this EQIA. It is our intention that the consultation should be appropriately focused and that all those affected parties are given an opportunity to respond to the consultation. Accordingly it will consult by the following means:

- The University's standard Section 75 consultee list will be updated to include local private childcare providers. Consultees will be notified of the consultation exercise by letter and email;
- All those who communicated with the Group as part of the data collection exercise will be notified;
- Notification of the consultation will be inserted in local newspapers
- An all-staff and all-student email will be posted to advise of the consultation exercise;
- Notice of the consultation exercise will be posted on the University's website;
- Representatives of the Group will try to meet with interested parties on request; and
- The HEEC Consultative Panel will be notified of the consultation exercise.

7.2 We would welcome your comments and specifically your views on the questions in the table below. Please complete the response pro forma and return by 28 August 2009. The consultation document and response forma are available to download at [www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html](http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html). If you require the consultation document in an alternative format please contact Equality and Diversity Services on 028 903 68137 or email Janine Smyth at [j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:j.smyth1@ulster.ac.uk)

**Consultation Questions:**

**Please note: If your comments are campus specific, please state which campus.**

1	Are there any data, needs, issues or impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in the equality impact assessment? If so, what are they?
2	Do you have any comments on the options (appendix II) and mitigating factors? Please state any other actions you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts identified?
3	Are there any options that have not been included? If so, please provide details in comparison to the criterion identified in the report.
4	Do you have any suggestions to improve equality of opportunity for the nine categories and/or good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
5	Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to this pro forma or the consultation process?

7.3 Please send any comments to the following address:

Ms Sara Hunter  
Head of Equality and Diversity Services  
Corporate Planning and Governance  
Room 02H15B, University of Ulster  
Shore Road  
Newtownabbey  
BT37 0LR

Telephone: 028 903 68137

Fax: 028 903 68322

Email [sp.hunter@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:sp.hunter@ulster.ac.uk)

**The outcome of this Equality Impact Assessment will be posted on the University website: [www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html](http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/consultation.html)**