



Equality Impact Assessment on the Review of Childcare Provision

Final Report

October 2009

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Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
2. The University's Policy on Childcare	7
3. Data Collection	8
4. Consultation and Key Findings	10
5. Conclusions and Final Decisions	19

Appendices

Appendix A	Sample Letter 1 with Optional Tick Boxes - Stepping Stones Crèche
Appendix B	Sample Letter 2 of identical letters with options - Stepping Stones Crèche
Appendix C	Sample Letter 3 – identical letters - Stepping Stones Crèche
Appendix D	Letter 4 – Letter from Parents at Jordanstown Crèche
Appendix E	List of Local Councillors and MLAs who responded to the consultation

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Review of the Childcare Provision within the University. This Policy was screened in 2002, and as an outcome it was agreed that no EQIA would be necessary at that time. However a review of childcare provision was carried out in 2006/07 which concluded that whilst the day nurseries continued to provide a useful service there was a need to address the question of appropriate accommodation for the crèche on the Coleraine campus; to consider the incorporation of the crèche into the university-owned childcare facilities and to review the contracts and increase the fees. An interim report was approved in 2007 on this basis.

In September 2008, a paper was presented to the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group (VCAG) proposing a further 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, Physical Resources and Finance); 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.

An EQIA Consultation Report and Response Pro-forma were prepared and made available for distribution to the public on 5 June 2009. The consultation period of 12 weeks closed on 28 August 2009. The University received 364 responses which are summarized in Section 4 of the report.

The main issues raised during the consultation process related to:

- support for a continuation of childcare facilities on campus (i.e. to maintain the status quo); and
- review current operational and contractual arrangements to increase financial viability.

The University has considered carefully the findings of the equality impact assessment and the consultation exercise, and has decided that:

- the Day Nurseries at the Jordanstown and Magee campuses will continue to operate, but under new operational and contractual arrangements which are more closely aligned to the private sector;
- it will continue with the provision of childcare facilities at Coleraine;
- it will maintain the financial support arrangements currently available to students at the Belfast Campus.

The University would like to thank all who contributed to this EQIA.

Further copies of this report are available on the University's website at

<http://www.equality.ulster.ac.uk/scheme.html>

If you have any queries about this document and/or its availability in alternative formats (including Braille, disk and audio cassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English) then please contact:

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Introduction

- 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 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.

- 3 The University set out in its Equality Scheme how it proposed to fulfil its statutory duties. It carried out a detailed initial policy screening exercise, in which it identified a number of policies that would be subject to Equality Impact Assessment over a five-year period. The Childcare Policy was not one of these. The decision to conduct an EQIA was included in the decision to carry out a full review of childcare provision.

- 4 The University is fully committed to the fulfilment of its Section 75 obligations in all of its functions, including its objectives as a teaching, research and examining body within the provision of its Charter and Statutes. The University ensures that effective implementation of these obligations is supported with the necessary resources in terms of people, time and finance.

- 5 In line with the University's Equality Scheme, a Childcare Review Group, incorporating an EQIA Sub-group, consisting of staff with relevant professional experience was set up in February 2009 to carry out the review. The overall aim of the review was to ensure the most effective support for the widest range of students, staff and children. The Working Group was chaired by Professor Allen, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information and Student Services). The other members of the Working Group were:

- 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).

6 The Group 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.

7 This report outlines the results and outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment.

The University's Policy on Childcare

- 8 The University supports the provision of childcare services for the children of students and staff 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.

- 9 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.

- 10 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.

Data Collection

11 In conducting the EQIA, the Sub-group considered a wide range of quantitative data, including:

- Quantitative data in relation to occupancy rates;
- Quantitative data in relation to the users of the facilities;
- Costs of running the facilities;
- Data in relation to the financial support available to students;
- Data in relation to the financial support available for staff;
- Equal opportunities monitoring data in relation to the staff employed by the University in the nurseries;
- Equal opportunities monitoring data in relation to the staff and student parents who use the Stepping Stones Crèche; and
- Data in relation to the costs and opening hours of local day care facilities.

12 It also took account of a range of qualitative data including:

- The 2005 childcare survey carried out by the University;
- The 2009 staff and student childcare survey carried out by the Childcare Review Group; and
- The Magee Crèche Parents' Committee Survey.

13 Based on the evidence it considered, the Review Group agreed that it would be important to establish baseline criteria in order to identify viable options. The following criteria were agreed:

- **Work life Balance**
To support the University's Work life Balance policies
- **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)
- **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

- **Comparability**

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

- **Reputation**

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

14 On this basis of the evidence considered and the baseline criteria the following options were included in the consultation document for consideration:

Option One

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

Option 2

Provision of Accommodation for Day Nurseries with External Providers

Option 3

Review Current Operational and Contractual Arrangements to Increase Financial Viability

Option 4

Maintaining the Status Quo.

Consultation and Key Findings

15 In accordance with its Equality Scheme and the requirements of Section 75, an EQIA Consultation Report and Response Pro-forma were prepared and made available for distribution to the public on 5 June 2009. The following actions were subsequently taken:

- Prominent advertisements were placed in six local and regional newspapers inviting the public to comment;
- An executive summary of the EQIA Consultation report was sent directly to the University's standard Section 75 consultee list and additional stakeholders consultees;
- An all-staff and all-student email was posted to advise of the consultation exercise;
- The consultation documentation was posted on the University of Ulster's website; and
- The report was made available by request in alternative formats (no requests were received).

16 In the first few weeks of the consultation period the University received a number of letters raising concerns that the decision had been made to close the childcare facilities. As none of these actually addressed the questions in the consultation pro-forma, these consultees were sent a further letter together with a pro-forma encouraging them to consider and comment on all the options provided in the consultation document and to focus on the impact in relation to Section 75.

Summary of Responses

17 The 12 week consultation period ended on Friday 28 August 2009. The University received 364 responses. These included:

- 23 completed consultation response pro-formas, 3 from organisations¹ and 20 from individuals;
- 153 identical letters with optional tick-boxes opposing the closure of Stepping Stones Crèche – only one option out of a possible 14 addressed the

¹ The three organisations who completed a response pro forma are Convocation, Stepping Stones Crèche at Coleraine and the Parents' Committee of Jordanstown Crèche.

impact in terms of Section 75 (see paragraph 18); (sample marked Letter 1 attached as Appendix A);

- 29 identical letters relating to the Stepping Stones Crèche including 14 points, one point related directly to disadvantage for Section 75 groups (see paragraph 19); (sample marked Letter 2 attached as Appendix B);
- 86 identical letters in relation to the Stepping Stones Crèche; (sample marked as Letter 3 and attached as Appendix C)
- 30 non-identical letters from individuals;
- 9 letters from organisations² including a letter of support to maintain the existing facilities from the Parents at Jordanstown Crèche with 34 signatures. (sample marked Letter 4 attached as Appendix D)
- 10 letters from local councillors and MLAs requesting an extension to the consultation period and concern with regard to any closure of childcare facilities and negative impact on students and staff (list of councillors and MLAs attached as Appendix E);
- 18 letters which requested an extension to the consultation period but did not actually comment on the consultation document;
- 2 letters from local childcare providers/nurseries indicating that they may be interested in providing a private service;
- 4 petitions were received supporting the childcare facilities at Magee, Jordanstown and Stepping Stones Crèche at Coleraine and opposing any closures with over 8,000 signatures in total.

18 Members of the Childcare Review Group also offered to meet with any interested parties. Professor Allen, as Chair of the Review Group, met with interested parties as follows:

3 July – meeting with Pat Ramsey MLA (SDLP) – meeting

6 July – meeting with the “Nursery Action Group” – to receive their petition

10 July – telephone conversation with Gerry Carroll, Vice-President Jordanstown, Students’ Union

30 July – meeting with Raymond McCartney, MLA (Sinn Fein)

30 July – meeting with Rachel Naylor (Magee Nursery Rep) and representatives from Magee Nursery

² Organisations who responded to the EQIA are - Committee on the Administration of Justice, Women’s Centres Regional Partnership, Students’ Union (Jordanstown), Coleraine Borough Council, UNISON, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The University received a letter from Disability Action stating they had no specific comments and a letter from the Higher Education and Training Awards Council stating they did not wish to make a response to the EQIA.

6 August – meeting with Foyle Day Care representatives

27 August – meeting with the Jordanstown Parents Group

- 19 The identical letter opposing the closure of Stepping stones Crèche included 12 tick-box options. Table 1 (a) outlines the number of ticks for options 1 to 11. The letter included an option whereby individuals could select which groups would be most disadvantaged by closure; the number selected for each group is shown in Table 1(b). The letter was completed by 153 individuals none of whom chose to identify their relationship (if any) with the Stepping Stones Crèche. 71 individuals requested that the University acknowledge their comments and 28 individuals provided additional comments.

Table 1(a) Options within Stepping Stone’s Letter

Options 1 – 11	Number
Having a crèche on campus enables me to work/study here.	73
It will be difficult to find suitable alternative childcare.	74
Alternative childcare would be more expensive, since Stepping Stones is a charity.	89
The fifteen staff at the crèche could lose their jobs	123
Local businesses benefit from having good affordable childcare in the area.	100
The crèche promotes good community relations because it is open to all, not just University students/staff.	113
Stepping stones provides valuable support to foreign students/workers with no family in the area.	97
Changing childcare would be upsetting for the children, who need a stable environment.	112
The University is basing its decision on a survey which included only 0.5% of the students.	93
The University did not consult the community users at all.	88
The University has not fully considered other options, e.g. Stepping Stones could pay rent.	93

Table 1(b) Option 12

Option 12: “Closing Stepping Stones Crèche will disadvantage”	Number
Working mothers	118
Single parents	118
Persons with dependent children	101
Persons from the Catholic community	22
Persons from the Protestant community	21
Persons from the Muslim community	21
Persons from the Hindu community	22
Persons from a minority section of the population	87
Persons with a disability	85
Resident foreign workers/students	88

- 20 The identical letter with optional comments was completed by 29 consultees in relation to the Stepping Stones Crèche, including 13 parents, one of whom was a student and three members of staff. It was also completed by a further 11 members of staff, 9 of whom indicated that closure of the crèche would not affect them personally. It was also completed by two further consultees who described themselves as a “family member”. This letter included an option for individuals to select which category would be disadvantaged by closure of the crèche facilities, the numbers relating to this option are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 2

Option: “Closing these facilities will disadvantage me/my”	Number
as a working Mother	5
as a person with dependants	4
Children due to a lack of continuity of care	3
as a person from the Catholic community	5
as a person from the Protestant community	4
as a person from the Muslim community	1
as a person from the Hindu community	1
as a single parent	1
as a person from a minority section of the population	1
as a resident foreign member of staff	1
as a resident foreign worker	2

Summary of Key Issues

- 21 The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland commended the University for its decision to conduct the EQIA and the collection of relevant quantitative and qualitative data. A summary of the key comments/issues received from organisations and individuals is presented below. Full copies of all responses are available on request (individual responses have been anonymised except for those from organisations and local representatives).

Comments on the Four Options

- 22 On the basis of the data considered for the EQIA and baseline criteria, four options were presented in the consultation document for consideration and comment. The University received a large number of comments on the four options from organisations and individuals and these have been summarised in the following paragraphs.

Option 1

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

- 23 A majority of respondents were opposed to Option 1 and the real and perceived differential or adverse effects on the Section 75 groups are summarised in Table 3 below. Respondents felt that this option was not conducive to the University's strategic priorities of 'widening access' and 'widening participation' or to the aims within the Gender Strategy and Action Plan. Respondents felt that closure of on-campus crèche facilities would have a negative impact on how the University is perceived by potential staff and students and the wider community.
- 24 Many respondents felt this option failed to take account of disruption to staff and students in finding and organising alternative childcare provision. Respondents indicated that there are insufficient private crèche facilities available, particularly in the Coleraine area; and most have extensive waiting lists of up to 18 months. There were also concerns that the mitigating factor of childcare vouchers would not give as much discount to staff as the salary sacrifice scheme.
- 25 Respondents were opposed to Option 1 as it would result in staff redundancies and questioned whether staff at Magee and Jordanstown could be redeployed within the University given the specific nature of their jobs. Respondents felt that the mitigating factor of the University having a redundancy policy and redeployment does not apply to staff at Stepping Stones Crèche as these staff are not University staff and would be entitled to statutory redundancy only.

Option 2

Provision of Accommodation for Day Nurseries with External Providers

- 26 Several respondents were opposed to this option as they felt staff would be made redundant. There were concerns about the provision of childcare spaces to staff and students as the external provider may target community parents to ensure financial viability. There were also concerns about the quality of care from an external provider.

27 Although a number of private providers were included in the consultation and asked to indicate if they were interested in this option, only two responded. Following discussion these providers indicated that the involvement of any TUPE transfer of existing staff would present a major difficulty unless a substantial financial incentive was made available by the University. The Chair of the Working Group discussed what potential there was for a commercially focussed (ie. profitable) childcare facility under UUTech³. Again the implications of TUPE would present major difficulties.

Option 3

Review Current Operational and Contractual Arrangements to Increase Financial Viability

- 28 Most respondents were in favour of this option and some users stated they were prepared to pay more and have the terms of their arrangements revised. However many felt that there was a lack of information on the reasons why there are unused spaces and how a budget deficit started, how this mapped to a crèche on each campus and why the deficit continued to grow. Several respondents requested information on financial projections showing potential income (via fees increase) set against the deficits over a projected timeframe to illustrate this option more fully. There were suggestions to increase financial viability such as changes to the minimum number of childcare sessions, removal of discount for full-time users, charging for bank holidays and provision of after school care.
- 29 There were concerns raised about the impact upon nursery staff in relation to proposed changes to contractual arrangements.
- 30 Respondents also requested information on the costs and savings to the University and parents in relation to the salary sacrifice scheme and the childcare voucher scheme; and on the amount the University was prepared to subsidise.
- 31 Users and staff at Stepping Stones Crèche felt that there is a large amount of vacant accommodation on the Coleraine campus and felt that the provision of facilities was of a low cost compared to the other two campuses and welcomed discussions to

³ UUTech Ltd is the University of Ulster's knowledge and technology commercialisation company within Innovation Services.

develop the tenant/landlord relationship with the University and to incorporate costs into their business plan.

Option 4

Maintaining the Status Quo

- 32 Some respondents felt that this is probably not a feasible option given the need for the review of childcare provision. However many respondents are in favour of maintaining the status quo as they stated they are happy with the current provision. Parents who used the crèche felt that it is a valuable resource and has had a positive effect on the lives of their children. Users of the childcare facilities said that having the facilities on campus made it easier to attend to a child in an emergency, contributed to their work life balance by accommodating flexible working arrangements and involved less time travelling.
- 33 Respondents also praised the professionalism and dedication of staff and the high quality of childcare provided.

The Consultation Process

- 34 Some respondents felt that the consultation response pro forma was not easy to complete and was time consuming. A majority of respondents recommended that the closing date for the consultation period should be extended until October 2009, as students were not available to respond to the consultation over the summer period. The University received one formal complaint in relation to this issue. The University decided not to extend the consultation period for three reasons.
- 35 Firstly, the University felt that it had consulted widely with student parents through a questionnaire in the data collection stage. Secondly, there is an imperative on the University to complete the EQIA and make a decision with regard to the Stepping Stones Crèche at Cavehill on the Coleraine campus as it is no longer deemed fit for purpose. Thirdly, the University felt an extension to the consultation was unlikely to elicit new information given the volume of responses it received.
- 36 At a meeting of the Working Group in September 2009, the new Students' Union President agreed that if an extension to the consultation period on the EQIA was not

considered useful, it would be appropriate to include the Students' Union in the consultation on the recommendations arising from the EQIA.

Other Issues

- 37 The Working Group noted press releases about the EQIA on the Review of Childcare Provision.

Table 3 - Summary of the real and perceived differential or adverse impact on the Section 75 groups (in relation to Option 1)

Section 75 Group	Impact on Specific Groups	Reason for differential or adverse impact
Age	Children	Disruption to childcare arrangements
	Young People (Students)	May be deterred from continuing to study or from applying to Ulster Limited income to pay for private childcare May have less access to private transport and rely on public transport
	Mature students	May be more likely to have a family
	Staff aged between 18-40 years	Age group with the most childcare responsibilities
	Older women (Grandparents/retired female relatives) ⁴	May be asked to care for children due to lack of childcare facilities
Marital Status	Married couples	Impact on work/life balance as parents will have a longer working day travelling to and from external nursery
	Single parents	Less support for childcare and lower income
Gender	Female students	Majority of student users are female
	Female staff	Majority of staff users are female – may be deterred from returning to work due to lack of suitable childcare provision
	Male and female staff	Removal of salary sacrifice scheme may have a negative financial impact
	Female staff employed by the day nurseries	Overwhelming majority of staff employed in the day nurseries are female and would be made redundant
	Women who breastfeed	Need convenient childcare to return to work/study while continuing to breastfeed

⁴ A respondent cited the following research in this area - *Mary McColgan et al (McColgan, M., Campbell, A., Duffy, J., Naylor, R. and Coogan, M. (2006) "Childcare on the Borderline" Research Report, University of Ulster).*

Disability	Students and staff who have a disability	Removal of facilities may be a barrier to study/work at the University and will increase travelling time to other nurseries
Dependants	People with dependants	Effect on care arrangements including lack of continuity, lack of alternative providers, increased cost, increased travelling time to alternative nurseries, impact on work/life balance and need to work/study near child in case of emergencies
Racial Group	International students, staff and community users	Less access to family support network Less access to private transport
Religious Belief	Students and Staff from the Catholic community	Majority of users are from the Catholic community
Political Opinion	No differential or adverse impacts identified for these two groups	
Sexual Orientation		

In addition a number of respondents felt that the provision of childcare promoted good relations due to integration with the local community (as there are community users on each campus); and the fact that the crèches bring parents and children together from all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Conclusions and Decision on the EQIA

- 38 Feedback from consultees has been useful in helping to inform the review of childcare provision at the University, and is gratefully acknowledged. The EQIA on the Review of Childcare Provision showed that respondents felt that there were real and perceived differential or adverse impacts in relation to Option 1 (Provision of a Financial Support Model for Staff and Students - Closure of existing on-campus facilities). Consultation responses highlighted support for a continuation of the provision of childcare facilities on campus (i.e. to maintain the status quo); and support for a review of current operational and contractual arrangements to increase financial viability.
- 39 Given the current differing models of childcare support/provision at the Belfast campus, the Coleraine campus and the Jordanstown and Magee campuses, the University agreed that it would not be feasible to have a single University-wide model for providing childcare support/provision.

Final Decisions

- 40 The University has considered carefully the findings of the equality impact assessment and the consultation exercise, and has decided that:
- i) **For the Jordanstown and Magee campuses**
the Day Nurseries will continue to operate but under new operational and contractual arrangements which are more closely aligned to those of private operators and which should enable the Day Nurseries to break even (subject to minor financial clarifications) for a pilot period of, say, five years. The financial model will include plans for addressing the potential for these changes to have a disproportionate negative impact on the distribution of the University and Students' Union

discretionary hardship funds should this emerge. Once the University has agreed the final fully-costed options, consultation will take place with parents using the Day Nurseries and the Students' Union;

ii) For the Stepping Stones Crèche at the Coleraine campus

the University made a firm commitment to continuing to provide childcare facilities at Coleraine and agreed that the following options should be explored:

- a) the University would begin costing for a new purpose-built facility which would be owned and operated in-house; or operated by a voluntary group on behalf of the University
- b) a private commercial company could be brought in to operate and manage the facility (see (a) above) on behalf of the University;
- c) an identified portion of University land be leased to a private sector provider for the purposes of building suitable childcare facilities on campus.

iii) For the Belfast campus

the financial support arrangements currently available to students at the Belfast Campus will continue. The financial support arrangements currently available to students are predicated upon a calculated price differential between the cost of provision at the University Day Nurseries and the cost of comparable provision in the private sector. Subject to the implementation of (i) above, this price differential will effectively be removed.

41 The University is committed to monitoring the impact of the decision and will publish the results of monitoring in its annual report on Section 75 progress to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

42 If you have any queries about this document and/or its availability in alternative formats, please contact:

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