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Our Ref:  
Your Ref:  
Date: 25 November 2015

**Dear Cathie,**

Thank you for your letter of 5 November.

My apologies for not being in a position to meet your original deadline for response.

The “*NI Children and Young People’s Plan: Regional Sub group transition to Adulthood of Young People with Disabilities*” mentions a link with DARD for access to transport. Members will appreciate that whilst DARD does not have policy responsibility for transport, under its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework it has developed the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) in conjunction with DRD. This scheme supports those entitled to a SmartPass, mainly the elderly and disabled, to avail of free or half fare travel on rural community transport partnership vehicles. DARD & DRD are committed to funding and delivering the Scheme until March 2016.

The Committee may also wish to note that the Department is currently finalising its Disability Action Plan 2015-17 and this includes a commitment by the College of Food, Agriculture and Rural Enterprise to provide a tailored disability support service for students. Key College staff will continue to receive specific training to enable timely support for students with specific disabilities e.g. awareness training about autism, dyslexia and deafness.

The Department would wish to highlight the requirement that authors of initiatives such as the “NI Children and Young People’s Plan” should take rural proofing into consideration in developing any new policies and strategies, the review of existing policies and strategies, and the consequent design and delivery of public services. A Rural Needs Bill was introduced into the Assembly on 9 November 2015 and is currently progressing in its passage through the Assembly. The Bill will introduce a statutory duty on Departments and Councils to

consider the needs of people in rural areas when developing or revising policies and strategies and designing and delivering public services

Yours sincerely

**Paul Mills**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

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the Department via Text Relay. Dial 18002 + number

