

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 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

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.

The Agriculture (Student Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. The activity subject to section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 relates to the annual inflationary increase of Higher Education (HE) student fees at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

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

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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.

The Agriculture (Student Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

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

The Agriculture (Student Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 will be amended to reflect the student fees charged to students enrolled on a HE course at CAFRE for the 2026/27 academic year. The 2026 Regulations make provision for an annual inflationary increase to be applied to the 2025/26 academic year student fees of 2.7% in line with the Department for the Economy's HE Tuition Fee Framework.

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

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

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

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

N/A

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

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

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

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

Figures for 2025/26 show 83% of HE students at CAFRE are normally domiciled in rural areas and 17% in urban areas.

The Regulations will increase the annual student fees for full-time and charged part-time CAFRE HE courses by 2.7% in the 2026/26 academic year. This retains parity with the student fee amounts charged to all HE students enrolled on a HE course at all other HE institutions across Northern Ireland. The level of fee charged is the same irrespective of whether the student originates from an urban or rural location.

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.

The inflationary increase of HE tuition fees at CAFRE will not impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas.

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

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

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.

N/A

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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

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 inflationary increase to the CAFRE HE student fee regulations is in line with the increase applied by the Department for the Economy for all other HE Institutions in Northern Ireland and will apply to all rural and urban HE students studying at a NI higher education institution equally.

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

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

Financial assistance, by way of the tuition fee loan, maintenance loan and grants from Student Finance NI, is available to all eligible CAFRE students regardless of whether they come from urban or rural areas. The maximum amount of tuition fee loan available to eligible CAFRE students will cover the revised HE student fee at CAFRE.

Eligible CAFRE HE students can also benefit from the CAFRE Widening Access Participation Plan.

The Regulations will not have differential impact on people from rural areas compared to those from other areas.

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 revised regulations apply an inflationary increase of 2.7% to student fees, reflecting the increase applied by DfE for the wider HE sector that applies to urban and rural students equally.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

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

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

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Dáire Hamilton-Toner
Position/Grade:	Deputy Principal
Division/Branch	Education Policy Branch
Signature:	Dáire Hamilton-Toner
Date:	21 April 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Sharon Muldoon
Position/Grade:	Head of Education Policy Branch
Division/Branch:	Education Policy Branch
Signature:	<i>S. Muldoon</i>
Date:	21 April 2026