

Regulatory Impact screening for the introduction of Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards

Screening Questions	Response to Screening Questions	Full Appraisal Required	Justification/Key Issues and Groups to Focus On
Is the policy or amendment to the policy likely to have a direct or indirect impact on businesses?	Yes	No	<p>The Department of Health is introducing new regulations for foster care services, which will introduce a requirement for independent fostering agencies to be registered with, and assessed by, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). The draft Regulations were subject to full consultation in late 2022, and a regulatory screening was carried out at that stage which concluded that a full assessment was not required.</p> <p>The Minimum Standards (MS) currently being progressed are intended to provide further information and guidance to both the RQIA and fostering agencies on how such agencies can meet the requirements of registration and assessment as set out in the draft regulations and other relevant legislation. They do not, in themselves, introduce any new requirement to be registered or assessed, or any fees in respect of registration (these are anticipated to be nil).</p> <p>The MS consist of 11 individual standards, each with a number of key areas and supporting indicators. The indicators are intended to be used as a guide by fostering agencies on how they can demonstrate achievement of, or progress towards, key areas and standards; it is expected there may be other ways that this can be demonstrated by</p>

			<p>fostering agencies. Fostering agencies, with the support of RQIA, will be able to choose the appropriate way to evidence progress within their own organisation.</p> <p>While only independent fostering agencies will be required to register with RQIA (reflective of the provisions within the Health and Personal Social Services (Regulation, Quality and Improvement (Northern Ireland) Order 2003), it is intended that RQIA will also use the standards in assessments of the quality of fostering services provided by HSC Trusts, ensuring a parity of accountability and assessment of fostering services. It is intended that the MS will be used, both by fostering service providers and by RQIA, to focus on securing positive welfare, health, and education experiences for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety.</p> <p>Representatives from independent fostering agencies (and HSC Trusts) have been involved in the process of developing the draft Minimum Standards and were supportive of the introduction of these Minimum Standards below which no provider is expected to deliver.</p> <p>In conclusion, given that the standards do not in themselves introduce any new requirements on registration, there is flexibility in how fostering services demonstrate achievement of the standards, and the fostering agencies and HSC Trusts are generally supportive of the introduction of the standards, it is not considered that the Minimum Standards will impact negatively on the independent fostering service providers or the Health and Social Care Trusts' fostering services.</p>
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Is the policy or amendment to the policy likely to have a direct or indirect impact on the voluntary/community sector?	Yes	No	<p>There are currently 4 independent fostering agencies operating in Northern Ireland, all on a not-for-profit basis. The new Fostering Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 will introduce a requirement that fostering agencies must operate on a not-for-profit basis. As such, identification and consideration of impacts as set out above will apply to the voluntary/community sector.</p> <p>It is not considered that the Minimum Standards will have a negative impact on the voluntary/ community sectors. The proposed new Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of fostering services in Northern Ireland will apply to all fostering service providers, in the statutory, and voluntary and community sectors. Standards and Regulations will be used by providers to set a benchmark of quality care and by the RQIA in registering and/or assessing fostering services.</p>
CONCLUSION		No	A full Regulatory Impact Assessment is not required on the basis that the proposals will impose negligible cost.

When Is a Regulatory Impact Assessment Required?

If the answer to any of the above questions is yes, consideration should be given to undertaking a Regulatory Impact Assessment. However, the level of appraisal should be proportionate to the costs involved.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment is not required for:

- i. Proposals which impose **no costs or no savings**, or negligible costs or savings on business, charities, social economy enterprises or the voluntary sector;

- ii. Increases in statutory fees by a predetermined formula such as the rate of inflation; or Road closure orders.

NOTES:

This Includes charities and the social economy sector.

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