



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Departmental Briefing regarding
Creative Industries Framework**

1 December 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Pat Sheehan
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Arthur Scott)
Ms Joanna McConway) Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Stephen McGowan)

The Chairperson:

I welcome Arthur Scott, director of culture; Joanna McConway, head of the arts branch, who is no stranger to the Committee; and Stephen McGowan, head of creative industries. You are very welcome. Is this your first visit to the Committee?

Mr Stephen McGowan (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Indeed it is.

The Chairperson:

It is nice to have you here this morning. If you would like to give your presentation, we will follow up with a few questions.

Mr Arthur Scott (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Thank you, Chairperson, for the opportunity to brief the Committee about the framework. As you know, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) takes the government lead on the creative industries. We work closely with other Departments, particularly the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and agencies such as Invest Northern Ireland to develop a more joined-up approach to how we support the creative industries.

Stephen provides the departmental lead on the creative industries and spearheads collaboration across DCAL and with the other Departments; he will provide further detail on the background to the framework. Joanna's responsibilities include the sponsorship and strategic management of organisations and activities key to supporting our creative industries, such as the Arts Council, Northern Ireland Screen, and several of our arts infrastructure projects.

The draft framework document has been informed by our engagement with stakeholders. It outlines the strategic approach to stimulate collaboration across industry, government and academia to grow and develop our creative industries. It is a draft document and approach that will be developed further in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and with other stakeholders. However, it is indicative of the tone and direction of our joint efforts to support the creative industries. It resonates with the themes and priorities of the Executive's draft economic strategy and Programme for Government, and it serves to provide the stimulus for further co-ordinated activity.

The Committee's inquiry into the creative industries will act as a crucial catalyst in focusing attention on this very important sector, and will stimulate debate and the sharing of ideas and opinions. The Department welcomes this inquiry and will engage with it fully through submitting

written evidence addressing the inquiry's terms of reference. As part of that, we are pleased to share the draft document with the Committee today to inform its considerations of the opportunities and challenges facing our creative industries, and to receive early feedback and insight from your perspective. Officials will take further work forward, including consideration of the issues and proposals outlined in the draft document and the precise mechanics of delivery. Stephen will provide further details on the framework approach, and afterwards we will be happy to hear your views and take questions. Thank you.

Mr McGowan:

Like Arthur, I thank the Chairperson and members for this opportunity to discuss the framework document. The creative industries sector is often referred to as having great potential for our region, and indeed it has. Recent high-profile events and successes have only added to the swelling tide of enthusiasm and interest in the sector and consideration of the opportunities and the potential of what could be possible in Northern Ireland.

I feel that we are nearing a tipping point in political, business, government and public perception of the value and potential of the sector. Things can go either towards enabling the sector to make a seismic leap in being able to compete on the world stage and helping us to rebuild and rebalance our economy; or to the sector's remaining a very attractive bridesmaid but never the economic bride.

The document is the first draft of the approach that we intend to develop and take forward with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Invest NI and other stakeholders across business, government and academia. The draft has arisen from a re-invigoration of our creative industries government leadership role in recent times and proactive engagement and development of enhanced partnerships across government and with industry and academia. The document represents an approach that, we feel, will move that engagement and those partnerships to a much higher and beneficial level. At its core is a focus on stimulating new ideas and collaborations. From that will arise opportunities to develop creative talent, content, products, services and experiences that can compete in local, national and international markets and which, together, will grow Northern Ireland's reputation as a global hub for creativity and innovation. It is a framework approach that seeks to harness the strength of our region while recognising the

realities of the environment and challenges that affect the creative industries.

We are all seeking to support a diverse sector that includes activities from architecture to design, crafts to performing arts, designer fashion to computer games and mobile applications, music to film and television. This is a diverse but fragmented sector, with insufficient scale, insufficient collaboration between subsectors and insufficient engagement in international markets.

It is also a sector that government wants to support and where interventions are cross-departmental but which often lacks cross-departmental collaboration and co-ordination. That needs to change, and we have been working for some time to change it. We could try to advance the agenda with an overarching strategy document; one that would, no doubt, be glossy, contain nice pictures and have its heart in the right place. However, as the Committee knows, too many strategy documents in the past, for many different sectors and on many different issues, have ended up as bookends on a shelf. The visions might have been right, but the mindset and means to deliver were not in place.

A collaborative framework approach seeks to bring about a change in the mindset of industry, government and academia to support the creative industries. For collaboration stimulates and is supported by flows of information, knowledge and insight that identify new commercial opportunities to build scale, partnerships and new routes into new markets, and where government and academia are aligned to support those developments.

The framework represents a strategic, real and meaningful partnership, and a joined-up approach between industry, government and academia; it establishes the mindset and means to enhance the development and delivery of current and future subsector strategies. DCAL is the government lead on the creative industries. The framework approach provides a mechanism for the Department and the Committee to demonstrate and inform that leadership role; it also reinforces the often forgotten or underestimated value of culture and arts. The diverse portfolio and bodies that the Department funds and supports and which the Committee oversees represent a region-wide creative and cultural infrastructure of organisations, programmes, knowledge, content and people that can be more fully harnessed to support the creative industries.

This creative and cultural infrastructure and landscape are strategic assets for a region; they represent a pre-innovation platform from which creative people, ideas and enterprises emerge. The collaborative framework is rooted in the goals and priorities of the Executive's draft economic strategy and Programme for Government. It is a commercially focused and economic development-based framework, but one where culture and the arts can be a catalyst for rebuilding and rebalancing the economy.

The document also highlights the wider catalytic potential of creativity and of the culture, arts and leisure sectors, whereby value can be derived from looking at problems from different perspectives and connecting things not previously connected: ideas, people, organisations and sectors. By promoting wider creativity and harnessing the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors, we can stimulate new approaches and possible creative solutions that support other government priorities in health, education, social inclusion and the environment. We will seek to develop that wider creativity agenda in parallel with the collaborative framework, and together they will help to establish and sustain a pipeline from which creative people, ideas and businesses will emerge and flourish. We will be happy to hear your views on the first draft and to take questions.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. Where are you with the timescale? I appreciate that this is the first draft and that you will be working with DETI and others. We have commenced our inquiry and will start to take evidence in the new year. I am mindful that we are taking a two-strand approach, but will the Committee have an opportunity to feed into your work?

Mr McGowan:

This is the first draft, and the Committee got first sight of the document, which was the intention in line with the inquiry. I believe that the inquiry will be a mobilising and energising focal point for the sector. It is an opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to come together and to give evidence to the Committee to identify the key issues. I see the framework being shaped by the outcomes of the inquiry. The framework has been developed and has arisen from our close, ongoing work with Invest NI and DETI over the past two years and from our taking on board the

economic strategy and the Programme for Government, which are out for consultation as well. As we move into the new year and the new financial year, I see the outcomes of the inquiry and the consultation on the Programme for Government and the economic strategy informing the final version of the framework approach.

The Chairperson:

It is reassuring to know that we can inform your work. You are saying all the right words today, Stephen, which is great. However, we have all been on enough Committees and seen enough frameworks and strategies to understand that although glossy documents may say the right things, they may not really mean anything to the sector concerned because they are very high level. How will you ensure that the framework means something to, for example, a craftsperson on the Ards peninsula?

Mr McGowan:

The structure of the framework is based on basic human nature about collaboration and the sharing of ideas. The creative sector in Northern Ireland will value and appreciate the opportunity to see new collaborations and market opportunities, and it will take the lead on the framework and will develop new ideas and commercial opportunities. As government, it is our role to enable, facilitate and promote that.

If 10 creatives from different sectors are put in a room, they will bounce ideas off one another and will see new opportunities. That is why the framework is not prescriptive. We want to bring such collaborations together, but none of us here can prescribe or predict the outcomes. However, there is a fundamental belief that collaborative opportunities will provide commercial opportunities.

Take, for example, a craftsperson collaborating with a musician, or a musician collaborating with a digital content company or games developer; such cross-sectoral collaboration shows where the value of the sector is and where we can move from local to global.

Mr Swann:

Thank you for your presentation. I concur with the Chairperson: your comments are very

refreshing. I hope that you can live up to your word and that the document does not end up another bookend, as it is an important economic tool.

You mentioned the tipping point. Much of what we hear now, especially in the presentation and in the framework, is about the need to drive forward potential. However, we must also recognise the need to support existing creative industries, such as the crafts industry that the Chairperson mentioned.

One industry about which I am concerned greatly is architecture. How will the framework support architecture as a creative industry? Taking account of the decline of the construction industry, will we promote our architects worldwide and give them a platform from which to work? What support mechanism will there be for architecture as a creative industry?

Mr McGowan:

With regard to architecture, yes, it is about promoting all subsectors of Northern Ireland's creative industries on the world stage. However, what came to mind immediately was Skillset, which is the sector skills council for digital content and computer games. Recently, it brought over a guest speaker who is from Northern Ireland, although I am afraid that his name escapes me. He is a world-renowned computer-game designer who developed the 'The Godfather' computer game, although he is actually an architect by training who designed buildings throughout Northern Ireland. There is a mixture, blend and blurring of architecture and digital content, and he brings architectural principles to computer-game design. Therefore there are opportunities for subsectors to promote and develop in other fields as well.

As regards core architecture, in the most recent round of the creative industries innovation fund there were opportunities for architects to work with designers and textile companies. For example, one company was involved in the incorporation of different materials, such as gold and other metals, into textiles. The Playhouse Theatre in the north-west is displaying some of that content. Therefore, at a broader level, it is possible for architects and subsectors to seek out new opportunities.

Mr Scott:

The Department also has the ministerial advisory group on architecture and the built environment. The Minister is the design champion. The group challenges the architecture discipline with regard to carrying out design review, challenging design proposals from private developers and government, and producing position papers on various aspects. At present, we are looking at a paper on the cultural corridor for north Belfast. In some ways, the Department either supports or challenges architects to design buildings that will be of perfect use today and which will also be icons of the future, while taking account of social needs and the fact that a building is not just physical, but has purpose, be it a newbuild or a road scheme, and how that affects business and the community.

Mr Swann:

That is more about guiding and working with architects who already have the job of designing and building cultural corridors rather than enabling architects who struggle to get new business to propel themselves onto the world market.

Mr Scott:

It is. It is trying to raise the standard of design excellence. If the buildings produced appeal to others, that generates export of those skills. It is trying to raise the skills in the architectural sector with regard to design quality, both on an environmental front and in social use and practical purpose, while taking account of that in a wider context so that it challenges any developer to take a step back and look at whether a build is the best opportunity. Is it a newbuild? Could brownfield sites and other assets be harnessed and fitted into the wider private and public economy to make maximum impact?

Mr Irwin:

Thank you for your presentation. In 2009, the number of people employed in the creative industries in Northern Ireland was 31,000, which represented 4.1%. The GB figure for 2010 represented 7.8%. Does the fact that Northern Ireland has a much smaller population than that of the UK make those figures seem even worse because we are so far down the line with only 4.1% employment in the creative industries? Should the Government do more to address that?

Mr McGowan:

Yes. It highlights the point that we have insufficient scale in the sectors and insufficient engagement on potential markets. I tend to be a glass-half-full type of person in the sense that, in comparison to GB, those figures show that we can grow. However, we also have to factor in that London and the UK are world leaders in creative industries. You have that clustering effect around London in particular, but we also see that in Glasgow and in the BBC's moves to Salford. There are opportunities, particularly with, for example, regional networking in television, to grow the creative industries throughout the UK.

One of the key issues in my view is that local creative industries see the potential and have the ambition to compete in global markets. The economic strategy very clearly makes the case that, if we really want to rebuild and rebalance the economy, we have to focus on export-focused growth.

Mr Scott:

The creative industries innovation fund provides funding to support those budding entrepreneurs to let them experiment and to try new ideas that, hopefully, can be scaled up and can go on to something bigger.

Mr D Bradley:

The Chair asked the question that I was going to ask. Great minds think alike. Anyway, I congratulate Stephen on producing the framework. No doubt a great deal of creativity was involved in bringing it to this stage. I share the Chair's concern that, if I were to bring that document along to the craftsperson in his or her workshop and say, "This is the future for you", they might be a bit cynical about it. They might think that they have specific gifts, their products take a long time to produce, they are barely keeping their head above water and that, at the end of day, the framework will not make much difference to them. How would you reassure those people? What would you say to them about the possible beneficial outcomes for them?

Mr McGowan:

The focus of the framework is on new ideas and new collaborations, and the craft sector in

particular has a key role in cultural tourism and promoting souvenirs and products that are more effectively and tastefully representative of the history and heritage of our region. The tourism strategy for Northern Ireland has at its core a priority to help people to discover and share stories with visitors. Visitors to our shores should see a craft sector, souvenirs and artefacts beyond the plastic toy leprechaun. It is about promoting that sector, and we work very closely with Craft NI.

Mr D Bradley:

A lot of those people tend to be isolated individuals, and they do not have the marketing connections and so on that they need to promote their product.

Mr McGowan:

This framework tries to provide those channels and supports. That is key. Different activities across different Departments and agencies can provide that type of support, but we have to try to get all the ships in the fleet sailing in the same direction. If a craftsperson or business in any other subsector in any part of Northern Ireland has a creative idea with commercial potential, they should have access to and knowledge of the full range of support that is available to them, and that support should be tailored to their specific needs. So, it is a case of them accessing that, but their needs must be recognised by government and agencies, and that support must be tailored.

Mr D Bradley:

We sometimes talk about hard-to-reach groups and individuals who are on the periphery. How can you draw them in so that they will feel part of this and feel that they will benefit from it?

Ms Joanna McConway (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

I want to say something about the Arts Council because I know exactly what you mean. The smaller arts organisations may not have thought about collaborations before and have not had the opportunity, perhaps because they have a small number of staff and a tight budget. Those opportunities may not be open to them, even if they did want them. It is important to say that the Arts Council does a lot of work with all the sectors, across all art forms, with individual artists, small and large arts organisations and umbrella bodies. We mentioned Craft NI, but there are a

number of others, where the Arts Council is working at that level to provide advice and support and access information from organisations that it may not even fund, such as the smaller fledgling organisations or organisations that may have other funding streams. There is still a link there with the Arts Council.

One of the key things about the model that we are developing for the creative industries is injecting into the Arts Council a more commercial edge and that idea of thinking about those new ideas and how to bring organisations from doing something locally to doing it nationally or internationally. The link between the Arts Council, Northern Ireland Screen and Digital Circle, which are part of the model too, is key. That gives those smaller organisations someone that they can talk to, so that they are not looking at a government document but can actually have those conversations with an art-form officer who understands the sector but also has a link to government.

Mr McGowan:

Joanna makes a very important point.

Mr D Bradley:

I had in mind an individual craftsperson rather than an arts organisation, big or small.

Ms McConway:

Individuals will obviously have links with their sectoral bodies. Even if they do not have links with us as central government or with the Arts Council directly, they will still have those links with their sectoral bodies, because creative people do talk to each other and collaborate. It is a natural approach for them to do that. We want to harness those links so that it is not so much about government telling them what to do, it is about us getting the information back and supporting them to do the things that they want to develop but for which they may not have had the funding or the support in the past.

Mr Scott:

It is about helping individual artists and craftspeople to recognise the entrepreneurial potential of what they are producing. Perhaps a link to some sort of cultural tourist attraction provides a new

market and a new outlet. I was recently speaking to the Carntogher Community Association. It is selling all of its cultural products online, and that gives it virtual access to the market, as opposed to having to set up a huge resource-intensive operation. That is a good example of the sort of connections that are made.

The Department has used the creative industries innovation fund for cultural tourism in relation to downloadable apps, one for Ulster Scots and one for Gaelic culture. Tourists who come here can download those to see what is on and what to see. We are pairing the cultural asset — for example, Ulster Scots and its history, which is coming from the Ulster Historical Foundation — with people in the industry on the digital side to put that together to make it an attractive package for cultural tourists. They can download the app and see a route that they can follow to see important sites. Likewise, with the Gaelic app, they can see what is on, where to go and where there is a ceilidh or something else. It is helping to realise that cultural asset through marketing to a wider range of people.

Mr McGowan:

This is certainly not a document that we wave in the air “peace in our time” style: job done. It is about a change of culture and mindset to one of collaboration. The structures outlined in that approach enable people in the craft sector, for example, say what type of support they need. That feeds in to the government agencies. At the moment, are we just sticking our finger in the air and saying, “What do we think they need?” This provides an opportunity for the industries, in all of the different subsectors, to tell us what they need.

Mr Ó hOisín:

A number of us were in Derry last week for our meeting, and we got a fairly extensive and exhaustive presentation from the chief executive of Derry City Council, the chief executive of Ilex and the chief executive of the Culture Company 2013. In the draft strategy, you express an intention to work with the Culture Company. Given that we are virtually 12 months away from the City of Culture year, what exactly are the modalities of that and what exactly is in place?

Mr McGowan:

Last year, the Department launched a pilot initiative, Creativity Month, the theme of which was

inspiring new ideas, new collaborations and a new economy. It was a pilot in this year, with City of Culture taking on the promotional need throughout 2012. That is going to provide a regional impact and regional reach for Creativity Month and a much more enhanced profile, activities and marketing support. It also provides a platform for 2013, because 2013, with the City of Culture, is going to be a very important year, not only for Derry/Londonderry but for the entire region. Culture will be highlighted as having a catalytic impact on the economy, health, social inclusion and education. The Culture Company, by taking the lead in 2012 and promoting Creativity Month and promoting throughout the year, will provide a platform for further action.

Mr Scott:

I will ask Joanna to explain the Department's wider contribution to the City of Culture.

Ms McConway:

In parallel with the work that Stephen is doing specifically with the creative industries and the creativity agenda, I am working closely with Shona McCarthy on developing a bid for DCAL to support the City of Culture in a wider sense. I understand that we are getting very close to 2013. However, you will understand that the Culture Company was just set up this year. It has been working very hard to develop a programme, and it has brought us some specific proposals in the past month or so. We are getting to the stage where we can put together a business case. We are not able to fund the year for the City of Culture by just having a funding pot that does not have clear parameters around it. Therefore, we need a business case that sets out what we are going to fund and how the outcomes of those elements will align with DCAL's high-level priorities. We do not expect that there will be a problem with what the Culture Company 2013 is doing in aligning with our objectives, as the original bid is very much in line with what we are doing. However, we need to look carefully at what we will fund and set that out in a business case that the Minister can stand over. That is what we are doing at the minute in parallel with Stephen's works on creativity.

Mr Ó hOisín:

What is the timescale?

Ms McConway:

I would like to have a draft business case ready for approval early in the new year. This year, we made a small bid for funding in the region of £40,000 for early setup costs, but that is for the January to March period. We would like to have an approved business case by the beginning of the 2012-13 financial year so that we will know exactly where we are with the funding that we will be able to offer.

Mr Ó hOisín:

How much money are we talking about?

Ms McConway:

That is still to be decided. It will probably be a substantial sum. The overall budget for the City of Culture from 2012 to 2014 is almost £20 million. Subject to an approved business case, I would expect that DCAL would be a substantial contributor to that.

The Chairperson:

Just on that point, Joanna, what will suffer as a result of having to make that contribution?

Ms McConway:

We hope nothing, because we hope to make an additional bid to DFP for DCAL's own priorities. The Minister has not yet indicated that she would sacrifice anything else from the Department's budget to meet those costs.

The Chairperson:

Obviously, it is a commitment in the Programme for Government. We will leave it until a later date.

Ms McConway:

I am sure that we will be back with you in due course to discuss further the City of Culture, subject to us getting to the stage where we have a business case that the Minister is happy with.

Mrs Hale:

Thank you for coming. Stephen, in your draft framework, you talk about how the framework has an acceptance of the unpredictability of things that happen. Do you foresee any major problems coming up?

Mr McGowan:

With the framework approach?

Mrs Hale:

Yes, in dealing with unexpected issues that might come up.

Mr McGowan:

The reference to unpredictability in the framework is more focused on the unpredictability that will arise from new creative ideas in those collaborations. As I said earlier, if we get craftspeople, digital content people and film makers in the room, we cannot predict what creative ideas they will come up with.

Mrs Hale:

You are talking about the initial planning stage.

Mr McGowan:

Yes. The document recognises that that collaboration will give rise to new ideas and new commercial opportunities that we cannot predict at this time.

Mrs Hale:

I would worry that it might stagnate because nothing of substance would come out.

Mr McGowan:

I would have faith in the creative energy of the creative industry to come up with ideas. The crucial point is taking that to the next step. That is why there is an industry-led approach by the different subsectors, together with government collaboration that is driving forward the creative ideas that are coming from the industry to enable them and to change them from local to global

ideas. As I mentioned earlier, it is about aligning government and academic support to enable those ideas to flourish; that is the key approach in the framework.

Mr McGimpsey:

About 10 years ago, we launched ‘Unlocking Creativity,’ and it seems that we have made reasonable progress since then. In that document, we anticipated rough targets for the creative industries, and I see that we now have 31,000 jobs, which is roughly 4% of the workforce, and that we have a turnover of £737 million in this area. Those are your estimates, and they are probably accurate enough. You will bring all of this together, and partnership and collaboration will be key to much of that. What progress do you anticipate making in the next five to 10 years? Where will we be with the number of jobs and turnover? I understand that you will be able to give me only a guesstimate, but if we get what we are looking for and bring everyone together, how much progress can be made? You talked about a critical mass. How close are we to reaching that critical mass, which will allow us to take off in the way that Scotland has?

Mr McGowan:

There are some subsectors in which there is a tangible sense that we have taken off or are just about to. Film and television is one example of that, and DCAL and Invest NI recently launched a new music industry strategy, which highlighted the potential for the cross-exploitation of music. If we get more Snow Patrols and more Van Morrisons, that will be fantastic, but a lot of musicians in Northern Ireland can make a good living and career from making music for films, computer games and mobile apps.

As part of the economic strategy, a creativity R&D and innovation action plan will be developed, and we will work with DETI to define the targets that we want to achieve in the sector. I cannot pick a figure out of the air at the moment; we are working with DETI and Invest NI, and we will set targets for the sector and the subsectors. The music industry strategy has highlighted the targets that we want to achieve over the next three to four years in that subsector. There are targets for employment and for the number of businesses that we want to generate.

Mr McGimpsey:

We have a target of creating 25,000 jobs over the next four years. What sort of contribution can

this area make to that?

Mr McGowan:

You will recall that the Business Alliance, which included representatives from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Institute of Directors (IOD), created a joint paper on the jobs plan for Northern Ireland. In that, it highlighted that the creative industries could produce 11,000 jobs over the time frame of that plan. That report was created by business organisations and not by a government body. It is indicative of the business community's belief that the creative industries can make that seismic leap.

Ms McConway:

It is important to draw the distinction between DCAL's and DETI's roles in the creative industries. A lot of what we do, particularly on my side of the house in arts, which sponsors the Arts Council and Northern Ireland Screen, is in making quite early interventions. The likes of the creative learning centres and Cinemagic, which most people will have heard of, get in there early with young people. They try to change the perception that going into the creative industries is a bit of a cop-out and not a serious career choice, and they suggest that it is something that those young people could do. Those young people may find that they know someone who is working on the set of 'Game of Thrones,' and they may feel that they would like to do that for a living. We are in the business of providing that catalyst through early interventions with young people, and we also make interventions with arts organisations to try new collaborations and with business to try new innovative ideas. DETI is at the other end, funding the big film activity, and it has a very clear ratio. Much of what we do is a little more risky, but we feel that it is a risk that is worth taking to get the big rewards in the creation of jobs.

Mr McGimpsey:

It is the golden thread, and DCAL pulls the golden thread together. How well do you work with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), for example, because that is where you are looking for young people? We are not asking young people for A levels and degrees, which are often a barrier for youngsters, to go into particular occupations in this area.

Ms McConway:

Absolutely. Our arm's-length bodies work very closely with DEL and the Department of Education (DE). We are trying to do longer-term things that are sometimes quite difficult to measure, but if you can get people at that stage and they are skills building, we know that that will have a longer-term effect.

Mr Scott:

DCAL's role can best be described as nurturing. It ensures that young people are exposed to creativity and creativity concepts and that they are encouraged.

Mr McGowan:

This comes back to a very broad point in terms of what we have as a Department and what you have as a Committee to oversee — this creative and cultural infrastructure. We have museums, libraries, the Arts Council and different organisations, such as Armagh Planetarium, and it is about how that infrastructure can be harnessed to promote the creative industries.

We have been working very closely with DEL, in particular, on the STEM strategy for Northern Ireland. One of the issues around STEM is that we want more young people to study science, technology, engineering and maths, but if a young person has a gift or inclination towards science, they are quite often encouraged to be a doctor or to go into a similar field. However, there are very lucrative and rewarding careers in animation and visual effects, for example, and such careers would not only be good for that individual, they would help grow our economy. The STEM strategy for Northern Ireland is heavily influenced by the DCAL infrastructure and the inspirational support that that can provide. In my view, no 11-year-old makes a conscience decision that they will study a STEM subject because it is in the long-term economic interests of Northern Ireland for them to do so. They are inspired by STEM because they go to the planetarium or W5, or they are involved in one of our creative learning centres, and they decide that it is a field that they want to learn more about and study. Again, that is the inspirational, catalytic impact of what we support as a Department and as a Committee.

Mr McGimpsey:

That is the idea.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for coming this morning and having this early conversation with us. I understand that you are looking for some feedback on the framework, but, as you will understand, we are only starting to gather information from the sector in relation to our inquiry. However, as we start to receive that information, we will respond to you more formally, rather than setting too close parameters on our own inquiry. Again, thank you very much for coming this morning and for taking questions.