



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

**Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of
the Creative Industries in Northern
Ireland: Ulster Orchestra Society**

29 March 2012

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 David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Professor Sir George Bain	Ulster Orchestra Society
Mr Dick Mackenzie	Ulster Orchestra Society

The Chairperson: We welcome Professor Sir George Bain, who is the chairman, and Mr Dick Mackenzie, who is a member of the board of directors. Gentlemen, you are very welcome.

Professor Sir George Bain (Ulster Orchestra Society): Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you for responding to our inquiry in the first instance and for agreeing to come to brief us this morning. The usual protocol is that you give an opening statement and then our members will ask questions to open up the discussion.

Professor Sir George Bain: Thank you very much for inviting us here this morning. I am the chair of the Ulster Orchestra Society and Dick Mackenzie is a colleague of mine on the board. We will make a statement for about 10 minutes and then try to answer any questions that you might want to pose to us.

We started by looking closely at your terms of reference. In particular, we noted the emphasis that you place on identifying the potential of the creative industries to secure economic benefit and, in particular, jobs and wealth creation. We believe strongly that the Ulster Orchestra has a contribution to make to that objective with which you are quite rightly concerned. We are working on our business plan, and we will make that a very central part of our mission.

Let me begin by describing some of the activities of the Ulster Orchestra. We are a medium-sized employer. We provide jobs to 81 people, 63 of them professional musicians and 18 of them administrators. We have a budget of just over £4 million, half of which comes from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Other core funders include the BBC — in some ways, we are almost the BBC Northern Ireland orchestra, and, indeed, we used to be that, virtually — and Belfast City Council.

Our expenditure has what economists are fond of calling a "multiplier effect", in terms of the goods and services that are purchased from the salaries and wages of our employees, payments for venues and hotel rooms, and expenditure of our patrons in bars and restaurants close to where we perform. That is an important point to stress, and one that, I am sure, has come up in other hearings that you have had. Indeed, the Arts Council has done an economic impact survey, with which you are probably familiar, which shows that for every £1 spent on the Ulster Orchestra, £2.41 is returned to the local economy.

We give about 90 performances a year to over 100,000 people, mainly in Belfast but also in eight other regular venues in Northern Ireland. Indeed, 8% of our audience comes from towns such as Enniskillen, Ballymena and Coleraine, and about 20% comes from rural areas. We are rather proud that our concerts have 80% occupancy. In other words, if they are held at the Ulster Hall or the Waterfront, for example, we fill, on average, 80% of the seats, which is an increase of 4% over the last couple of years.

The contribution that the orchestra makes to what you might call the cultural infrastructure of Northern Ireland is often not noticed. It is an invaluable educational resource for schools, the Belfast School of Music and individual students. Indeed, each year, about 30,000 young people in Northern Ireland benefit from the orchestra's education and outreach work. A lot of people think of the Ulster Orchestra and other orchestras, not only here but in North America and elsewhere, as being a concert on a Friday night or Saturday night at the Waterfront or the Ulster Hall, for example. It certainly is that, but it is a good deal more. If the orchestra were to disappear, a good deal of the musical infrastructure of our society would collapse.

We also complement and strengthen the work of other bodies, some of which may have appeared before you, such as the Belfast Festival at Queen's, the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture, Northern Ireland Opera, the Belfast Philharmonic Choir, which Dick sings in, and the Ulster Youth Orchestra. That is a pen sketch of the Ulster Orchestra.

We face three major challenges: managerial, artistic and financial. The last one is the main challenge. As I am sure you have heard from every group that has come before you, contributions from our major funders have at best remained constant and at worst declined. Attracting sponsorship from private and philanthropic sources is extremely difficult at the moment. As some of you may know, I was involved in the fundraising for the new Lyric Theatre. We were very lucky to raise over £18 million for that project. If we had started two or three years later, we would never have done it; the luck of the Irish.

We are not here to complain; we are not here to ask for sympathy. We understand the financial realities. We know that, in the current economic environment, public sector funding is being constrained; you know that even better than we do. Although we think that the Ulster Orchestra is very important, we also know that there are many other equally worthwhile claims competing for your attention. The strategic conclusion that we draw from that observation is that we have to help ourselves. In particular, we have to attract alternative sources of income in addition to what is coming from our core funders.

Finally, I will say a word about our strategy. We have just employed an experienced development director — that is an American euphemism for "fundraiser" — who has been tasked to work with members of the new development board to increase significantly the orchestra's income from corporate sponsorship, trusts and foundations, annual giving from "friends", legacies and major gifts from individuals. That will be a very important part of our work in the future. It is something that the orchestra, like many other arts organisations in Northern Ireland, has not done and that we will have to do more and more.

Important as this aspect of our work is, it is largely up to us to do it. With all due respect, I do not think that there is a great deal that the Committee or the Government generally can do to help us. Broadly speaking, the tax laws in the UK — not in the Republic actually — are now just as favourable as those in the United States, which is perhaps the home of fundraising. So, it is really over to us in that department.

I want to concentrate this morning on a second part of our funding strategy, which, we believe, aligns very closely with your objective of maximising economic and social benefit from the creative industries. We start from the premise that the Ulster Orchestra is of fundamental importance to the economic and social well-being of Northern Ireland. The orchestra adds value to a number of key government objectives. Let me stress three of them: inward investment, education and social development.

Hence, as part of our strategy, we have just begun — this has fallen particularly to Dick and me — to engage with private, public and voluntary organisations. Our appeal to them is based not on philanthropy but on perhaps the most reliable of motives: self-interest. What can the Ulster Orchestra do to help organisations achieve their objectives by providing value-added services in return for an appropriate fee? That is the message that we are putting across.

We are not asking for charity, philanthropy or handouts. We are saying, "You have objectives, many of which we think that we can help you to achieve, and in order to do that we need a fee to cover costs etc". For example, although the key elements of attracting inward investment are probably financial incentives and a good education and skills base, part of the incentive package must be the quality of life — education, music, theatre, sport and other leisure activities — that Northern Ireland can offer to incoming workers and their families. Indeed, we took note and satisfaction from seeing that the First Minister, when he was in Washington a week or so ago, endorsed that very view in a speech that he made there.

The orchestra has a dual role to play in that regard. First, it has a role to play as an ambassador, demonstrating that Northern Ireland is a multi-dimensional society, quite different from the image that it is usually given in the national and international media. That is the first role that we can play. It is a role that is played by many symphony orchestras, and we can get into that later if you wish.

Secondly, it has a role to play as a provider of some of the things that demonstrate that Northern Ireland is a fine place to live, to work and to do business in. We have already begun a dialogue with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the strategy, and of course we are focusing particularly on Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Our strategy will take time and support from a variety of organisations to produce results. In the meantime, we would find it immensely helpful if your Committee, after due consideration, was able to endorse our strategy and approach and to support it with respect to some of the Government Departments and agencies that we have in mind. Thank you for your attention. Dick and I will do our best to answer any questions that you might have.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. Over the past number of weeks, we have been receiving various presentations. One of the themes that has been coming up is the suggestion of a creative Northern Ireland or a creative Belfast and having a hub around creativity. What role could the Ulster Orchestra have in such a hub?

Professor Sir George Bain: If there were such a hub, the Ulster Orchestra, which is probably the largest employer of creative people when it comes to theatre, art and music, would have a central role to play. I am not familiar with the detail of the proposal, but the economic literature on the location of industries shows that, very often, you get clusters and certain areas where, by having various firms all doing a similar thing grouped together, you get a lot more synergy, a lot more productivity and, perhaps, a lot more impact than you would if they were all spread out individually. As I said in my opening remarks, the orchestra already co-operates very closely and, indeed, in some ways, underpins the musical aspect of various things such as Northern Ireland Opera, the festival at Queen's and so on. So, if it came to pass, I think that we would play a very central part in it.

The Chairperson: Outside of your relationship with Queen's in relation to the festival, what is your relationship with the universities as regards interns and so on?

Professor Sir George Bain: Interesting. In spite of my history at Queen's — I have only been at the Ulster Orchestra for the past three months — I do not think that there is a particular relationship there. However, my predecessor provided a completely new board for the Ulster Orchestra. All of us have joined since 1 January. One person, in particular, Iris Belshaw, has considerable expertise in human resources, and, funnily enough, she brought forward a proposal at the last board meeting that we should develop an intern scheme because there is a crying need for it. Having been on the board of the Lyric for five years, I can say that that is the case. A large number of people are trying to get into creative industries but are in a catch-22 situation. They apply for a job and do not get as far as the interview panel because one of the essential criteria is experience, and they do not have any. Hence the idea that you can have an internship. The Lyric had one or two just as I was leaving for the Ulster Orchestra. It is an extremely good idea, and, by coincidence, Iris put forward a paper proposing an internship programme to the board meeting last week. It should not be restricted to people in universities, because one interesting thing is that, generalising on the basis of the Lyric experience, a lot of the roles that are performed in production do not necessarily require university degrees. There are production roles of one sort or another. So, that brings a very positive balance.

Mr Dick Mackenzie (Ulster Orchestra Society): The professional musicians in the orchestra are part of the teaching process at Queen's and Jordanstown in their departments of music. That is an informal relationship between the professional musicians who are teaching their students, and a number of the players in the orchestra have come from the department of music at Queen's.

The Chairperson: The term "creative industries" covers an area that is very broad and quite diverse. It includes music, digital formats, fashion, architecture, and so on. It is incredibly broad. However, it is also rather fragmented in the sense of the number of Departments that are responsible, including the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and so on. What is your opinion on having much more collaborative working or an integrated structure?

Professor Sir George Bain: Very positive. That is exactly what I was hinting at. I mentioned two or three areas, and it is quite clear that, in our judgement and in that of the permanent secretary — I met him recently — we have a contribution to make to the work of DETI, particularly to Invest Northern Ireland and the Tourist Board. It is also extremely obvious that we have a contribution to make to education. Indeed, as I said, if the orchestra or, more importantly, the players were to disappear, a good deal of the musical tuition and infrastructure of Northern Ireland would disappear. What is perhaps less obvious but still important is that there is also a considerable contribution to be made in health and welfare, the Prison Service and in justice. Dick, as a former civil servant, could probably name even more areas.

However, the problem is, as we are finding now, that there is not any central co-ordination, and each area is quite discrete. We go to see the permanent secretary in DETI and then go to see the permanent secretaries in Health, Social Development and so on. A more coherent approach would be useful. Almost every area contributes to the creative industries, in a way; at least, most Departments do. If you are trying to make Belfast and Northern Ireland stand out, you would get more bang for the buck, as North Americans say, if you had a more synergistic approach.

Mr Swann: I want to follow up on what you said about synergies. In your paper, under the heading "Champion Synergies", you make a proposal for a cultural tsar. What would be the role of such a tsar? What teeth would that tsar have?

Professor Sir George Bain: I did not draft this paper, and I am not sure that I am in favour of tsars myself. They seem to have come to a sticky end in general. However, I am sure that it would be useful to have greater co-ordination, and, if by that you mean a co-ordinator, that would be more complementary and supportive of what the Chairperson was saying. That is about as far as I would want to take that proposal.

The Chairperson: You are not going to volunteer for that role?

Professor Sir George Bain: No. I did not even want to volunteer to be chairman of the orchestra. I have, supposedly, been retired for eight years.

Mr Swann: My question was more about whether you would see that as a role for the Minister rather than another individual. If you disagree with your own paper, I will not hold you to it.

Professor Sir George Bain: No; it is a fair point, and I am happy to illustrate it. When I look at the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I see a very widely based Department. For example, where I live out in south Antrim, for reasons that I will not go into in detail, fishing became quite an important issue. The Glenavy river had been polluted for 50 years, and who looks after fishing? Lo and behold, I discovered that it is the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Of course, fishing is part of the broad scale of things, but I would not see it coming under the heading necessarily of a cultural tsar or something of that kind. The Chairperson was saying that it is the job of several Ministers or several permanent secretaries. The cultural industries spreads across almost every Department, and, hence, I think that there is a role for a co-ordinator.

I am amazed at the extent of the areas that DCAL covers. I think that to some extent, although members will be better informed, some areas have been put there partly because there is nowhere else to put them all. Another example, which I have used over the years, is the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). I suppose that it is part of cultural or historical life, but a lot of people, including me, once upon a time, would use it for genealogical research. Somehow, it seems a little different from talking about theatre, music or whatever.

Mr Hilditch: I want to ask you about the orchestra and potential links to the film industry. While there is potential there, it seems that we have lost out. How can that be readdressed?

Mr Mackenzie: Perhaps I could answer that. I was the interim chief executive of the Ulster Orchestra for three months at the end of 2010. During that period, I made contact with Northern Ireland Screen, which I found to be a very forward-thinking organisation. At that time, it was involved with the first series of 'Game of Thrones'. My pitch was that the series needed a soundtrack, and I asked Northern Ireland Screen whether it had thought about using the Ulster Orchestra.

We will continue to have that dialogue, although there are some difficulties in doing it. For example, the business of making a soundtrack for a movie or a video is quite complicated. At the moment, we do not have a studio in Belfast that can do it. There are studios all over London that can do that kind of work, and London has orchestras on tap. So, it is a challenge to try to do it. However, we started the dialogue when I was there, and that dialogue with Northern Ireland Screen will continue. 'Game of Thrones' is now in its second series; I think that it starts next week. Again, the soundtrack was done in London, where there is the infrastructure. The closest that we come to that kind of studio is studio 1 of the BBC in Ormeau Avenue, but it does not have all the additional work that you need. I do not understand the technology, but the chief executive of Northern Ireland Screen explained to me that the infrastructure needed to do a soundtrack is quite complicated. We will continue the dialogue.

I want to refer to the point about having an overall person for the cultural industries. My experience of going to individual Departments has been that the expertise of someone such as David Sterling in DETI was quite energising. He was very clued into the objectives of what industrial infrastructure is needed in Northern Ireland. Sometimes, if you think about one person looking after everything, there can be a dilution of interest. I have not found it to be a disadvantage thus far in working out the strategy to go to the individual Departments.

Mr Hilditch: To the lay person, with the film industry potentially being on the increase here, it looks like a natural progression to do that sort of work.

Mr Mackenzie: Absolutely.

Professor Sir George Bain: It would be a very important part of the work of, say, a London orchestra. It is also part of the work of local composers and that sort of thing. If you get the 'Gramophone' every month, you see that there is a section on film music. An extremely popular part of the Ulster Orchestra's evening concerts is film music; everything from 'The Bridge on the River Kwai' to 'The Magnificent Seven' and some of the other great classics. Some people turn their nose up at that sort of thing, but it is an extremely important part. As we all know, as the film industry is expanding and is using the premises down at the Harland and Wolff Drawing Office, there is huge potential. As Dick was saying, although I am nowhere near as knowledgeable as he is about it, it requires investment. If you could make the investment, would it not be cheaper and more effective to do it here rather than London? I lived there for eight years, and everything is more expensive.

Mr Ó hOisín: I will follow up on Mr Hilditch's question. When looking at the creative industries here, I think that a lot of us realise that, although some things are done very well, we do not have the critical mass to allow things to be done as perhaps they should be done. What cross-fertilisation or co-operation exists on an island-wide basis, which would obviously be cheaper than taking things cross channel, in respect of working with the National Symphony Orchestra and projects with RTÉ, whose budget would be a lot bigger than the like of BBC NI? I do not see any evidence of that in the document. As you say, Sir George, you are not the author of it, but maybe you could —

Professor Sir George Bain: I am much happier to take ownership of and to speak to that; it is a very good question. Correct me if I get this wrong, Dick: historically — that is, until very recently — there was very little North/South co-operation. I was previously, for about a decade, closely associated with Barry Douglas and Camerata Ireland. The whole rationale and defining principle of Camerata Ireland is North/South. That has not been the case here. However, starting this year, I think that I am correct in saying that, for the first time, there has been a joint concert with RTÉ —

Mr Mackenzie: It was just three weeks ago.

Professor Sir George Bain: — and the Ulster Orchestra. That is seen as the beginning, I hope, of much greater co-operation between the two. The arts budget, as you know only too well, of the Republic is under the same sorts of pressure as the arts budget here in Northern Ireland. RTÉ's budget is under pressure in the same way that the BBC's budget is under pressure. So, there is a lot of scope for that. In addition to the RTÉ orchestra, the Republic has, of course, a chamber orchestra. That is something that I hope will develop.

Mr Mackenzie: Up until about three years ago, as part of the ambassadorial role that George was talking about, there was an annual visit of the Ulster Orchestra to the National Concert Hall in Dublin. That is touring, so there is overnight expenditure. One of the difficulties with our funding regime at the moment is that we have had to cut out touring, even to Dublin. That is something that we are looking to reintroduce as part of our ambassadorial role.

Depending on the repertoire that we are playing, the Ulster Orchestra may need players in addition to its 63 players. Very often, the first port of call for those additional players would be players from the South.

Professor Sir George Bain: To be honest, I think that this is probably more by chance than by design, but one of the new board members is Simon Taylor. Going way back, Simon worked at BBC Northern Ireland. He then became the chief executive of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Currently, he is chief executive of the National Concert Hall in Dublin and has been for the last year or so. He is on the board and was put there mainly because of his artistic knowledge of the repertoire. He chairs the artistic committee. Again, that is something that will probably enhance co-operation North/South. The Ulster Orchestra has not toured for over a decade now. We would certainly be keen to begin touring perhaps locally — locally being this island — before we start touring across the Atlantic, the Irish Sea or the Channel.

Mr Ó hOisín: Chair, you and I had the pleasure of seeing the Youth Orchestra some time ago. You saw them in Belfast, and I saw them in Derry. I was very impressed by their performance of Rachmaninov and various other productions. What percentage of the Youth Orchestra will go through to what is, I

suppose, the first team? I was certainly impressed with their performance, and I am sure that you were too.

The Chairperson: Absolutely.

Mr Mackenzie: I am glad that you said that. I was the first chairman of the Ulster Youth Orchestra for 10 years, from 1993 to 2004. The answer to that question is this: very few. I can think of two people, a brother and sister from Newry, Joanne and David Quigley. Joanne has made it as a front line professional violinist and plays in Edinburgh. David is now a concert pianist, and he played with the Ulster Orchestra a few weeks ago. I think that two of our local players at the moment came through the Ulster Youth Orchestra. Most of the Ulster Youth Orchestra players are taught by the professional musicians in the orchestra.

Professor Sir George Bain: Unlike Dick, I did not chair it, but about five or six years ago, the Ulster Youth Orchestra managed to bankrupt itself —

Mr Mackenzie: That was after I left. *[Laughter.]*

Professor Sir George Bain: It was another colonial who managed to pull that off. The Arts Council asked me if I would sort them out; I know more about finances than I do about music. I discovered that a very large number of the players do not see themselves as being professional musicians; you are obviously familiar with that. I remember once that they wanted to do a photo shoot and wanted me to have a violin in the photo. I asked the youngster who gave me the violin what he was up to. He said that he was reading maths at Cambridge. This was a local lad who had gone to Cambridge, and there he was, playing in the Ulster Youth Orchestra. I think that that is wonderful, particularly given the way in which musical education has been decimated over the past decade or so. It was really good to see that we could get people who were prepared to put a lot of time and effort in. You know what they earn each year. The orchestra was doing a Mahler symphony and had two weeks to mug it up and get it going. Here was somebody who was doing maths at Cambridge, but it could have been at Queen's or the University of Ulster. He had no intention of being a professional musician, but music was an important part of his life. I think that that is great. The second point is that the Ulster Youth Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra will be jointly performing at the BBC Proms in the summer.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the fact that you intend to build stronger relationships with business. Sponsorship from business accounts for a small proportion of your income.

Professor Sir George Bain: It is a very small proportion — 4%.

Mr Irwin: We have found with other groups that increasing private sector sponsorship is quite difficult. How do you propose to increase that or to put pressure on?

Professor Sir George Bain: When I retired, I started to play the piano again. Unlike when I was a youngster, I managed to get to grade 8. When I was invited to join the board of the Ulster Orchestra, I thought that perhaps they wanted me to take over from Barry Douglas for a cut price fee. Alas, that was not the case. I was invited because I had been in the fundraising business for 20-odd years, ever since I joined the London Business School in 1989. University presidents belong to the begging classes, although, increasingly, we tend to do it pretty professionally.

Fundraising or "development", as Americans are fond of calling it, is certainly not a science. It is an art, and there is a systematic way of going about it. One of the main things, and I feel very strongly about this and get very annoyed about it, is to actually go about it. This is self-promotion, but the Lyric had a funding challenge when I joined, and I was told that it required £12 million, but that became £18 million. It was the biggest private fundraising effort that had ever been undertaken in Northern Ireland, and it was successful, partly because the environment was successful. It was not due to me. There was a whole range of people involved, including Mark Carruthers and, in particular, Angie McCluskey, who you have probably never heard of. She was development director at the Lyric Theatre. The key is to have somebody who is a professional and to have aggressive Canadians like me who are not afraid

to accost people and ask them for money. It is amazing how many people are afraid to ask for money. It is almost as if you are panhandling.

I always think that it is an honour to be able to represent a cause that you think is really worthwhile and to ask people to contribute to it. Therefore, we have taken the first step. Angie is still connected with the theatre, and she did not want to come across. In any case, the post was advertised. We now have the equivalent of Angie McCluskey at the orchestra, and she has been there for a month. We are designing a campaign etc. But I will make no ifs or buts about it: it will be difficult.

The banks were one of the big funders. The orchestra is fairly prestigious, and banks used to be pretty prestigious until the point came when people were afraid to even mention that they were bankers. Banks wanted to be associated with similar organisations, but now they do not want to give money at all, even though they have it. They do not want to be seen to be doing that when they are laying off staff and making redundancies. Therefore, it is going to be difficult.

I am a non-executive director with Canada Life and Great-West Lifeco — those are the only two things that I still do. If you want to know one variable model for predicting the success of an insurance salesman, it is the number of calls that he or she makes. When you think about it, it is obvious. The more calls that you make, the more people that you ask, and, all things being equal, the more successful you will be.

What I have found with arts organisations — this is true in London, where I lived for eight years, as much as here — is that a lot of arts people think that they have an almost God-given right to exist and that arts is a good in itself. It may be a good in itself, but many other things are good in themselves. If there is a God, it is a God who helps those who help themselves. Therefore, you have to go out and ask and ask. We will do that. It is a challenge, and by definition, a challenge is something that you can fail at, but we will do our best not to fail.

The Chairperson: It is interesting that you find that a challenge. The Ulster Orchestra is a brand name and you have a resource so that you can then call on someone who is a professional to try to assist you. However, the difficulty across the sector generally is the fact that you have a lot of artists who are sole traders and not entrepreneurs. That is not their expertise; their expertise lies in creativity, be it within music or art. So that is a massive challenge for them.

Professor Sir George Bain: We will not be asking the players to do the asking. We will put together a development committee —

The Chairperson: What I am saying is that, outside the orchestra and in the arts in a broader sense, there is that difficulty for those outside of the orchestra.

Professor Sir George Bain: Anyone who becomes chief executive of an arts organisation today, in the same way as anyone who becomes a vice chancellor of a university, will be asked at interview about raising money. Certainly, that is true of vice chancellors. Of course, American presidents spend almost all their time raising money. An important aspect of the job is: "Are you prepared to raise money? Are you able to raise money?"

The point you raise is a good one. We are now going to be looking for a new chief executive. We will not be able to afford both an artistic director and a chief executive — the latter being defined mainly as a manager. The Lyric Theatre, for example, has both an artistic director — Richard Croxford — and a manager — Ciaran McAuley. Even if that were desirable — and there is always the potential for conflict between the managerial aspect and the artistic — we cannot afford two positions at a salary adequate to attract the right kind of talent. We will have to settle for one. There will be a balance struck, when we draw up the job description and start the interviewing, etc, as to how much we weigh the artistic and how much the managerial.

Certainly, some of this will fall to the chief executive. The very reason I was asked to join the board was not because of my musical ability, which is extremely limited. It was because I had experience of fundraising. Then you put together other people.

The main difficulty here, in Northern Ireland and indeed on the island, is that it is a small place. There are relatively few of what are called "leadership gifts" that you can hit: people who are really in a position to give you a large sum of money. The way you raise that kind of money is not by rattling tins on a street corner on a Saturday trying to collect. You have to get a lot of it through major gifts. A major gift, in this context, is probably — and it varies with the context — £100,000 or something like that. You are not going to do it by raising small amounts of money such as my 50p from my change at the newsagent which I give to the cancer trust or whatever.

So the main difficulty here is the small population base. It is the same difficulty that the orchestras in the South face. They get a much higher proportion of their income from the box office. Across the water, a London orchestra gets a much, much higher proportion of its income from the box office than we do. The simple point is that we are dealing with 1.7 million people and three point whatever million in the Republic. That translates into the funding game as well.

However, at Queen's University and the Lyric Theatre we raise money; other people raise it; and we will do our best to do so. Mainly, too, there are two kinds of approaches. One is through straightforward philanthropy: you go to someone who has a huge interest in music and you hope that, because they are wealthy, they will support it. The other approach is through self-interest. If you can somehow find an alignment with the objectives of a Government Department or a private company, in exchange for helping to promote those objectives, they will pay you a fee. That is what Dick and I are particularly working on.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for your presentation. Why has it taken so long to see the connection between here and the South of Ireland as a more joined-up approach?

Professor Sir George Bain: I have no idea really. The context —

Mr McMullan: The whole context seems to centre around funding, and I am worried about getting somebody in with the right face who could raise the funds, because [*Inaudible.*] Sometimes you wonder if that is why the President of America is President; because he can raise money rather than because of his political aptitude.

Professor Sir George Bain: It certainly does not hurt, does it? [*Laughter.*]

Mr McMullan: That would worry me a wee bit. Have you looked at lobbying or have you done any lobbying? We talk about working with Northern Ireland Screen and the likes of that there. The other tax breaks we do not have here are for television, etc. I noticed in your —

Professor Sir George Bain: Tax breaks for what?

Mr McMullan: For television. We do not have the same tax breaks here as there are in the South of Ireland. We do not have any here at all, except for the big screen. You said that the real challenge in the marketplace is increasingly driven by digital technology. Have we done any lobbying at a high level to see whether that can be changed for here? It is one of the things that we have been discussing here, and it seems to be the way forward. To get the likes of 'Game of Thrones' and that there in or other television in, you need these tax breaks and incentives that we do not have here.

Part of the problem is that production costs are a lot higher here than in England or anywhere else, first, because the venues here are more expensive to hire. We do not have the entrepreneurial skills that they have in England; we have to take them over. You seem to be pushing against the tide to try to get round that. The relative things that you would need to change is something that we have been looking at as well — the tax breaks, etc. Would you not be far better to push this more into an all-Ireland context? As Mr Ó hOisín said, we do not have the critical mass here and we need to be pushing this as a bigger market to compete with the likes of Europe, America or London.

I was very interested when you talked about the 11-council model, which is part of the RPA coming in. You said that bigger councils might have a bigger budget. I do not think so: we will be going much the same again because of the economic downturn. Budgets will be very tight.

Mr Mackenzie: I am not an expert on the tax breaks. I do not know what the tax situation is.

Professor Sir George Bain: The recent Budget gave a tax break to film, did it not? The UK Budget.

Mr McMullan: We are not in line with the tax breaks they have in the South of Ireland that can attract television.

Professor Sir George Bain: I must say that I am ignorant of this.

Mr McMullan: I think the way forward is for you to start lobbying from there. We have to get those tax breaks to get the bigger companies in to spend the money. Even the BBC has moved out of here and down South to produce in other parts of Europe that give the tax breaks, so we are losing out on that.

Professor Sir George Bain: It is an interesting point, and one we can follow up.

The Chairperson: OK. Is that you finished? I thought you were pondering your next question.

Mr McMullan: I was on a roll there, but I think I will stop. Thank you.

Professor Sir George Bain: Thank you for the idea.

Mr McGimpsey: Once upon a time, I listened to your arguments about resource, and it is imponderable how much should come from the taxpayer and how much you should earn yourself, so I do not want to get into that. I do not think there are any answers down South or anywhere else. It is about tapping into society a bit better. You do one orchestra production a week in the Ulster Hall over six months. Maybe you need to up your number of concerts and so on; I do not know. If you are doing a three-hour week, that is not a very heavy commitment, I have to say. It may be that you can generate income better than that. I do not know; I do not want to get into that.

We are talking about unlocking creativity, and the key thing is that what you are providing in the Ulster Orchestra is a fantastic resource for society. It is about how we connect with our young people in schools in particular, and you light that spark there. It is not just about listening to music, because our young people listen to music for hours a day from an early age. It may not be your music; of course it is not. It is popular music, and they listen to music for hours a day. The other side of it is about learning how to make music yourself, and I think that the Ulster Orchestra has a huge role in that. There is huge potential for the orchestra to work with our schools and young people, through the Department of Education. It is about using and tapping into the skills, abilities and capacity of the Ulster Orchestra and its 63 professional musicians, many of whom are of a very high quality, as part of the Unlocking Creativity strategy. It is about generating interest in that among the young people in school at the minute. How do we tap into that? How well are you doing with it? What is your programme for that? How well received are you? What sort of support and co-operation are you getting from the Department, headmasters and so on to get in there? It seems to me that if the resource of the Ulster Orchestra, which is mainly funded by the taxpayer, was providing that sort of ambition for a lot of our young people, the investment would pay for itself in kind, if not in cash, many times over.

Professor Sir George Bain: I completely agree with everything you said, Mr McGimpsey. First, just by way of a footnote, there are about 90 concert engagements a year. However, as I think I said in my introductory remarks, the orchestra is about much more than the concerts that appear on a Friday, Saturday or whenever.

It is only very recently that I have got into this, and as part of my education, I went across to Liverpool for the Association of British Orchestras conference. Although it is the association of British orchestras, orchestras from the South and, indeed, continental Europe are represented as well. It struck me as true that education and outreach, which is the kind of rubric that it falls under, is an

absolutely critical part of almost all orchestras. That is driven in part by economics, which, since it rests on self-interest, I am rather pleased about. Musicians are not well paid; those in the Ulster Orchestra are particularly not well paid. There has not been a salary rise for the past three years because of the budgetary situation. So, most musicians teach, among other things, to supplement their income. There is, therefore, a fantastic resource out here — teaching. However, some of the players do much more than that. For example, the Ulster Orchestra does a lot of work with disadvantaged children. In fact, this year, just as I was coming on board, it held an event at Dundonald, where my wife and I skate, for the kids from Fleming Fulton School, which the orchestra has had a relationship with for 25 years. Those are largely physically disadvantaged kids, etc.

There is a great deal more that could be done. For example, there is a project called Sistema that uses music to help children in deprived areas to develop. It started off in the slums of Brazil and has been introduced virtually worldwide. However, it requires a certain amount of capital to get it going. It is being done in Liverpool, but it is not being done here. So, a lot more could be done. We had a full-time outreach and education officer, which Dick might want to say something about in his time. The position has just fallen vacant, but it will be filled again.

I would say that by far and away the best argument for keeping the Ulster Orchestra going, besides the artistic argument, which you made very well, is the contribution that it can make to education. It already makes a significant contribution, but it could make an even bigger one.

Mr Mackenzie: Yes, there is an education department in the administration of the orchestra. Last year, when I was there, it comprised two people, one of whom has left to become chief executive of the Ulster Youth Choir. The other person is on maternity leave at the moment, so the position is vacant. The department develops a programme of about 140 different events that are offered to schools. Those will involve either a single instrumentalist, a quartet or a subset of maybe 10 or 15 players. Those are compiled in a leaflet that goes out to all schools in Northern Ireland. The schools then use that as a menu to invite people in over the year. That is the individual school level. There are a number of events that are specifically directed at schools, such as 'Rain Falling Up', which everybody has brought to the Waterfront Hall.

One of the issues is to encourage all the players to be involved in the project. I say this gently, but not all players are necessarily good teachers. Not all the players engage in the education programme. About 30% of them engage in the education programme, and some are extremely enthusiastic. Ricky Matson, our double bass player, is a great enthusiast and takes a lead. In addition to helping with education, he goes out and does a lot of teaching in schools.

There is more work to be done. We are having difficulty at the moment with the maternity leave, but we are about to advertise to bring in another education officer. We were very fortunate with the lad who has now left us. He was extremely good and organised a lot of events in the Waterfront Hall of his own volition.

Professor Sir George Bain: You asked what we can take from it. Although there is a lot of activity — 30,000 kids etc — my hunch is that it is not done very strategically, in close collaboration with the Department of Education or as part of a campaign of saying what we can do to help you to achieve your objectives. As some of you will be aware, a report on music education that was published in England and Wales recently shows the way that music education has been declining over several years. That is also true here and in the Republic. From Plato onwards, there is a realisation and acceptance that musical education, as you suggested, is a critical part of a more general education.

The first stop in the conversations that Dick and I are beginning to initiate is the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and the second stop is Education. Instead of doing it with Ricky Matson the double bass player and whatnot, which is all highly commendable, we need to take a more strategic approach and get a better funding base so that it can be done on a much bigger scale.

Mr McGimpsey: You spend your lives chasing the resource. I understand that you need money from the Arts Council, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and so on just to keep the show on the road. However, what is the show on the road for? Yes, it is to do with your concerts, but it is also about getting that resource out and supporting our young people. As far as I can see, the one thing

that children love to do more than to simply listen to music is to make music. You guys and your folks can give them at least the rudimentary basics of how to make music. The self-confidence that that promotes in children should not be underestimated.

The question is how we make it part of the Unlocking Creativity strategy so that society understands that it is getting a huge benefit from an organisation such as the Ulster Orchestra. It should not simply be measured in pounds and pence or a case of, "We give you £10, and you contribute a few quid". It is about something else altogether, and that is so important. How is that actually working these days? We are 10 years out of it now. It appears that a bit more joined-up work and strategy is required from the Arts Council or the Department that all organisations, including yours, feed into.

Professor Sir George Bain: I completely agree. I am getting to be an old man, and I look back on education. I started in Canada, and my kids went through the system here. I made a decision — can it really be 50 years ago? — to come to the United Kingdom to pursue my graduate work. As I was saying to Dick over coffee before we came in, there are two things that really worry me. One is the decline in the teaching of modern languages, which is unbelievably dysfunctional. That is particularly important when we were not in a strong position to begin with. The second is the decline of music education. The proportion of youngsters playing a musical instrument 30 or 40 years ago was probably much higher than it is today.

There is something I learned in my short duration in the Ulster Youth Orchestra that now seems obvious, although it did not look it at the time. When I was a kid, I learnt how to play the piano. The piano is an individual instrument, whereas a violin or whatnot is more of a team instrument. You do not join an orchestra as a piano player, unless you are as good as Barry Douglas, in which case you come to do concertos and whatnot, but you are not part of 30 violins or whatever it may be. What I began to realise at the Ulster Youth Orchestra, of course, was that the kids did not just benefit from the musical education. It is the same as sport: it is a team exercise. Working in an orchestra or a choir teaches you a whole set of other skills, not just musical skills. It teaches you all the sort of skills that playing on a rugby or football team teaches you.

So, both those teaching areas are terribly important and both are in decline. I accept the point that the teaching could be a lot more joined-up and strategic.

The Chairperson: I thank you for taking the time to speak to us this morning; it was very useful. Thank you.

Professor Sir George Bain: Thank you for inviting us.

Mr Mackenzie: The next concert is tomorrow night. *[Laughter.]* I am singing in it, so there you go.

Professor Sir George Bain: But, some of the concerts are really good. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.