



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

**Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of
the Creative Industries in Northern
Ireland: Oh Yeah Music Centre**

19 April 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

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

Witnesses:

Mr Stuart Bailie	Oh Yeah Music Centre
Mr John D'Arcy	Oh Yeah Music Centre
Ms Shauna Tohill	Silhouette
Ms Charlene Hegarty	Smalltown America Records

The Chairperson: I welcome representatives from the Oh Yeah Music Centre. You are very welcome this morning. Who is going to lead off — John or Stuart?

Mr John D'Arcy (Oh Yeah Music Centre): I will kick off. I should say that it takes four of us to match Paula's energy. A lot of the points that you addressed with Paula are pretty similar to the ones that we will cover. We are happy to take questions after our presentation.

I have been the chairman of Oh Yeah Music Centre since its foundation five years ago. In fact, we were last with the Committee almost five years ago, when we were just starting off. We will celebrate our fifth birthday in about two weeks' time on 5 May. So, we extend a cordial welcome to members and their families who want to come down to touch and feel what we do and to see it at close hand. I have been the chairman of Oh Yeah essentially from the start. As regards Mr Swann's earlier question about whether there is a cultural tsar, I carry the rather unwieldy title of further education and higher education skills ambassador for creative and cultural skills, which does not go on to a business card easily. My day job is in further and higher education, and we do lots of creative industry stuff in that area. I have also been chairman of Audiences Northern Ireland. Again, you raised some points with Paula about getting people out to the arts, and I have some experience of that. Way back in the mists of time, I was a very clumsy and inelegant musician, about which I will not give too many details.

With me today is Stuart Bailie, who has been the chief executive of Oh Yeah Music Centre since its foundation. As part of our presentation, Stuart will address what we do and how we do it. We are here with some of the people we work with in the creative sector. To my left is Charlene Hegarty. Charlene is label manager with Smalltown America, which is a fantastically innovative Northern Ireland business that specialises in music publishing and record label stuff. That is a very fast-moving industry. Charlene and her colleagues have a model of excellence here in Northern Ireland, which I know is envied across the UK and, indeed, in Europe.

On my extreme right is Shauna Tohill. You will all have heard Shauna's music. She is the sound behind the current Northern Ireland Tourist Board campaign, with the single 'Can't Keep Up'. It has been my pleasure to have known Shauna for about the past six years. Stuart and I take pride in having seen Shauna develop as an artist over that period to the point where she is breaking new ground not just in Northern Ireland but across Europe. We are delighted that Shauna is here. She was up at the early hour of 6.00 am to travel from Sligo in order to talk about her role in the creative sector. I think that is testimony to our energy.

We have given you a short paper. Essentially, we are going to talk about developing creativity, supporting creative enterprise and looking at how we try to inspire people. One of the things we did in Oh Yeah was to create a hub. We have a 15,000 square feet warehouse in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, in which we have recording studios, rehearsal studios, performance space and a museum. There are also places where people like Charlene can do business. We have a fantastic roster of music industry people. We felt that we needed to have that physical hub to develop the music industry. However, we are not isolationists. Like Paula, we work with the colleges. We also work with the universities, and we are increasingly working partners in the rest of the UK. Stuart can give detail on some of the work that we are doing with European partners in France and Germany. They see what we are doing here in Northern Ireland as groundbreaking. I think that it is better to hear from the practitioners than me, so I will ask Shauna to give a bit of background to her development in the music industry and the sort of support that an artist such as her needs and that we hope the Assembly can help us with.

Ms Shauna Tohill (Silhouette): I am a singer, songwriter and performer based in Belfast at the moment. I have been writing and performing from a young age because I grew up in a musical family. My mother and father were musicians who played a lot around Northern Ireland and Ireland. My grandmother, Eileen Donaghy, was a well-known folk singer. I am not sure whether any of you may have heard of her. So, growing up in a musical family, I was undoubtedly going to be a musician. From about the age of 15 or 16, I decided to pursue music full-time as my career.

My musical journey began with the band AngelFall. We were a pop/punk rock band with two girls and one boy. We were trying to enhance the number of girls rather than boys on the scene. Our first gigs were in mid-Ulster, where we grew up. We would play in local bars, such as Bryson's and the Cellar, which, at the time, was the place where young local musicians thrived and were supported by many older musicians who encouraged younger folk to do what they wanted to musically. The older musicians who most influenced us were the likes of those who now work in the Glasgobury Music Group. They ran a little workshop session called the Rural Key, which was one of the first musical workshops that we, as AngelFall, attended to develop our skills in the music business. At that point, as far as we knew, all that we needed to do was to write songs. However, there is a lot more to it. We had to learn about how we speak to people, e-mail, communicate with the people who do sound in the business, with management, agents and things like that. Those classes in those sorts of things helped us to develop in all areas of the business.

After attending Rural Key, AngelFall got its first big show at the Glasgobury Music Festival, which might then have been in its third or fourth year and was still quite small. It has been really growing since then. Since then, AngelFall's profile began to rise, and we played some nice festivals and toured around Ireland. We never really got out of Ireland. Shortly afterwards, AngelFall split up and its members played in various acts. I was a session player. I played bass for Joe Echo, who is now in INXS, and for a few other artists.

I then began to write on my own and started my current project, Silhouette, and that song is used in the NI Tourist Board's campaign. When I started Silhouette, I again went to the Glasgowbury Music Group, which took me under its wing and helped me to develop the confidence to go ahead and do it alone because I had been used to being around so many other people. Glasgowbury helped me to do that and paid for recordings, PR campaigns and things that I could not otherwise have afforded. It also helped to enhance my profile by mentioning me in radio interviews and so on.

After those first steps, I worked very hard as a freelance vocal coach, mainly in the Lisburn School of Music. I was a vocal coach for four years, until a couple of months ago. I also worked as a temp in whatever area I could. I worked in a bank for a while and in clothes shops — at anything that earned me money to support my career as a musician. Eventually, I came across some general arts award funding with the Arts Council. When I initially applied, I was denied quite a few times just because I did not know how to speak the language. Coming from a creative background, I did not really know how to speak in business language; therefore, I could not meet all the criteria. Eventually, I got some funding, but that was in later years when a few people who work in Oh Yeah had taught me how to speak the language. Until then, I gained enough money through working, and I recorded more of my songs to push myself. The only way that I can really push myself as a musician is by having money to record and to pay for someone to do PR, get a tour, and so on. I need money to do that. At the time, that was a difficult part, and it still is, because it is really hard to balance the work and the creativity and keep the ball rolling.

When I moved to Belfast, the Oh Yeah Music Centre was in the early stages of developing. It was truly what Belfast needed: a hub of creative musicians and people in the creative industry. I got involved there by volunteering for some of its events when I worked in a group called Bruised Fruit, which ran a lot of gigs. I also played at a few of their shows. A while later, I recorded and released my first proper single with VM Records. The only reason I got that was because I won a competition at a battle of the bands that was held in Warrenpoint. That was fantastic. The record company paid for all of the recording, PR, photos, and so on, but I still had to pay for all the artwork and physical CDs, which do not come cheaply. You still have to work on your future plans to keep the ball rolling with such things as social networks.

A few months later, Oh Yeah had Silhouette in for a Scratch My Demo session, where I had the opportunity to show people what I had been up to and working on at the time. I felt that was a very productive thing to do, as it helped me to see where my strengths lay as a musician and what I needed to improve on. Oh Yeah offered a lot of advice that way. It also gave me the opportunity to meet other people in the industry who work in and outside Northern Ireland, especially in publishing. I met a man called Mark Gordon who works at Score Draw Music, which is based at the Oh Yeah Music Centre. A few years ago, Score Draw Music was going out to do a conference in LA, and, after hearing me at Scratch My Demo, they asked whether I would represent all of Northern Ireland in my music playing at that conference. To do that, I needed funding, and the Arts Council provided me with that. I was able to go to LA and show people the talent that comes from Northern Ireland. I was joined by another two artists from another publishing company in Northern Ireland. That was a really fantastic opportunity. I got to meet various people in the publishing industry throughout the world who I otherwise would not have met. It was a fantastic way to push myself out there and create contacts to enhance my career.

A few months after that, the Oh Yeah Music Centre was putting together a new CD to showcase the talent that we have here in Northern Ireland. It was called 'Oh Yeah Contenders'. I was asked whether I would be willing to get involved in that, and, of course, I was very happy to. The song that I chose to record for that was 'Can't Keep Up'. Again, Oh Yeah paid for everything, even a tour and a tour bus, and we got to travel around all around the venues in Northern Ireland that Oh Yeah is connected with. The song 'Can't Keep Up' was then used for the NI Tourist Board campaign. If it were not for the Oh Yeah Music Centre and all the companies who are able to provide the money for those sorts of things to happen, my song would not have been used on the campaign. Even if I had recorded it myself, I would still have needed the support of the creative industry to push me out there and into the hands of those who work in the NI Tourist Board.

There are other music businesses, such as Smalltown America, which has been so kind to offer me some free studio time to do some pre-production for CDs. No Dancing Records and Third Bar management have been really supporting me and pushing my name outside of the UK. Because of

that, I have had the privilege to join Snow Patrol for various performances, including at the MTV awards in Belfast. They asked me to join them as a guest vocalist. Again, I needed all of the support that I have been given in order for them to have heard a CD of my singing. After the MTV awards, Snow Patrol kindly asked me to go on their European tour with them as a guest vocalist. I got to go outside of Northern Ireland and the UK, experience Europe and develop fans there. Hopefully, when I release my next single, everybody all over Europe will love it.

Looking back, it would have been good to have had someone to guide me in financially providing for my career from an earlier stage; for example, in filling out Arts Council forms and general business matters. We touched on it with Glasgowbury. You need to have those specific skills. I do not feel as though I had those skills until a few years ago. It would have been great to have had them earlier. However, I am very happy with the support and encouragement that everybody has provided to me. It is amazing to see how much the businesses that were there at the start have developed over the years and are helping younger musicians to thrive and grow.

Looking to the future, I feel that in order to support my livelihood, creativity, recording and songwriting, etc, it would be ideal to have three things. First, I would love to have a creative space — a place that I could call my office — to go to every day. I would know that I could get up in the morning, go there and just write, and that I would have freedom to do that. There are places throughout Europe where people can go and do writing residencies and such things. I know that there are places in Ireland as well. However, it would be great to have more of those opportunities — creative space where you can go and write.

Secondly, it would also be good to have management. I do not have management yet. I have not needed it so far. However, it would be fantastic to have someone on board who could take over the business side of things. Management could talk to people while I get on with creating and providing the music. It would just be much better to have someone who is good at the business side of it.

Thirdly, it would be good to have funding, whether through investment or grants, to create job opportunities for artists, musicians and people in the arts — even if it is temporary contracts for touring and things like that. That would be great.

That is really all that I have to say.

Mr D'Arcy: Thank you, Shauna. Chair, we thought that it was very important for you to get the creative artist's perspective. As Shauna spoke, you will have heard about the fledgling music businesses that we have here. They have grown very rapidly over the past five years. A really good example of that is Smalltown America. I will hand over to Charlene, who will give us a sense of where they are.

Ms Charlene Hegarty (Smalltown America Records): Good morning. My name is Charlene Hegarty. I am 25 years old. I am currently label manager at Smalltown America Records. I deal primarily in the creative development of the label and the people whom we represent at grassroots level. I have prepared some notes for my presentation today. I will cover who we are, what we do and, basically, our suggestions in light of your inquiry.

Smalltown America Records is one of the largest independent music businesses that are operational in Northern Ireland. We employ five full-time staff. We operate from dual centres in Londonderry and Belfast. Our business portfolio includes music retail, recording, publishing, artists and business affairs management, and cloud-based e-commerce technology for music. We released our first record in 2001. To date, we have worked with over 200 artists across all popular genres.

We deal in three core areas: intellectual property (IP), international sales development and technology. Essentially, intellectual property is the song or piece of music that you own. IP and the creation, security and monetisation of that are the cornerstones of our business model. From the recording of a band's first audition tape to the release of an established artist's fifth record, we are in charge of and in ownership of every element of that process. In so doing, we ensure that artists are justly rewarded for their creative endeavour and that no income stream, however small, is overlooked.

With regard to international sales, at present 87% of Smalltown America's sales takes place outside of Northern Ireland. That is a mixture of recording, publishing, synchronisation with film and television, and live-performance income. The most successful bands on our label are those with a strong international touring presence.

Smalltown America Records is a digital business first, and a music business second. Although the power of press, radio and television cannot be overlooked, our traction has increasingly come from digital space. In the past financial year, 34% of our income came from our proprietary digital distribution business, independentmusic.com. In the next financial year, we expect this percentage to outgrow that which we current enjoy from big-box retailers, such as HMV, Amazon and iTunes.

With assistance and guidance from Invest Northern Ireland, Smalltown America relocated from London to Northern Ireland in 2007. Its founder, Andrew Ferris, comes from Derry. He spotted a market opportunity and local creative industry optimism, despite the prevailing economic conditions. Initially, Smalltown America's offices were located in the Nerve Centre in Derry. The company has since moved to larger premises, and the Oh Yeah Centre in Belfast has provided a wonderful launch platform for the rebranded business. We are seeking to expand our current office footprint in the Oh Yeah building and to recruit additional full-time staff. Smalltown America endeavours to employ exclusively Northern Irish staff for all its projects; where we cannot, local staff members benefit from assisting others on more complex technical projects.

From our perspective, Northern Ireland is an immature music marketplace. As a result, it is widely accepted that there is a lack of resident musical professionals. Consequently — as Shauna laid out for the Committee — the majority of artists struggle to develop their art and business practices until someone from a business such as ours steps in to take responsibility. As we can acquire only three to six new artists a year, even in our own sphere many get left behind who could generate income and grow the sector exponentially. Although in some ways inevitable, the demise of the Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission (NIMIC) has ultimately been fractious for music industry practitioners, in that there is no longer a local forum for labels, publishers, managers and larger groups, such as the Oh Yeah Centre, to get together, innovate and, most essentially, to share resources. We are currently seeking peer-to-peer advice. We travel to London and are active members in the Association of Independent Music (AIM), a body that protects our interests at a hyper-local level and at a macro level through ongoing initiatives with UK Music.

Looking to the next 10 years, Northern Ireland Screen is a suitable example of the transformative effect that significant financial investment, good governance and intelligent slate funding can have on the creative sector. The film and television industry is justifiably thriving as a direct result of this influence, and we hope that there will be a resultant uplift in demand for our services from broadcasters and production companies that are receiving NI Screen assistance. We feel that that link is very underdeveloped. While we and other local companies nurture and promote the creation of industry-standard musical content, we sometimes exhaust our limited resources in trying to connect with world markets as hyper-independent traders. It is accepted that, in the context of creative development, a level of convergence is required between what music specialist companies deliver and film companies need, and vice versa.

We welcome any increased funding for the public or private music sectors in Northern Ireland, but, based on our experience in the past decade, we feel that it is appropriate to indicate areas that would most benefit from investment. The first is the creation of intellectual property, most specifically in relation to songwriting, not recording. Although it is accepted that musical tourism is an important element, as a private company working in the music sector, we believe that everything evolves from the strength of indigenous intellectual property, and we would like to see a more focused approach to nurturing and protecting that process. People undoubtedly visit a country because of its musical heritage. We enjoy and celebrate that through our tourism programmes, but we believe that a core focus is required to develop and protect the next generation of musical talent, so that the well does not run dry, so to speak.

Secondly, we believe that slate funding works, as demonstrated by individuals and groups with track records and broad-based support from the wider music industry. An example of that is NI Screen's

initiative, the product development fund. We believe that the precedent set forth in that slate-funding scheme can transfer directly to the music sector.

My final point concerns digital rights music management. We believe that greater assistance and the accurate tracking and accounting of artist and publisher royalties will help to strengthen the Northern Irish music economy. Each year, more than £1 million goes unclaimed by artists and performers. The growth of a musical project requires time, money and skill, but it is common for financial shortages to bring all activity to a halt. There is a gap in understanding, and greater educational endeavours can only seek to set that right.

There is a need for international touring assistance, most specifically for those artists that can demonstrate a viable release schedule in international territories. We trade in creative output, and the creators of that output are the best promoters of it. Although that is both accepted as valid and essential in what we do, we face blocks at every stage of the export process, especially when it involves people moving from one place to another in business practice.

That is where I will leave it today. Thanks for your time, and I welcome any questions.

Mr D'Arcy: Thank you, Charlene.

Stuart will finish our presentation by giving an overview of where Oh Yeah has been and where we hope to support people like Charlene and Shauna and their businesses.

Mr Stuart Bailie (Oh Yeah Music Centre): I do not think anybody in this room would disagree with the statement that music is a tremendous resource for Northern Ireland and is something that we deliver really well. That has been going on for a long time. Occasionally in the past, there have been frustrations because the talent has not been able to rise or be delivered or encouraged. Shauna has told you about the very many connections she has made, some of which have been lucky and others structured. That is something that we need to move towards.

I will give a snapshot of some of the great news that we have heard over the past 12 months or so. We became aware that Van Morrison's 'Brown Eyed Girl' had been played one million times on American radio. That is an extraordinary achievement and shows the power of intellectual property and how a great song can be a huge asset. Snow Patrol's record sales have now exceeded six million, and the band Ash from Downpatrick have had 18 top 40 hits in the UK and two number-one albums. Heavyweights like Phil Coulter and Paul Brady have added to that incredible legacy, as has David Holmes, the soundtrack composer from the Ormeau Road who is in Los Angeles working on Hollywood soundtracks. Those people have collectively helped to sell more than 100 million records. We have done incredibly well, sometimes in spite of very difficult circumstances.

The questions we were asking ourselves seven years ago were: how can we make it better and how can we get over some of those obstacles? We were very aware that the Nerve Centre in Derry had been doing very good stuff to encourage musicians and creative industries from Derry. We had started to see some interesting projects coming out, such as Glasgowbury, which is organised by Paddy Glasgow, who continues to do very well. Belfast lacked that, and the Oh Yeah Music Centre was a response to that vacuum.

In 2007, we got the keys to the building, which was an old whiskey warehouse behind St Anne's Cathedral. It has been a lot of work. A lot of that work has been done in a piecemeal fashion and a lot of it has been done incredibly resourcefully. However, with the help of acts like Snow Patrol and Ash and artists like Foy Vance and Duke Special, we have made considerable gains.

We have two rehearsal rooms, which are used during the day by 80 students from Belfast Metropolitan College and are privately used in the evenings and weekends by young bands that want to rehearse. We have a privately run recording studio, which is turning our incredible stuff that features regularly on Radio 1, 6 Music and lots of other exciting outlets. We have approximately seven businesses, including the one run by Charlene, who is a blinding example of the young initiative that we need to take Northern Ireland to another level.

We have lots of people who are coming in for workshops and events. We have a venue space. We have a music exhibition, which has just incorporated a tribute to Gary Moore with lots of original guitars and clothing donated from his estate. That tribute is bringing in a lot of people at the minute, and over the Titanic anniversary weekend we had a lot of international visitors and media coming to see the narrative of Northern Ireland music, which was incredible.

We are trying to bring on business. Northern Ireland is generally not good at producing entrepreneurs and is generally not good at all when it comes to creative industry entrepreneurs. There should be five or six managers fighting to manage Shauna to take her to the next level. Her career is going incredibly well and she building her craft, but she should be on the next level. We hope that will happen soon, and the international profile that she has now should accelerate the process. The line from Snow Patrol when we had the early discussions with them was, "It took us 10 years to be an overnight success." It should never take another band 10 years to become an overnight success; there should be people every step of the way that they trust to help them, mentor them and give them advice that can steer them in the right direction.

We have a good policy for young people. We have an organisation called Volume Control which is, essentially, for 15- to 18-year-olds who do monthly shows for their peer group and for all-ages audiences who would not be served in venues with bars. They do everything from front-of-house, production, sound engineering, lighting and stage management, to finances. They will be able to buy and sell us in a few years. A couple of the graduates from Volume Control are already working in the industry, which is incredibly exciting.

We are also working a lot with the over-50s, and we are finding a lot of people who are getting their guitars out of their attics and are starting to write music again, either for their own fun or for an artistic purpose. We work with disabled people and socially disadvantaged people, often in partnership with organisations such as the Cedar Foundation, the Spectrum centre in Dungannon and lots of community centres around Belfast. That is all very exciting as well.

We have a talent development scheme, assisted by the Arts Council, which is housing and mentoring four acts who are already getting quite a bit of attention. We have piloted a business incubation scheme, which gives desk space, Wi-Fi and a little bit of training and mentoring to young entrepreneurs. We are waiting for the result of a funding application to see whether we can take that further.

All those things are very exciting — cultural tourism, as has been mentioned, and the branding of Northern Ireland and Belfast. There is a much more positive spin emerging through the use of music to brand Belfast as a musical city, and we have been a big part of that through our exhibition and as authors of the Belfast music bus tour. We put a lot of content into the Belfast music application for iPhones, which gives a guided tour of Belfast and introduces our hall of fame of great musical achievers.

We have worked with Belfast City Council, which has been very good. We have worked with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Creative and Cultural Skills, the Musicians Union, the PRS (Performing Right Society) and many other people. It is a very exciting time; more than ever, people are merging their strategies and talking to each other about them rather than staying in their individual silos and competing with each other. There is a much more positive atmosphere at the moment.

We have been very happy to receive funding from the likes of Hope for Youth, Ulster Garden Villages, Unlimited, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation. Last year, when the MTV machine came into town, we were part of the inward visit. We welcomed MTV before it made its decision. We watched, like everyone else, Belfast become an incredibly positive image before a potential audience of 1.2 billion worldwide. It was an incredible moment for the city.

We co-ordinated Belfast Music Week with the help of Belfast City Council and our partners, which was seven days ahead of the MTV Europe Music Awards. We had 177 events in over 45 venues in Belfast. We brought 33,500 people into the city, 70% of whom were there specifically for Belfast Music Week and it is set to return in November. That was all about celebrating local music, not international acts.

The research showed that people were very aware of Belfast Music Week as a separate brand, aside from the MTV circus. We are very confident that that will continue as an annual event.

There is a lot of support in the media for Northern Ireland product. Silhouette has been played extensively all over Radio Ulster, Cool FM and Citybeat. That sort of thing did not happen in the past. We are very happy about that. We are a little bit concerned that funding is affecting organisations or publications such as AU magazine, which is a great forum for local music, but which has had its funding withdrawn.

We have been a model for an organisation in Arras in France, which has come to visit us and put us as a chapter in their appraisal for a music centre in France. We have also been visited by delegates from Bogota, Colombia, who were fascinated by what we are doing and by people from Santiago, Chile, who were very keen to see how we do things. In our turn, we have made a few benchmarking visits and we are fascinated to make the connections as the music centre, the centre of excellence or the creative hub becomes an accepted model in many cities.

We have looked at examples in Toronto, Brighton and London. Recently, with the help of the British Council, we went to Berlin. At South by Southwest this year, as well as watching showcases for local talent, we talked to people from Memphis, Los Angeles, New Orleans and the Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame about how they use their legacy and the great excitement of rock and roll to bring people through their doors.

That is about it. We have a long way to go. We have been going for only five years. We are delighted that so many young people are coming in and out of our building and that so many enterprises are catching the potential to do well. We feel that Northern Ireland is coming into a new era. There are great centres of excellence out there, including the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, whose patron is Paul McCartney. Alumni from the BRIT School in Croydon include Adele, Amy Winehouse, Kate Nash and The Feeling. Alumni from that school have sold 65 million records in 10 years. Although we are scaling up and getting our people ready, there are people who are working on an even bigger scale. The BRIT School is being rolled out in Manchester and has currently been adopted by Oklahoma city. So there are models that we can look to for even more inspiration, but we are very happy and very pleased, and sometimes rather tired, at what we have achieved. It has been a great time. We have some CDs that feature Shauna's music. She mentioned the 'Oh Yeah Contenders' CD, and I will leave that here if that is OK. There is a bit of information there as well.

The Chairperson: We really should have had a live performance.

Ms Tohill: I would have preferred singing to speaking. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation. It was great to hear from people in the business about the challenges that you are facing. You have to be congratulated for the vision that you have and the work that you have put in, and it is tremendous to see the outworkings of that in such a short period of time. We are talking about the possibility of a creative hub, and you have created a hub. It is obviously paying dividends for Northern Ireland. On behalf of the Committee, I congratulate you for that.

One of the issues that you raised in your paper and which Charlene spoke about is the lack of a forum. How could that work, and what would be the benefits of that?

Mr D'Arcy: All of us will probably chip in on that. As Paula said in her presentation, music is pervasive across the whole extent of the creative industries, whether that is working in soundtrack music, record sales, CD sales or downloads. We have been absent from a structured voice for the sector for the past two or three years, and that is a vulnerability, because we now have a music strategy for Northern Ireland. One of the challenges in my day job is how to manage strategy, who is accountable for that and where to get the buy-in from the people who are supposed to be contributing to the strategy.

From an Oh Yeah perspective, we are not in the business of suggesting that a quango should be set up, but we feel that there is merit in the Culture Department and possibly the Department of

Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) through Invest Northern Ireland thinking about getting some sort of advisory forum that could reality-check where strategies are going. If strategies are not going in the right direction, such a forum could give proper advice on how those strategies may change. I will hand over to Charlene to get a practitioner perspective. We feel that there is a vacuum in that there is some distance between various providers and where government want to move forward with the creative sector. Northern Ireland Screen is a really good example, but that is a body with huge infrastructure. In these times of austerity, we do not think that we necessarily need a full-blown body such as that but some mechanism whereby the music community can help the Department and Northern Ireland plc.

Ms Hegarty: I agree with that point entirely. To recall one of the points that I considered earlier, when we seek peer-to-peer advice, we make a call to London. We receive a lot of great support by way of advice and practical walk-through examples through AIM. We can plug into that by a small membership fee annually, which we are happy to pay. It is a very small amount by comparison with the amount of advice and instruction that we get. It is an impartial body that represents like-for-like companies in our field. In a sense, it is open to everyone. Based on the acceptance of the fact that there was a vacuum, NIMIC was set up, and the downfall of that is well noted. It was accepted that, in theory, what NIMIC was trying to achieve was of benefit. For us, it would obviously be great to have that.

I would like to think that everyone in Northern Ireland could work together rather than being insular and competitive with one another. The world is a big market. In very small terms, there is obviously wonderful output in respect of film. As I indicated, a lot our income comes from the synchronisation of our music on film platforms. At the minute, none of that happens locally. I suppose there is a vacuum between who is doing that locally and understanding where we can start to channel our energies. If loads of resources were put in place there, they would be well used. As I say, we would really benefit from impartial input. Obviously, we as a company have our own business objectives, and we welcome any input.

The Chairperson: Is there any way in which you could strengthen your links with Northern Ireland Screen to make some of what you are talking about happen?

Ms Hegarty: Absolutely. We have gone round the houses, so to speak, and have introduced the notion of what we do. However, that really requires a lot more focused attention. We are a small team of five, and it is fair to say that our focus is on representing the artists we work with and their creative output. So I think that there are accepted limitations to what we as a very individual entity can do to monitor that, because it is a big field. There is constant potential for development there. We would certainly benefit from an impartial advisory committee of some sort that could help to correlate that more cohesively for us. That is really where it is at for us. We make best endeavours, but we accept our limitations to an extent because of our resource.

The Chairperson: You raised the issue of intellectual property. Does the increasingly digital nature of your industry mean that it is becoming more difficult to protect that?

Ms Hegarty: I find that there is a gap. I think that there is a great opportunity to maximise income in the digital age, but I think that a lot of that is not so much wasted as missed. Shauna gave the example of trying to fund some of her projects, and I am sure that she would admit to the fact that sometimes it is hard to understand the scary world of digital music and to make money from it. As a company, we seek to educate everyone we work with, especially the artists, to make sure that everything they do that can make money does so and that that money goes back to them. As I said earlier, £1 million goes unrecouped every year from digital outlets for music, and so on. That is because artists do not track their incomes as there is a gap in their understanding.

As a company, we make sure that that is well sown up for everyone we work with at the entry point, because it helps us if they can remain financially fluid. The worth of intellectual property has exploded in the digital age. Admittedly, the unit rate and per-bit rate have somewhat decreased but the volume has increased hugely. As a company, that is the area in which we work. We trade digitally online through our own proprietary business called Independent Music, and we have managed to increase our sales through that.

The Chairperson: Can you think of any measures that the Assembly could take to increase IP protection by enhancing legislation? Have you any suggestions?

Ms Hegarty: I think that there is a lack of understanding; that is commonly accepted. A number of acts on our label have come through a music college of some description, but some of them have absolutely no idea what PRS or Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) are. We were absolutely astonished to learn that an artist, not on our label, who has been touring consistently for 10 years is not a registered member of PPL. Every time you play live, you get money through PPL. He has played for 10 years, but he has never been signed up for that. I cannot understand where that lack of understanding comes from. As a practitioner in the business, I have found that what I would assume to be very common knowledge is not. We can work with only three to six acts a year. That is accepted in respect of how many people we employ at present and how we can fully follow through on our promises. We can work with only that number. I can be sure that those three to six acts are completely aware of that. However, I am concerned that there is that lack of understanding. It may be in educational and musical colleges, and so on.

I came through a music college. I studied at Bangor tech, and I had a wonderful time there for a year. My focus going into it was never to be a performer like Shauna, because I cannot sing. I really wanted to focus on the business element of that. While I got my first entry-level experience in that field, I quickly grew out of that in the sense that, over the course of the year, although it was good, I certainly did not feel as though I wanted to progress to second- and third-year qualifications. I felt as though I could learn more by myself. That is my personal example.

My experience of some performers, in particular, who come out of music colleges is that there is great focus on the performance element. As we discussed, we consider all ideas of intellectual property creation and development to be very important. However, an understanding of how valuable that is, sometimes, falls down.

Mr Ó hOisín: Both presentations this morning have been very inspirational with regard to the inquiry. I should say to Shauna that my musical taste covers every genre, from Eileen Donaghy through to moshing and playing great air guitar at places like Bryson's. *[Laughter.]* Earlier, Paula brought up a serious point that has been relayed to us in workshops that we have gone through, and it was about the dichotomy between the performer or skilled worker and the management. If anything comes out of this inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries, it has to be that recommendation. We expect indigenous development here. We see the value of that, which Stuart outlined. We expect organic growth. However, organic growth is a small and steady thing, rather than an overnight success, as you mentioned. We expect all that without adequate and proper investment.

A fortnight ago, we had a presentation from Ross and John from the Stendhal Festival, which has just started. It has huge potential. I know the work of Paddy Glasgow very well and what he has delivered in the middle of nowhere. That is the truth, it is beside where I am from, so I know exactly where it is. What he has done over 10 or 12 years is absolutely amazing. That is outside the remit of what goes on in Belfast and, again, all of the indigenous things. Therefore, if anything comes out of the inquiry, Chair — to touch on some of the points that you made — it must be how we tie together the dichotomy that exists.

I do not have a question; I just wanted to say that. That is the most important thing. The two presentations today were most important in our examination of that. Thanks again, everybody.

Mr McGimpsey: I agree entirely. They were very strong presentations. I found it absolutely fascinating to look at your social enterprise and not-for-profit venture edging into what is a very tough commercial business, and how that works.

As a Government, we want to support your activities as best we can because that is good for all of us, society, and so on. My view with regard to the creative industries is that, if you want to do it well, look at who is doing it well and copy them. Therefore, go across and look at Scotland, in particular. We are looking at the creative industries, and we should have a good look at that place because it matches here so closely.

With regard to your activity and what you are about, you mentioned the Liverpool Institute and the BRIT School. Can you talk to us a wee bit about that? Are they appropriate models to give you support in Northern Ireland? What we do not want is to see Charlene's company going to London after a while. We want to keep her here, see her company grow and see other companies setting up.

The issue is the margin between the not-for-profit, voluntary, social-enterprise activity and the hard-nosed commercial business. As you said, there is a lack of entrepreneurial skills in that area. That is key. I have had a background in business all of my life. That is one of the key factors. How does it work in England? You talked about the BRIT School expanding to Manchester and Paul McCartney's institute.

Mr Bailie: Well, something like £15 million was put into the BRIT School. Also, a significant building was built at the site of Paul McCartney's old school. It has a curriculum-based programme, which means that students can learn about stage lighting, performance and writing. It is a finishing school for artists or people associated with the production of music. The BRIT School also seems to lean towards the artist and the performing arts. It has very close connections to the industry, and anyone who watches the BRIT Awards will realise that the school has charity status. The BRIT Awards has given £10 million to the BRIT School over 10 years and the education authorities pay for the rest. It is also a curriculum-based project, even though these very colourful individuals come out of it.

There are other places that deal with business and entrepreneurship, such as Generator, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which teaches more about the nuts and bolts of the business and how to make it work. These are all things that we can learn from. Those people might have a fighting fund of £10 million or £20 million, but we have a 20-year lease on a building and we have probably spent £200,000 on it in five years, which was done piecemeal. We have appalling problems with soundproofing and security and all the niggly things. If someone were to write us a cheque tomorrow, we would ask for £30 million to build a fantastic finishing school for music and music industry practice. I know that Dublin is importing a model from Brighton.

People are seeing the value in it, and, given that you said that alumni have sold 65 million records, that is a good business case. We have a lot of talent, and a lot of our talent goes astray or takes a long time to come to fruition. If anyone has a blank cheque, we can make it happen. You were talking earlier about getting a really big visionary approach. It is possible; we are doing the very best that we can at the moment.

Mr D'Arcy: That is the important point that Stuart is making, Mr McGimpsey. It is one thing to have a cheque book, but the key thing is to have a vision and a strategy that is measurable. In the previous presentation, there was talk about the Health Department, the Department for Employment and Learning, and so forth. There is traction to be driven through there in getting the Departments to help with, for example, adding in business modules to music technology courses. The colleges will always operate to a set curriculum that is provided by the awarding bodies, but there is nothing to stop the Department encouraging greater employability or entrepreneurial skills. There could be free-standing modules on how to make money in the music business. There is a great degree of discussion that needs to happen. We should be learning from the BRIT School and elsewhere. My understanding of what is happening in Dublin is that it is a private college working with an institute of technology, so it is almost a private-public partnership model. There are exciting things to happen there.

The key thing is that we have a tremendous resource, and we are really pleased that the Committee is taking the creative sector very seriously. Being the anorak that I am, I have been very impressed by the contributions that you had so far during this investigation. There is a huge amount of information to build on. If there is anything that Oh Yeah, Smalltown America or the performing community can do to help with additional evidence or case studies, we will be more than happy to supply them.

Mrs Hale: Thank you; it has been an absolute joy to be at the Committee today to see your enthusiasm. I want to pick up on the point that you just made about business models in music or arts courses. I spoke my daughter's friends who are studying music; one is in Dundee and the other is in Westminster. There are no business modules in any of their third-level courses. You said that there

were difficulties in accessing application forms for funds. Do you believe that, if mentors were available to help access those funds and some of that unclaimed £1 million, would that help up and coming artists?

Ms Tohill: I think it would. It is important for young musicians, especially people who are just studying music. It is good for them to have someone to go to who can advise them to do things in the right way and approach things from a business perspective. As a creative person, it is harder to come from that kind of business mindset. It is not a different mindset; it is just a different way of approaching things.

Mrs Hale: If a business module were attached to a creative course at a university or in a tech, would that put you off?

Ms Tohill: Not for me; I quite like both sides. However, I know of people who went through Bangor tech and had the opportunity to look into the business side as well as the music side. A lot of the musicians tended not to have much to do with the business side because they wanted to focus on the creative side. Some people may not be as interested but it is an important part for musicians to learn. If you want to be able to make a career out of it, you need to have a business perspective or at least someone to go to.

Mrs Hale: I would be concerned that we would lose a lot of artists to unscrupulous managers if they were not able to take ownership.

Mr D'Arcy: Some nice work was done by Craft Northern Ireland, which had an apprenticeship scheme called the Making It programme, through which it found opportunities with producers for people at colleges and universities to come in and learn their craft but also from someone who was making a livelihood out of, for example, pottery design. It was the old-fashioned apprenticeship model, and there is maybe scope for making it relevant to the industry that you are in instead of having a formal six-week course on balancing books and trial balances. In other words, when a band comes to Charlene in two years' time, they would understand that they should have been members of the Performing Right Society and have all those things built in before they start. You are absolutely right: it is just lost revenue.

The Chairperson: It may be useful if you could forward us examples that you used as case studies, such as Liverpool, London and Dublin, just to inform us a little bit more. If you are open to a visit from the Committee, that would be quite useful.

Mr D'Arcy: We would be absolutely delighted to host a visit at any time. You would be most welcome.

The Chairperson: That would be great. Thank you very much for your presentation.