



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Briefing from Ulster Orchestra

21 October 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Briefing from Ulster Orchestra

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#### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Nelson McCausland (Chairperson)  
Mr Gordon Dunne (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Dominic Bradley  
Mr Leslie Cree  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Mrs Karen McKeivitt  
Mr Oliver McMullan  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

#### **Witnesses:**

Professor Sir George Bain	Ulster Orchestra
Mr Trevor Green	Ulster Orchestra
Ms Veronica Morris	Ulster Orchestra
Ms Auveen Sands	Ulster Orchestra

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** I welcome Professor Sir George Bain, who is the executive chairman of the Ulster Orchestra; Trevor Green, special executive; Auveen Sands, the head of finance and operations; and Veronica Morris, the head of executive relations. Thank you indeed for coming in this morning; we are appreciative of the opportunity to hear from you about the current situation and to assure you of our continued interest and concern about it. We look forward to hearing your presentation.

**Professor Sir George Bain (Ulster Orchestra):** Thank you very much, Chairman, and thank you very much for inviting us. I understand that you had a late evening last night, so it is particularly good that you are here to hear what we have to say this morning. I tried to put it on one page, and I gather that the page was circulated in advance with your other papers, so I will not labour it. There are really three headings: "What's the problem? What's the solution? Why we would like your support for the solution". The problem is a very simple one and one that you must be hearing about from numerous quarters besides the Ulster Orchestra. It is, namely, that we are in grave financial difficulties. The reason that we are in grave financial difficulties is again quite simple. Like most arts organisations, our two main income streams are from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and, secondly, the BBC pays us — that is partly BBC Northern Ireland and partly Radio 3 — for the music that we supply to it. Over the last four years the funding from both those sources has declined by 28%, which is roughly £1 million in real terms. For an organisation that was underfunded and under-resourced — neither the players nor the staff have had a pay rise since 2008, and the orchestra has not been able to tour for 10 years, long before the cuts came — it simply means that we are not viable.

I will make a final point before I come to what could be the solution. We usually hold our AGM in September, and, like most organisations, we present our annual accounts at the AGM. If we had done that this September, we would have had the auditors informing us that, as directors, we would have to qualify the accounts. In other words, you are supposed to be able to stand on your tiptoes, look ahead 12 months and say, "Yes, the directors believe that we can trade solvently for the next 12 months". We would not have been able to do that, hence we have postponed the AGM until 15 December, and we hope to perhaps work out a solution for salvation before then.

What is the solution? We think that part of it stems from Belfast City Council. The Ulster Hall, in particular, and, to a lesser extent, the Waterfront Hall is where we perform most of our concert activity. When the Ulster Hall was refurbished at a cost of over £8 million in 2006-07, the Arts Council and DCAL put in about one third of the funding — about £2.8 million of the total. They did so on the grounds that the Ulster Hall should be the Ulster Orchestra's permanent home, that the Ulster Orchestra should be, in effect, the anchor tenant and that other people wishing to use the hall would be fitted around the orchestra's needs. That seems to have got lost a bit. In fact, the then Minister of Culture actually said that the rent should be free. That did not get into the agreement, and I think that, over time, it has been largely forgotten, with the result that Belfast City Council gives us £150,000 a year in round figures. In round figures, we give it back £160,000 for using the hall, which, I think everyone is agreed, is a bit of a bureaucratic nonsense. It is also a financial nonsense, because we actually have to pay VAT on the transaction. So, the first part is that we should have a rent holiday. The proposals were considered at the strategic policy and resources committee of Belfast City Council on Friday last week, and I gather that that one was generally well received. It is now going forward to council, and it will then go forward to another committee further down the road. So far, however, I think that this proposal is getting a fair wind.

The second part is that we have asked Belfast City Council for, in effect, a bridging loan of £500,000. We have said a letter of comfort: it could be that, but basically it boils down to £500,000, which is what we need to sign off the accounts. It would clear the deficit at the end of our financial year in March 2015. This is a more difficult one. The council is saying, not unreasonably, I think, "Listen, this is the Ulster Orchestra. It serves the whole Province, so why should it be only the city council that bails it out?". I am not often stuck for an answer, but I am stuck for an answer on that one. Yes indeed, why should it be only Belfast City Council? Hence, I think that we need other support if the council is going to step up to the plate on this. The most obvious source of that, in our view, would be DCAL, which might share that burden.

The third part of the solution rests with us, and that is why we have asked Trevor to join us to help us out. Basically, the Ulster Orchestra's operating model was viable as long as the public purse was prepared to fund roughly £1.5 million more per year. Those days have gone, if not for ever then certainly for the foreseeable future. Hence, part of the solution of our salvation rests in our own hands. We have to come up with a different operating model. Trevor Green, who is a hugely experienced orchestral manager, having managed orchestras in Scotland, in England for the BBC and in Australia, has actually introduced new models for other orchestras, and he is helping us to do that.

Fourth and penultimately is DCAL again. Hopefully, towards the end of the financial year, when there may well be an underspend, as there often is, we will look for some support for redundancy if that is necessary and, even if it is not, for an early retirement scheme. We can come back to that.

Finally, whatever we come up with and even if, with Trevor's help, we are able to design a new operating model, we have to ask the Arts Council to make sure that there is enough money to finance it. So, the solution has many parts and many actors. I suppose the part that is most relevant to you this morning is the bit that concerns what DCAL or the Executive through DCAL might do.

Finally — I will be brief — why support us? I will not even mention the cultural benefits; I think that they are well known. The social benefits are not so well known, and perhaps — well, never mind the "perhaps" — that is at least partly our fault. The Ulster Orchestra is a bit like the proverbial iceberg: the bit that people see is the concerts, when the conductor is in his tails on a Friday night in the Ulster Hall or the Waterfront Hall conducting. However, there is a huge amount below the waterline that involves educational work — some 25,000 young people each year are beneficiaries of musical education from the players of the orchestra — or, indeed, as some of you will be aware because the activities occur in your constituencies, we have been using the orchestra as an instrument to try to mitigate multiple social deprivation in various parts of Belfast. On the economic issue, perhaps because I was trained as an economist, I often think that money talks loudest. Perhaps it is not the most important thing, but at the moment it is. The orchestra has a multiplier, which is a concept that you are well familiar with, of £2.62 for every pound of Arts Council funding that it receives. That produces a net cash flow of

about £3 million a year: in other words, if you deduct the Arts Council grant, it is about £3 million. If you put that forward at a reasonable discount rate, you end up with about £50 million over 25 years. The orchestra is a significant economic contributor to Belfast and, indeed, more generally to Northern Ireland.

The final point, which is the last bullet, is an understatement. Although all the arts organisations in Northern Ireland are extremely important — I appeared before many of you when we were raising money for the Lyric Theatre — the orchestra is different in the sense that it gives Belfast and Northern Ireland international reach. We are broadcasting on Radio 3 all around the world. I think that that increases Northern Ireland's international reach and world standing. Indeed, as you are all only too well aware, we are making great steps here to build up the cultural tourism product and to grow industries such as movie making and TV production etc. We are involved in that and are trying to become more involved so that we would contribute even more on the economic front. I will leave it there.

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** Thank you indeed, Sir George. We appreciate the clarity with which you have set that out and the short brief, which also clearly sets out the position. Could I clarify one point that you made? The document refers to emergency funding, and you used the term "bridging loan".

**Professor Sir George Bain:** I wish I had had the wit to think of the term "bridging funding", which is what I should have said.

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** I did wonder; I wanted to clarify that.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We are not going to pay it back. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** I just wanted to get clarification, that is all.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** It is to give us —

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** Breathing space.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** The first question is from William Humphrey, but, before he starts, I will say to members that they should keep strictly to questions, and, at the end, when the witnesses have left, we can discuss what actions we want to take rather than interspersing proposals for action in the conversation.

**Mr Humphrey:** Good morning. Thanks for your presentation. Our party is hugely sympathetic to your plight. I am aware that you have been working with local schools in north Belfast; indeed, the orchestra has been practising in Spectrum, and I welcome that outreach. Your document talks about the reduction from the Arts Council and payments from BBC Northern Ireland and Radio 3. What, in real terms, are the cuts from the Arts Council that you are having to endure?

**Ms Auveen Sands (Ulster Orchestra):** Since March 2013, we have had a £400,000 drop in income, plus another £75,000 in-year funding cut. That is actual. So, you are talking about nearly £600,000 or £700,000 in real terms. That is the additional income that we have to find. That was a very short space of time in which to lose that amount of income. It is a significant amount of income to find and is practically impossible. That is not including the BBC reductions; it is the —

**Mr Humphrey:** I will come to those in a minute.

Those reductions are huge, and it is very difficult to replace that funding in such a short time. Have you asked the Minister why? We face huge cuts and budgetary problems, but, to be honest, they do not stretch back to 2011.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Perhaps I could answer that and make it clear that we are not complaining about the Arts Council or the BBC. Obviously, Arts Council funding, relative to other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, these islands, is not huge to begin with, but it actually treats us

quite generously. Before the cuts, we were getting, in round figures, 20% of the total Arts Council budget, which is roughly £2 million out of £10 million, and we were getting roughly 80% of the music budget. The problem, I think, is not about directing criticism at the Arts Council or, indeed, at the BBC, which, as you well know, Mr Humphrey, is also suffering cuts. Everybody is suffering cuts. They just cascade down. The Government get cuts, Departments get cuts, quangos, like the Arts Council, get cuts, and so on. It just comes down. I think that the Arts Council actually treats us generously. In fact, I think that some other arts organisations would argue that it treats us too generously, but they would, wouldn't they?

**Mr Humphrey:** To be fair, in my question, there was no implied or overt criticism of the Arts Council. I was simply asking whether you had asked why it had reduced your funding to the level that it has.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** No, we have not.

**Mr Humphrey:** Have you sought a meeting with the Minister?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We saw the Minister last Thursday. I think that we started from the point of departure that the grant was cut, not why it was cut.

**Mr Humphrey:** Was there any reason or explanation from the Minister for why it had been cut?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** No, but, as I say, we did not ask her to give an explanation. She was rather helpful. She said, like you — I am very pleased that you did — that she strongly supported the orchestra. She was aware of the work that had occurred in Poleglass, which is the same work that you have referred to in north Belfast. She was well aware of that. When we put the proposal that Belfast City Council might be prepared to provide some bridging funding — I am glad that the Chairman corrected me — she said that she might be prepared to ask her colleagues on the Executive to share that burden if we could come back by, say, mid-October with an alternative operating model that would actually make sure that we would not build up another deficit starting on 1 April 2015.

**Mr Humphrey:** It is not for me to tell you how to do your job, but I suggest that a meeting with the Minister and putting those questions to her would be important. I also think that it would strengthen your case in any future meetings with and requests that you may well have of Belfast City Council. I also think that you should put those questions to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

In relation to the BBC, you were obviously here when Lord Hall was here a couple of weeks ago.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** I was.

**Mr Humphrey:** Have you spoken to Lord Hall, the national head of the BBC, and the controller of BBC Northern Ireland about your plight?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We have indeed, Mr Humphrey. We have spoken to both Lord Hall and a woman called Helen Boaden, who has just taken over as director of radio for all of BBC, which includes radio, the Proms and all the orchestras. Of course, we are in very close touch with Peter Johnston, who, as you well know, is the controller of BBC Northern Ireland. They are all very sympathetic and, indeed, have been helpful. I will expand a bit, but let me start with the basic proposition. Our bargaining power is not great. The BBC has five professional orchestras plus a professional choir. Radio 3 is oversupplied with classical music. The only reason — I think that it is the only reason — that the BBC feels obliged to buy music from the Ulster Orchestra is that its charter lays down an obligation that it will represent and help all the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. I think that, if they were making a simple-minded business decision, they would simply say, "Our orchestras already supply enough classical music". It is not the greatest position to be in as a negotiator.

That having been said, they are aware of their duties to represent and develop activities in all four parts of the UK. Helen Boaden, who is, as I say, in charge of Radio 3, said that hence there would not be a cut this year in the Radio 3 component. Auveen can give you the figures. There has been a steady cut over the past three or four years. She is holding it constant for next year — 2015-16 — but she says that there will be an £82,000 cut in 2016-17. Peter Johnston, on behalf of BBC Northern Ireland, has held the BBC Northern Ireland bit constant over the last three or four years. He is also

holding it constant for this year. I was talking to him yesterday, and he said that, unless something very dramatic happens, it will be held constant for next year. So, as far as the BBC is concerned, it is a Radio 3 problem. The only person who can solve that is Lord Hall, and we have been making representations. The Arts Council has been extremely helpful on this. Bob Collins, who, as you know, is the chair of the Arts Council, was previously the chief executive of RTÉ and in that role got to know Lord Hall very well when they were both working in the broadcasting industry. We are making representations to him that the £82,000 should not occur in 2016-17.

**Mr Humphrey:** Have you made overtures to the private sector?

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** Sorry, William. I will cut in there to give others a chance.

**Mr Dunne:** Thank you very much for coming in this morning. I think that we all fully recognise the excellent job that you do and the valuable contribution that you make to cultural life in Northern Ireland. I have a couple of points, and a number of the issues have already been addressed. What is the Ulster Orchestra doing to broaden its appeal to everyone throughout Northern Ireland and beyond? Secondly, I think that the point that my colleague was about to touch on was on private sponsorship. I understand that JTI Gallaher made a significant contribution to that, and we all know the sad news in relation to its business. Does it have a commitment, perhaps a legacy commitment, to the Ulster Orchestra? What have you done to find alternative sponsors?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Let me make a couple of points, and I will ask Veronica to pick it up. First, JTI has behaved extremely reasonably on this. It will honour its obligations through until 2017. There is no question of that not happening.

**Mr Dunne:** Good.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** In any case, a lot of the JTI money is money in and money out in the sense that it is extremely useful to us in, among other things, enabling our programme called Move to the Music, which brings in elderly people, particularly from rural areas, to hear concerts and so on. The money that JTI gives us, which is roughly a couple of hundred thousand pounds a year, we spend on the objectives on which it wants us to spend. JTI is honouring its obligation.

More generally on sponsorship, leading back to the question that Mr Humphrey asked, Northern Ireland, as we all know, does not have a large private sector. In the private sector, it has very few large companies. As we know, we are largely characterised by small and medium-sized enterprises, and, speaking as a fundraiser for Queen's, the Lyric and a variety of causes over the 16 or 17 years that I have been here, I know that that is not the best ground to have the best prospects for funding. That having been said, the non-London orchestras — basically, the provincial orchestras in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham etc and the Scottish ones — in general raise about 4% of their income from sponsorship and philanthropy. The Ulster Orchestra raises 4%, so there is not a lot of scope there.

You also asked what we are doing to widen our appeal. Veronica, perhaps you can say a word about that.

**Ms Veronica Morris (Ulster Orchestra):** Good morning, Mr Dunne. As George has touched on, there are certain amounts of money available from the corporate sector here. They tend to be money in and money out because the delivery of the projects that companies want us to deliver for them means that there is no profit in it, as such, for the orchestra. They are very important for us in the objective of reaching out and expanding our reach into Northern Ireland. That is why the learning and participation work is so important to us. We want to focus on that a lot more than we have done. We have been doing work in that area over the last three decades. In recent years, we have been reaching out into a lot more socially and economically deprived communities in Northern Ireland. We want to do more of that.

We have had some very good discussions with private funders on extending what we do in that area. There is money for that type of work through private philanthropy, maybe not even within these shores; maybe going further afield. We want to come up with a plan to extend that work. It has the potential to be very high-impact. The work that we have seen in the Poleglass area and north Belfast impacts on the individual, the family and the communities. We can see the impact it has when we work with the community groups. We know that that is where our efforts have to be and should be as a publicly funded organisation. That will definitely be a broader part of what we do in the future.

Mr Humphrey mentioned the work being done in the Shankill and Poleglass. We had a three-month period where we tutored P5 students. At the end of June, we had a concert with them. Their parents and grandparents were there. The children played along. We were really amazed by the musicality of the children in those areas. A grandmother who came up at the end was in tears. We were a bit taken aback; we did not know quite what to say. Her autistic grandchild was one of the children who had a viola. She said that it was the first time that she had seen him being able to focus, stay still and take direction. She said, "He can't do sport because he can't cope with the big groups. He can't do art because it's too messy and it's not focused enough for him". When he got an instrument, it made a huge difference to him. They were getting great feedback from his teachers in terms of what he was able to do in the classroom as well. When we see that, we know that we want to do more of it. That is where our focus is in terms of getting funding. It may come from corporate sources or philanthropic sources, or it may be a combination of some government funding to leverage through those sources.

**Mr Dunne:** Thanks very much. There is no doubt that you have an excellent product. It is important that you continue to market it as best you can.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** Thanks very much for your presentation. The SDLP is certainly very supportive of the Ulster Orchestra. My questions are not to be taken as negative; I would just like a response. This has been highlighted in local media over the last number of weeks. I have been talking to a few people who say that the Ulster Orchestra is ours and is local, but yet it is seen by local people as Belfast-based. I know that you talked this morning about meeting Belfast City Council and that it is going to bring proposals forward. One of the proposals that I read in the media was for a name change for the Ulster Orchestra. Was that put to the council in order to get a funding package in place? You talked about a bridging funding. If so, was there a suggestion made? It is very important.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** I think that it was more the other way round. It stems from where I started this morning: many of the councillors are saying, "Look, this is the Ulster Orchestra, and yet you're looking to Belfast City Council uniquely to solve the problem". That is not an unreasonable response. There is certainly no proposal on the table. I would not go so far, Mrs McKeivitt, as saying that they are making that a condition. It is the sort of chit-chat that arises. I have seen quite a few councillors in the last few weeks. It is sort of something that comes up in conversation.

In terms of what we do for Northern Ireland as distinct from Belfast — I will ask Trevor to come in on this in a second — you are quite right: it is Belfast-centric by nature. For a start, there are only three concert halls in Northern Ireland that can take the full orchestra: the Waterfront, the Ulster Hall and, in Derry/Londonderry, the Millennium Forum. There are other places where you can take smaller ensembles and so on but not put 63 players on the platform. Historically, Derry/Londonderry gave us a small amount of money, and Coleraine gave us a small amount of money, which would have amounted to perhaps £5,000 a year. During the year, we would perform in half a dozen places outside Belfast, but it is not great. One of the things in the new model would be to have a variety of ensembles that could be created out of the orchestra. Perhaps Trevor will come in on that.

**Mr Trevor Green (Ulster Orchestra):** My job here is to see if we can structure a sustainable model so that we are not round this table every four or five years asking for more cash. That is really important.

A symphony orchestra in any part of the world would have a minimum size of between 60 and 65 to play symphonic music that reflects 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century music. If it gets much smaller than that, you destroy the ability to perform the repertoire, so it becomes a chamber orchestra rather than a symphony orchestra. My role is to look at a lot of things, including what kind of model would be relevant in the 21st century here in Northern Ireland. My thoughts are, basically speaking, that I have always dreamed of a situation where we call it a community of players — a community of musicians. You have an orchestra of, say, 65 players, but, in that group of 65 players, you have a symphony orchestra that can play symphonic music, you have a pops orchestra and you have an education ensemble, so you have a number of ensembles that can play education work. Therefore, on any one day, you could have 10 or 15 ensembles in schools in the community. The most important thing about a symphony orchestra in the 21st century is that it is relevant to the community that it serves. If that gets distant or distracted, we will have a situation like the one we have now. That has possibly happened over the last 10 to 15 years: it has distanced itself, through no fault of its own; it is just the way that orchestras have been run for centuries.

In the sense of redesigning a new model, it is important that, apart from the symphonic music, which has a certain period of time, there is an education, outreach and community orchestra ensemble, which is a number of ensembles from two musicians to 60 musicians. There is also an ensemble that

is very commercially minded that looks seriously at what I call contemporary music, meaning really popular music — music from the shows, backing groups that work with contemporary popular artists — so that it attracts the different segments of the community.

As you probably realise, the community is very segmented in its interest in classical music or in music, and we have to reflect that, not just symphonically but generally in musical terms. The orchestra is in the entertainment business, and, if it ever loses sight of being an entertainment body, it loses its position in the community. It is pure entertainment. It is not educational, although that is part of it, and it is not necessarily information; it is pure entertainment. Whether you are entertaining a five-year-old or a 95-year-old, it is all about entertainment. That is the relevance of the future and the model that we are trying to look at, where we can devise this group of musicians that will serve the community in every sense required. Then everybody in the community can identify with it, not just the elite group; I hate the word "elite": people love elite sportsmen, but, when it comes to being elite musicians, there is some kind of criticism attached. That elite community needs to break down so that we are relevant and we make contact with the population and the community that we serve, and that is throughout Northern Ireland.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** I asked about the name change because the contribution from local government seems to have come from Belfast City Council this past while. If you were to ask other local governments for a contribution, that is probably what they would say. With RPA and stuff coming in —

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We went to the new Derry/Londonderry/Strabane super-council and spoke to the chief executive. We have not gone to the others yet, mainly because we did not think that they were the most likely source of support, at least in the short term. One of the reasons why we do not go all over the place with the orchestra is partly that you cannot get 63 people in, but there is no reason why you have to take 63 people. If you take Trevor's point, you could have much smaller ensembles of anything from two to 63, but it could be 15, 20 or whatever. We could do a lot more of that. Quite often, the collective agreement that we have with the Musicians' Union constrains us. I am not using that as an excuse; it is management's job to change that. I think that there is more scope, but, frankly, from the talks that we have had with the Derry/Londonderry council, I do not think that it will have a great deal of money. However, last year, during the City of Culture, as you will know, the orchestra was up there four, five or six times, off the top of my head. It is for the Derry/Londonderry people to say so, but I think that we played a very significant role in advancing their cause and executing the nature of the year of culture. We can do that.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** One of the other points that I wanted to raise was that, in the Programme for Government, the growing of the creative industries was very important. It still is. Part of the work that has been done to promote this region has probably been, if you like, the birth of the film industry here. How important do you think it would be to this region to link the growing of local creative industries with the Ulster Orchestra in selling that brand as one package?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Extremely important. I will ask Auveen to come in and supply some of the detail. It has been a major objective of ours. Again, as everyone here is better aware than I am, Belfast, Northern Ireland, has been making strenuous attempts to attract the movie and TV industries etc. Two state-of-the-art facilities are being constructed at this moment. We are very much in touch with Rotha Johnston, the chair of Northern Ireland Screen. We want to do this. Where does the music go at the moment? It goes to Prague. Although Prague and Bohemia have had quite a musical reputation over the past 200 or 300 years, nonetheless, we think that we can do the soundtracks just as well as they can be done in Prague. We have actually begun to make a little breakthrough. Auveen, tell them about our movie-making.

**Ms Sands:** In April 2014, we completed two film recordings: one for a children's programme, 'Puffin Rock', which will be released, and the other for an Irish film, 'A Nightingale Falling', which has already been released in the South. It was very much a breakthrough for us to do those recordings. It was something that the players were very enthusiastic about. That was done in collaboration with NI Screen. We were able to take that first leap forward into the film recording industry. Obviously, that gives us an international presence as well. The music for 'A Nightingale Falling' will also go for digital release, which is a step forward again. Certainly, if we can get the right model, move forward, get some of these recording contracts — obviously we have to compete with the likes of Prague, which is not easy — and get ourselves into a good position to do that, it helps the Ulster Orchestra, and it helps NI Screen and Northern Ireland in that we have an international presence and can sell our brand.



**Mr Hilditch:** I suppose that most of the really relevant questions have been asked at this stage, but could you give me an outline of the structures and management of the orchestra? You have mentioned the 63 players. Obviously, there is a management structure and reference to a board. Is it a limited company or a charity? What way does it sit?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Legally, like most of these bodies, it is a company limited by guarantee, a charity. We have charitable status. Gifts to us attract gift aid and so on. There is a board at the top, again like most companies. Over the years, I have been on numerous boards of this sort — not just while I have been in Northern Ireland, but elsewhere — by which I mean charitable boards, as distinct from company boards and so on. Without any doubt, this is the hardest working and, I think, one of the most competent boards. You get invited onto these things and you expect that there will be a meeting every other month, a committee meeting in between, the odd cocktail party to go to and that will be that. Well, unfortunately, for the past three or four years, that is not the way it has been at the Ulster Orchestra; the board has had to do a great deal of the heavy lifting.

Underneath that, there were 23 employees; there are now 18. We have had to cut back, basically in three areas. We have no chief executive at the moment. I am the executive chairman and performing that role rather inadequately, and I do not say that in false modesty. While I am the proud possessor of grade 8 piano, it does not get you very far in running an orchestra. I can handle the money side and whatnot. We have concerts and artistic planning, which is one area of the orchestra. We have, of course, Auveen's area of finance and operations, and we have Veronica's area of external relations. The orchestra really has those three areas. As I say, at the moment, there are 18 full-time equivalents.

**Mr Hilditch:** Will that be reviewed in any way? You keep talking about the players.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Well, we could not cut it any further.

**Mr Hilditch:** You could not.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** No. As I say, we have reduced it from 23 to 18. At the moment, with Trevor's very professional help, we are looking at all sorts of models. You get yourself into this vicious circle sometimes of being penny wise and pound foolish. For example, if there is one thing that I have had a great deal of experience of at Queen's, the Lyric and indeed in London and other places, it is fundraising. We advertised for a professional fundraiser — "development officer" as the jargon goes. We offered a very low salary of £25,000, which is probably half the market rate. Surprise, surprise: we did not get anybody. We do not have a development director. In some of the models that Trevor is designing and Auveen is costing, we are actually putting back a development director or fundraiser at a reasonable market salary, because, if we get over this hump, as one or two of the questions from Mr Humphrey, I think, and others implied, we will have to do a great deal more, and we can.

My experience of fundraising is that it is not rocket science; it is just hard slog. You just have to keep going out asking and exploring etc. I am engaged in a project in Armagh at the moment on Archbishop Robinson's library. We have a professional funding consultant there. It is, in some ways, a less attractive proposition than the Ulster Orchestra, but, on the other hand, it is moving ahead. I think that, actually, we will probably have to hire more people.

We outsourced the box office. We used to have two people. If you came into the Ulster Hall, you would have seen that there used to be four people sitting on the ground floor: two for Belfast City Council and two for the Ulster Orchestra. We did this because we had to save money. We thought that we could save two salaries etc. We have discovered, however, that we had much better service — not surprisingly perhaps — when we had two specially dedicated people. Of the models that we are playing with now — there are various models, of course — one is that we will bring these people back in, because we think that maybe that is the way to proceed. Trevor, you have been around so many orchestras. I think that you are amazed that we are operating at all at the moment.

**Mr Green:** I am. I had not heard the orchestra live for around 10 years. I had been living in Australia. I had heard their recordings, I had heard them on Radio 3, but I had not heard them live. I came out here very naively thinking that perhaps, because of all the situations and difficulties that they have gone through, the standards would not be so great. I have been to around four or five concerts now, and I have to say that this is a superb ensemble. I am amazed that, under the present sword of Damocles or whatever it is that is hovering above their heads, they are playing so well. The concerts

that I have heard recently were really outstanding in very difficult repertoire. What you have here is a really fine ensemble. The tragedy would be to lose it.

You are probably aware of El Sistema, a system that was developed in South America and has grown up into a really major event all around the world involving young people in music. From that, a young conductor emerged who was a horn player with that orchestra. He is now a major conductor. We just appointed him. He is Rafael Payare. He is young — in his late 20s or early 30s. He has just joined the orchestra, and he gave his first concert five weeks ago. He is a really exciting, tremendous talent. I recently went to see his debut in London with the London Symphony Orchestra. It is not an easy job for a young man to turn up in front of an orchestra like the London Symphony Orchestra. He did a marvellous concert. He has really superb musicianship. Actually, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra has just booked him for a concert next year. So, again, you have a really terrific, young, vibrant, artistic director of the orchestra who will take it places. You also have Jac van Steen, who is the associate conductor or principal guest conductor. He is established and working really hard with the orchestra, producing some fantastic results. This is not an orchestra in artistic trouble; it is in financial trouble.

**Mr D Bradley:** I got a text two hours ago from a friend of mine who is a music teacher. He did not know I was coming here, but, as it happens, it is quite relevant to what we are discussing. He said:

*"I am teaching one of my 10-year-old pupils reels and jigs plus the tunes of popular songs from his native India. He recently was accepted into the youth orchestra. Yesterday, I found the notes of his first tune. I am amazed at the progress he has made in two years. It is great to think that he will always have music, probably long after I am dead and gone. It is a great feeling to give someone something that is so precious and to know that it is valued. I can see that music is helping another pupil who was traumatised by bereavement. He is being helped greatly by the tonic of participation in music. To be part of this process is the greatest gift that any teacher can ask for. We don't do it just for money".*

I suppose, although it takes money to run an orchestra, as you said, the impact and benefits of it far outreach the cost of any investment. I was quite surprised by the number of people who contacted me about the Ulster Orchestra and asked me to support their lobby. There were people from brass and reed bands — we have quite a few of those locally — people from concert bands, audience members and so on. Having an orchestra is a sign of a progressive, developed and mature community and that we would be much poorer if we were to lose the orchestra. Like Karen, I support the continuation of the orchestra. The problem now is to get the resources to keep it going.

You referred to the Musicians' Union contract, and it looks as though you want to renegotiate that or look at it again. What does that entail, and how will it help to ensure the future of the orchestra?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** It is not a question of trying to blame it all on the Musicians' Union, but it is a national agreement, and agreements of any kind generally constrain you. That one constrains us quite a bit. Trevor, perhaps you could give two or three examples.

**Mr Green:** There are many restrictive practices within the agreement, which has grown up over many years. I will give you an example. There are times when we do not give performances and the orchestra is not actually required to perform, but the members are on full-time salaries. We cannot use them in educational work on those days. We are paying them, but to bring them in to do education work we would have to pay them extra fees. That is part of the contract that they have with the Musicians' Union. Ditto with the film industry; it is fees, fees, fees. On our ability to earn income, it is money in and money straight out again, back to the players. We need to buy out some of the restrictive practices and rights issues. It has happened in other orchestras and has not quite happened here. In the UK there are some instances where that is changing rapidly as we speak.

**Mr D Bradley:** You referred to the funding for a redundancy and early retirement scheme. Is that a doomsday scenario, or is that part of the new model that you hope to bring in?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** To be frank, we are not quite sure. We are trying to cover every eventuality. Actually, in the doomsday scenario, the special fund would pick it up. In other words, as you well know, there is a fund for organisations that go bankrupt. If we go completely out of business, we do not have to worry about redundancy; somebody else can worry about it. On the other hand, it is possible — only possible — that some of the models that Trevor and Aueven are designing could perhaps include redundancies. We do not know yet, although we are allowing for it.

The other point is more about early retirement. Some of you will recall that, back in 2002, I chaired the investigation of the fire strike, and the firemen, not surprisingly, were keen to impress on the commission how dangerous their work was. We found that it was the twenty-third most dangerous occupation and that, if you really wanted to get yourself killed, as we know in Northern Ireland, you should become a fisherman. That is the most dangerous. What has surprised me with the orchestra is that, although people do not get killed, my goodness do they have work-related injuries. For a start, over half the musicians have hearing problems, and, unlike me, they developed them much earlier in life. In the days before health and safety, a trumpet player like Trevor would be blowing a trumpet into a string player's ear, and, not surprisingly, they developed problems. Secondly, so many of the movements are unnatural — if you are a violinist, your shoulder goes. Tamás, our leader at the moment, who is Hungarian-American, is off for six months because of his shoulder. We are having a farewell for Ashley Mason tomorrow: he was head section leader of the violas and has retired early because the joints in his fingers have all gone. Finally, like anybody who plays a horn or a woodwind instrument, I have found that my face has changed as I have got older; your lips change with it, and eventually your ability to do that job well begins to go. For example, with all due respect to Sir James Galway, who has been extremely helpful in this morning's 'Belfast Telegraph', as you have seen, he would not be playing as well at 75 — he is the same age as I am, or I am the same age as he is — as he was when he was 45. Therefore you really want to have a scheme where you can allow players who are past their prime to retire gracefully. As Trevor said, as we work on the new models, that is something that we would want to be there continuously to allow players who get injured over time or get into their 60s and whatnot to make a graceful exit.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am not sure yet that I fully understand the business model going forward. You are in a mess now, and I just wonder whether it is a bottomless pit that we will be asked to throw money into.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Trevor, maybe you should start on this, and I will pick it up.

**Mr Green:** It is not a bottomless pit, and it cannot be, because we would be around the table every couple of years. At the moment, we are about £1.5 million to £2 million short to run a full symphony orchestra of around 61, 63 or 65. That is due to a lot of the cuts made. If we take the money that we have, reduce the size of the orchestra and reduce the season, we destroy it in a sense. If we were to reduce salaries and reduce the time that it works, we cannot retain the musicians. With a combination of a reality check on the value of a symphony orchestra and what it costs plus more entrepreneurial flair, sponsorship and community involvement with the orchestra — I am sure that there are pockets of income that we can generate from all sorts of sources by having a model that is more flexible to meet the needs and demands of the community —

**Mr B McCrea:** Trevor, if you do not mind, can I just check some figures? How many performances do we have in a year and what level of ticket sales come out of that? Do more performances generate more cash, or are they a drain?

**Ms Sands:** Not necessarily. The concerts around Christmas would be our more sellable concerts and do very well. Typically, our annual ticket sales have been around £400,000, historically. They dropped last year because we made a few changes to the programme to see whether we could attract a different audience. That went down by about £70,000 or £80,000.

**Mr B McCrea:** So the answer is that you could not.

**Mr Green:** We have to reflect in the repertoire — the music that we perform — the demands of the community that we serve; it is market-driven. There is a danger with some orchestras that they just plan programmes and put them on and hope that people will turn up. We have to reflect that. We need to take a step back and plan more attractive programming and perhaps control the size of the orchestra. When you play with a core group of 63, frequently, you add an extra 10 strings or extra players to play the repertoire and cope with the instrumentation of the orchestra. We need to cut back a little bit and stick with our core size, which probably means playing music from the 19th century and a little bit of 20th century. Twentieth-century orchestras are large; they are 90 up to 100. We need to control that figure. That means that we play a lot more popular programming. That has to be reflected in everything that we do, from serving the community, from the diehard regulars who have been subscribers for 40 years to attracting new subscribers, families and having children's concerts. We need a greater variety of repertoire to meet box office demands. I think that we can improve on the box office performance.

**Mr B McCrea:** Part of the issue that I am a little concerned about — it will be a bit contrary here — is that, as you seek to diversify even into educational commitments in areas of social deprivation, the issue that you mentioned before about elitism being bad might be the contrary. There is an issue where we should revel in being elite.

**Mr Green:** I could not agree more.

**Mr B McCrea:** Good. It was interesting to hear you say, Trevor, as somebody from outside, just how good the technical standard was. I have to confess to just being one of those people who likes the music.

**Mr Green:** No problem.

**Mr B McCrea:** Whether it is better than Czechoslovakia or not, I have no idea.

**Mr Green:** It is better than some in London.

**Mr B McCrea:** It strikes me that there is an issue here. You talk about connection with the community; I am not sure that you are even connecting with your core community. I think that I might have mentioned that I would like to go to more concerts. I cannot remember the last time that I was at the orchestra; I think that it was the festival last year. People like me ought to be brought in to support it, so I am interested in how you will tap into this great well of people who are sort of interested but are not going.

**Mr Green:** Can I return the question and ask what would attract you? What music will get you and your family into the concert hall? What is missing? Is it the repertoire? Is it soloists? Is it conductor? Is it excitement? What is missing?

**Mr B McCrea:** First of all, I do not get it about the guy at the front — the conductor. He just waves the stick.

**The Chairperson (Mr McCausland):** I think, Basil, that we should focus a bit more on our questioning. There is a practical issue: the education debate has started, and several members, including me, will have to go to it. I will hand over to Gordon Dunne.

*(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr Dunne] in the Chair)*

**Mr Cree:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. You are very welcome. I wonder, as I sit here listening to you, whether it is not time to bring in another Dutchman. Apologies for the pronunciation, but I wonder whether there is an André Rieu, who is showing just what can be done in the big picture stuff. I do not expect you to get to that stage in the short term, but there is evidence that it works.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** I will not go far into this, but it works in the sense that Rieu comes and plays on one or two nights and attracts a very big audience. However, I have a hunch that, if he played for a full season in Belfast doing what he does, he would not attract a full season of capacity audiences. I am not knocking it, but it is touring; it moves around. It is a very exciting night, but we are talking about putting on 50 concerts a year, and you would not have him. Even Rafael Payare, you are not going to have him. People want variety. What he does, he does very well, but it would not be steady.

**Mr Green:** It is Mr McCrea's point in the sense that you were talking about repertoire. It is very attractive; it is also incredibly expensive. If you saw the costs of the orchestra —

**Mr Cree:** It is a different league, clearly, is it not?

**Mr Green:** It is a different world; they play in sports arenas and things. It is very successful. You are really saying that it is the repertoire. People turn up and they know the tunes, and the way the tunes are presented from the stage is very theatrical. They are all in different costumes, and the girls from the fiddle section stand up and sing. I am not sure that we could go to that with the Ulster Orchestra yet, but we could certainly feature the repertoire that they perform throughout our season.

The present season that we are performing in Belfast, which has been put together in difficult circumstances, would probably be superb if it was in Birmingham or London. I am not being critical about Belfast, but you look at it and say, "We either spend the money on a concert or go and have a meal. Let's go and have a meal tonight because I do not understand and do not know the repertoire". The point that you are making is that the popular repertoire would have an appeal here, and that is an area that we need to look at. I would call it "pops", but if you say "pops", people get panicky thinking that we have gone downmarket and are dumbing down the product.

**Mr Cree:** There is classical as well there though, is there not? Your business is music, but it is all about numbers at the end of the day. You say that the forecast for the current year will totally exhaust your resources. Is that true?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** That is correct.

**Mr Cree:** No other reserves at all.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** No.

**Ms Sands:** At the end of this financial year, we are left with around £500,000 in reserves. We are projecting a deficit of £400,000. That was before the Arts Council in-year funding cut of 4%, so we are close to a £500,000 loss. If that were to occur, it would wipe out our reserves come March 2015.

**Mr Cree:** Have you done any financial profiling over the last two or three years to get you to where you are? Are you contemplating doing that?

**Ms Sands:** What we are contemplating and what we have to do is that, come 1 April, we need to be operating a break-even model. We cannot continue to operate an orchestra that is loss-making. The income that we get from the Arts Council, even without the in-year funding cuts, is not sufficient to run an orchestra. That is why we are looking at these models to try to get us to a stage that, come 1 April, we are break-even and can continue to operate.

**Mr Cree:** Yes, of course. That is the immediate term. I am thinking more of the medium to long range, where you need to profile where you have come from and therefore develop where you hope to go. Has any work at all been done on that yet, particularly on financial profiling?

**Ms Sands:** Could you explain with greater clarity what you mean?

**Mr Cree:** Looking at how all your costs have contributed to the current situation and the make-up of those costs and therefore how variable they may be or how you have to vary them.

**Ms Sands:** That is part of the modelling process. We have a very high fixed cost: it is the payroll; it is around £2.5 million, which is more than half of our costs at this stage. We have taken our other costs down pretty much as low as they can go. If you want to look further into how we can take further costs out, you would, as Trevor said, operate within the strength of the orchestra and have no extra players. Another variable is that you could have no soloists. Those are the two main things that we can take out at this stage. If you start doing that, you will impact your box office, which will impact your income. We are very restricted in where we can go at this stage. That is why we are looking at the model to see whether we can do something to the staff cost to make it more variable, make us more reactive to funding cuts and also make us more proactive in trying to get new income in, because we are restricted in terms of education and film work. It is to try to get a model that gets all those things at the one time.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** William, do you want to come back in?

**Mr Humphrey:** Yes, Chair. First of all, congratulations on your rapid rise to Chairman.

**Mr Cree:** It is only temporary.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank you for your candour today, because you are in a very difficult position. I want to establish something in relation to Belfast City Council. You have heard from most of the main players in Belfast City Council. Unfortunately, we have not heard from Sinn Féin today. Given your

conversations with the chief executive of Belfast City Council on bridging funding, are you confident that you will get that?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** There are, of course, degrees of confidence. However, without in any way committing the chief executive or the councillors we have spoken to — I should say that we have spoken to councillors from all the political parties, including Sinn Féin — my feeling, for what it is worth, is that, if we could get a co-funder for Belfast City Council for the bridging funding of £500,000, it probably would be forthcoming.

As I said a little earlier, Mr Humphrey, I think that the free rent is an easy ask for the reasons that I gave and for very obvious reason: as you know, the Waterfront is a beautiful hall with a very small conference centre, and it will shortly become the same very beautiful hall with a major conference centre. I think that will take some bookings away from the Ulster Hall. The Ulster Hall is dramatically underutilised. I spoke to a councillor yesterday, who pointed out that all the boxing events in Belfast in the last 150 years were held there. Indeed, there is a boxing exhibition on Belfast or Northern Ireland boxing in the Ulster Hall at the moment. Some of the last big fights, not counting Carl Frampton on the Titanic slipway, have been held in the Europa. Why should they be held there? That is another point. The simple point is that, if the orchestra failed, the Ulster Hall would be largely empty.

**Mr Humphrey:** So, council money may be forthcoming if you have a co-funder. I do not need names, but how close are you to getting the co-funder to unlock that?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Unless I am missing a trick — you gave me some advice earlier that we will follow up and I would welcome some advice on this. We have spoken to the SpAds of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, although we have not spoken to the Ministers, as there are very many claims on their time at the moment. If there is money, it will come not directly from the Executive but through DCAL. As far as I can see, the only potential likely co-funder would be DCAL/the Executive, with the Executive putting money through DCAL.

Looking at the longer term — this builds on Mr Cree's question and Trevor's models — quite some time ago in Westminster, I did work on the Post Office with Alan Johnson when he was the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. What I found was that everybody in Whitehall thought that the Post Office was absolutely crucial. In the same way — we have heard it this morning and Mr Bradley and others have read out texts — a very large number of people think that the Ulster Orchestra is crucial. The Secretary of State said to Departments in London that, since the Post Office was so crucial and they did not want him to close down rural post offices, all Departments should make a contribution — you know, social security etc etc. We have a not too dissimilar position here with the orchestra. It was fantastic to hear Dominic Bradley read out that text about the young person, and Veronica gave other examples. At the moment, all funding has to come from DCAL through the Arts Council. However, we have a very big product that we can offer Belfast city. We have a product to offer in tackling multiple social deprivation. We also have a product for musical education, and Paul Sweeney, the permanent secretary in the Department of Education, is organising a meeting on 25 November to bring together education and library boards etc. We could also work with the Prison Service and use music in rehabilitation. There are several places where we could ask for money.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Briefly, William.

**Mr Humphrey:** The point that Mrs McKeivitt made earlier is very important; it is sage advice. It is a regional orchestra. As a Belfast man and a former councillor, I am hugely proud of Belfast. However, it is a regional orchestra and changing the name may cause you difficulties in future.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** You are quite right.

**Mr Humphrey:** When the super-councils come into being — this is where the bridging funding is important — they will have a greater resource, and no doubt you will be knocking on those doors. We are all very proud of the Ulster Orchestra and the work that you do. I wish you well in your work and hope that the orchestra will long represent Northern Ireland at home and away.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** That was a good speech, William.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** I want to make one final point. Much has been discussed today, but the Ulster Orchestra is cross-departmental. Have you considered meeting the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment as well as the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure? I know that you met her last week. You could talk about the tourism aspect of the Ulster Orchestra; it is an international brand that you could sell across the world. Have you considered approaching the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We have, Karen. In fact, it was the first Department that we approached. We did not approach the Minister but the permanent secretary. We have also been in discussions with INI, because, as everyone is aware, there is a cultural tourism product — if I may put it in such vulgar terms — to which not only the Ulster Orchestra but the Lyric, the MAC and other organisations contribute. However, that sector is in a bad way, and, as you know, the Department has just cut the budget for tourism and so on.

One of the things that we are particularly looking at is cruises. As you know, some 98 cruise liners a year come into Belfast. We are exploring the prospect of doing something with the Titanic Quarter and Titanic Belfast. I am not saying that that is hopeless, but I have had a bit of experience with North Americans getting off those cruise liners. They come in at 6.00 am and at 8.00 am they are disgorged into 25 coaches and zoomed round the city. By 4.00 pm, they are taken back to the ships for the simple reason that the liners want them in the casinos and all the other places on the ship so that they spend their money there rather than in Belfast. Getting at that market is not impossible, but it is tricky. We have looked at that, but I am not sure.

One of the main ways that you could use the orchestra would be to promote Belfast and other areas like Derry/Londonderry and the Province as a whole abroad. With my accent, I have often been wheeled out by INI to speak to inward investors to tell them that, unlike what the managing director of 'Game of Thrones' said, there is something to do in Belfast after 4.00 pm in the afternoon and it is not a bad place to live. We have an extremely good education service, schooling and so on. Those are the things that managers and, indeed, workers who come here want to know.

I often quote Liverpool. Liverpool also has a fantastic young conductor — a chap called Petrenko, who is Russian rather than Venezuelan. Liverpool City Council gives £1.5 million to the Liverpool orchestra, not because it is musically more sensitive, intelligent or aware than Belfast City Council but because it wants to create a view of Liverpool abroad that is not all about deprivation and hooliganism but is a city of culture. That means something for inward investment. The orchestra could do a fantastic amount in that way and could play a part when the First Minister and the deputy First Minister go abroad, when INI has delegations here or when the city is trying to promote itself. We could do a great deal.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Basil, very briefly. You normally are.

**Mr B McCrea:** Chair, I will be under your guidance, no problem. I have a couple of quick questions. Do you not think that you should do more with the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We would be delighted to do more. As I said, it is the one council — the new super-council — that we have spoken to.

**Mr B McCrea:** It has a theatre or a place —

**Professor Sir George Bain:** The Millennium is the only other place that we can get the 63 players on the stage without fear of them falling off.

**Mr B McCrea:** If you are going to go to lots of councils, is there anything that you could do about creating a mobile stage? We have had proms on the Titanic slipway and things like that. If you want to get funding from other councils, you will have to turn up there.

**Mr Green:** I am not sure about the mobile stage. Did you say that there are mobile stages?

**Mr B McCrea:** I am only asking. If you want funding from Armagh, you are going to have to go to Armagh.

**Ms Sands:** First of all, we have done a number of events for Derry/Londonderry City of Culture. That has been done.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** How many concerts outside Belfast —

**Mr B McCrea:** In the October monitoring round, we put an additional £2.5 million into legacy projects for the City of Culture. There is a lot of funding going in there; you need to see how you can be part of that. They got huge recognition throughout the island of Ireland and on a UK basis. It is a city of culture. It would not be a good thing if the legacy of the City of Culture was that we are going to lose the Ulster symphony.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** It certainly would not.

**Mr B McCrea:** I just think that there is an issue in that regard.

On a more positive note — the Chair is keen to get me to move on — you will have to move to different venues. If you have only three venues and you want funding, how do you take 63 people —

**Mr Green:** We would not take 63; we would reduce the size. There is quite a bit of repertoire that you can play and there are special arrangements that you can do to reduce the size of the orchestra. We could, as a minimum, take 45; we could take 55. We could vary the size of the orchestra to suit the venues.

**Mr B McCrea:** OK. Last question. It seems that you have a brand called the Ulster Orchestra, which you would be unwise to lose. You should consider strengthening it by associating with other things that have a similar brand. I do not know whether this is even possible, but Ulster Rugby has a great big stadium. Do you do anything to try to popularise the music that you do, such as having pre-match or post-match —

**Ms Sands:** We have already done that.

**Ms Morris:** Yes, we had a collaboration with Ulster Rugby; I do not know whether anyone saw it. We filmed a promotional video with them. It was shown as part of the Heineken Cup; I think it was the semi-final they got to. That was great for raising our profile. We have lots of friends in Ulster Rugby. The difficulty is that our concerts are on a Friday night and so is the rugby, which makes it slightly difficult. The more flexible model that Trevor is talking about will allow us to split the band —

**Mr B McCrea:** Do you have a concert every Friday night?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** No.

**Mr B McCrea:** Just one last question.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Finally.

**Mr B McCrea:** Finally, finally. It is Presbyterian minister stuff.

**Mr Humphrey:** There are only three points in their —

**Mr B McCrea:** Could you take a large group of people to other venues like Ulster Rugby and be part of their success? That is what gets you out there.

**Ms Morris:** That was the idea of connecting with Ulster Rugby; they came to us, and we came up with a collaboration. However, we have not done anything since. We go to other venues in Northern Ireland; we do not do as many as we would like because it costs quite a bit of money to take a band out. Again, it is back to funding. Our intention is to do an awful lot more regional work where we can get the money to do it. Where we can split the band into smaller ensembles, you can go to different venues. Venues in Northern Ireland generally find that 63 is quite a lot to get onto the stage because stages are generally smaller in theatres here.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Apologies, there was a bit of Second Stage legislation going through, so I had to be elsewhere. I am sorry that I missed most of your presentation, but I have more than a passing interest in the Ulster Orchestra. I am glad that the Minister has affirmed her support for it as well. I remember when the Ulster Orchestra used to play in the north-west, particularly in Derry. One bus went on in the



evening, but the other bus stopped in James Murphy's for one of the finest traditional sessions. That was a regular occurrence; it was a great event.

I do not want to come the cynic who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing, but I did a wee bit of research yesterday evening on your turnover. I am glad that you, Sir George, confirmed the return per pound invested. I am not trying to draw you on this, but the North West 200 people are sitting outside and they said that they return £27 for every pound invested.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Who said that?

**Mr Ó hOisín:** The North West 200. They are sitting outside and are going to give us a presentation. Your figure was £2.62. That is a stark comparison. Maybe that is unfair and is comparing apples and oranges and all the rest of it, but is there anything that could be done to see a greater bang for your buck, as they say?

**Professor Sir George Bain:** There probably is. For a start, I would not mind seeing the calculations: £27 is a remarkably high figure.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** It is their figure, not mine.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** I live in south Antrim, where the Dundrod motorcycle Grand Prix is held. It closes most of the roads once a year. Anyway, £27 is very high. I do not think that we could do anything to get £27 for every pound invested, if that is the right figure. I am sure that there are things that we could do. For a start, as I said during the presentation, it does not take into account what we are trying to do with the movie industry and all that sort of thing. Again, I guess that, if you could get more people to concerts, you could increase the multiplier. Auveen, do you have an observation?

**Ms Sands:** It is a defined calculation. If you want to expand on it, I am sure that you can get it above £2.62. As George said, the film industry and digital recordings are all economic spend for the North.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Are you saying that the figure of £2.64 is conservative?

**Ms Sands:** Yes.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** It is conservative. Two pounds sixty-two is conservative because a great deal is not countable.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** And the social benefits —

**Professor Sir George Bain:** We are not putting those in at all.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** You cannot quantify those at all. OK.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Thanks very much. Sir George, we extend our thanks to you and to your panel for a very informative session. We really gained from it. I am sure that you were impressed by the enthusiasm of members.

**Professor Sir George Bain:** Very much so. We are very grateful for the unanimous support, at least in principle.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Indeed. It is important that we continue to lobby for support and that you, as an organisation, do what you can to remodel and make your organisation more efficient and effective. Thank you very much for your contribution.

Apologies; this is my first session in the Chair; it is all a bit new to me.