



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Briefing from Ulster-Scots Agency

11 February 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr P J Bradley
Mr Dominic Bradley
Lord Browne
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr John Hunter)
Ms Hazel Campbell) Ulster-Scots Agency
Mr Jim Millar)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I welcome Mr John Hunter, Ms Hazel Campbell and Mr Jim Millar, who are here to brief the Committee on the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency.

Mr John Hunter (Ulster-Scots Agency):

Thank you for the opportunity to meet the Committee this morning. We look forward to sharing with you some of the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency. I am accompanied by Hazel Campbell,

the agency's interim chief executive, and Jim Millar, the agency's director of language and education. Hazel and I were appointed in December 2009, so we do not have the detailed knowledge about the agency's work that we would like to have, but we will do our best, with Jim's help, to respond to questions.

I know that the Committee has seen our briefing paper; therefore, I will not go through it. Instead, I will outline briefly some of the key issues facing the agency that appear in our business plan. Our remit is much wider than that of our sister body, Foras na Gaeilge, which focuses on language issues. In addition to promoting the language, we promote Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and traditions. Over the years, we have sought to raise our profile through that promotional role, and we are keen to build on that as we move forward into the next decade.

In the short time that I have been with the agency, I have been impressed by the extent of its engagement with a wide variety of groups in the Ulster-Scots community, including, notably, primary and secondary schools, as well as a range of cultural groups. The agency offers a range of grants to those groups to support their activities in promoting the Ulster-Scots tradition.

The agency's role in developing its grant arrangements has given rise to a number of issues, particularly in the past financial year. The value of applications, particularly to our dance and musical tuition programmes, as well as festivals, has risen rapidly. For 2010, in respect of music and dance tuition, we have received applications for £1.3 million against our budget of £700,000. For festivals, we have a budget of £190,000, and the applications received amount to nearly £400,000. Therefore, not uniquely in the public sector, we are forced to ration the grants that we can offer to interested groups. Obviously, some will be disappointed by the level of funding that we can offer, or we may have to reject some applications because of budgetary pressures. Therefore, we are continually reviewing our funding strategies and criteria in an effort to get a better fit between the applications we receive and the budgets available to us. The large number of grants, many of which are relatively small, also brings challenges in respect of monitoring the expenditure, and auditing and evaluating the projects funded to ensure that funds are used as intended.

I know that the Committee is interested in our relationship with other Ulster-Scots groups. We provide core funding for three groups: the Ulster-Scots Community Network and the Ulster-Scots Language Society, both of which were in existence before the agency was established; and

the Ullans Speakers' Association in Ballymoney, which was established in 2008.

I have met representatives from those groups, and I am anxious to ensure that there is complementarity between their programmes and those of the agency. To that end, and with the Department's agreement, we are about to embark on a review of the agency's relationship with those core-funded bodies. Another challenge facing the agency from a budgetary perspective is the core group's aspirations to grow at a time when our budgets are being strictly controlled, if not reduced.

As an agency, in addition to overseeing and evaluating the groups and projects, we need to ensure that our house is in order. Therefore, Hazel and I will be looking at good governance and accountability in particular and ensuring value for money for the services delivered. The agency is conscious that this is an area that has attracted media attention recently, and we will endeavour to ensure that our systems and processes are robust and meet the requirements of good governance for any publicly-funded body. That is a priority in our 2010 business plan, but it would be wrong of us just to concentrate on issues surrounding governance. Therefore, we will look at a number of strategic issues facing the agency also. In our business plan, we will commit ourselves to developing an education strategy, and we will also review our grant schemes for the areas that I mentioned earlier, namely, music, dance tuition and festivals.

Finally, I am conscious not to be viewed as a bird of passage, given that the tenure of my appointment is for six months. I assure the Committee that I will do my best during that time to advance the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency and place it on the sound footing that we all want to enable it to move forward. Thank you for the opportunity to make those introductory remarks.

The Chairperson:

I am pleased to hear that you provide core funding to the Ullans Speakers' Association. We had a very pleasant visit to the Ballymoney-based project, and they were trying to refurbish a wee radio studio inside their offices. I hope that they were able to make progress on that and on other resource funding issues. Perhaps you will tell us a little more about that later.

Miss McIlveen:

Thank you for your presentation. I declare an interest as someone who is proud to be an Ulster Scot. For the record, I am a representative on the Ulster-Scots academy implementation group. I

am also involved with local Ulster-Scots groups; I attended the Ballybogey Ulster-Scots language class and I am a regular attender at Ulster-Scots events. That puts my declaration of interest into context. Furthermore, I represent Strangford, which has very strong Ulster-Scots connections in relation to Hamilton and Montgomery, which we recently celebrated. I observe a genuine commitment and passion from local people who want to develop and celebrate their culture. I am also concerned that there could be a certain amount of social engineering from those who feel that that is what Ulster Scots should be rather than what it genuinely is.

I notice from your budget breakdown for 2010 that “Serving the community” has been allocated £1.76 million and “Providing a first class service” has been allocated £1 million. What do those figures actually mean? Do those areas contain programmes and a strategy for building community confidence and cohesion on the ground?

Mr Hunter:

That is a very comprehensive question. I will ask Hazel to deal with the budgetary aspect and then turn to Jim to explore programme development issues. I am not aware that the agency is engaging in social engineering, and I am keen that it does not do so because that is not part of our role and remit. We want to be inclusive in our approach to all groups that are part of the community. We are conscious of their heterogeneity, and working with them should be part and parcel of our remit, in a way that brings all groups into a relationship with the agency with respect to what we can offer.

Ms Hazel Campbell (Ulster-Scots Agency):

“Serving the community” covers a wide range of grants that we offer to the community. It includes our grants to the core-funded bodies that we have mentioned; grants under the financial assistance scheme; our summer schools; after-schools summer clubs; library workshops; and language classes. All our outward-facing work is covered under that heading. The other heading refers to the agency’s staff and running costs.

Miss McIlveen:

Do you have a dedicated strategy that looks at building capacity in communities?

Mr Jim Millar (Ulster-Scots Agency):

We have a community development strategy, part of which provides direction for the agency in

how it moves forward and the kinds of activity with which it is involved. Recently, the strategy indicated the need to support community groups that were at the developmental stage of needing financial support from the agency. The community workers scheme is a recent innovation that resulted from examining the strategy to see where we can offer support.

We now have eight strong Ulster-Scots groups that are receiving financial support to employ, an administrative officer on a part-time basis to help support the development of those groups. Their associated costs, such as administration, rent, accommodation, and so on, are also covered.

Miss McIlveen:

I am aware of your work in funding dance groups and summer schemes; there have been some very successful ones in the Newtownards area. Moving to curriculum development, what discussions have you had with the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning in progressing that line of work?

Mr Millar:

Members will be aware that the agency commissioned a curriculum development unit, which was based in Stranmillis University College. As a consequence of that unit's work, we published all the material from the primary schools' project on the agency's website. We have been trying to talk to education and library boards and schools directly in order to engage with particular schools, and there have been some developments from that. Some curriculum material had lain dormant for months as we waited for developments on the Ulster-Scots academy group.

Once the agency received the material back from the sponsor Department, we engaged with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to seek advice and guidance on how best to move this forward. They advised us on the need to update the material, and we formed a focus group comprising a number of practicing teachers. We took the material to them and asked them to recommend changes and how best the material would fit into the curriculum today. We now have an opportunity to roll that material out over a three-year period starting in 2010.

Miss McIlveen:

Have you been carrying out any pilot projects with particular schools?

Mr Millar:

Yes. All of the material was piloted originally in around 12 or 15 secondary schools. In the recent past we have used some of the material in summer schools, after-school clubs and for other activities. The piloting has already been done, but because the material had lain for a period of time we needed to refresh and update it. We sought guidance from the ETI on the matter, and we are now at the stage where we are ready to proceed with it in 2010.

Mr PJ Bradley:

You are very welcome. Although tourism is not within the Committee's brief, cultural tourism certainly is. I believe that you have a very sellable product, with millions of potential clients in the Carolinas, the Appalachian country, Tennessee, Kentucky and that whole area. I have been to those areas, and the problem I have seen, from your point of view, is that most of the people there identify themselves as Scots-Irish — all of the clubs are referred to as Scots-Irish — and it is difficult to get the term "Ulster" across to those people; in other words, to attract them here. Is that a handicap for you? One would think I was the American correspondent in the Committee.

Secondly, the Committee recently received correspondence from Kintra regarding the Milwaukee Irish Fest. Has Kintra approached your agency as a possible funder for the showcase that it is presenting at the fest later this year?

Mr Hunter:

We have been approached by Kintra with a view to providing it with support to attend the Irish Fest in Milwaukee. We are due to discuss our reaction to that request at our board meeting tomorrow, but the proposal that will be put to the board — as has been the case with previous applications to go to festivals in the United States — is that if the board agrees, we will make a sum of money available and then invite groups to bid for that sum of money to attend the festival. Kintra is not the only group to have sought financial help from the agency in respect of that Irish Fest — an accordion group has also sought support for it — so we need to be transparent when deciding on the level of support to be offered and the successful applicant. They way forward will be contingent on the outcome of tomorrow's board meeting.

Mr PJ Bradley:

It is good to hear that there are other groups interested. I know that quite a few councils are going

to attend this year.

Mr Hunter:

We will not be providing the full costs.

The Chairperson:

Does the Ulster-Scots Agency have a view on the value of the Milwaukee Irish Fest? Is it a biggie?

Mr Hunter:

It is a huge festival. I do not have the details; Jim, do you?

Mr Millar:

I do not have details, but I do know that it is one of the biggest of that type of festival in the United States. It is a major event.

Mr Hunter:

We have received reports from groups that attended in previous years; I think members of the agency actually attended in a previous year and provided a report indicating that, in their view, it was a good investment. Of course, creating the outcome measures to evaluate that is another matter.

Mr PJ Bradley:

In its early days, it was a very Irish festival, supported mainly by the South of Ireland and the west of Ireland, but it has grown and it is now reaching out to us here. We should encourage the development of that as best we can.

Mr Hunter:

As regards tourism, we see the Northern Ireland Tourist Board as a key partner on the projects that we jointly embark on. We have been looking at a number of issues in the past, and will continue to look at issues. There is a proposal before the agency to support an interpretive centre, to be funded primarily by the Tourist Board, but with some limited support from the Ulster-Scots Agency because of the links with Scottish Presbyterians. Perhaps Jim will speak about some of the other projects we have been involved in with the Tourist Board.

Mr Millar:

The truth is that inter-agency work between the Tourist Board and the agency has been less than we had hoped for. We have been deeply involved with Tourism Ireland, which is a North/South body, particularly with the American connection.

Members have heard about the Hamilton and Montgomery project that the agency launched some years ago. That was well received by Tourism Ireland and featured in its America strategy for a couple of years. The intention is that we work together more closely. Some of our projects are nearing commencement date with the agency and with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Mr McCarthy:

Thanks for your presentation, which has given me a clearer insight into the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency. I have been confused inasmuch as there are so many branches. I have a list of five all relating to Ulster Scots, and I never knew what each one did.

I think that the planned Ulster-Scots academy has caused some embarrassment, certainly for people in the Strangford constituency. Some time ago, I saw a huge plaque outside the old Regent House School, where the academy was to be based. The plaque was there for ages, but the academy never happened. Then there were reports that someone had failed to pay rent or something like that: there were what one would call “oddities” about the matter. Then, the plaque disappeared. Your report states that the agency has nothing to do this, which may be a good thing. *[Laughter.]* Is the academy off the radar altogether?

Mr Hunter:

It is off our radar in that the Department is responsible for considering the academy. It is on our radar to the extent that we have an obvious interest in the promotion of the Ulster-Scots language. Therefore, we wish to work closely with whatever develops on foot of the Department’s consideration on the academy. We await developments from the Department before we can respond.

Mr McCarthy:

Was the bar too high? I understand that up to £2 million that had been allocated for the Ulster-Scots academy had to be withdrawn because it could not be used. That was a problem the

Committee found when it visited the Ullans Speakers' Association in Ballymoney during the summer. Money seemed to be available, yet, as the Chairperson will recall, the association could not get funding for what it wanted to do.

Mr Hunter:

My understanding is that moneys were reserved for the academy, but that they were in the Department's control. For reasons known to the Department, those moneys were not expended. The cost of refurbishment of the Regent House School site was pretty horrendous, and that might have changed the initial view of it as a location.

Ms H Campbell:

I do not have the details.

Mr McCarthy:

Obviously, somebody made a mess of it at that time. There was an expectation that the academy would come to Newtownards, and that did not happen. What annual grants does each of the following groups receive from the agency: the Ulster-Scots Community Network, the Ulster-Scots Language Society and the Ullans Speakers' Association? Do you have that information?

Mr Hunter:

Yes.

Ms H Campbell:

In 2008, we paid the Ulster-Scots Community Network £200,000. Not all of the money for 2009 has yet been drawn down by the network. To date, we have paid it £115,000. We have made an award for the incoming year of £300,000.

Mr McCarthy:

Is that for 2010?

Ms H Campbell:

Yes.

Mr McCarthy:

That is fine. What about the Ulster-Scots Language Society?

Ms H Campbell:

In 2008, the Ulster-Scots Language Society was paid £32,643. To date, in 2009, we have paid £63,885, but those accounts have not yet been finished, so there will be further funding paid out relating to 2009.

Mr Hunter:

That big increase reflects the establishment of the formal work that the language society undertook to be approved as part of the grant procedure.

Ms H Campbell:

We do not have the final figure for 2010 for the society because we are awaiting some information from the group, but it will be less than £100,000.

Mr McCarthy:

OK. Finally, there is the Ullans Speakers' Association in Ballymoney, which advised the Committee of its concerns.

Ms H Campbell:

Our offer to the Ullans Speakers' Association was from mid-year, May to June or June to July, I cannot remember precisely which. We are only midway through the year with them. At the end of 2009, we had paid out almost £33,500.

Mr McCarthy:

Is there a budget for the coming year?

Ms H Campbell:

The current budget will bring us up to May, and we have not set the budget for the following year yet.

Lord Browne:

I understand that you have proposals to set up and open a visitor and information centre in your

offices in Belfast. Will you update us on the business case for that? Do you have an opening date in mind? Perhaps you will remind me of the location of your offices in Belfast?

Mr Hunter:

I will begin with your last question. Our offices are at the old Donaldson & Lyttle shop on the corner of Great Victoria Street and Bruce Street. It is a prominent location, and that was one of the reasons why we chose the site. We wanted a site with public access and reasonable proximity to the city centre but not in the centre due to high rental costs. Concerns over health and safety and access for disabled people precipitated our move from Franklin House: it became clear that we had to move from there. We engaged the Valuation and Lands Agency, as it was then, to give advice on suitable alternative premises, and it came up with a list of around 30 potential sites, which was whittled down to six. Those six were explored, and, eventually, the agency decided that the most appropriate site was the one that we are now occupying.

We have three floors. The ground floor provides the opportunity to establish a visitor and welcome centre. Budgetary pressures have prevented us from opening the ground floor for such a purpose, and, in the context of the current budgetary pressures, we cannot see it happening in 2010 either. We use the ground floor for events. In fact, we used it extensively in the week before last to celebrate Burns week. We held a series of lunchtime events comprising Ulster-Scots music, dance and food, such as haggis pies, which were cooked by a local caterer. That retained the Scots link.

The agency occupies the first floor, and on the second floor, to provide a one-stop shop, we have accommodation for the Ulster-Scots Community Network, the Ulster-Scots Language Society and the storage of some of their materials.

The costs in the agency's accounts reflect the total rental cost. That included the Ulster-Scots Community Network and the Ulster-Scots Language Society premises, but, in the future, we will be attributing the rental cost to them to give a truer reflection of the rental costs applied to the agency.

Lord Browne:

What are your rental costs?

Mr Hunter:

The rental costs are £95,000 for the three floors: £25,000 for the ground floor; £48,000 for the first floor; and £22,000 for the second floor.

Lord Browne:

Is that per annum?

Mr Hunter:

Yes. That is substantially more than the rental cost of Franklin House, but the rate per square foot is slightly less than that of Franklin House. The additional accommodation that we have obtained through the move is the source of the additional rental costs in our accounts.

Lord Browne:

Have you had any link-ups with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau in Donegall Place to attract footfall?

Mr Hunter:

I am not aware of any discussions.

Ms H Campbell:

One of the options that we might look at somewhere down the road is the possibility of utilising the tour buses that go round the city centre. There is a stop near our office, so we might look at that option. As the chairman said, however, we do not have funding to man the ground floor at this time, and that is one of the issues.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for attending this morning's Committee meeting. In relation to your financial assistance scheme, why was the decision made to permit the language-based projects to apply for 100% granting when other projects can go for only 75%?

I say that, Chairperson, because, as you know, we received some impressive deputations, such as that in May 2009 from the Cairncastle LOL 692 Community and Cultural Group Association, who seemed at that time to be operating on a shoestring. That group is authentically Ulster Scots; it reaches out across the North Channel to Scotland's Ayrshire coast.

This morning's presentation seems to have cleared up some of the issues, but there remains some confusion between people who are naturally Ulster Scots as part and parcel of their daily lives and those who are trying to rediscover their roots. It is down there somewhere, but we are not quite sure where it is and we do not come across it. I hold my hands up as a blow-in from Belfast into east Antrim. I first came across Ulster Scots when the caretaker at my school told me off. To this day I do not know what I did wrong because I could not understand his language. That language is under threat, because as Belfast expands, the newcomers — blow-ins like me — bring in a different style of language and drive out the indigenous language and culture.

What is the agency doing to help those people retain what they have and reintroduce people such as me back to a culture which is, at least partially, mine? My father's people were from England, but my mother's side is Scottish, and I have roots there somewhere. What can the agency do to help me to rediscover them? That goes back to the question of education; some good work was done at Stranmillis University College, and some good material was produced, but it was left to lie in cupboards. Was that because the teachers were unaware of what they were dealing with, or was the Department or the ETI not pushing it forward? The North Eastern Education and Library Board made great strides in trying to support the initiative in that area, but it seemed to run into the buffers. Will you comment on the financial situation as well as the other points that I have made?

Mr Hunter:

The Department took responsibility for the educational materials that were developed at Stranmillis University College in the context of the work that it was doing with the Ulster-Scots academy. They were only released back to us last year, which was when we commenced the three-year roll-out, as Jim described earlier.

Mr Millar:

The agency has been engaged at a local level. As far back as 2006 and 2007 we ran a number of road shows to speak to the community that Ken identified; those people who had an interest and those who were convinced that they were Ulster Scots. We asked them what the agency should be engaged in. They told us that they wanted activity to commence in schools and at community level. As a consequence, we focused on a number of programmes, particularly in primary schools, but increasingly in post-primary schools. We ran after-school programmes, library

weeks, storytelling programmes and summer schools in an attempt to build confidence and capacity.

We also commissioned work with Stranmillis University College to train native speakers to deliver language awareness training packages. Those were rolled out after those people had received sufficient training and had obtained approval from the college. We attempted to initiate a large number of projects, but much of our capacity revolves around the notion of building confidence in communities so that they can understand more clearly the cultural and linguistic integrity of Ulster Scots.

As regards how much funding is available to different groups, we recognise the need to increase support for the linguistic community — the community that Ken identified. The financial assistance scheme, which is approved by the North/South Ministerial Council, indicates that the agency is able to provide funding up to 100% for purely linguistic programmes, whereas the normal maximum financial support for cultural groups would be 75%, given the fact that we are further ahead on the cultural issues than on the linguistic issues.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you: that is helpful to know. Who was responsible for the Burns pamphlet that was delivered to my house? It celebrated Burns night and contained about a dozen Burns poems alongside pictures of wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous beasties.

Mr Millar:

I think that the Ulster-Scots Community Network was responsible for that.

Mr K Robinson:

I congratulate whoever who was involved in producing the pamphlet. It was interesting to read.

Mr McCartney:

Following on from the first part of Ken's question about the 100% grant for the language, is there a greater emphasis on the cultural aspects of Ulster Scots than the language itself, and has there been an increase in the use of the language and the number of people who speak it following the introduction of that grant scheme? Also, and this is just an observation, 11 of the agency's 18 staff are involved in administration. Is that because of grant applications? Should room be built

in for more development officers to facilitate the growth of the culture and the language?

Mr Hunter:

Jim will deal with the first question and I will respond on the second.

Mr Millar:

It is true to say that there is much more capacity in the community for cultural issues, whether they be music, song or dance. Therefore, it is much easier for the agency to invest in such activity. It is an easier win for the agency and provides more confidence in the community.

We have increasingly tried to tie in language activity with cultural activity. For example, after a pilot programme that lasted for a year, the agency has recently appointed peripatetic music and dance tutors. Part of the process is about telling those tutors that it is not just about dance or music but about linking those to the linguistic tradition. Therefore, if they are playing music and singing a song, that song must be identified as an Ulster-Scots song, because that will provide a linguistic lesson for the children to engage with.

It is more difficult to engage with language communities. There is a lack of confidence in those communities that is not apparent in cultural areas. The 100% funding enables those groups and individuals to engage more easily with language as part of a cultural activity. For example, we are currently considering a large number of festival applications, and we are able to offer 100% funding for language activity at a festival but a lesser award for cultural activity.

Mr McCartney:

When you set the budget at the beginning of the year, do you ring-fence money for language activity? If there are more applications relating to culture, which is understandable given that it covers a broader area and because language is perhaps the most difficult part of the, for want of a better term, package, would the agency set aside 10% or 15% of its £1 million budget to ensure that language applications are protected?

Mr Millar:

There are pockets of Ulster-Scots language communities in Ulster: it is the same for Irish or any other minority language. The agency's strategy is to try to support those areas. Members spoke about the Ullans Speakers' Association, which is clearly located in a strong language area. We

provide core funding primarily for language groups rather than cultural groups. That is our focus, but we try to encourage groups and make it clear to them that funding is available at a higher level for the language and other activities.

Mr McCartney:

Have you noticed any return for that on the ground? Are more people speaking the language?

Mr Millar:

There is much more interest in Ulster Scots, and the Ullans Speakers' Association is a good illustration of that. The native speaking community in certain places, such as Ballymoney, has grown in confidence because of that. A lot of people in those places now have the confidence to say that they are part of a linguistic community. The work that has been conducted in Ballymoney is exceptional in respect of the radio broadcasts and the amount of community engagement that comes about as a consequence of that. That is a very positive sign.

In the earlier days, the Ulster-Scots Agency might have assumed that the language was spoken in locations throughout Ulster. That is clearly not the case, and we need to place a more clear focus on the areas in which the language is spoken.

The Chairperson:

The Ballymoney people contend that that they are "the crucible" of Ulster Scots.

Mr Hunter:

Expenditure on administration is a concern for the Ulster-Scots Agency. Indeed, it should be the concern of any agency to minimise administration expenditure so that resources can be allocated to the programme activity. I indicated the pressure that we face in respect of grant applications. In 2010, we have received 45 applications for festivals; 44 for dance tuition, which is double the number for the previous year, and 263 for music tuition, which is triple the number for the previous year. We have rejected 44 applications, most of which will probably be resubmitted on appeal.

Significant activity is associated with managing grants schemes that offer relatively small sums of money to the various community groups that we support. Therein lies the rationale for the review into music, dance tuition and festivals, which we will undertake this year with a view

to streamlining procedures, reducing administrative overheads and increasing the agency's efficiency in processing large numbers of applications.

Mr D Bradley:

Does the agency see itself primarily as a language organisation or a cultural organisation?

Mr Hunter:

We would not go for one or the other. We see ourselves as having a responsibility for promoting language and culture on an as integrated and interactive basis as possible. Rather than working in silos, we seek opportunities to operate all our activities in an integrated way.

Mr D Bradley:

From my experience with the Irish language movement, I know that, if language is not the core activity, it often becomes secondary to other cultural aspects.

Mr Hunter:

The development of the Irish language is at a different stage to that of Ullans. We feel that the agency can generate interest in Ullans through cultural activities. The Irish language is not at a similar stage of development because it has been used more extensively.

Mr D Bradley:

Have you looked at the experiences of language minorities in Europe to see whether there are any lessons that could be learned with respect to Ulster Scots?

Mr Millar:

Indeed we have. We engage quite closely with our sister organisation, Foras na Gaeilge, and we have a strong working relationship with that group. There are many lessons that we can learn from the Irish-speaking community. Agency staff attend the appropriate conferences to meet and network with representatives of other minority languages, whether it is Welsh, Irish, Scots Gaelic or, indeed, Scots. The Scottish Parliament is very keen to raise the status of the Scots language in Scotland. As recently as last weekend, I attended a seminar in Edinburgh on issues relating to minority languages in the UK. There are many lessons we can learn. We have identified the major issue as building confidence within the community that speaks the language.

When we consider how we use resources, we are increasingly clear that there are locations in Ulster — Donegal, County Down and County Antrim — where there is a much greater emphasis in the community on language than there may be, for example, in County Fermanagh or County Cavan. It is a slow process; but we do what we can to encourage and support those groups. Clearly, a language community is not something that can be pushed forward by a government organisation. There has to be a groundswell of opinion in favour of that language. The people themselves will have a major role to play and that is fair and appropriate.

Mr D Bradley:

My final point relates to one raised by Ken Robinson earlier. I had conversations with some of the smaller Ulster-Scots groups, and they feel that much of the resources have been “hoovered up” by larger organisations and that it is more difficult for them, as Ken said, to get a fair slice of the cake. Do you have a strategy to ensure that smaller independent groups are catered for in the disbursement of resources?

Mr Hunter:

One of the difficulties we face is that every community group would like to be core funded. We do not see that as a viable strategy for us, because of the cost implications. Therefore, we are trying to support smaller local groups through the various financial assistance schemes, etc, that we have described.

We have sought to work with those groups, through our development workers, to support them and help them develop their capacity. Through some of the community workers’ schemes associated with that, we help to free volunteers in those organisations to continue with work at a local level. However, we are conscious of the tension between the smaller groups and the core-funded groups that are longer established.

Ms H Campbell:

Part of our grant for the Ulster-Scots Community Network is designed to build up capacity at grass roots among those groups.

Mr T Clarke:

I wish to put on record that I have been a member of Randalstown Ulster-Scots culture group for a long time. I am pleased, and heartened, to hear a fluent Irish speaker being very informative in

relation to Ulster Scots, and perhaps raising some of the queries that I would have raised in relation to how funding is distributed.

My question follows on nicely from Lord Browne's and concerns the rental of your property in Belfast. Will you explain the purpose of having a property in the centre of Belfast, and what value I, as an Ulster-Scots supporter, get from its location there? How is Ulster Scots being promoted in the Belfast area?

Mr Hunter:

It all hinges on our ability to open up the ground-floor visitors' centre; to attract people from the tourism buses, and be linked to the Belfast Welcome Centre. Through those, we can provide support for a network of associated bodies with which we have a relationship in the Ulster-Scots community. They could use the location as a resource to which they could come and look at the publications of the various groups including those of our own group. They could access those, and get advice directly from reception or from staff on the first floor who could go down and give advice. It is designed to be the shopfront of the Ulster-Scots Agency. That accounts for the importance that we attach to being able to open it up on a permanent basis as our shopfront, rather than have it decorated, as it is at the moment, with literature and posters but not open or accessible to the public.

Mr T Clarke:

I welcome that and would like to see it. Belfast is the capital city of Northern Ireland and that is where many of the visitors to Northern Ireland come. However, I am disappointed that that stage has not been reached. To promote Ulster Scots, it is great to have a vision. However, you have cited £95,000 as the cost of the annual rental; I am sure that the rates bill for that property is also astronomical.

Mr Hunter:

I do not know the exact figure.

Mr T Clarke:

Maybe you could give us that information. Although you are in your new location, I am disappointed that you have not moved on with your vision to promote Ulster Scots in Belfast. Having an aspiration is one thing, but delivery is another. The promotion of Ulster Scots in

Northern Ireland has suffered for many years, and, although people such as Michelle and I are members of groups in less populated areas, Ulster Scots is not selling itself to visitors to Northern Ireland. You took a positive first step by securing premises in Belfast, but, if you cannot find funding to open the ground floor to promote the language, that first step will turn out to be a negative one. Therefore, to a degree, you have failed, so I would like to see you coming back soon to tell us that you have stumbled on or come across some way to continue promoting Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland. That was a comment, rather than a question.

Mr McCarthy:

Will someone tell me the difference between Ulster Scots and Ullans?

Mr Millar:

It is different terminology for the same thing. In the Scots language, there are three dialects: Insular Scots, Doric Scots and Lallans. Lallans was the language spoken by Robert Burns. Ullans is the regional variety of Scots that is spoken in Northern Ireland. It is spoken here because of the massive number of Scots who came here since, and, indeed before, the 1600s. Ullans, Lallans, Insular Scots and Doric Scots are members of one linguistic group, but Ullans is the Northern Ireland version.

Mr McCarthy:

There seems to be a bit of friction among the Ullans people, who say that Ullans is the proper title and that we should all use it.

Mr Millar:

The legislation that established the agency refers to Ullans, so that is the term that should be used in future legislation and it is widely used in the Ulster-Scots speaking community.

The Chairperson:

I thank the team, John Hunter, Hazel Campbell and Jim Millar, for coming along. We enjoyed engaging with you.