



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Inquiry into the Funding of the Arts in
Northern Ireland**

25 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
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

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

Ms Roisín McDonough) Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Ms Nóirín McKinney)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

Good morning to the team. You are all very welcome, as ever. In attendance are two senior representatives of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and two senior representatives of the Arts Council. I ask Arthur Scott and Roisín McDonough to introduce the team.

Ms Roisín McDonough (Arts Council of Northern Ireland):

Thank you. I am with my colleague Nóirín McKinney, the director of arts development with the Arts Council.

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

Thank you. I am with Joanna McConway, the head of the arts and creativity branch in DCAL.

The Chairperson:

Arthur is the director of the culture division in DCAL, and Roisín is the chief executive of the Arts Council. I advise the officials that the purpose of the session is to engage in a discussion on the Committee's recommendations. I want you to make a brief opening statement of no more than five minutes before we move to questions, as has been agreed.

Mr Scott:

Following the Committee's inquiry, the Arts Council and the Department produced an implementation action plan. We see 2010-11 as being a transitional year as the next comprehensive spending review (CSR) approaches. A number of measures have been informed by the Committee's report, and other measures were in train as part of the normal monitoring of spending and of what the Department and the Arts Council deliver. I hope that, during the session, we will be able to discuss more of the detail of that.

Ms McDonough:

As you know, the board of the Arts Council has had an opportunity to discuss the report in some considerable depth and has sent its response to the Committee. The board said that it shares the Committee's ambition and objective to make the arts more accessible to people across Northern Ireland. That has been a long-standing ambition of the Arts Council. We welcome the focus and attention that the inquiry has brought on the arts and on what the arts can contribute.

One of the critical issues that we all face is a resource challenge. That is particularly critical this year and in the ensuing year, when new capital investment will come on stream. That investment must be protected. Given the challenges in the sector, the Arts Council was disappointed that the promised third-year uplift was reduced from £1.5 million to £1.1 million.

As the representative from the Department said, this is the final year of the CSR. It is also a

year in which we are reviewing the mid-term point of our Creative Connections strategy. We have been consulting with artists and arts organisations on that. The review may have a bearing on the Arts Council's future strategic direction. Although its direction would not change in any fundamental way, we want to establish, through talking to organisations, whether there has been any drift in the objectives that we set ourselves in the strategy. We will encapsulate that in our report, which we will make to our board. Therefore, 2010 is very much a transition year as we move forward into the next CSR period.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Roisín. We will move to questions straight away.

Mr McNarry:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. You are very welcome. My first question is for our DCAL guests. In your response, you state that the Department will undertake research to gather and analyse data relating to the spend on arts in Northern Ireland. Can you tell us who will conduct that research and what will be the timescale for completion? What do you intend to cover in the research?

Mr Scott:

The departmental professional statistician has been out working with colleagues. As you know, the Arts Council collects its own data sets. We are looking at what data is available and working towards a programme that will complement the work that is being carried out by the Arts Council as regards informing the Department. Terms of reference are being gathered on what exactly should be commissioned. I will ask Joanna, who is familiar with the detail of it, to say a little more about that.

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

The Department has set up a steering group to look at that. The Arts Council's figures are based on its own budget. Obviously, the Department's budget for the arts is slightly wider than that because we also sponsor Northern Ireland Screen. We have a small internal budget for resource and capital. Therefore, we set up a steering group comprising me, the departmental statistician and the departmental economist to look at the amount of money that the Department has allocated to spend on the arts. We hope to compare that with other departmental spends across the regions by looking at exactly what is spent on the different budget lines.

As Arthur said, in England, Scotland and Wales, terms of reference are being drawn up. We have already looked at some options for the type of work that could be undertaken. We hope to bring that forward.

Mr McNarry:

Are you going into your preparations with a priority scale in mind? Do you share my opinion that the attitude towards the arts is that they are not a high priority for funding? Do you have that in mind? Are you approaching it with that type of attitude or is it a purely financial exercise?

Ms McConway:

No; it is a benchmarking exercise but we are also interested in looking at the definition of the arts across the regions. In England, Scotland and Wales, streams of the arts may be funded that we do not currently fund. We need that information to make grounded decisions about how we fund the arts in Northern Ireland and what is appropriate for our regional arts infrastructure.

Mr Scott:

At the departmental level, the research that we will commission, which will complement that of the Arts Council, will look at the broader social and economic benefits of investment in the arts. As Roisín indicated, there has been considerable investment in the capital infrastructure of the arts. We will conduct research to look at evidence of the social benefits of investment in the arts, such as well-being and a sense of confidence among the community. We will also look at the economic benefits that are generated by the arts, such as creative industries, and, particularly in the current economic climate, we will look to see what can be done to spur and encourage that further. We will produce evidence in preparation for the comprehensive spending review, so that the priorities that have been set by the Department and the Arts Council can be represented to best effect to try to secure the necessary resources to fulfil the strategy.

Mr McNarry:

I am glad to hear what you said about creative industries. I have pursued that for a long time. I am glad that more people are coming round to it. You may have mentioned this already, but what is the timescale?

Ms McConway:

For producing the research?

Mr McNarry:

Yes.

Ms McConway:

We are at the terms of reference stage at the moment, so we are still scoping the level of —

Mr McNarry:

I did not ask you that; I asked you what the timescale is. When will you be finished that? Have you not decided?

Ms McConway:

We have not decided the level of work that will be required to complete —

Mr McNarry:

Really, you are not able to answer my question at all if you have not decided the level of work that is required. Could you come back to us and tell us what you are doing and when you will do it?

Mr Scott:

We will come back to you with a timetable.

Mr McNarry:

That will be very helpful.

The Chairperson:

David, you also have questions for the Arts Council.

Mr McNarry:

I will not use the word “crisis”, but, every day, we hear that we are in critical financial difficulty, regionally and nationally. I have picked up on the response of the Arts Council’s chairperson, Rosemary Kelly, to the Committee of 14 January 2010 in which she referred to funding. The

letter states:

“The Arts Council regrets the loss of this missed opportunity to advocate for the needs of the arts sector”.

I am not sure that that is a fair criticism; however, I want to talk about money. The letter continues:

“Finally, of further concern was the fact that a significant number of the recommendations carry a further resource implication. It is difficult to see how these can be achieved in a context in which there is not only no increase, but rather a significant decline in funds.”

We need to address that, but we need your help to do so. If you do not agree with our recommendations, we do not need to seek extra money for the Arts Council to meet those recommendations. If you agree with our recommendations, what extra funds do you require?

Ms McDonough:

Thank you for your question. We were using the planning figure that we had been given for the third year of the CSR. As you may recollect, the modest uplift in funding for the arts that was agreed after our campaign for the arts was, principally, backloaded into year three. I expect that that was done not only because it was recognised that new premises would come on stream, but to stabilise and try to develop the sector, given the chronically low level of funding that the arts in Northern Ireland has endured for many years.

Mr McNarry:

I understand that. My point is not about what you are doing or what you have planned. I know about your budget. You are not telling us whether you support the recommendations in our report. You support some of them and not others. You are finding a difficulty with those recommendations because you do not have the money to implement them. The Committee needs to know how much money you need. Would the Arts Council getting that money help us to help you?

Ms McDonough:

Yes.

Mr McNarry:

If you accept the recommendations, will you list those for which you need money and state how much you need? That is all that I am asking.

Ms McDonough:

That is a difficult question to answer. We were originally allocated an uplift of £1.5 million in the third year of the CSR, which was less than what we had asked for in our previous submission in the campaign for the arts. The reinstatement of that allocation would, undoubtedly, help us to invest further in some of the areas towards which the Committee has directed us. That includes areas such as a strengthened Start Up programme, of which the Committee thought highly. It would include the possibility of directing more to the areas that the Committee has suggested, such as the community, traditional and voluntary arts. If that funding were reinstated, all of those would become matters for active consideration.

We are not in a position to make our formal announcements for 2010-11, because the budget still has to be confirmed. The board took some decisions on how it wanted to allocate that money, and it had to use the resources at its disposal to protect the investment in the new venues.

Mr McNarry:

I appreciate that, and I understand that this is as good a time as any to make a pitch to get your £1.5 million reinstated. I and the Committee do not know how much of that £1.5 million fits in with the recommendations for which there are shortcomings. If there are shortcomings, we need to know that. You seem to think that we are asking you to find additional resources to meet our recommendations. To return to my question, how much do you require?

Ms McDonough:

I have already made my pitch for the £1.5 million —

Mr McNarry:

I know, but hang on a second: this is a Committee that has to deal with money and has to be responsible and accountable. I am on the Finance Committee; if you said that to the members of that Committee, they would walk away from you. I do not need you to do it now, but what I am saying is —

Ms McDonough:

We can certainly come back to you with figures.

Mr McNarry:

We have not costed the recommendations either, so will you tell the Committee what the cost is?

Ms McDonough:

Absolutely; we can do that. We will come back to you in writing with that.

The Chairperson:

OK, thank you for that.

I have a question for the departmental officials relating to recommendation 4. That is our recommendation that an interdepartmental group on funding for the arts be set up. In the Department's response, you state that an interdepartmental group is not necessary, given the current information available on arts funding. However, from our point of view the key purpose of that recommendation was to encourage other Departments to begin investing more in the arts and to raise awareness of how funding the arts can help other Departments achieve their objectives. Do you think that other Departments are sufficiently aware of how investing in the arts can help them to meet their objectives?

Mr Scott:

Thank you, Chairperson. Picking up on the earlier discussion regarding the creative industries, interdepartmental co-operation is vital to realising the importance of creative industries and the contribution that they can make to the economy. To that end, there was an interdepartmental group, but that appeared to have lapsed, so we have been in discussions with Invest Northern Ireland and have agreed to reconstitute and re-energise that group, particularly around the creative industries.

Therefore, the Department's response related more to the evidence showing the significantly lower level of funding that comes from the other Departments. However, the Committee is absolutely right and we concur that, as is set out in the Creative Connections strategy, promoting the value of the arts, in relation to both the social and economic benefits that it can deliver, is an important role for all the Departments. Our Department takes an exceptional lead responsibility for that, together with the Arts Council. We will be making progress in that regard.

The Chairperson:

If you do not mind, will you forward to us the membership of that interdepartmental group on creative industries? It would be useful for us to know how that group is constituted.

I have a question for the Arts Council regarding the interdepartmental group, and I should make the point that a good number of organisations referred to that in the inquiry. Is the Arts Council of the view that an interdepartmental group would have no positive impact on encouraging other Departments to fund the arts? Do you think that it is the Arts Council's role to encourage other Departments to fund the arts?

Ms McDonough:

I chair two consortia, the first of which is for the creative industries and involves the Department for Employment and Learning, DCAL, Invest NI and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I chair that consortium because the Arts Council deploys the resources that DCAL secured for the creative industries. The second consortium that I chair is the one for re-imaging communities, which has representatives from the Department for Social Development, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Housing Executive, SOLACE, the PSNI, the Community Relations Council, Invest NI, DCAL and, as I said, the Arts Council.

The Arts Council was also involved in the creative youth partnerships, along with the Department of Education and the five education and library boards. That has not gone forward as yet, but the other two partnerships are very much alive and well.

We have a strong track record of involvement in such partnerships, and a strong belief in the value and necessity of those partnerships, which bring a focus to the arts and which, in all of the instances that I have cited, have brought additional money to the table. The only cautionary note that I would add is that the consortia are very much focused on delivering. They have been set up to deliver a particular agreed programme of activity, rather than simply talk at a more general level about what the arts bring and how extra resources are required. Therefore, my only caveat is that an interdepartmental group should have a body of work that is focused on delivery in communities. Both of the examples that I cited do precisely that.

The Chairperson:

Are you saying that the Arts Council does not favour an interdepartmental group that has the

purpose of seeking additional funding for the arts?

Ms McDonough:

No, that is not what we are saying. We do not believe that an interdepartmental group has value per se unless it is prepared to bring money to the table for practical purposes. That is the slight subtlety in our position.

Mr McNarry:

You would support any group that brought money to the table. You would not care where the money came from.

Ms McDonough:

I absolutely agree.

Lord Browne:

Recommendation 7 is that DCAL and the Arts Council should work closely with Arts and Business Northern Ireland to ensure that more support is given to community-based arts organisations in their accessing of private sponsorship.

I fully understand that the Arts Council has experienced difficulty in attracting funding from the business community, particularly in the last two years. I know that you put that down to the recession, whereas Arts and Business Northern Ireland places the responsibility closer to your door. Arts and Business suggests that there could be plenty of opportunities, particularly in community areas, to engage with the community and with businesses. It suggests that, with the right skills, organisation and resources, that could be possible. Regardless of that argument, the critical question is: does the Arts Council have a strategy to attract funding from businesses in the next two years?

Ms McDonough:

Arts and Business is the body that the Arts Council funds to do that. It has a pot of money, which, as the Committee will be aware, is used to act as leverage to get private sector organisations to fund initiatives. If Arts and Business put in a bit of money, it requires co-funding.

In the wake of the Committee's recommendation, I have spoken to Arts and Business about building the capacity of community arts organisations by getting more sponsorship. This year, Arts and Business will run a pilot, and we will evaluate the success of that.

As members will know, Arts and Business collects information annually in its private investment in culture survey. The survey for 2008-09 showed that only 1% of private investment in the UK goes to Northern Ireland and that the amount of money invested in Northern Ireland in that period reduced by 24% from what had been invested in 2007-08.

Regrettably, things are moving in the wrong direction, but we are where we are. Although the direction that is being taken is not what the Arts Council or the Committee would wish, we still have to work hard to try to leverage as much as possible from the private sector. We meet Arts and Business quarterly, and one of the early actions that it has agreed to undertake from the Committee recommendations is that on the community arts component.

Lord Browne:

I will put a similar question to DCAL. You will continue to work with Arts and Business, but have you made a commitment on providing more assistance, and, if so, how will you do that?

Mr Scott:

The financial assistance that the Department can offer is governed by decisions on the budget, but we commend, endorse and support fully the work that the Arts Council and Arts and Business Northern Ireland are doing. Roisín made the point about reversing the trend, and that can be achieved by producing an evidence base to persuade more people of the benefits of investment in the arts by showing what can be achieved from that investment. If that evidence base is sound, more businesses will be encouraged to see the societal and economic value and benefits of the arts. More needs to be done around the creative industries to demonstrate their future importance to the economy and to offer job and personal development opportunities to many people in Northern Ireland. That element is understated at present.

Ms McConway:

The Minister has engaged with Arts and Business on a number of occasions. He attended its recent awards ceremony at the Ulster Museum, and a major event that is being planned involving Arts and Business will bring together members of the arts and business communities to provide a

catalyst for that kind of work. We hope to hold that event in the spring.

Mr Leonard:

I will concentrate on the community arts, and, through that, the relationship between the Department and the Arts Council. Excuse me if I to and fro a bit in my question. I will kick off with questions to the departmental officials. Will you outline to the Committee how the Department works with the Arts Council and how that work promotes community arts? What aspect of your work results in a direct interface with community arts people? How does that encourage other arts sectors in the community to develop community arts? In relation to the 2010-11 budget, what dynamic is there to develop outreach work specifically? What does the Department want to see from the Arts Council, and how does it ask to see the outcomes of the council's work? What follow-on is there? I hope that you will paint that picture for the Committee.

Mr Scott:

The Department shares a sponsorship role with the Arts Council, and the Arts Council shares the departmental aims, objectives and priorities that have been set. The arm's-length body — that is, the full council, together with the chief executive — considers a strategy to take that programme forward. The current strategy is around creative connections and themes.

The Department relies on the arm's-length body to have the professional expertise to determine how best to implement departmental priorities across the various art forms, the groups that deliver and make up the arts sectors and the practising artists. It is then a matter of working with the Arts Council to set and agree targets for investment and to monitor progress towards those targets. In earlier evidence, we referred to the mid-year review of the Creative Connections five-year strategy, which has four themes: promoting the value of the arts; strengthening the arts; increasing audiences; and improving the Arts Council's performance. The review will look at what progress has been made on those themes during that period and will make adjustments to deliver the best possible outcome.

We also have an open, transparent, frank and honest relationship with the Arts Council, which is healthy. The Department is there to constructively challenge the Arts Council's plans and the delivery of those. We have agreed that we will carry out a major evaluation of the annual support for organisations programme. That is scheduled for 2010-11, and it will involve a detailed study

by the departmental economist. That study will feed into and provide useful information for the Arts Council and the Department in how to cope with funding challenges as we move forward, at the same time as wanting to deliver benefits.

I will now hand over to Roisín McDonough.

Mr Leonard:

Sorry, I am not being ignorant but just before you do, I want to pick up on that point. We all have experience of arm's-length bodies at various levels. Do you feel that that relationship is robust enough? That is, not just in holding the Arts Council to account, but in the detail, because, it should never be forgotten —

Mr Scott:

Well, yes, the classic model is —

Mr Leonard:

Just let me finish, sorry. The devil is in the detail, particularly in community arts, which is work that is done on the ground. Does the Department have a robust enough relationship to deliver a difference on the ground, via the Arts Council?

Mr Scott:

Yes, the Department is in a position to examine, to whatever level of detail that is required, what the Arts Council is delivering. I used the word accountability, because that is the classic model. I see the relationship, which is fairly new to me because I am relatively new in post, as a value-added approach. I am there to add value and to help Roisín McDonough to deliver within the departmental priorities and to share the challenges, rather than seeing it as we are the Department and that is the Arts Council. It is a partnership that is about getting the best outcome for the spend and achieving those societal and economic benefits.

Mr Leonard:

I want to drill down into the issue a little further and talk about budget flexibility. I know that you said that you would invite anyone who had money to the table. However, I am not talking about a global figure; I am talking about internal budget flexibility for community arts. Your submission refers to a definition of community arts. Is there any flexibility in the definition that

could help that sector? There seems to be a bit of a blockage there, and I say that based on my experience at local government level. That blockage, in turn, affects outreach flexibility.

I would appreciate any feedback on how the objectives of community arts relate to your work and on any flexibility that might be available.

Ms McDonough:

We believe in having as broad and as inclusive a definition of community arts as possible, which is the one that we have signalled to the Committee in our original submission and evidence to its inquiry, and in our response to the Committee's recommendations. Therefore, our definition of community arts is not narrow; it focuses on people being able to access arts in local communities at whatever level they want.

Mr Leonard:

Do you think that the debate on whether the definition should be broader or narrower has caused a blockage within all the sectors?

Ms McDonough:

As you would anticipate with most things in Northern Ireland, there is a great passion around the debate on what constitutes community arts. Some people have a narrower definition in that they believe that they are about authorship, both with regard to process and the end product. Other people have a wider definition that puts participation at the heart of community arts, and there will be shades in between. We have gone for a probably more inclusive definition of community arts that focuses on people being able to access, and participate freely in, the arts at whatever level they feel that they can and at whatever level they want to. That does not automatically involve having to go through a whole spectrum of activity that has clear product ownership at the other end. We have proffered that as our understanding of community arts, and Noírín will talk about the delivery mechanisms for that.

Ms McKinney:

Mr Leonard talked about the interface and drilling down into the issues with the sector. We think that we have a healthy relationship with the sector. I will take a longer perspective and look at the trend in Arts Council funding over the past 10 years or so. If we look at our support to community arts within quite a pure definition of community arts as opposed to arts in the

community, we can see that there has been a seismic shift, and that is before we look at all the other elements that Roisín mentioned, such as participation.

When we look at our programmes overall, we can see that around a third of our total grant expenditure of £13 million goes towards community arts. Some people look only at our core funding programme, the annual support for organisations programme (ASOP), as the main funding programme, and the community arts do not draw such a healthy percentage of funding under that programme. However, we must look at the picture in its totality. We have dedicated programmes such as the Re-imaging Communities programme, which is very much about community participation, development and a real engagement in the arts.

We are also looking at the Start Up scheme. We are delighted with that scheme, our only disappointment being that we had just £100,000 for it. To go back to Mr McNarry's comment, if we could put £200,000 or £500,000 into that scheme, its success could be rolled out further.

We also have our lottery funding programme and our small grants scheme. The majority of small grants, because they are about grass roots activity and organisations, go to the community and voluntary sectors. We feel that the interface is healthy, but that brings us back to the broader question of balance. We have all the other respective needs to try to balance. Different art forms will have different priorities at different times. As Roisín mentioned, one of our big objectives for the coming year is to meet the needs of the new capital facilities that are coming on stream, such as the Lyric Theatre and the MAC arts centre. That was the reason why the settlement was backloaded. Those tensions will always be there.

Just so that you are clear, we do not allocate budgets by art form, so we do not say that there is a definitive amount for community arts and that that is all that we will spend. We respond to the needs of the time and the applications that we receive, and we try to build in flexibility in that way.

Mr Leonard:

May I interrupt? That is a very practical point. Are the applications coming in at grass roots level? You mentioned capacity building. We all know that some people are missing out on general funding because the capacity is not there. I do not mean that as a criticism; it is a reality. It may mean that those most in need do not get. How will you address that?

Ms McKinney:

We make targeted interventions. We carefully monitor the cold spots where communities or geographic areas are not accessing grants, particularly through the small grants programme. We actively encourage work on the ground. I return to the Start Up programme. There is nothing better than an officer in a local council having some financial capacity to encourage a group, through a very light-touch funding programme, to take that first step. That is what that is all about. Hopefully, that will help such a group on the ladder to accessing small grants and lottery project funding, which are more complicated processes. However, we are there to help them through those processes. We see the Start Up programme as being a mechanism to make targeted interventions. We are very conscious that there are groups that still do not know what they can access.

Mr Leonard:

Let me speak with tongue in cheek: I know there has been debate about the Belfast Community Circus School, and so on, but the criticism is made that the Grand Opera House would not be indicative of art in the community.

Ms McKinney:

We would not include the Grand Opera House as a venue in our community arts spend.

Ms McDonough:

The Grand Opera House is not included.

Mr Leonard:

I am being slightly tongue in cheek. I do not mean that to be taken the wrong way.

The Chairperson:

The Arts Council says that additional resources would be required if professional organisations are to do more outreach work. However, would it not just be a case of reprioritising existing budgets for professional arts organisations? Why do they need more resources to do more outreach work?

Ms McDonough:

There are a couple of points to be made. Many of those organisations have been on standstill levels of funding or, year on year, have been unable to get uplifts to match inflation. The situation has been chronic. However, that does not apply to all organisations. This year, we have had to put a vast number of clients on standstill funding: they are getting what they got last year, which, given inflation, represents a reduction. We have had to make some cuts to the funding for other organisations, so they are on reduced funding.

We have had to do that to protect the capital investment. However, our capital investment is not just in the Lyric Theatre and the Mac arts centre; it includes the Playhouse in Derry/Londonderry, the Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin led by An Gaeláras, and the Waterside Theatre. Those are professionally run organisations, but they are also community-based arts centres, and wonderful, new and refurbished facilities are associated with them. I think that they will be able to strengthen their programme of engagement and do more outreach work as a consequence.

However, others will not be able to do that with what we have been able to give them, and to ask them to do so could jeopardise the kind of programming that they need. They have to keep the lights on and the staff in post, where appropriate. Not all of those organisations will be able to keep all their current staff in post as a consequence of some of the decisions that we have had to take. To ask them to undertake even greater activity with scarcer resources will cause them real difficulty.

The Chairperson:

What is the Department's position on that issue? How does the Department feel about asking professional arts organisations to do more outreach work?

Mr Scott:

The Department endorses the Arts Council's position. The council, like most public bodies, needs to assess critically where the available resources can achieve most. It is for the council to decide where those priorities lie. If budgets are being reduced, then difficult choices have to be made.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for coming along, ladies and gentlemen. Billy has strayed into my line of questioning

somewhat; in fact, a coach and horses have been driven through it. However, I will persevere.

My question is to the Department. I will leave the officials to ponder it, and perhaps they can come back to me later with a response. It is a fairly simple question, but I hope that I will receive a fairly complex and accurate answer to it. Is the Department satisfied that the Arts Council's current approach targets the deprived communities that we are concerned about? I will leave that question hanging in the air.

Fundamentally, we — this Committee and Administration — need to encourage the public to believe that any money that we spend on the arts is a wise investment. The more people we can encourage to be engaged in or by the arts, the easier that task will be.

There seems to be a difference between how the Belfast Community Circus School views the figures on funding and how the Arts Council does. A difficulty seems to have arisen. I am not a mathematician or the son of a mathematician, so can you explain what the Arts Council's hang-up is about the figures that the Belfast Community Circus School provided to the Committee? Can you give the Committee a breakdown of how it arrived at the figures that it says are accurate, and can you explain how they have come to a different conclusion and set of figures?

I would like to ask another question of the departmental officials; are we targeting the correct groups?

The Chairperson:

Was your grandfather good at maths? *[Laughter.]*

Mr K Robinson:

No, he was pretty poor at maths, too. That is why I became a school teacher.

Mr Scott:

Targeting social need is a cross-cutting theme for all public bodies. The Arts Council has told the Committee that that theme is mainstreamed in its programmes. We are satisfied that those aspects are being considered in strategies. Dealing with the arts is a complicated process. You cannot put people into boxes. People access, and participate in, the arts in a variety of ways. Some may engage in the arts in their own area, while others may have to travel to do so. That

underpins the evidence base and the research carried out by the Arts Council, as well as the Department's proposals.

To return to the first question, we are taking the time to carry out a scoping exercise so that the Department's work will complement rather than duplicate the work that the Arts Council has done. It may be helpful to share our thinking on the scope of that work to give Committee members an opportunity to reflect on the proposed departmental research. Hopefully, that work will present some of the evidence needed to address some of the issues raised.

On an operational basis, and as regards delivery, I am satisfied that the Arts Council is more than meeting its responsibilities to target resources to best effect and to take account of the deprivation indicators as mainstreamed across the government programme.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for that answer. However, the comment was made earlier that we were making the arts more accessible. That suggests that there is some sort of Pandora's box and that we are getting into whatever it may contain. I am choosing my words very carefully, but is that not a rather superior approach to the arts? Do various art forms not take place down there already? It is not a case of breaking into Pandora's box and making the arts accessible to people down there; rather it is about realising that there are things around us that we can use. There are latent talents and art forms that are perhaps not recognised by the official arts bodies, and they could be promoted.

Mr Scott:

Following discussions with neighbourhood renewal groups, I am conscious that potential opportunities are not being tapped into. There are reports that people in those areas have no vision or ambition for the future. The perception in local communities is that the measures that other Departments have deployed do not appear to be having an effect. One wonders, therefore, whether there is a lack of creative talent and whether giving people an opportunity to access and take part in arts events might spark something within them?

To address that issue, we need to look at what has been done. Roisín McDonough indicated that the Creative Connections strategy is being reviewed. We have only scratched the surface of that strategy, which contains much more detail about actions that might address some of the

issues that we have raised. However, we need an evidence base to see what has been achieved. The pressure on resources does not preclude us from exploring new approaches to delivering the creative connections strategy and departmental aims and objectives. However, any actions must be evidence based. We are in the process of putting that information together, and we will share it with the Committee.

Mr K Robinson:

The Arts Council representatives in the room are working on their computers and calculators in an attempt to answer the other part of my question.

Ms McDonough:

First, we tried to address that point in our written submission and in our response to the Committee's recommendations. The issue was raised by the Community Arts Forum rather than by the Belfast Community Circus School. The Community Arts Forum looked at our annual support for organisations programme, and it pointed out that, between them, two job-sharing officers deal with a portfolio of 10 to 15 clients, who receive only 9% of the funding programme. We said that that was an erroneous conclusion, and, through the Committee, we gave examples of other organisations that we fund that could easily fall under the community arts category. However, we do not put them into that category because those two officers, on their own, could not possibly carry out assessments on up to 40 applications. The remaining applications were assigned to other officers, working in areas such as venues, drama, music and those covering other specific art forms. Therefore, one cannot say that we allocated only 9% of ASOP to community arts because community arts incorporates many spheres of artistic activity, and that is right and appropriate. That has been the principal challenge to those figures.

Moreover, the support for organisations programme is only one programme. We analysed the totality of our funding, across every programme, and we confirmed that it is targeted at the 20% of areas that are most deprived. More than half of our funding goes into those areas, and we are very proud of that track record. That is the kind of approach that we had to take to provide an evidence-based analysis of where our funding goes, and we stated that in our submission, so it is not the case that only 9% of funding goes to community arts and, therefore, it needs more. That is not the approach that we adopted when designing our programmes or targeting our resources. We spend much more than 9% on community arts.

Mr K Robinson:

Your submission states that 56% of principal grants are made within the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, so that shows the amount of money that deprived communities may or may not be getting.

You have also provided supplementary information on the analysis of audiences that attend the Grand Opera House. Are those audience figures used to produce that 56% of funding to the 20% most deprived communities, or do organisations receive funding on the basis of their postcode?

Ms McDonough:

The Grand Opera House has a ticketing system, which captures, at the point of payment, individuals' details, their address and their postcode. We make interventions in super output areas, and the figure is not formed on the basis of obtaining the postcode of every individual who attends any event or programme of activity. That would be logistically impossible. However, the postcode of the organisation is noted.

Furthermore, we ask organisations that receive regular funding for returns. Some of them keep very good evidence and others less so. We understand people's frustration when we ask them to keep evidence of where the beneficiaries are drawn from. However, that helps to inform that analysis beyond simply the postcode of the organisation. That is supplementary information. We cannot obtain the postcode of every individual who participates in a programme of activity. Only organisations with box offices, such as the Grand Opera House, can obtain that information.

Mr McNarry:

I am intrigued about what is and is not community arts. Do you have any money to fund a Flash Harry concert in Portadown between now and the end of April? That would help us.

Ms McDonough:

Does Flash Harry need funding? I thought that he was very popular.

Mr McNarry:

He needs it at the moment.

Miss McIlveen:

At this late point in the discussion, most questions have been answered. I was not at the Committee during your initial evidence sessions, and, therefore, I apologise if I ask questions that have already been answered. In recommendation 13, the Committee recommended that, given participation levels, the Arts Council should increase the level of funding for voluntary arts organisations, such as those involved in amateur dramatics or traditional arts. DCAL's response states that the board of the Arts Council has agreed to consider that recommendation in the context of the 2010-11 Budget settlement. However, the Arts Council's response does not provide that information and challenges the recommendation. What is your understanding of the position?

Mr Scott:

When a budget is allocated, the Arts Council considers the priorities that have been set by the Department and comes back with a detailed business plan. The Department has received a detailed business plan for 2010-11, and we are considering it.

Miss McIlveen:

Your response states that voluntarism and independence are important in the voluntary arts sector and suggests that more funding is required. However, given the public service agreement (PSA) target in the Programme for Government to increase participation in the arts, is more funding for the voluntary arts necessary?

Ms McDonough:

I do not think that we challenged the Committee's recommendation. We endeavoured to describe the nature of the activity and say that it is a very important sphere of activity that has wonderful strengths. Not all of it needs funding. We have given some examples of progression from small-scale amateur initiatives to a pathway into professionalisation. There are many such examples; we have given a couple only. Those are fantastic achievements.

We used to receive a pot of about £250,000 from the Department of Education for traditional arts. That money remained in standstill for a very long time and then decreased year on year. At the moment, we do not know what, if any, funding we will receive. We have been advised that it is unlikely that we will receive any money from the Department of Education for what it calls its cultural traditions programme, under which we funded a lot of grass roots traditional arts activity.

Not only are we faced with a contraction in our own resources as a result of all the issues about which we have been talking, but other Government Departments, in this instance, the Department of Education, are likely to withdraw funding.

In that context, it is very hard to see where we will get the resource to match the ambition of the Committee, which we share. If the Committee has any influence to bring to bear on the Department of Education, it should urge the Department to continue with that funding, because we have had to absorb that loss in our reduced resource envelope. We endeavoured to explain to the Committee the position in which we find ourselves; it is not that we do not share the Committee's ambition.

Miss McIlveen:

There has been a lot of discussion about community and voluntary art. What is voluntary art as opposed to community art?

Ms McDonough:

That is a very good question. The term "voluntary arts" describes a broad range of amateur activity, and I do not say that with any sense of being disparaging. It ranges from photography clubs to watercolour painting to drama and all of the other art forms. People engage in that for lots of different reasons, and there are real benefits.

Perhaps the difference is that, with community arts, there is a strong sense of local identity at community or neighbourhood level. Sometimes a community of interests comes together in a neighbourhood for a particular purpose and engages in the arts; for example, women's organisations or tenants' groups. Some people would say that that is community arts as distinct from an individual taking up photography or joining an amateur dramatics society to put on a performance in a competition. That could be characterised as amateur and voluntary. Broadly, those are the distinctions.

Miss McIlveen:

Do marching bands fit into community or voluntary art, or do they sit on their own?

Ms McDonough:

I would have thought that, broadly speaking, they fit into community art.

Miss McIlveen:

Do they have a recognised pot of money?

Ms McDonough:

The Arts Council has, for the past seven or eight years, probably invested around £3.5 million or £4 million in bands. We invest in the musical instruments for bands scheme, which includes brass, silver, flutes, etc. Our priorities are to increase the repertoire of the bands and to increase the skills of band members and their ability to read and play music perhaps better than they do currently. There is a real focus on young people in disadvantaged areas and on getting them to play music and to engage. That is where our focus resides. As I said, we have been doing that for the past seven or eight years, and there has been a significant amount of investment in that sphere of activity.

Miss McIlveen:

I congratulate you on the work that you do as part of the Re-imaging Communities programme, and I encourage you to do more of it.

Ms McDonough:

Please help us to get the resources that we need to do more.

The Chairperson:

Are you content, Trevor?

Mr T Clarke:

If there is a Flash Harry concert, perhaps Linda Bryans could be the compère, because she is currently out of work.

Mr McNarry:

I second that.

The Chairperson:

That was very helpful, Trevor. Thank you.

I thank the Department and the Arts Council for the presentation this morning and for answering questions.