



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**European Issues**

3 February 2011

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

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

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)  
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Lord Browne  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mr David McClarty  
Mr Ken Robinson  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Edgar Jardine	)	
Ms Joanna McConway	)	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr David Mann	)	

**The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):**

Good morning. Thank you for coming to the meeting. We will now have a discussion on EU engagement. I will hand over to you, Edgar, to introduce your team.

**Mr Edgar Jardine (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for inviting us to the Committee. We hope to give you an

overview of the Department's involvement with European issues and funding. I am joined by two colleagues from the Department: Joanna McConway, who is the head of the arts and creativity branch, which has a specific interest in European funding; and David Mann, who is the deputy head of the inland fisheries group. Fisheries too play a significant role in the interface between the Department and the European Union.

The Committee's interest in European issues is timely. The report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in January 2010 on European issues has prompted a re-evaluation of the Executive's relationship with Europe and how we can strengthen links in the run-up to the main round of funding for 2014-2020.

As a result of that work, the junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) are taking the lead in reinvigorating the work of the Barroso task force, and the European unit in OFMDFM is developing priorities for future EU engagement. Incidentally, OFMDFM is undertaking a review of its Belfast and Brussels offices, on which it is engaging with Departments, including ours.

The approach of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to EU issues is at two levels. First, we contribute to strategic policy development to ensure that EU policy legislation is aligned with DCAL's aims and objectives. We also maintain a watching brief on relevant funding streams so that we can provide support to our sectors when accessing funding from the appropriate sources, whether that be the Special EU Programmes Bodies (SEUPB), the United Kingdom managing authorities or from Europe directly.

The structures provide the necessary links to the European Commission. There are three levels: the first is the European Commission office in Belfast, which provides a direct link to the Commission; secondly, the OFMDFM policy co-ordination unit acts as a liaison across all Departments for updates and inputs on European issues; thirdly, the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels supports Ministers and officials in building networks and in brokering relationships between Brussels machinery and Northern Ireland Departments.

DCAL is not a managing authority for any EU funding in the 2007-2013 period; it does not

channel funding directly from the EU to our sector organisations. That contrasts with Departments such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), which are managing authorities, as is the SEUPB, which is attached to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

As most of our services are delivered at arm's length, we do not draw on EU funding directly, as doing so would create an unnecessary level of bureaucracy. Visiting Arts, the managing authority for the Culture 2007-2013 programme, said that it would prefer to fund individual arts organisations directly. The exception, of course, is where we have direct operational responsibilities in fisheries. In that area, the Department accesses the European Fisheries Fund via DARD, which is the managing authority for that fund. That funding is used to support the implementation of the EU Eel Regulation.

The Department has also availed itself of funding under Peace II and INTERREG IIIa programmes to develop and promote angling waters. Those were very successful programmes that benefited Northern Ireland's economy and its tourism product. We maintain some direct links to Europe on fisheries matters, particularly through our colleagues in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), who provide us with scientific advice. They sit on European committees, where relevant; for example, in developing the EU Eel Regulation, which I mentioned earlier. DCAL also has responsibilities under the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), and our chief fisheries officer leads on co-ordinating our efforts to conserve the Atlantic salmon population.

DCAL and our partners have a strategic role to play in the wider sectoral responsibilities. For example, I sit on the Barroso task force working group, which is currently considering new priorities for our approach to European issues in 2011-12. As the Committee is probably aware, the task force's specific remit is to examine how EU initiatives and programmes can help Northern Ireland to improve competitiveness and create sustainable employment.

Our head of creative industries, Stephen McGowan, who appeared before the Committee last week, has assisted DFP to encourage projects under the northern periphery programme area,

which is also under INTERREG. Stephen was integral to encouraging a number of new projects under that programme, and has also engaged with economists from the SEUPB to develop new INTERREG creative industries programmes in line with DCAL's aims and objectives. It is important to say at this stage that we reckon it is quite important not just to look for money but to try to influence the shape of programmes so that they are better tailored to the needs of our Department.

I will now move on from the strategic role to the funding role. There are a number of funding streams that are relevant to my Department's areas of responsibility. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is a major element of the EU structural funds. In Northern Ireland, it funds the DETI sustainable competitiveness programme and the SEUPB-managed INTERREG and Peace III programmes. DETI supports Northern Ireland Screen, which is one of our sponsored bodies, on projects such as the HBO 'Game of Thrones' production from the sustainable competitiveness programme. The INTERREG programme is managed by the SEUPB, and, as noted, DCAL is involved through taking the lead on creative industries. Both the Arts Council and National Museums have made applications to the Peace III programme, and those are pending final decisions.

Our arm's-length bodies provide support to sectoral organisations that wish to apply for funding, and the Arts Council is particularly proactive in that regard. It retains a dedicated officer to assist organisations in applying for European funding. Its main interest is the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which includes the Leonardo da Vinci programme. Under that programme, a number of member states form a consortium to undertake study visits to exchange skills. The Arts Council previously helped a bid to assist the craft sector. Following a successful visit by sectoral representatives to Finland in November 2010, the Arts Council is bidding for further funds to facilitate a visual arts exchange project.

We are grateful to the Committee for providing us with the Assembly Research and Library Service briefing paper on the issue. As it notes, a number of arts sector organisations have availed themselves of funding from the current Culture 2007-2013 programme. Sectoral organisations can seek funding directly from the EU or from EU managing authorities that administer EU funding at member-state level. To put it in perspective, the culture programme is

relatively small in the overall context of EU funds, as the structural funds tend to take the lion's share of resources. Organisations funded by the Arts Council received European funding totalling £384,000 in 2008 and £278,000 in 2009 from various sources.

Members are probably aware that there are a number of constraints that limit the value and access to European funding and how it can be used. I particularly point to the importance of additionality, in that, just like Lottery funding, we cannot use European funding to cover core costs or activities. Many organisations are already struggling to deliver their core activities at the moment, and, even with the help of government bodies, their capacity to take on additional work is limited, particularly as they do not get any support for core activities through the funding programmes.

Furthermore, there is usually a requirement for a partnership element in European funding streams. That can sometimes pose difficulties. For example, the culture programme's criteria require projects to have strong cross-country co-operation objectives. Festival support is reserved for cultural festivals that have a European dimension. Few, if any, of the festivals that we fund through the DCAL community festivals fund meet those criteria. In fact, they are usually locally based and, in general, are concerned with promoting or celebrating local issues. Many of our sectoral organisations also deal specifically with activities that are unique to Northern Ireland.

We see opportunities for continued engagement on EU issues. Policy development for the sixth cohesion policy is under way. That is the EU's major policy for setting criteria for structural funding. As I mentioned before, that is a large proportion of EU funding. Previously, Europe has focused on infrastructure. However, the emphasis is expected to move to take account of the changing economic climate and focus on employment, knowledge-based enterprise and innovation. Those are all areas in which DCAL has a stake, so, at EU level, funding is likely to be directed at the newer, poorer states, and the process will become more competitive for the perceived wealthy states and regions such as Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The UK has suggested that, in the next round, wealthier member states could be allowed to decide their own regional priorities and fund their own regional programmes, rather than continue to receive EU funds that are prescriptive to certain objectives. That could help to remove some of

the current barriers to accessing funding, although it is at a fairly early stage of consideration. Finally, engagement at an early stage will increase the chances of making the most of European funding after 2014, and we will certainly play our part with the assistance of OFMDFM's European office and our UK counterparts. The current efforts to reinvigorate the Barroso task force working group are particularly important in that context. I am now happy to take questions.

**The Chairperson:**

Appendix B to the Minister's response refers to the new EU culture programme and says that Sport NI and the Ulster-Scots Agency do not have any plans to avail themselves of funding under that programme. One would think that, with all the pressure on funding, both organisations would position themselves to try to avail themselves of the culture programme. What are your comments on that?

Secondly — you have covered some of this with the Barroso task force — how does DCAL contribute to the policy development debate at EU level, given that the EU has recently taken a greater interest in sport promotion and development? Dr Dan Hull's research paper draws the Committee's attention to a European Commission White Paper on sport, which was published in 2007. One of the measures in that is a European sport forum.

**Mr Jardine:**

For the smaller bodies, it goes back to the amount of effort that is required. It is not really so much the application, but the European Union now has very significant monitoring requirements, and quite a significant administrative overhead is very often required for relatively small sums of money.

Sport NI is not currently engaged in those programmes, but I think that it has been involved in the past. In fact, in 2002, it drew some money down. However, it also benefits from Peace money through the north-west Peace III project, which delivers a coaching and club development programme across Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh, Donegal and Sligo. It has a cross-border dimension. It is not a direct applicant to Peace III but receives funding indirectly through the coaching element of the project. The value of that is around £15,000, which is not a huge amount of money. In general, bodies are not involved significantly because of the degree of effort and

because of the business areas involved. For example, the festival funding requires several countries to engage, yet most of the festival money in our proposals is for localised festivals such as Féile an Phobail, local council festivals, and so on.

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

You were asking about the European Commission's White Paper on Sport. When we are talking about strategic policy development, we have a number of links to Europe. Edgar mentioned OFMDFM's European co-ordination unit, which has offices in Belfast and Brussels. However, our primary contact with Europe is through our counterpart Departments in the UK. For DCAL, specifically on sports, contact is through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and, on fisheries, we work a lot through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Therefore, our strategic input on the White Paper is through DCMS. The strategy covers three areas: the social function; the economic impact; and the organisation of sport right across Europe. Similar issues are covered in 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019'.

**Mr O'Loan:**

I am struck by a point in the research paper, which you will have seen, arising from the Lisbon Treaty on the interest that the EU is taking in the contribution that sport makes, in particular, to social cohesion. I see that there is no budget line attached to it. From what you are saying, which is good, I take it that there is congruence on DCAL's sports policies and what is emerging from Europe. In preparing for the next funding period, beginning in 2014, are you getting any signals that there will be a sporting dimension to funding and that programmes will be created around that?

**Mr Jardine:**

It may not be called sport, but we certainly expect something around social cohesion. We see sport as being a very strong contender in that, and we are firmly of the view that sport has a role to play in social inclusion. Even in the work being done through the Barroso task force to look at next year's priorities, social cohesion looks as though it will be on the radar screen. That is the kind of area in which we see sport having a particular opportunity to bid.



**Mr O’Loan:**

Are you expecting specific sports programmes, even on an international basis? I can see how one could be designed.

**Mr Jardine:**

On whether it will be based specifically on sport or on sport’s contribution to skills, health, and so on, it is more likely to be embraced on a broader canvas.

**Ms McConway:**

It is important to say that Peace III funding is specific to Northern Ireland and the cross-border region, and, although it is not a sports or arts programme, it is available to all cross-border projects. It is certainly applicable to sport, and we foresee it continuing into the next spending period.

**Mr K Robinson:**

To pick up on what Joanna said about Peace III and the emphasis on the cross-border region, one of the fundamental flaws here is that, because we have become so used to coming up with cross-border issues, we are missing the big game in Europe. In addition, we all agree about the limited capacity of organisations to apply for funding. We see that at a local level, where, for example, small groups cannot apply to the Arts Council because they do not have the in-house capacity to find the appropriate form, fill it in and put forward a justifiable case. Can you not take a leaf out of local government’s book and consider the programmes that they have come up with? I am a member of Newtownabbey Borough Council. I was the chairperson of Euron ‘99, and, as a result of getting involved in a European programme, we brought 21 countries and more than 300 exhibitors to the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. Recently, through our twinning links with towns in Poland and Germany, we brought a music festival to Mossley Mill. We had jazz bands from Poland, groups from Germany and the Friendship Band from Northern Ireland. We have to reach outside the box. Way back at the birth of the Assembly, the Chairperson and I were on the then Committee of the Centre, and we were very critical of what was happening — or not happening — in Europe regarding this Administration. Quite honestly, we seem to be revisiting the points that we raised 10 or 12 years ago about what is going on in Brussels. We still merely respond, because we are not in early enough to shape policy before it becomes an EU

directive. I referred to David and the marine side of things, such as trying to save the Atlantic salmon. I have a constant battle with developers who want to develop in a river basin where local angling groups are struggling to maintain or re-establish salmon. I am thinking of the Three Mile Water in the Newtownabbey area, where, against all the odds, locals have done that. I have to tell developers, as I did recently, to be careful because about eight Atlantic nations, not just planners or the local council, will be on their tail.

We seem to lack an overall drive to get into Europe at an earlier level. We seem to lack the drive to deviate from the Peace III-type programmes, where, as long as we tick the box of Donegal, Sligo or Louth, we are OK because we are Europeans. However, that will not work; we have to go further into Europe; we have to look at the emerging European nations to the east. That is where the development and the European grant money are going. DCAL must think — and reach — outside the box if you and those organisations are to access the money still available. Do not be blinded by the easy options of Peace III or Peace IV.

**Mr Jardine:**

You made several important points; the first was the issue of influence. Through our office in Brussels and through the Barroso task force and so on, it is vital that we influence the shape of programmes rather than simply apply what Europe sends us. Secondly, I totally accept your point about focusing on Peace III. Anybody who has experience of working Peace III knows that it requires courage and perseverance. Peace III and funds such as the culture fund and so on are at the margins; the big money is in structural funds. That is where we need to direct our attention.

The other point was support for groups. The Arts Council, in the DCAL family, has been the most proactive; it has a dedicated arts officer whose job is to assist people. Finally, you talked about the local authority, and in many ways local authorities have led the way. Visiting Arts made the point that it would much prefer to deal not with Departments but with bodies that are second or third tier removed.

**The Chairperson:**

Who is the Arts Council's dedicated officer?

**Ms McConway:**

Debra Mulholland. Although organisations still regard applications as daunting, the European Union has done much to make the application process much more streamlined. It is still difficult to access funding directly from Europe, but managing authorities are there to smooth that process and assist. The Arts Council is helping to build those links; it worked closely with the British Council, which was the precursor to Visiting Arts, and it now works closely with Visiting Arts on the culture programme. It also accesses the lifelong learning programme, for which Icarus is the managing authority in the UK. We are not looking just at Northern Ireland-allocated funding: £1.1 billion will be allocated to Northern Ireland over the 2007-2013 period, £977 million of which is through our local Departments. Most of the funding that we should access has already been allocated to Northern Ireland through Peace III, INTERREG, DETI and so on. That is why we still focus on those funds.

**Mr K Robinson:**

To my mind as a layman, Europe is not as central to our thinking as it once was. I do not hear it as often in the media and I do not see as much activity at a higher level directed towards Europe. Community groups are very active in seeking European help to fit into various categories and schemes, but we need our second wind at a higher level to get back into Europe in a way that we were perhaps 20 years ago.

**Mr Jardine:**

I think that the Minister has recognised that, which is why the junior Ministers in OFMDFM, who lead on Europe, are giving a strong lead to Departments to get the second wind on Barroso. It has been described as reinvigorating. It is timely, now that preparation is under way for the 2014 and 2020 programmes.

**Mr K Robinson:**

David, we had concerns about the commercial side of fishing and the inland potential.

**Mr David Mann (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):**

You mentioned the engagement with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) to which we are signed up through the EU. Our chief fisheries officer engages with

that body regularly, and we have a strong body of research on salmon conservation from the River Bush salmon station. That feeds directly into our policy development on NASCO. We also draw down money from NASCO for habitats work. We work with angling clubs to improve the habitat in areas where salmon are spawning. There is strong engagement.

**Lord Browne:**

You said that the Arts Council is in discussions with the British Council on joint funding. What is the form of those discussions, and is there any indication of their outcome?

**Ms McConway:**

The British Council is no longer the managing authority; the culture programme is now under Visiting Arts, and the lifelong learning programme is under Icarus. The Arts Council works with the managing authorities to promote the funding that is available and to work out what is applicable to its funded organisations in Northern Ireland. The Arts Council has many outlets to do that; it has seminars for its funded organisations, produces newsletters and has a website. It does that for promotion purposes, and it works with its funded organisations to build links between it and the UK organisations. When it comes to applications and audit requirements, it can be of most assistance.

**The Chairperson:**

There are no further questions. I am grateful to Edgar, Joanna and David for their evidence. Thank you very much.