



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

**Inquiry on Maximising the Potential of
the Creative Industries**

23 February 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Steven Hadley	Audiences NI
Mr Peter Johnston	BBC Northern Ireland
Ms Jill Graham	Craft & Design Collective
Ms Jan Irwin	Craft & Design Collective
Mr Michael Jones	Discovery Glass
Ms Irene McBride	Discovery Glass
Mr Dermot Lavery	DoubleBand Films
Mr Michael Ockwell	Grand Opera House
Mr John Anderson	John Anderson
Mr Ciarán McAuley	Lyric Theatre
Mr John Edmund	Marketing Strategy & Planning
Mr Roger Fitzpatrick	Northern Ireland Film & Television Trade Association
Mr Mark Garrett	Northern Ireland Film & Television Trade Association
Mr David Kilpatrick	Northern Ireland Film & Television Trade Association
Ms Briony Crozier	Northern Ireland Museums Council
Mr David Hyndman	Northern Visions
Mr Jonathan Rose	Ofcom NI
Ms Ruth Cooper	Prison Arts Foundation
Mr Michael Maloney	Prison Arts Foundation
Mr Geoff Moore	Prison Arts Foundation
Ms Sarah McCaffrey	UTV Ltd
Ms Una Murphy	Una Murphy
Ms Denise Hayward	Volunteer Now
Ms Callie Persic	West Belfast Partnership
Mr Fintan Cheng	Womb Productions
Ms Carole Kane	Worker's Educational Association

Mr Steven Hadley (Audiences NI): Quiet at the back, please. The performance is about to begin. Our feedback is sponsored by Creative Scotland. I just wanted to make that clear.

[Laughter.]

I will go through this point by point. On the first issue, we really questioned the need for a subsectoral analysis. That was representative of the fact that the creative industries have quite different elements, the scale of which is vast, and that process does not really allow for those differences to be acknowledged.

We questioned whether this was about inward investment in respect of domestic markets or whether it was export focused. Although very different disciplines are involved in the creative industries, quite generic statements tend to be used about them. The indicators and definitions, especially the economic ones, do not transfer from one sector to another. Some sectors are operating in public and private, and some are exclusively private.

On the issue of key challenges, I banged on a bit about 'War Horse', because it is a really obvious example of the arts and cultural industries. We need the ability, resource and capacity to take risks. We talked about the need for investment in education and for third-level institutions to have a connection with the real world and industry. We questioned, from a government perspective, how you could corral creativity and try to teach it. We talked a lot about regaining confidence and creating the right environment for creative people and organisations either to thrive or to settle in Northern Ireland. There are issues around regional pride, leadership from the Assembly and, as Michael said when he joined our table, how we all work for and with each other. The example of Creative Scotland came up several times during that conversation.

On the third issue, it was pointed out that the measure we are looking at is not an immediate return on investment, which seems to be the mantra of so many conversations at the moment, but what the wider economy and society will look like 20 years to 30 years down the line. The political will to achieve anything is a recurring issue. We talked about Creative Scotland, and whether Scotland's year of creativity was something that could genuinely happen in Northern Ireland. A lot of politicians, it was felt, support cultural and creative industries when there is a clear economic output, but that will disappear when the discussion turns to different kinds of outputs.

It was pointed out that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is the golden thread — it does not have the money, but it has the ideas — but there are inbuilt bureaucratic obstacles, with senior civil servants operating in silos. We had long conversations about not reinventing the wheel, in that a lot of work around best practice has been done. We referred to Creative Scotland again when we talked about that. We felt that it was important to acknowledge the irony of sitting around talking about how to be creative and then talking about copying what someone else has done. We need to be mindful of that.

When we addressed the fourth point, we said that we needed to be pragmatic, look elsewhere and learn from other people rather than copy from them. We noted that there is a great difference between our product base here and building a structure to develop it, by which we mean that there are issues of quality and of product being international-class and world-class. It is all very well saying that we should look at what we have and build an infrastructure on top to enable people to go to export markets and develop their businesses, but what if the product is not there in the first place? We need to have an enormous prior conversation about how we get world-class products with which to leverage economic and social impacts.

We talked a lot about building a cultural identity for Northern Ireland and acknowledging that we are a region of Ireland as well as a region of the UK. Obviously, that taps back into political will and is about whether we can maximise the fact that, in some senses, Northern Ireland is behind the curve, but it should be small enough and agile enough to learn from and capitalise on other people's best practice and mistakes, move quickly and get ahead of the game.

We felt that joined-up government is more of a dream than a reality. We need strategic investment, not funding, and a development body, not a funding body. There is a feeling that this process — although it is worthwhile and we are happy to engage in it — is perhaps, too catch-all to be useful. We feel that we need to break down the sectors for individual analysis.

We were talking about political will — we are looking at Creative Scotland again — and the fact that our politicians will support the cultural and creative industries if clear economic outputs are defined, but, as soon as you start talking about social or cultural capital or the value of things beyond economic considerations, they tend to be less interested. We felt that Creative Scotland had made the economic, social and the cultural argument in one go and was, therefore, something that we could learn from.

Mr Ciarán McAuley (Lyric Theatre): Good afternoon. The votes are in from table 2. We also had quite a diverse range of responses. I take Stephen's point that today's event is a catch-all process, which makes it difficult to get complete consensus, but we have got some.

When we discussed point 1, there was definitely a feeling that there needs to be greater recognition of the non-economic benefits of the creative industries — the more qualitative elements — but that there is insufficient evidence to prove them. Perhaps we need some more studies and research on the impact that the creative industries can have.

We talked about the behavioural impact of the training opportunities that are provided by the creative industries and the fact that they are not easily measured. Those include working with social problems such as addictions and therapy, and they are much less tangible. We need research to identify what those benefits are.

There was a comment that some outputs, particularly in the film industry, are not necessarily seen by Northern Ireland audiences. We need to consider routes by which our indigenous products can be seen by the indigenous people. We need to develop the local taste for local product.

When we discussed point 2, which was to do with identifying the key challenges, we found quite a few. I am sorry to harp on about it, but the first was the lack of funding. There is a feeling that there is not sufficient funding to support practitioners, and, therefore, practitioners are left to get other jobs. Therefore, there is a challenge between maintaining their other jobs, which are helping them to feed their families, and their craft career, which they should be developing. Insufficient funding means that practitioners cannot concentrate on their crafts.

There is a feeling that the restrictions on grants and on the opportunities to bring in grants do not recognise the stages of different industries' development. For example, a start-up business may be able to access moneys more easily than a business that has been in operation for a number of years, even though that business has to reinvest in capital equipment, and there are no mechanisms to allow such organisations to do that. So, restrictions on grants need to be reviewed.

There is also a feeling that cuts in other sectors will lead to reduced service provision and that that will indirectly affect the creative learning industry. The Prison Arts Foundation, in particular, made that point. It said that the cuts in the criminal justice system were affecting personnel in prisons and, therefore, the ability of the Prison Arts Foundation to deliver in prisons. It is not just cuts in the arts sector but cuts outside it that will affect its delivery.

The comment was made that there is insufficient research to influence policy and that there is always a need to prove our worth. We always feel that we need to prove the worth of the creative industries, be it to politicians, policy makers or the public at large. Creative industries are seen as a soft option and, therefore, not as valuable as hospital beds or cancer units.

Point 3 was about the particular gaps that exist. Again, that comes back to the fact that our practitioners are dependent on part-time jobs or, on the other side, the benefits system. Therefore, risks to the benefits system could affect the creative industries.

There are few support networks in the creative industries, particularly for supporting the business side and giving people the business acumen they need in the industry. The forms involved are very economically driven, and people in the creative industries do not necessarily have the skills to fill them in. So, we need some support networks. There are support networks such as the Go For It network,

but it is structured more for traditional, commercial and economic models of business than those for the creative industries. We feel that there is a gap, because people coming into the industry are not being given enough practical skills, and that relates back to the business part of it. Even on a practical level, we have people studying at university, but when it comes to putting those skills to use in a practical way, they cannot do so.

Point 4 was about other models, particularly those for craft. The feeling was that the craft models in ROI, England, Wales and Scotland are much better because separate craft councils have been set up in those regions. There are tax credits for film production in other parts of the UK and in ROI. Such tax credits are not available here, even though they would help film industry. There is a feeling that we need much more research on the audiences and the people of Northern Ireland, as opposed to stealing research from other regions. We need research here, because that will affect our policy and the way in which we do things.

On point 5, we need greater collaboration among the different sectors and collectives. The Prison Arts Foundation feels that there needs to be greater collaboration with, in particular, the Departments, because it has access to a lot of different Departments, and that works for it. A lot of the creative industries are put into the silo of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and yet we all know that those industries have greater impacts on areas such as education and social cohesion. Therefore, we feel that other Departments need to take responsibility for the creative industries. There is also a feeling that when a particular advocate of a project leaves the Department, there is sometimes a loss of momentum and support for the creative industry concerned, and that can cause a hiatus. So, some thought also needs to be given to that.

There is a strong feeling that the career routes from formal education into the creative industries are not robust enough to allow people aged 15, 16, 17 and 18 to see how the choices they make at those ages might affect the jobs they take in later life. We tend to push our children into formal education and traditional industries and jobs. There is a feeling that if you do art, you are going to be an artist, but that is not always the case. If you do art, you could end up in the creative industries doing costume design, film design or whatever. So we need to look at how we can allow children to develop knowledge of the opportunities in the creative industries earlier.

On point 6, we feel that there is a pressure to meet the demands of current interests and priorities. For example, digital media is exciting and sexy at the moment. However, for those not in digital media or that sector, there is a danger that traditional crafts and creative industries may fall by the wayside. Therefore, investment that was made in those industries is at risk, and there is a pressure to tick the boxes, as it were, to access funding. That also applies to prioritising targeting social need (TSN), which is valid. However, if you do not work in a TSN area, you feel as though your work is not valued.

There is a danger of investing in the now. We need to be aware of the future legacy, for example, of the film industry. If we are investing in projects such as HBO productions, which, again, are very worthy, are we looking to the future and making sure that the grassroots part of the industry is being developed enough, so that we have sufficient structures in place to support that industry if the HBO-type project disappears? There is also the danger of lower-priority areas disappearing because we are not funding them.

In the theatre sector, one issue that I fully support is the need to recognise the benefits of the professional sector and not just areas such as the community sector. Those are all valid, but people in the professional sector depend on funding for their work and to feed their families. We need to invest more in the professional sector and recognise its worth.

Mr Peter Johnston (BBC Northern Ireland): It is my task to try to summarise a part-conversation between four of us from very different backgrounds, which illustrates the problem of how many sectors we all represent. Undoubtedly, there are connections. The one thing that we all agreed on, however, was that there is potential for higher economic benefits. We talked about those benefits and how they manifest themselves. It is easier to spot the benefits of something such as 'Game of Thrones', but there are, for example, tourism events coming up in 2012 and 2013 that have significant benefits.

We talked about the individual experiences of a craft-based business and how economic benefit is generated from that. That is quite difficult to do, and we need to be more sophisticated about how we work out what we are trying to achieve. As others said, a lot of this is about social capital that may have long-term benefits that are hard to predict in the normal risk/return model that we use to approach those things.

We kept returning to the fragmented nature of our industries and the sector and how to address that. That should be a strength in a place of our size and scale. However, our perception is that we do not really have that, and we then talked a lot about the trendy stuff of clustering. However, you need to get into the detail of how and why you cluster and what you are trying to achieve by that. Some of that is probably about grouping creative people who may not have instinctive business skills and then having an infrastructure around them to be able to exploit that on their behalf, as long as it is not exploitative.

Government and universities have a role, but we need to define and be clear about that role.

The economic context is an issue. Some of the industries that we are talking about are under economic pressure. Others, funnily enough, are bucking the trend of economic pressure. There was the inevitable discussion about digital media. The key issue for us was defining what it is. Many so-called digital media businesses or industries are based on very old industries, such as selling books or connecting people socially. You have to have a proposition or service to be able to sell using digital means. It is not quite as simple as saying, "If we build it, they will come".

That said, digital media is clearly something to focus on, because this is a relatively peripheral place, and the beauty of digital technology is that it opens you up to a wider market.

We spoke about funding and how government and others can support things. A good point from David Hyndman is that we always tend to talk about funding schemes. However, are there things we can do that do not cost money but have a significant impact? There is a tendency to think that money will solve everything, but you have not really sorted out what you are trying to achieve.

To make an impact in this area more than in many others, you need to understand that it needs speed, flexibility, and probably a different attitude to risk. If there are to be government interventions, the inherent risks and the approach need to be thought through carefully.

We talked about training and skills as well. We think that there is a place for intensive apprenticeship schemes in certain areas. We have begun to identify those in some industries. We are involved in one at the minute with Skillset and Northern Ireland Screen. We said that thought needs to be given to how people who benefit from such apprenticeship schemes are to move to the next level. Have we really thought that through?

One of the challenges was prioritisation versus letting 1,000 flowers bloom. My solution to that argument is, basically, to try to do both. It is a business in which you need to facilitate creativity from wherever it comes and have an infrastructure that does that. At the same time, you need to prioritise some big projects from which you get big returns, such as the much discussed 'Game of Thrones'. You might need to do both those things at the two ends of the spectrum rather than oversimplify it, because it is not as simple as that.

We recognise that it is good to get people together in a framework such as this. It was quite difficult because of the differing perspectives, interests and all of that. To some degree, that is good, if what we have said is that we were too fragmented in the first place. However, you need a really detailed plan to make any tangible progress. If we just rework or reheat other theories that are too conceptual, we will not really make any progress.

Ciarán McAuley mentioned evidence. We, too, talked about having robust evidence of what the benefits are and how they most come to light, but we were more sceptical. I do not know why there is an obsession with Creative Scotland and experiences elsewhere. We think that you should learn from other places. However, we think that we need to look at those experiences very carefully, see what worked and decide whether it would fit here. We need to create some of our own solutions because, frankly, we are a bit different in all sorts of ways.

Like others, we also made the point about joined-up government. At least three Departments are involved in all this. We echo what someone said about the possibility of DCAL being part of the wiring — a creative connection, if you like. However, other Departments also need to play a role if the creative industries are to fulfil their full potential.

Ms Callie Persic (West Belfast Partnership): A lot has been said that we will touch on as well. We know that the creative industries have a massive economic impact. In addition to the points raised earlier, we also said that the creative industries make a huge impact on creating vibrant communities, which are attractive for investors to come and stay and for people to live. We do not want to underestimate that. It is about creating vibrancy within our city and communities, and the creative industries contributes to that, of course.

I will move on to the challenges. I listened to everybody, and one of the things that came up time and again is the challenge of urban and rural creative industries. I thought about it, because we are often Belfast centric. The challenges are political will, joined-up government, the need for a strategy and how to represent the sector. Should it be represented by one voice, or are there many voices, because there are different subsectors? How do we do that? How do we show better leadership? General information and communication across the sector is a real challenge for us. We may be communicating with each other, but are we communicating to the right people? Is information getting out there?

Everybody has spoken about skills development, which just underlines the importance of skills development and business development skills, for example. Key challenges include funding and access to finance to help people to get up and going, to become sustainable and to become businesses, if they so choose. It was also pointed out a couple of times that there are arts that will need to be subsidised. We need to recognise that not all arts will become businesses and that there is value in that.

We need to be a bit more innovative and quicker in risk taking. That leads us into the gaps in the curriculum, skills development and the careers guidance that people get. There are bits and pieces of financial support, so how do we join that up better? How do we get people thinking about the creative industries as a career opportunity? We talked about creative internships and apprenticeships, and it seems that a lot of people here are thinking the same way.

In relation to the policies, it was felt at one point that we had the lead on many things, such as the music strategy, but we have fallen behind and are being asked to take the lead from others. We want to get back to where we were. We were also leaders in the crafts but have fallen behind a little bit.

In terms of point 5, there are three main players: government, academia and industry. The community and voluntary sector is important too, because it is the fourth partner that brings people up and through. A lot of the time, folks are in their bedrooms writing apps, for example. How do we get them linked in?

Another thing that we talked about was the need for infrastructure to help artists to do their crafts and what they want to do and to provide business support for them. Maybe, different people are required to do that. How do we help get that done? The fragmentation is, of course, big, but we talked about how to create tangible things — spaces, networks, schemes and gatherings — so that we can bring people into a room and exciting things can happen, and that will help combat the isolation people experience when working. That is important because a lot of people are sole traders.

If we are going to prioritise, we must remember that these are creative processes, so a lot of the time they are spontaneous. So, sometimes we need something that will help us react and be creative. Sometimes the timescales, such as funding coming once a year, are not realistic. We need something that is more flexible; perhaps, a fund of some sort. We also need to develop the idea that we can be a bit more risk taking and take calculated risks.

We need to be smart about the priorities we want to target. Also, if we have targeted priorities, we need to know that there is whole value change around that. There are other subsectors that could benefit, so we need to make sure that they are given the capacity to link into those higher priorities.

Ms Sarah McCaffrey (Ulster Television): I am going to keep this brief, because a lot of the areas have already been discussed. I am from UTV, Jonathan Rose is from Ofcom, Mark Garrett is from a production company and Michael Jones is from a craft industry. Sorry that the discussion became very broadcast orientated, Michael, but we did talk about the crafts and tourism, how you could get more money from tourists and what more we could do with craft.

We were also discussing non-news programming and the success of Irish and Ulster-Scots programme funding. Also, we looked at how we could do more non-news programming. In the South of Ireland, there is Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) funding, and maybe something like that in Northern Ireland would be beneficial for production companies here, because, not only could they get an investment in non-news programming, they could look to network production with that form of funding.

We also spoke about licences. At UTV, we have our licence renewal coming up, so Jonathan and I had a quick chat about that. The radio licences are also coming up for renewal. The financing for those community licences is an issue. In Wales, according to Jonathan, the Government give funding to community radio stations. Could there be something like that in Northern Ireland? Maybe, that is something to be explored.

Again, the issue of skills came up. That is very important. I came from a skills focussed trainee background, so I understand how important that is. I also did an HND in media, so skills are very important. We have spoken about that, so I will not go on about it in detail.

We also spoke about tax rebates and were talking about people coming here to make productions and getting confused about Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, because our tax rates are so different. The issue of corporation tax came up, and there was discussion about what would happen if our rates became similar or our rate became lower.

There was also discussion about copyright issues and the regulation of content. If you put something on YouTube, there is a whole issue with copyright.

Filling in forms was discussed, and that has come up a couple of times. Forms can be very bureaucratic and sometimes not very friendly, so we were talking about trying to find new ways around that. We talked about investing in talent and internships with bigger production companies. I know that the BBC is involved in a great set-up at the moment. Also, we spoke of the university of skills and transferable skill sets: what a great body it is, but it probably means more money, skills, training for young people and funding. Funding came up quite a bit. I have basically summarised that, but everything has already been addressed.

Mr Michael Ockwell (Grand Opera House): This is the joy of coming last: everything has been said.

We felt that, if society is judged by the quality of its social well-being, then its culture is its key driver. We are involved in an industry that inspires, and we should never forget that. If we cannot harness that potential and make sure that we sell it, we are totally underselling ourselves.

We felt that there needs to be collaboration at all levels. We think that there is a lack of joined-up thinking. The education system devalues arts and leisure, and that is a key point. We should nurture talent in the future and stop the skills-flight from here. There is a brain drain, and people are leaving these islands. We need to provide proper training opportunities.

As to filling in forms, we need to look at that in a different way. There needs to be a better way to distribute money, and it should be recognised that it is investment and not subsidy. Funding bodies would do better to address gaps in the market and treat the sector as a proper industry. That is not just a DCAL remit, but an all-government remit. We need to be better at making those arguments. It

goes back to what was said: do we want our bins emptied, or ballet dancers on stage of the Grand Opera House? We will never win that argument, so we need to be far better at how we frame the arguments.

We felt that there is a lack of policy and a lack of skills and knowledge on the part of those who are trying to set the policies. We are great advocates of Creative Scotland. We thought it a very good model to look at. We felt that the creative industries are wider than just the arts. We have an all-encompassing industry, and lots of people are involved in the sector. We talked at some length about whether there should be an all-Ireland strategy; about the fact that the arts deal with identity, but they should be wider than that; and we also addressed the issue that our neighbours across the border have, for instance, no VAT on ticketing for cultural events, and no VAT on the restoration of buildings. Therefore, we are holding back, and inhibiting product that we can produce, because we are not playing on a level playing field.

We felt that collaboration is important; we need to develop business skills; and we need to partner proper cultural organisations with business. We need to define what a cultural sector is. Where does it start and where does it stop? Then we can determine how we can collaborate. We felt that there is a need for an audit of what is happening and who is involved. If we had an up-dated skills audit, we could establish a baseline. Once we do that, we can proceed to the last point, which is to feasibly prioritise which elements of our sector should get the money.

I have to say, however, that everyone at my table felt that the Grand Opera House was a very worthy beneficiary.

[Laughter.]

Thank you.