



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of the  
Creative Industries in Northern Ireland:  
Belfast Metropolitan College

24 May 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of the Creative Industries in Northern Ireland:  
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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)  
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Dominic Bradley  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mrs Karen McKeivitt  
Mr Oliver McMullan  
Mr Pat Sheehan  
Mr Robin Swann

**Witnesses:**

Mr Damian Duffy	Belfast Metropolitan College
Mr Justin Edwards	Belfast Metropolitan College
Ms Gillian Magee	Belfast Metropolitan College

**The Chairperson:** We are going to receive evidence from Belfast Metropolitan College. I welcome Mr Damian Duffy, who is the director of development and learner services, Ms Gillian Magee, who is head of corporate development, and Mr Justin Edwards, who is the director of curriculum and assistant chief executive officer.

First, I thank you very much for hosting us today. It really is a pleasure to have been given a sneak preview before your official opening. It was a wonderful tour, and certainly very relevant to what we are looking at in our inquiry. I invite you to make some opening remarks, after which members will want to follow up with some questions.

**Mr Justin Edwards (Belfast Metropolitan College):** Thank you very much, Chair. I am delighted that the Committee was able to join us at our E3 building. Thank you all very much for attending and taking the opportunity to see the facilities that we are about to open. We are very proud of this new facility, which, in conjunction with our facility at Titanic Quarter, is demonstrating how further education is evolving and continuing to evolve in its relationship with industry and in its development of the curriculum, teaching and learning for all ages, levels and abilities.

I will take a moment to outline some of the concepts, particularly around this building, because they may be relevant to your line of inquiry. The E3 building on the Springvale campus was not developed around a concept of a specific curriculum, although there are some specific curriculum elements in it; it was developed around the concept of reintegrating creativity and innovation — I put those two items together — into all forms of curriculum. You had the opportunity to see the open-plan area, which is

capable of holding over 200 people and can bring teams of students together from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds to think creatively and innovatively about industry-based projects.

The idea is to bring in live industry projects and bring industry close to what we are trying to do in education and training, giving the students the experience of what industry is looking at, but, again, taking a step back from the skills that the curriculum requires and allowing learners to think laterally and creatively and come up with solutions. That is the theme behind this building. To date, we have been able to pilot that project with great success. We have been able to share that success with certain industries, particularly the IT and media industries, but it goes much further and much wider than that into engineering, manufacturing and construction. Again, you have had the opportunity to see what we are doing there today.

This Committee has heard from members of the IT industry, and I note that they made reference to Belfast Met and the work that we are trying to do, particularly around gaming with our Codea Dojo. Our Codea Dojo is established. It encourages young people to engage in games design and computer engineering in a creative way. There is also our new open source games design and interactive media curriculum, which will happen on this campus, and our foundation degree and incubation centres, which will be based here at E3. It is a very exciting time for the college. We are creating great opportunities and new ways of thinking about how to instil more creativity into that range of subject areas and bring out the creative industries.

**Ms Gillian Magee (Belfast Metropolitan College):** Thank you for coming today. I echo Justin's comments; you are very welcome, and we hope that this will be the first of many visits. I am going to take a minute or two to go through some of the detail of our submission. One of the joys of being last up is the fact that you get to read through all of the Hansard reports. It has been interesting for us to do that. It is very clear that themes are emerging, and they echo the comments that we put into our original submission. Your own report shows that the creative industries and the sector as a whole contributed just 2% of our gross value added (GVA). That compares with almost three times of that in the UK and double in the Republic of Ireland. According to your report, jobs created in the sector over the past decade grew by about a quarter, compared with the entirety of Northern Ireland creating around 10% additional jobs.

We welcome the inquiry, because it has recognised and acknowledged the fact that the sector is largely untapped. We were very keen to come at it from two areas, first to consider the opportunities and the benefits that we as the FE sector might bring, but also to shine a light on where we perceive some of the barriers to be. In pulling together our submission, we considered a myriad of research from Belfast City Council, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Sector Skills Council. That research is out there, and everyone has access to it.

We have grouped the barriers to growth under three basic headings. Business acumen and the composition of the sector require consideration. With the exception of the ICT and digital arms, the majority of creative businesses are microbusinesses. Traditionally, and still today, those businesses have lacked the skills to take their product to market. I come from a tourism background. One thing that we constantly found in tourism was that, traditionally, it was very difficult to put something in front of the visitor to buy. We call on the Committee to consider that in its inquiry.

The second area is around investment in people. As I said, traditionally, a lot of microbusinesses in the sector have neither the funds nor the time to undertake self-development or employee development. That is something that needs to be looked at. One area that Justin has touched on and, I am sure, the Committee will want to explore in a little bit of detail later, is skills and qualifications. Practitioners are asking for closer working relationships with the colleges and the universities to bridge a gap in terms of what they perceive to be a fit-for-purpose curriculum and to ensure that the end product — the graduates and the learners who we produce at the other end — are fit to go in and able to deliver.

One message that I would like to leave with the Committee is that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has empowered us to create and to work within a flexible framework. We can work very quickly and respond in a very flexible way to industry needs, and we do so regularly. I am sure Justin can talk a little about that later.

Justin has talked about the fact that we are working very closely with the likes of Digital Circle. We are working with them on 30-week ICT conversion courses, for which graduates come to us. They come to us with a background that is not a natural pathway into employment. We are working to convert that and to fill that skills gap. The economic strategy estimates that there will be 8,000 jobs in ICT

over the next 10 years, and we are working proactively with the industry out there to fill that gap. Thank you for the opportunity to give a top line of our submission.

**Mr Edwards:** At this point, I am willing to take questions on particular topics or on items that you have seen during your visit.

**The Chairperson:** OK. Thank you. You have certainly identified some of the barriers and themes that we have come across, particularly around the fact that there are individuals in the creative industries who are very creative but lack the business acumen to get their product to market. I was really interested to see your incubation units on the site. Perhaps you could develop that.

**Mr Damian Duffy (Belfast Metropolitan College):** It was interesting to look through the evidence from some of your previous discussions. I think that it was Belfast City Council that highlighted the difficulties in securing the right type of business incubation facilities. We are perfectly placed to support the creative industries and companies on the digital side of the agenda. You can segment the creative industries as a sector in a number of ways: you are looking digital media; broadcast; multimedia platforms; and, as Justin alluded to earlier, the ICT skills that go around that in the new area of app development. We in the E3 facility and the college are very well placed to provide facilities, access to equipment and technical support. We have already made that investment.

What we would like to do — this is where we are trying to work closely with a number of Departments — is to put in place a number of programmes to bring people into the system or to allow them to access the facilities. A proposal for a £300,000 creative industries programme is going through an assessment process with DEL at the moment. That is essentially geared towards working with particular businesses, through a mentoring process, to give them access to the incubation facilities and our equipment. It would fit in very well with the approach to bringing people through the ideas-generation process to business planning stage.

We have had connections and discussions with DCAL about some initiatives through the creative industries fund. We hope to hold a creativity and innovation week in September. As a college, we bring a number of things to the table for technology, arts, fashion and the performing arts. We have a range of products and capability that we would like to showcase during that week. As Justin said, when we use the word "creativity", we almost immediately join it with the word "innovation". This is a very innovative facility. The business incubation facilities that we have to offer are just one part of the jigsaw.

**The Chairperson:** Your paper mentions that the creative sector does not feature sufficiently in the pre-16 curriculum. I just wonder what work you are doing with local schools in learning communities. What discussions have you had with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) about the delivery of the creative sector in the curriculum?

**Mr Edwards:** Through our schools partnership programme, we already work with a range of schools in the region. What we are trying to do is to bring creativity through vocational qualifications rather than just the standalone qualifications. I will deal with those separately in a second.

The Fresh programme, which I alluded to earlier, involves project-based learning for HE students. We are already modeling that so that we can operate it with the schools sector. Can we bring school students into this facility to give them — albeit a shortened version of the programme — experience of project-based output and creative and innovative thinking around the particular skills and talent that they have? We will model that up in the hope that it will be available to schools for the next academic year. We will then have to work with schools on how they would integrate students into their main site programmes.

**The Chairperson:** How many schools do you work with?

**Mr Edwards:** We currently work with 24 schools across the greater Belfast area, and one or two outside that area that interact with us. I think that the challenge is to try to change views about vocational education — that still remains — and to bring in those with high and low academic achievement who might have a skill, talent or creative ability in a particular vocational area. We want to explore that with students and build it up. On the vocational qualification side, I believe that the qualifications and credit framework is a fit-for-purpose tool, and if there is a space that we have identified, we can develop qualifications to fit that space. That also goes for the creative service sector. We can adapt very quickly. I think that the best example that we have at the moment — it is

not in the creative industries, but it shows how qualification development can work — is our work with the wind energy sector. We have worked with sector skills councils and awarding bodies and developed a completely new qualification for wind farm maintenance. If we can do that with wind farm maintenance, there is certainly no reason why we cannot develop new forms of qualification in, say, the digital media industry. We managed to bring the Codea Dojo on board and it is up and running, and through my work with our qualification team I have tried to understand what qualification will lead directly on beyond that. We will have that in place and are working with the likes of e-Skills to find those opportunities.

The tools are there, but it about making the best use of the qualification framework and the tools. As you are aware, CCEA is not currently the regulator of vocational qualifications or non-vocational qualifications, and there is a definition gap between those two areas and an awarding body. However, there are 127 other awarding bodies operating in Northern Ireland, particularly in creative areas.

About a quarter of our provision is in a range of vocational subjects that are creatively relevant. We have courses in fashion, music, digital media, design, graphics and ICT. We are really touching the bases of all the digital sectors that the Committee refers to, from level 2 all the way through to our BSc in fashion management.

**Mr D Bradley:** Thank you very much for the tour; it was very interesting and stimulating. I think it was Justin who mentioned the use of open source software. What are the advantages and the possibilities of that?

**Mr Edwards:** The IT market is changing radically. From talking to the IT industry as we do, we know that the idea of proprietary applications on the desktop is changing to a world in which all applications are through the web, with the advent of things like Google Chrome. However, the idea of open source software means that we could lead the way. It means that students can access the software without a significant outlay, and, through the various licensing arrangements, such as Creative Commons, they can protect their intellectual property while building a name for themselves for what they can develop and experience that in the ICT space. By having an open source dedicated course — we are not ignoring our proprietary partners; we have good relationships with Apple, Microsoft etc — we will open up thinking about what is happening in that software development market and how to reach out to students in that space at a very early stage.

Picking up on Damian's earlier point, we are already running short courses on mobile app development, which is a big need for the industry. The college has a licence to download a lot of the software that can be used to develop mobile apps, particularly proprietary applications such as those used by Apple, and use it in our facilities for production and education purposes. It has huge potential that we are only just starting to tap into.

**Mr D Bradley:** During the tour, you showed us your large collaborative space and said that you are adopting a collaborative approach to problem-solving, product development and so forth. You also mentioned that you had to retrain the lecturers. What sort of new training did you have to give them to equip them to deal with that new approach?

**Mr Edwards:** The lecturers had the skills to cope with the new approach. What we had to do was to reinvigorate those skills — I think that that is the best way to put it. Historically, a lot of focus has been on teaching units or qualifications in a specific area. Introducing the idea of going beyond the teaching of the skills and looking at the creative application of those skills means asking a computing lecturer to work with a business lecturer and a lecturer in engineering and manufacturing to see where the synergies are between the different vocational areas. Suddenly, we are going outside the box of the qualification and assessment output that is associated with the curriculum through to cross-working and, although subtle, that was an uncomfortable transition. The students led the pace, and we gave the lecturers a two-day training session. We took them through the exercise and made them think creatively about a problem. We then brought their students in on a one-week exercise, and we sat with the lecturers every evening and talked through the challenges of facilitating rather than lecturing. There is still a need for lecturing and skills development, but we asked them to facilitate the group of learners and let the learners bring their understanding of new technology. Surprisingly, the learners in all vocational areas were adapting social media and how they were going to use social media to enhance the products, and students in business areas, engineering areas and areas that are not normally associated with the development of social media were talking about how social media would help their business idea go global or reach outside. The lecturers were challenged, perhaps by the digital divide, in keeping pace with some of the things that the 17-, 18- and 19-year-olds were

discussing. We are working with our lecturers on that basis. Over that period of time, they responded very well, and they are now keen to run the pilot again and talk to their colleagues. However, it is about transforming the teachers in the environment, not just about the equipment in the building around you.

**Mr D Bradley:** How does that approach impact on traditional assessment techniques?

**Mr Edwards:** That was a challenge in itself in that we had to spend a considerable amount of time working out the objectives of the assessments and the curriculum, whether we were meeting them through the project-based learning and whether the projects were efficient enough to make sure that the output met the assessments. It takes time, knowledge and expertise on the curriculum side to work it through, and, if you do work it through, you get results.

**Mr D Bradley:** Were there any difficulties with the students adopting that approach, especially if they were coming from more traditional learning settings, say?

**Mr Edwards:** Some groups of students took to it better than others, and it was interesting to watch the group dynamics among the students about perceptions of what they were getting engaged with. The learners had to be reassured that their learning outcomes would be achieved through the exercise, and we had to do that exercise with them as well. One interesting issue was that most of the students did not see the project before they entered that space. However, one group of students saw the project in advance and, rather than think creatively, had made preconceptions about what they needed to do to achieve the learning outcomes. They were probably the most challenging group in terms of keeping them engaged in that activity. We have just completed and are finalising an evaluative report of that complete exercise, and, once that is available, we will publish it publicly.

**Mr Irwin:** Thank you very much for the tour; it is a very impressive building. Your response refers to research that demonstrates that creative industries improve the economic performance of cities. In your view, what can the creative industries do to improve economic performance in more rural areas? You say that Belfast Metropolitan College operates a course that serves the whole city. I am quite sure that you have students from the outside the city. The paper plays a lot on the city, but a lot of Northern Ireland is rural, and I surmise that students from all over Northern Ireland come here.

**Mr Duffy:** There are opportunities in the education sector, full stop, to look at the way in which we deliver learning, and we, as a college, have already started a process to invest in blended learning or technology-assisted learning approaches. That is a move away from the traditional chalk-and-talk approach but, in doing that, the application of technology opens up the opportunity for people from rural communities to engage in a different way. We are, hopefully, about to finalise an INTERREG-funded project that looks at a partnership between us, IT Sligo and the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland to set up a virtual enterprise platform. The platform will essentially be a host for a range of toolkits around starting your business, innovation in your business and rural business tourism, bringing together best practice from across the three regions. However, part of the challenge is to use the technology to enable and to look at different ways of allowing people to access content. We have talked about this at a strategic level across the sector and with the Department, and I think that there are business and development opportunities if we can reconfigure the way in which we deliver and look at the digital potential of that.

We got involved in a conversation with Belfast City Council, which has secured some national funds of, I think, up to £16 million, from a national broadband initiative. The reality is that we have got 100% broadband coverage, and pretty good broadband coverage, so the conversation that we are having with Belfast City Council is about beginning to look at content. Now, the sector that we are interested in is education and training, so we are asking what education and training providers, including private-sector training providers, could do if they were given some support to develop content. That really does throw it open. In the future global aspects of creative industries, things are becoming more and more mobile and accessible. We need to have the infrastructure, facilities and skills to put the materials that we develop into a digital format to get out to the globe.

**Mr Edwards:** Our reach as Belfast Met goes outside the city. About 34% of our higher education students come from the greater Belfast area, and reach much further right the way across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Irwin:** I presumed that; it was just the way the document read.

**The Chairperson:** What was the rationale for the decision to locate this facility on this site?

**Mr Duffy:** It dates back 15 years. There was originally a plan for the Springvale campus, if you remember, which was a university campus located right on the peace line. About two or three years into the project, after the first sod was cut, the University of Ulster decided that it wanted to do something different. Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, at that stage, was left in the position that we wanted to continue to do something on the site, so the first part of the development on the Springvale campus was the community learning centre, which is located adjacent to E3.

The plans and ambitions that we had 12 or 15 years ago did not dissipate. We continue to work on the proposals around E3. This has been almost 10 years in gestation, to bring the project through the process and to secure the funding from DEL and the international fund. There has been a long history associated with the Springvale campus site. To be honest, it is with some sense of achievement that we feel we have delivered on that in a fairly unique location, exactly on a peace line. The process has involved lots of communications with local stakeholders, and we are looking at how we can reach out and deliver solutions. We worked on a programme recently with the Prince's Trust for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), bringing them in to look at animation programmes.

We are working in the context of Belfast as a city; that is important for us as a college, because we are Belfast Metropolitan College. We want to look at the potential in the city and to look at the contribution that we can make to the city as a whole. The history of the location is long-winded, but there is tremendous potential here, although I am equally conscious of the fact that our friends in the north-west have put together a pretty impressive package as well, and they have proposals on the table around a creative industries hub. To be honest, we would say that some of what we have done already is the beginning of the foundations of a creative industries hub for the city of Belfast. I think there is a lesson for us to share because we are a small region. Perhaps the Committee can have some influence on this: how do we bring together the various parties to share the experience between and across the cities and further across the region?

**The Chairperson:** If you have read previous Hansard transcripts, you will notice that the need for a creative hub is very much a common theme, be that in Belfast or having Northern Ireland as a centre of excellence generally. On the tour, you mentioned discussions that are being held with Belfast City Council and Invest NI in respect of an innovation centre; where are those discussions?

**Mr Duffy:** Just to fill you in, Belfast City Council has made a commitment in its investment strategy to develop what was entitled an innovation centre on the Invest NI site on the other side of the road. Our discussions with the council, Invest NI and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) were around what that innovation would or could look like. We feel that, whatever is done, it needs to complement what is here. We are at an early stage of discussions, and have agreed to meet to have an input in shaping the proposition. The types of ideas that are in our head are around a digital creative industries hub. That is one of the proposals. We see that as complementing the business incubation facilities and the technical capability that we have. We also see it as filling a gap for the city of Belfast, and building on its history.

To date, Belfast City Council has a very good track record in the creative industries. A lot of good work has been done in the creative industries unit in Belfast City Council to develop the industry and the potential of the industry. We are just trying to bring some of that discussion together. So, it is the early stages of the discussions, but we have thrown our hat into the ring; we have some ideas and are saying that we should not do something that does not build on what we have already achieved. We have to try to bring the bits together, which is symptomatic of the whole issue around the creative industries sector. We have all the bits of the jigsaw, we just have not necessarily fitted them together in the right way. Hopefully the Committee can deliver a solution in that regard.

**The Chairperson:** That sounds all very positive.

**Mr McMullan:** It states in your submission that, for events and tourism, £8 goes back in for every £1 invested. When I look at public investment, I see that only £4.80 goes back in for every £1 invested. Is tourism that much on the up that we get £8 in for every £1 spent? How are we delivering that in rural tourism areas? Most rural areas are facing problems in promoting tourism because of budget constraints.

My other question is, how do you see an all-Ireland approach to the creative industries?

**Ms Magee:** I will happily cover the question on tourism, albeit I do not want to speak on behalf of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I am sure that it would be delighted to have the opportunity to talk to the Committee. Several years ago, when I still worked in tourism, VisitScotland ran a programme called the Homecoming. It was very similar to the Northern Ireland 2012 Our Time, Our Place programme of events that is currently running. That demonstrated that, for every £1 invested in what were perceived to be large-scale international-type events, you could expect a return on investment of £8 back into the economy. In Our Time, Our Place, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland are promoting seven big events internationally. Those include things like the MTV awards and the recent launch of Titanic Belfast. There are events that will go into some of the rural areas, including the opening of the new visitor facilities at the Giant's Causeway. There is a good spread across Northern Ireland. Previous research points to the fact that events are a hook; they are a reason for people to come on holiday to Northern Ireland. They definitely do present that opportunity and generate those returns.

**Mr McMullan:** Is there not a high investment needed to promote those high-energy events?

**Ms Magee:** There can be. High levels of investment can be required. Again, not wanting to speak on behalf of the Tourist Board, one thing it is very keen to promote is the opportunity for smaller events and festivals to cluster their programmes around some of those iconic events. You will very rarely see a single event taking place without a series of events. For example, on the back of the MTV awards, Belfast City Council ran Belfast Music Week and looked to piggyback on the investments and potential that that was creating. That is very much the message coming out from tourism. There are similarities running right across the creative sector. It is about clustering and coming together to give people something to buy. The discretionary and disposable income is still there; it is about making it easy for people to access product. Does that answer your question?

**Mr McMullan:** Partly.

**Mr Duffy:** The untapped potential of cultural tourism, and tourism generally, fits with another piece of what we do, namely the artisan skills, which are the skills of making product to sell to tourists, including craft products and the materials and the marketing of those products. Some small companies make very innovative products, and they can get them to market by having e-commerce capability or appropriate marketing tools and by using the internet. That can be a whole range of products and services, including bus tours, catering and any amount of souvenirs and materials, and, if we are trying to increase the number of tourists who come to Northern Ireland to the extent that we plan to, there are business opportunities there, and people need to go back and look at the skills. We have a foundry that is 50 years old, and it still works on producing bronze art and plaques and very interesting pieces of fine art. Some of that would easily sell in our tourist facilities across the North of Ireland.

**Mr Edwards:** I will answer the second part of your question, which is about the all-island creative approach. I was at the BT Young Scientist awards in Dublin, and a point was made in a speech that no company globally is continuing to invest R&D in the development of the keyboard. That might sound like an obvious item, but a point was made about the articulation, communication and creative skills around storytelling. Heritage-wise, from an all-island point of view, we can take our creativity to the global market in the space where computers are going to rely on voice recognition and development of products. The heritage can bring storytelling, creative arts and creative writing on to the global stage.

Operationally, on the ground, we are working with the institutes of technology in Dundalk and Sligo, and we recently tried to submit — we were unsuccessful — an EU bid to get cross-border participation in the transition of students at higher education level in both directions. I am particularly keen to do that in the IT industry, particularly on the creative side, with those institutes, and we are starting to realise that, collectively, we could reach out to the international market in terms of education. We and Dundalk are working in the Chinese market in terms of education — Damian actually met them in China — and, by pooling our resources and collectively working together, we can show what we have to offer in creativity and education and put creativity back into vocational subjects. That is an all-island opportunity on a global stage.

**Mr McMullan:** That is interesting. Unfortunately, that is not in the report. That should be in there because that is an exciting prospect. If that is as exciting as you say, it should, without doubt, be in there as another example of how we can promote collectively. The thing coming through a lot of this



is collectiveness and not going alone. The market is too big and too competitive for us to go alone. In some cases, yes.

That leads me into my last question. Invest NI is very proactive and does a lot of good work with the big industries here. Do you think that there is a need for another tier to look after the smaller microbusinesses that do not have the likes of Invest NI to promote them and their product, and to help them market and hold on to their ideas so that the bigger companies cannot take their ideas?

**Mr Duffy:** I am happy to pick that up. In an earlier life, I worked in a local enterprise agency, and I appreciate, from a small business point of view, the value of tailored support. We need to look at developing a creative industry sector that is outward-looking and that looks at the market opportunities globally. In order to achieve that, there are benefits in clustering — bringing small businesses together under a particular umbrella or brand to promote all the capability, the fine arts, craft and the multimedia opportunities. In many cases it is hard for some of those microenterprises to get beyond a certain point.

We have come through the process of having a separate organisation. We have evolved from having LEDU, the small business agency and the Industrial Development Board. We have created a one-stop shop. Co-ordination between the Departments could be improved — between DCAL, DEL and DETI — around the package of policies and programmes that we have in place to support small businesses. On the one hand you have the creative industries fund. If you get to a certain point in your life cycle as a small business you can go to be an Invest NI client. If you want to go overseas, there are marketing supports from Invest NI.

So, a bit of work could be done to develop an integrated package of help for businesses of whatever size to bring them through the process, offer them technical input and access to marketing support to go overseas. More than 90% of businesses in Northern Ireland are microenterprises. There is great value in promoting the brand and having the Northern Irish brand out there in the sector.

I came back from China in March. I was there for three weeks and on my way back stopped in Hong Kong. We are a small place in a small speck in the world and we have got some great things to say and talk about, and great richness in our heritage and culture, but we need to have a collective brand that we can bring to the marketplace. There was an interesting observation — I said this a number of weeks ago — at a CBI/Invest NI workshop about how we develop our exporting capability. I said that I had travelled for the past 20 years the length and breadth of the planet and been in British embassies and British Council offices around the world. I have yet to see an image of any sort of Northern Ireland. I have seen pictures of red London buses, sheep in the Welsh valleys and Scottish mountains. It is a very simple thing but we have a range of things that we can do now to promote the Northern Ireland brand to the globe, using the networks we already have in place.

Small businesses have limited capital and funds available to go to the international markets and, more importantly in some cases, do not have the international sales and marketing capability. They just do not understand what it takes to sell internationally. That is an issue for a whole range of businesses, not only the creative industries. We have a limited professional capacity in Northern Ireland to sell and market ourselves internationally. It could be much improved, and I have said exactly the same to Invest NI. We need to develop professional programmes that help our businesses, regardless of sector, whether in agrifood or creative industries, to help them to sell to a global marketplace.

**Mr McMullan:** There is need for somebody or something else there to do that after what you said. You are the first person I have heard mentioning in all the submissions so far that that brand is not being seen out there.

**Mr Duffy:** We have a brand and have done a massive amount of research, but we need to bring together the different strands. I do not think we need another organisation on top of Invest NI or a subset of Invest NI. We need to bring the sector together, be clear about what it offers, and package it as a single approach.

**The Chairperson:** I think that Mr Swann will be disappointed that the Causeway is not the branding for Northern Ireland.

**Mr Duffy:** That is exactly the point.

**Mr Hilditch:** My question is around the same issue, looking at the incubation units and various things like that. My question was in relation to the experience or the relationship between your and Invest NI and local economic development, probably through Belfast City Council, and how you define that. However, you have given us an overview and I do not know whether there is anything to add.

**Mr Edwards:** We are having some very useful conversations, but occasionally we feel that Departments themselves should be having some of the conversations that we are having.

**Mr Hilditch:** I would not be terribly keen to see another tier because there is enough out there but, as you say, it is probably a case of bringing it together.

**Mr Duffy:** It is about bringing it together and agreeing the protocols of who deals with which aspects. To be honest, there is some overlap and duplication in the way that things are dealt with. However, I think that it is as much about different Departments dealing with different pieces of the jigsaw, with DEL interested in education and skills and DETI interested in economics and promoting the sector. If different people try to get to the same place, there is a risk that you will dissipate the effort in funds and programmes.

**Mr Edwards:** I think that this building replicates how that relationship is growing. You saw the incubation centres on one floor and where the education will happen on another. There is no line between education and business start-ups; it is a grey mix. You make the transition from your idea being formulated through the educational concept into a business start-up, and you form part of the work as a business start-up back into education to allow you to look for talent to grow your workforce.

We are starting to get major industry. FE has evolved considerably over the past five years and brought itself much closer to employers. As Damian said, we are working much closer with INI and Belfast City Council. I outlined how we are changing our delivery approach, and we have to move that again. However, I believe that this building is a signal that that is going in the right direction.

**The Chairperson:** The fact that, as a sector, the creative industries are very diverse and that a number of different Departments look after them make very much for people working in silos. It is about bringing that together through cross-collaborative working. As a final question, what work do you do with the universities, so that we do not have another sector working on its own?

**Mr Edwards:** I am delighted to answer that. Our relationship with the universities is good at higher education level. We have a number of foundation degrees that are validated by the universities, and the two main local universities are our main suppliers of validated qualifications. We do work with universities outside Northern Ireland, albeit on a very small scale, when they have specific specialist skills. For example, our fashion design course is a unique offer at Belfast Met and in Northern Ireland. As part of the tour today, you saw our autoclave for our composites. That is the only one in Ireland; the universities do not have access so we have offered it to them. Therefore, it works the other way and they can access our vocational equipment for practice and application.

We have broad links between our level 3 provision and always make sure that that maps across to university entry criteria so that there is a transition and a flow of students through to the university environment, particularly at age 18. We work very hard not to replicate. With budgets the way they are and in trying to continue to offer the full breadth of vocational education that we want to offer, we have to work very closely. We have engaged with the University of Ulster on our business curriculum to make sure that there is no overlap, and we will continue to do so on the creative side. In establishing any new curriculum, the first question is whether there is another provider out there already providing it.

The governing body of Belfast Met recently approved a curriculum strategy which will allow us to home in on the priority areas and on how creativity and, in another strand, languages pervade in those priority skills areas. Is Belfast Met covering those areas? Do we have linkages and progression routes internally, or do they link back to the universities? Our lecturers also work back and forth across the piece. We provide lecturers to some university areas, and back the other way.

If there is one thing to be said it is that we are getting faster at adapting and bringing qualifications to market and in making sure that those qualifications meet the needs of industry. The universities are getting better with approving foundation degrees, and we find the University of Ulster is more interactive with us than Queen's. That is not to say that Queen's does not work with us on some basis in certain areas. However, we sometimes find that the speed at which those qualifications are brought

to life is not the speed that we are now used to in the field of vocational qualifications. There are synergies and linkages to be created and developmental work to be done.

**Mr Duffy:** We are already partnering on some specific projects. Skillset Media is a body that represents the sector. That is a partnership between us and the universities. There were 100 applications to bring together this particular grouping, and we were one of 100 selected. We work with the University of Ulster as part of Skillset Media.

The Connected Fund, which is managed by our sectoral group, Colleges NI, has set aside some money for Belfast Met to establish a creative cluster and begin to work with the universities in September. There are a number of specific projects that we are already collaborating on.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for hosting us. What we have seen and heard today has been incredibly useful. Thank you very much.