



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Performing Arts: Northern Ireland Theatre  
Association Briefing

23 May 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Performing Arts: Northern Ireland Theatre Association Briefing

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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  
Mr William Humphrey  
Ms Rosaleen McCorley  
Mr Michael McGimpsey  
Mr Oliver McMullan  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

**Witnesses:**

|                      |                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ms Emma Jordan       | Northern Ireland Theatre Association |
| Mr Vincent McCann    | Northern Ireland Theatre Association |
| Ms Louise Rossington | Northern Ireland Theatre Association |
| Ms Charlotte Smith   | Northern Ireland Theatre Association |

**The Chairperson:** Representing the Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA), I welcome to the meeting Louise Rossington, the general manager of Big Telly Theatre Company; Emma Jordan, artistic director of Prime Cut; Vincent McCann, operations manager of the Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre; and Charlotte Smith, co-ordinator with the Northern Ireland Theatre Association. You are all very welcome. Thank you very much for coming this morning and thank you for your detailed, comprehensive paper. If you would like to make an opening statement, members will follow up with questions.

**Ms Louise Rossington (Northern Ireland Theatre Association):** Thank you once again for inviting NITA to give evidence as the representative voice of theatre and the performing arts in Northern Ireland. We welcome the Committee's recent inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries, at which my predecessor as chair, Stephen Beggs, and some of my colleagues gave evidence. I am joined today by Charlotte Smith, whom you may recognise; Charlotte is our part-time co-ordinator, and NITA's only member of staff. I am also joined by two fellow members of NITA's voluntary board, Vincent McCann, who is operations manager at the Market Place in Armagh, and Emma Jordan, executive director at Prime Cut, which is a leading producer of contemporary international theatre based in Belfast. I am general manager of Big Telly Theatre Company, which is Northern Ireland's longest-established professional touring theatre company and is based in Portstewart.

As you know, NITA is the representative body for professional theatre in Northern Ireland. We promote Northern Irish theatre on a local, national and international scale, and our membership is

drawn from across the performing arts sector, including independent theatre companies, regional venues and festivals, in addition to freelance practitioners and performing arts students. Although we understand and welcome the focus of the Committee today on the performing arts as a contributor to the economy, we believe that there is a wider contribution to social cohesion, education and health, and their intrinsic value as an art form should not be overlooked.

When considering the required structures that will support the development of the sector as an economic driver or catalyst and how to provide better identification and channelling of talent, we encourage the Committee not to divorce our sector's intrinsic contribution to a healthy society from economic factors under consideration, nor should the current economic value of the sector be considered in isolation from its future potential, both in its economic contribution and to a wider Northern Irish society. That having been said, theatre and the wider performing arts can make a clear case for their positive economic contribution now. Despite our relative size, our development potential and return should not be overlooked.

I will highlight a few of our submission's key headlines. Theatre is Northern Ireland's most popular art form, accounting for 60% of all ticket sales from 6,661 art form performances in Northern Ireland in 2010-11. To put that in context, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland annual contribution to the entire arts sector is approximately £13 million a year. Theatre, as one part of that sector, annually accounts for ticket sales revenue in excess of £10 million. It is clear that funding to theatre should be considered as an investment with a clear economic return rather than a subsidy.

The arts councils in England and in Wales recently commissioned an independent report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research, which concluded that arts and culture make up to 0.4% of the UK's GDP, which represents a four-fold return on the 0.1% of government spending invested in the sector. The most recent figure for Northern Ireland was produced by our Arts Council and published in its 2010 'Digest of Arts Statistics'. It found that for every £1 invested in the arts, £3 was returned to the Northern Ireland economy.

**Ms Charlotte Smith (Northern Ireland Theatre Association):** Realising the potential of the creative industries is important, and theatre and the performing arts play a significant role as our feeder sector. Large-scale television and film production, attracted by our talent and the incentives on offer, provide opportunities for innovative companies and creative professionals to showcase their ability. Many of the talented professionals who work on productions such as 'Game of Thrones' or 'The Fall' have developed their skills or sustained their careers in the Northern Ireland theatre sector.

Unlike other sectors of the creative industries, professional theatre and the performing arts make a further economic contribution. A vibrant culture and entertainment offering is often cited as a key consideration for foreign direct investors, and our theatre performances and festivals offer an attraction that can help to boost evening and late-night trading in our towns and cities. Likewise, the value of our contribution to Northern Ireland's tourism offering is often overlooked. Cultural or arts tourism makes up 40% of Northern Ireland's tourist figures, and is growing worldwide by 15% per annum. At least £856 million per annum of spending by tourists visiting the UK can be attributed directly to arts and culture.

Despite those avenues for further development, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) primary policy document related to theatre and the performing arts remains the collaborative framework for the creative industries, which, we feel, focuses primarily on other sectors. To achieve full potential, we require appropriate investment; equally, we need a clearer policy direction and leadership, not just in our lead Department, DCAL, but across government.

Advocates in our sector have a detailed understanding of its artistic output and value, and we would welcome active engagement by decision-makers to assist in developing policy and exploiting opportunities to champion the performing arts, regionally and internationally. We note the importance of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as our sector's primary funder, the primary advocate championing the arts in Northern Ireland and as a source of specialist expertise. As we all prepare for the next comprehensive spending review, there is a need for the performing arts sector, the Arts Council, DCAL and the Minister to work closely together in making a stronger case for investing in the performing arts. Doing that is key to our ability to act as an economic driver or catalyst.

The lack of policy direction for the performing arts to date is the result of a failure to consider strategic opportunities. In this context, a clearer policy focus on how to develop the performing arts generally is needed from DCAL. On specifically how the arts could be developed as an economic driver through tourism and the night-time economy, we believe that greater direct input is required from the

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and we encourage it to pay greater attention to our sector's potential to meet its tourism, business development and export aims. Responsibility for developing policy and delivering the potential of the arts in tourism and the night-time economy should not be left solely to the Arts Council and DCAL. Closer collaboration between the Arts Council and other agencies, such as Invest NI, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland — drawing on their expertise and that of their respective Departments — will result in the sector being better resourced.

**Mr Vincent McCann (Northern Ireland Theatre Association):** Building partnerships with a broad range of partners across all sectors, be they public, private or voluntary, has been highlighted as one of the principal ambitions of the Arts Council's draft five-year strategy. Key areas that have been identified for partnership building include cultural tourism, education and learning, health and well-being, inclusion and community building, and the economy. The work will involve partnerships between the performing arts and the likes of the British Council, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Irish Arts Council and Creative Scotland. We think that such partnerships will create a stronger, healthier creative sector and foster opportunities, but they will also stretch the resources of smaller partners such as theatre companies, venues and sector representative bodies such as NITA.

In addition to those mentioned, local councils are extremely important players in supporting arts development and provision. I am sure that all members here are well aware that the review of public administration is looming high on the horizon, with local government reorganising and transitioning from 26 local councils to 11. The change in the number of councils is likely to place an added pressure on available funds to, from and within local government. As such, it is important that the case for investment in the performing arts continues to be made, based on solid, pre-existing success stories of councils and council venues working closely and effectively with performing arts organisations.

We support the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in identifying and working towards greater engagement with local councils, especially in the context of the new post-RPA 11-council configuration, and its suggested formal advisory group representing the new councils. In addition, very few performing arts organisations have the critical mass of in-house skills and market knowledge to exploit global market opportunities fully.

Examples of resource sharing do exist in the sector, but greater support is needed to allow partnerships to develop in order to fill gaps in knowledge and skill sets. Few formal arrangements or mechanisms exist. We would, therefore, welcome the creation of a shared resource network or performing arts hub facilitated by the Arts Council or possibly at local authority level.

**Ms Rossington:** Regionally, we are competing for local and international visitors with our neighbours, particularly Scotland and Ireland. They have long recognised the importance of the arts' economic and social contribution in their executive policy commitments. The Scottish Government's economic strategy recognises the importance of culture and the arts in promoting Scotland and commits to maximising access to high-quality cultural events and opportunities. Through Creative Scotland, they have long exploited the opportunities of the so-called cultural economy to act as a lever for inward investment.

The Irish Government's Programme for Government encourages their Arts Council to continue to dedicate resources to touring companies in order to protect investment in regional arts infrastructure around the country and bring cultural tourism opportunities to towns and villages. That underlines the value of the arts in that context. Both Governments are seeking to enhance their regional and international reputation, and that is underlined by their continued willingness, despite the economic climate, to invest at a higher per capita level than is the case here in Northern Ireland.

In contrast, financing a theatre in Northern Ireland has, to date, largely focused on infrastructural investment. The 2011-15 Budget notes:

*"Funding to support the running costs of capital projects such as Lyric and Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) will be prioritised in order to protect the substantial public investment already made in these venues. Programmes such as Annual Support for Organisations Programme (ASOP) will continue but the levels of funding available will be reduced."*

As NITA members, we believe that the investment in the MAC and the Lyric as world-class flagship venues for theatre and the arts complements the investment of about £33 million over the past 15

years in regional venues across Northern Ireland. However, to maximise a return on those world-class venues, a more strategic approach to financing the sector is now required, with a greater emphasis on programming, product development, product marketing and touring to develop and grow audiences. We repeat the call that we made following the previous Budget: this is not the time to continue to reduce the funding available to Arts Council-supported companies that produce the content for those venues.

In order to help audience discovery, there needs to be a strategic programming fund to develop or remount existing work, promote performances and improve our capacity to access international markets. We believe that that could result in a massive return in the quality and quantity of Northern Irish programming, leading to higher ticket sales and better opportunities to develop products to export or tour.

That investment in successful but under-resourced companies would, in turn, help to improve the sustainability and return of the sector and generate international recognition for the arts in Northern Ireland by improving our capacity to tour.

**Ms Smith:** The performing arts industry has the capacity to work almost anywhere in the world. However, working internationally is not all about touring productions; companies also seek international partnerships to develop ideas and share expertise. Investment in research and development allows such international collaborations to flourish.

Touring internationally is a big step for a company; it takes considerable time to develop appropriate networks and to make overseas contacts. Moreover, the ability to raise funds for an international tour raises challenges, as public investment cannot normally cover the cost of touring abroad. We believe that the creative industries fund criteria could be amended to improve that capacity and to help us to expand into international markets. The creation of a scheme in the fund would allow performing arts revivals to tour internationally. That is imperative to strengthening the image and reputation of Northern Ireland's arts sector across the regions of the UK, in Ireland and on an international platform.

At present, the primary funder of such work is the British Council. It can help to organise an international tour but, as with every funder, it is limited in the funding that it can provide. As a result, many organisations look for their costs to be covered by international producers and promoters who buy their work for a fee. At present, there is no specific support from either the Arts Council or Invest NI to develop theatre product for international export or touring.

Performing arts organisations have the potential to act as catalysts to change the image of Northern Ireland internationally so that it is seen as a confident and creative place in which to live, work and do business. Despite those challenges, many of our members have successfully toured a number of productions internationally. However, to maintain and increase our international touring success support is required to develop capacity, conduits and market intelligence. Opportunities do exist to showcase Northern Ireland productions at international festivals such as those in Edinburgh, Avignon, New York and Dublin, but the funding does not exist to facilitate that.

Once more, investment in effective marketing for use at internationally profiled events would assist NITA's members to ensure that a greater percentage of Northern Ireland's artists and companies are represented on touring programmes, led by Culture Ireland. Likewise, through close collaboration or investment through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board or Tourism Ireland, theatre and the performing arts could be used to help to market the tourism offering of our region.

**Mr V McCann:** Finally, the Committee has already made recommendations as part of its inquiry into the creative industries to improve skills development. We propose closer collaboration between DCAL and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to investigate vocational and work-based routes into the creative sector. That, in turn, will help to ensure better identification and channelling of talent.

A key area where talent can be identified and channelled is in the youth drama sector. It has a diversity of organisations already operating in it and offers training and performance opportunities to many talented young people. Maintaining and improving the connection between the youth theatre sector and the professional performing arts sector is vital in continuing to cultivate, mentor and channel those talents.

The sector has a history of using small pots of money that would not fund a full-time staff member but which are used to fund similar positions for a shorter period on a particular show, project or product.

We would encourage co-operation between DCAL and DEL or DETI to develop a talent seed-feed to promote emerging professionals or companies willing to run start-up projects that could aid early career innovation and entrepreneurship.

Unlike other parts of the creative industries, however, the arts, including theatre, could be observed as being subsidised by a low-wage but dedicated and talented workforce. Unlike skilled workers in other sectors, performers and theatre staff in the sector get comparatively low wages. For instance, in 2008, the average earnings of a Northern Ireland worker were more than one and a half times those of an artist. The mean income for an artist was just under £7,500 per annum, with 50% earning £4,200 or less a year from their work. As a result, performing arts professionals and performers often subsidise their income with additional employment, and the sector relies on a network of casual staff and freelancers. The impetus must be to retain talent in Northern Ireland by improving the overall sustainability of successful and established companies and venues in the sector, growing their capacity to develop talent and create opportunities for employment in a long-term career that is based here in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, however, we know anecdotally that cuts in arts investment coupled with a reduction in private sponsorship has forced many organisations to reduce core costs, such as salaries and the opportunities that are open to freelance and casual staff.

The sector has continually plastered over the cracks created by budget cuts, with fewer people delivering the same standard and quality of work. That is unsustainable. As a result, our best actors, venue managers, technicians, producers and directors leave the region to avail themselves of prospects for career growth and higher wages in the other regions of the UK, Ireland and further afield. Despite that, Northern Ireland's performing arts talent has continued to deliver high-quality arts to international audiences, resulting in a long list of acting, directing and writing credits that began with careers in Northern Ireland.

Channelling talent begins by inspiring it. We are cheered that, following our previous evidence session, the Committee picked up on our endorsement of the STEM to STEAM model. If adopted across government, that change in educational focus to promote the arts as part of science, technology, engineering and maths could help the performing arts and other creative industries to be seen as a viable career path. For others, it may nurture the necessary creativity in our young people that is needed to benefit innovative industries that rely on creative thinking. We are also delighted that the STEAM agenda has already found a place in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's five-year strategy.

**Ms Rossington:** Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to you today. At this stage, we would welcome any questions that you might have.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. Again, thank you for your paper and your detailed presentation. As an initial question, could you perhaps define "performing arts"?

**Ms Rossington:** As far as NITA's membership is concerned, performing arts cover drama and dance. However, they also cover circus, street performance and puppetry, for example.

**Mr V McCann:** Music.

**Ms Smith:** A key component of the performing arts is that the performance is live and is delivered live to an audience. You might have things that are pre-recorded that you would use as part of it. However, it is always a live performance.

**The Chairperson:** It is not necessarily just the artists; the support behind those performances is also included as a sector in performing arts?

**Mr V McCann:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** What I want to be clear about is that if we are looking at this any further, we have a definition of what performing arts are. Members will be aware from our previous inquiry into the creative industries that it was incredibly broad. Therefore, our recommendations were quite broad. If we are looking at the performing arts as a sector, we want to ensure that we encompass everyone who believes that he or she works in the performing arts sector.

**Ms Smith:** That is very important. For example, in a smaller production, you often find that there is an equal number, or more, people working behind the scenes. In venues, you have arts administrators, people who do finance, people with technical roles, people who do marketing, and so on.

**Ms Rossington:** Promoting, outreach and education.

**The Chairperson:** That is all part of the sector.

**Ms Smith:** Yes. It also includes directing and choreography. We could provide you with a definition if you would like one. There is an enormous number of roles in the performing arts.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. You have provided us with a number of recommendations. In one of the sections, you said that you would like to see more direct engagement between the performing arts sector, the Minister and DCAL. Do you believe that that is lacking?

**Ms Rossington:** Yes. A clear collaborative framework was delivered for the creative industries. However, we feel that the performing arts, as a sector, was not well enough evidenced in that framework. We feel that there now needs to be a collaborative framework specifically for the performing arts. I do not think that there has been enough partnership and feed-through of a clear strategic focus that leads down from the Minister through DCAL.

**The Chairperson:** Vincent, you mentioned the Arts Council's draft strategic five-year plan. Your paper states:

*"For many, including NITA, this strategy was felt to heavily reflect Ministerial priorities to the detriment of what should be ACNI's most important ambition and target".*

Will you expand on that and what it means?

**Mr V McCann:** The strategy was in draft form, so we are still waiting on the final version. The NITA membership — I am thinking of my current role — felt that the Arts Council seemed to be ticking boxes that did not necessarily reflect the needs of the stakeholders of its direct operation. I will use an example of drama being used as one of the recommendations. There was one drama recommendation within an entire five-year strategy. There was definitely much more of a focus on the Arts Council provision as a community organisation offering opportunities for the community, as opposed to what we see as the intrinsic value of the Arts Council's remit of providing the best quality experience, whether that be at a community level or professional theatre level.

**Ms Smith:** One of the important things that we picked up on and the sector certainly contributed to during the consultation period on the strategy — something that came through very clearly — was the importance of supporting work of excellence, because from that foundation stone flows all the other contributions that the arts sector makes to health, education and the economy. It is putting that as the central focus.

**The Chairperson:** I suppose the two questions will go together. If there was greater engagement between you and the Department and if there was a greater understanding of what it is that you do and what you contribute to society, do you think the ministerial priorities might be different?

**Ms Rossington:** I think, and certainly hope, that that would be the case. I think if there was more direct engagement, there would be additional knowledge of how much the arts can contribute to society. Intrinsicly, you have to have the professional level and quality of the arts in order for that to drive all the other areas that you are looking for it to drive.

**The Chairperson:** You mentioned a number of funding programmes and how you feel that they should be adapted to meet your needs. In relation to the BBC performing arts fund, which is mentioned in your paper, do groups from Northern Ireland access that fund?

**Ms Rossington:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** What contribution does that make?

**Ms Rossington:** The issue with that fund is that although we would welcome it very much, it focuses on a particular sector in a particular year, and it just so happens that, this year, it is focusing on theatre. However, that may not come up again for the next two or three years, because next year, it might be music, and the following year, it might be something else. Also, in the period since the last round of theatre funding, it has changed the focus of the objectives and outcomes for the fund. So, although it is really useful, it may not be for everybody and may not suit everybody's requirements at that particular time.

**Mr Humphrey:** Thanks very much for your presentation. In relation to working class communities, I represent North Belfast, where a number of parts of the community are in some of the most deprived wards in the United Kingdom, not just Northern Ireland. What work are you doing proactively to deal with people in working class communities who are detached from the arts? The other thing is that there is a particular issue with the Protestant working class community. The term "arts" is not something that they buy into; they talk more about culture. Are you conscious of that?

**Ms Emma Jordan (Northern Ireland Theatre Association):** Speaking personally about the work that we do, I think that — to feed back to the current strategy — the link between the community engagement and outreach work provided in the professional sector is not quite evident in the strategy. We produce professional theatre, for example, in the MAC, and we have an extensive outreach programme that engages quite a lot in North Belfast, because, obviously, it is identified as an area of profound social deprivation. We work for extended periods of seven or eight months, doing workshops and bringing communities together. A lot of the professional sector in Northern Ireland is doing profoundly good community engagement work. I do not necessarily think that, perhaps, the link has been made that the professional sector is servicing community outreach very successfully.

**Mr V McCann:** From a local authority perspective, many venues, as I am sure members are aware, are owned and operated by councils. There is a strong integration between, for instance, our operations and community relations and good relations departments to develop programmes that would feature in the work that we do but also in the work that councils do to engage with all communities in a district.

**Mr Humphrey:** I will come to councils in a moment. My experience is that there are not too many people who will go to the MAC or the Lyric. It is about you guys going out to them initially. The Ulster Orchestra did that a few years ago; it held concerts in the Shankill and Andersonstown leisure centres.

**Ms Smith:** Our sector is very aware of that. We produce work that we want as many people as possible to see. There are excellent theatre companies such as Replay, which specialises in theatre for young people. It tours schools and community centres and tries to make sure that people recognise at a very young age that the performing arts are for everyone. It tries to break down those barriers.

**Ms Jordan:** We have to work very hard to create a sense of ownership of those buildings — a sense that they belong to everyone. They are not just for the well-off in our society. If our entry point is to work at the coalface in a community, which has been the case in our work, it is also our responsibility to be a bridge and to instil a sense of ownership of those fantastic venues and a sense that they are for everyone. We act as a very good conduit to allow people to work in a safe environment and to instil in them the idea that art is for everyone.

**Ms Rossington:** From my personal experience, our company, which is based in the regions, does a lot of work with communities across Northern Ireland. We have a small portable theatre in a horsebox trailer that we take into rural, isolated communities. People who may never have been in a traditional theatre venue get to experience five minutes of theatre.

For me, it is not necessarily about getting people into a traditional theatre space. It is about getting them to engage in theatre as an art form in the first instance and for them to understand that it can be for everyone.

**Ms Smith:** We have some wonderful site-specific organisations such as Kabosh, which was at the Balmoral show last week. It set up a big barn there, with the intent of making sure that the arts are open. I know that Emma's company, Prime Cut, had a show at the baths, which was a very interesting project. It brings the arts into unusual venues that people want to go to.



**Mr Humphrey:** Vincent, you mentioned councils. There are opportunities for organisations such as yours, but there are also inherent dangers. We are in a double-dip recession and the economy is not strong. As a member of Belfast City Council, I know that some councillors are very passionate about culture and supporting the arts, but there are other people who do not see that as a front line service and believe that ratepayers' money should be used to deliver front line services.

The difficulty for you guys is that when money is tight, councillors look at areas such as yours to make cutbacks. The fact that there is an economic downturn and that money is tight from regional government and from local government is a danger to your sector and for those of you who are involved in it. What progress have you been able to make with the private sector to get money? It strikes me that — you talked about international touring, Emma — the private sector in other countries is much more involved in funding things such as the theatre, the opera, orchestras, and so on, and that there is not that culture here yet.

**Mr V McCann:** The American model is the example that is often espoused in relation to philanthropic giving towards arts and culture. One of the key differences between us and the American model is the tax situation, in that, in the United States, philanthropic giving can be written off as tax. Nicholas Hytner, the outgoing director of the National Theatre, said that, in a sense, it is a similar sort of model. It is a different form of taxation, in that, here, the Department contributes from the public purse to the Arts Council while, in the American model, the taxman does not take a cut in the first place. So, there are models that could be considered in how the Department of Finance and Personnel could look at those sorts of things.

**Mr Humphrey:** The Department of Finance and Personnel has no control over taxation.

**Mr V McCann:** Within here, I mean.

**Mr Humphrey:** Stormont has no control over taxation.

**Mr V McCann:** I am sure that it could certainly make the case to the UK Government. The case is being made by the larger arts organisations in the UK on possibly looking at —

**Mr Humphrey:** I am just making the point that the Department of Finance and Personnel cannot decide on the thing that you are talking about.

**Mr V McCann:** I understand.

**Mr Humphrey:** Over 50% of tourists are cultural tourists. Visit Britain did a report a couple of years ago showing that music was one of the things that 21% of tourists travelled for. Having chaired Belfast City Council's development committee, it seems to me that Belfast City Council, compared with other councils, given the economies of scale, puts a considerable amount of money into the arts. However, RPA and the establishment of the larger super-councils will provide an opportunity for you guys with larger councils, more money and different economies of scale. What work are you doing to engage with the proposed councils?

**Ms Rossington:** Each individual company or organisation will be different depending on where they are located. I know that Belfast City Council has been extremely supportive of the arts. My company is not based in Belfast, but I know organisations in Belfast through NITA, and it is amazing that the council has increased its funding to the arts in the current economic climate. We are having a lot of consultation and discussion with our local council, which is Coleraine Borough Council, and we are making sure that the work that we do in the local area covers what will be our new area after RPA. We already have very good relationships with arts officers and community relations workers in all those council areas. I think that that is the case for the majority of arts organisations because they recognise the need to do that.

**Mr Humphrey:** Yesterday, a report was launched by the Minister for Social Development on the input into the economy from the culture of the loyal orders, the Orange institution, the Royal Black institution, the Apprentice Boys, and so on. Does your organisation, collectively or individually, have contacts with, for example, the Grand Lodge of Ireland?

**Ms Rossington:** Individual members work with different communities and organisations. That is not within the overarching remit of NITA as an organisation because we are the representative body for

our particular sector. Individual members certainly do work and have contacts with those organisations.

**Mr Humphrey:** Would it not be an idea for NITA to talk to the Grand Lodge of Ireland, given the figures that came out yesterday, the impact that it can have and the sheer number of cultural tourists, which is growing every year, who come to watch the Twelfth demonstrations across Northern Ireland?

**Ms Rossington:** They can be a partner in any discussions and collaborations that we will have.

**Ms Smith:** NITA is very committed to developing our partnerships in the same way that the Arts Council strategy had, as one of its major ambitions, nurturing partnerships that were already there and looking into new ambitions. NITA is in a similar position. At the same time, we are a relatively small organisation in that we have only one part-time member of staff, but we try our best to work in partnership with as many organisations as possible given our resources.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** It is good to see you again, Charlotte. The work that you do in my constituency in Fairfield and elsewhere is excellent. You rightly recognise the Committee's recommendations in the inquiry into the creative industries in identifying the performing arts as a main stream of the creative industries. One of the other recommendations, which transcends a lot of the inquiry into the creative industries, was the lack of an economy of scale in this region. For example, say I am sitting as a talented artist, which I am — *[Laughter.]* — but I earn only half the industrial wage and have very little work. Should I stick with it? Our funding comes from a number of different sources, including DCAL, the Arts Council and local government. It is all over the place. It is a hand-to-mouth existence really. Maybe we are being too ambitious? Maybe we should scale things down? Maybe we should do that collaborative work with the other jurisdictions? Maybe there is a different way forward? Have you considered that? I know that this is a fairly extensive report, but how much have you considered that in recent times?

**Ms Rossington:** Considered scaling back as a sector?

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Cutting your cloth.

**Ms Rossington:** There are strengths in the sector. There are objectives and outcomes that come from our sector that impact not necessarily only on the economy. The arts can have a massive influence on health and education. To cut back on the arts would be detrimental to those sectors. I also think that if there was a restructuring of some funding in respect of seed funding and emerging artists funding, there might not be that desire for people to leave us.

As organisations, we struggle to find the talented people whom we are looking for to put on a professional production. We have to go to other regions in the UK to get what we need, and we come across people every day who have left here and never come back. We would like to try to reinvigorate the sector in order to attract those people back to Northern Ireland not only from other parts of the UK, but the South and further afield. There are champions in Northern Ireland who can help us to do that.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I know that community arts work and all the rest of it is a costly exercise, but it came out in our report that there are things that we have been very precious about in the past that we will have to look to fundamentally restructure. I am a great supporter of the arts, but, sometimes, you have to let go of things.

**Ms Jordan:** To refer back to the presentation, with the massive investment in venues and the cutbacks in respect of us being able to programme venues within the region and touring, it seems counterproductive to think about scaling back the possibility of us being able to deliver. What is the point in the investment in those facilities if we are not going to be able to programme them?

As to where we are now, we have responsibility to the young people who are growing up in our society whom we want to stay here. We want our artists to stay here, we want them to work here and we want them to live here. They are our future. However, as it stands now, because we are not producing enough work, because we are not touring internationally, and because we are not promoting ourselves in this way, we are losing our future artists. We have already invested, but it is a step backwards.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I agree absolutely. I know that there are the likes of the Market Place and the Strule, and even in my town of Limavady, there is a new arts and cultural centre, but the reality is that we had a concert on Saturday night and one person turned up. That is in a 300-seater auditorium that we were very proud to deliver. There has to be a radical rethink of how we fund the arts and how much funding we provide. The infrastructure is in place; it is just a matter of making sure that the talent is here and people turn out and appreciate it.

**Mr V McCann:** I think that is to do to with — *[Inaudible.]* — the quality of provision in the regional venues. I am not sure what the event was that you had on — we have all had our turkeys over the years — but we have got a large-scale production tonight in the Market Place of 'Factory Girls', a big production that started in the Millennium Forum, and it is very heavily booked. Those are the sorts of productions that should be touring. We should have the capability of touring regularly to all the venues. When the Arts Council decided to start on this programme of developing the arts centres within 20 miles of every person, there had to be the product to fulfil that. The audiences have a need and a desire for them. I do not believe that people who live in your constituency or my constituency should have to go to Belfast to see a piece of theatre.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I know that, Chair, we talked about this last time: in a local church hall, 300 people turned up to see 'The Sweetie Bottle'. It was absolutely packed.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Thank you for the presentation. I have to say that it is one I have heard before. It is a script that I worked to when I was at DCAL all those years ago, and basically it is, "More investment, please". We can make all the arguments that we want, but that is where you are.

When I was a Minister, we doubled the arts budget. The Arts Council's budget doubled from £8 million to £16 million a year. Part of the deal was that government were doing their bit, and we were also looking at other things such as bringing in production. We are getting some results from that now with 'Game of Thrones' and the new film coming in, 'Dracula', which is probably appropriate for where it is going, but the reason why they are coming in is because of grant aid. At that stage, I thought that if we grew a workforce, we would get investment, but, in fact, it does not work like that, as you know. It is about the bottom line. I have reported to the Committee the long conversations that I had with Roy Disney when he said that it was down to the bottom line. He said that they would rather sit in Hollywood in their own houses and make films there, but that if coming to Northern Ireland would give them better profit, they would come, and if they needed cameramen, they would bring them. He said to forget about the backdrop, that they could build all of that: the bottom line is profit. That is what is happening now and that is largely, but not exclusively, down to grant aid. That is what is bringing those companies in, plus the fact that we have a giant Moygashel-type factory out in Moira or somewhere that can house them, and then we get them support.

Frankly, I think you need to be developing a different approach. We doubled the support, and that was carried on through. We then had the arguments from the arts side that it needed infrastructure. There was always a danger there, so the Opera House, the Lyric Theatre and the Old Museum Arts Centre were redeveloped, and there is the Millennium Theatre in Derry and new theatres in Armagh, Limavady, and so on. Now, the danger is that all the money that is going through the Arts Council will end up being diverted to support those theatres because they do not have the appropriate revenue streams.

It seems to me that there are so many different voices coming from the arts. I hear what you say, and there are arguments that I made at that time. I do not disagree with you. There is a wealth of talent here. The key thing was to unlock not just the creative industries but creativity among our young people. The arts and culture were to, and do, play a key part in all of that.

You talk about programming, product development, individual artists, confidence, creativity and all of that. Those all form good lines. However, you, in the arts sector, have to determine with the Arts Council how you want your budget spent. It seems to me that the Arts Council is spending it in a particular way, and you guys are being left out in the cold — perhaps marginalised, I do not know — and are, therefore coming to us. Frankly, the way that government finances are at the minute, there is not a lot of money to spare, as you know. We have record unemployment and serious issues around health, education, and all sorts of things. You make an argument for moneys, and you say that this is beneficial. I agree that it is beneficial to society, but there are other priorities.

It seems to me that the Arts Council needs to work harder to support you. If these arguments are good enough for us, they will be good enough at the Arts Council level. What is your relationship with

the Arts Council? Is the Arts Council not listening to you and giving you support? There is a budget, and the Arts Council has to prioritise and decide how to spend that budget. We can help. We will listen, be sympathetic and do all that we can. However, frankly, I do not see the DCAL budget rising. It is being cut at the minute. Everybody will have to take their share of those cuts.

I can look at other areas that are just as important to the folks involved. The North West 200, for example, is a giant sporting spectacle, one of the biggest in the UK. It clearly needs support. It may need support in the form of government policy on roads or whatever as well as money; I do not know. Those involved will lobby for that support. We have heard what is going on in football. We are trying to spend £25 million on Windsor Park, and football does not like it. We need to look at that again. There are all sorts of other areas. Everybody can come in and make these arguments. Your pot of gold is in the Arts Council; that is where you need to be.

**Ms Rossington:** We have a very strong relationship with the Arts Council. It is very supportive of NITA and individual member organisations. The issue is that the Arts Council lacks a clear strategic vision that is fed down directly from the Minister through DCAL. It has a draft five-year strategy, which, frankly, had to be shoehorned into the current Minister's priorities, which do not seem to recognise the performing arts at all. We are asking for the performing arts to be recognised in ministerial policy so that a proper framework can be produced to drive this and give the Arts Council a clearer strategic vision.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I understand. You are quite right that the Department and the Minister determine the policy. Bodies such as the Arts Council and the Sports Council deliver that policy through strategy. If you feel that the performing arts is not being properly recognised, that is a matter for the Arts Council. There are a lot of people on that board — the chair, the chief executive, Roisín McDonough, and so on — to make those arguments to. If these are points of principle, the arguments should be made strongly. I have not heard the Arts Council tell us that; maybe I have missed it. That has to be where you make your argument. If the Arts Council is not making its argument to the Minister, it should be. Otherwise it will lose the confidence of the sector.

You were going to say something, Charlotte.

**Ms Smith:** As you recognised, there are strains on resources and funding. The Arts Council does not have an easy job as budgets are being cut. That places an emphasis on the importance of championing the potential of the performing arts to deliver in other sectors as well. In a previous presentation, we went into greater detail about how we deliver in areas such as education and health and about the wider social benefits of breaking down social barriers. Through championing the performing arts effectively and creating better cross-departmental knowledge of our sector's huge potential, we will be able to access funds from different Departments' funding pots because we, as a sector, have the ability to deliver in those areas.

**Mr McGimpsey:** You have the arguments, and I agree with you. However, funding lies with the Arts Council, and arguments can be well made around health and education, and so on, as well as economic development. I support your arguments. I made them personally, and I strongly empathise with you. However, I simply caution you that the budget is what it is. The deal with the Arts Council, way back yonder, was that we doubled its budget, but private sponsorship, which William talked about, had to play a bigger role here. Yet, when we came along to rebuild the Lyric Theatre, the bill was £17 million. Mark Carruthers talked to Sir George Bain about how they had accessed private money: it was about £2 million that they accessed. The taxpayer paid £15 million. That case needs to be a lot stronger. Until you crack that or tell us how you will do it, it is pointless to say, "Send Sammy Wilson over to see George Osborne to get the taxes changed". That ain't going to happen. There must be other returns.

However, the North West 200 could get support and sponsorship — it used to be from Kennedy's; it was the Kennedy's North West 200 until the building crisis hurt it so badly. Kennedy's was not the first sponsor, there had been a number. It seems to me that if you offer the right kind of product, you will get business support. I have always felt that we just say, "Oh, they don't do that over here. It is not like America, where they've got different tax laws and all the rest of it". In fact, if you have the right product that you sell in the right way and work with them, you will get some support from business.

**Ms Rossington:** There are such specialist organisations, and many of us do access private sponsorship through many different ways and avenues. Arts and Business is a key organisation within that process. However, it tends to work on an individual organisational basis. For instance, our

company has attracted private sponsorship for certain projects, but the amounts are small. In return for that, we would tend to deliver on some business objectives. There would be a sort of co-partnership, co-collaboration relationship, as it works for many organisations, particularly on the company's side.

Also, we have just taken over an empty shop on Portstewart promenade, and we are trying to generate footfall. The landlord gave us that space rent-free for a year, but we now have to find the rent ourselves. That is about championing the arts and opening them up to a wider audience. It is also about trying to regenerate the town, and that is happening in lots of places across the UK, including Belfast. Many arts organisations are doing that alongside large businesses and corporations. So, it is not necessarily just about a business saying, "Here's £1 million to do this". It is about other ways of working with businesses.

**Mr McGimpsey:** That is the whole point. You have got to find innovative ways of working with business. Go to the National Trust property at Mount Stewart on a Sunday, and you will see a jazz band blowing trumpets and all the rest of it. That is not necessarily what I want in a park on a Sunday afternoon, but large numbers of people do. It provides employment and opportunities for performing arts. It seems to me that there are a lot of opportunities if you guys, who are so creative in other ways, engage your creativity, rather than adopt the mindset of coming here or going to local government looking for a grant. Frankly, those days are no longer around. Your approach must be different, and you have so much to offer that it just seems to me that the empathy that is there could be developed profitably for you and your workforce. As things stand, bringing through youngsters is a big development area. However, because the work is not here for them, they will have to seek it abroad. Nevertheless, you are giving them training and qualifications that will stand them in good stead.

**Ms Smith:** You are certainly right about the importance of diverse income, but I think it should also be noted that any funding is a really positive investment due to the wider economic impact of the performing arts. We talked briefly about the night-time economy. The performing arts have a wider reach, and so it is still important to invest in us.

**Ms Rossington:** Arts organisations are very creative in how they seek investment for many different projects and productions.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I do not disagree with you. I do not know what the MAC's costs are, but the Lyric's were £17 million and those of the Grand Opera House something similar. Very large amounts of money have been invested in these infrastructures and in the sector. I make the argument, and will continue to make it, and other colleagues will be asking, "Where is the return?" And that is the other side of the argument.

**Ms Smith:** That return comes from the programming that needs to go into those venues in order to help them generate a return.

**Mr Irwin:** Thank you for your presentation. I will ask about one thing that I saw as I was reading the document. Professional artists get very low pay, and female artists get 30% less than males. Is that because there is not the demand? Not many would work for such salaries if they needed to earn a living. Someone said earlier that, for the talent, you have to go outside Northern Ireland. Is that because we have not got the talent or is it because the salaries are too low and what they can earn is too little?

**Ms Rossington:** It is not that Northern Ireland does not have the talent. Quite often, Northern Irish talent leaves Northern Ireland and does not return. We try to bring that back when we can. The problem is that there is not enough work being produced here for artists to avail themselves of. That is the issue. There is not enough programming going on to sustain the level of income and work that artists require.

**Mr Irwin:** Is that because there is not the demand in Northern Ireland for it?

**Ms Rossington:** I do not think so.

**Ms Jordan:** This is where it fits within the framework of the creative industries. For example, to have a sustainable career as an actor in Northern Ireland, you have to have a career that has a balance between working in theatre, which is poorly paid, and in film, radio and television. Therefore, you can

create an opportunity for a sustainable career path for artists here. At the moment, maybe we are all at the start of the journey of the creative industries in creating that platform. The best scenario is when all the creative industries work together and at a certain level where we can facilitate cogent career paths for our artists. That is not where we are at. Theatre is poorly paid.

**Mr Irwin:** For instance, if you wanted to raise the profile of Northern Ireland, what steps would be involved in creating a group that would tour internationally, for instance? Would it concentrate on drama or might it be possible to combine a number of performing arts?

**Ms Jordan:** At the moment, our company is just at the coalface of an international co-production with a company from Sarajevo in Bosnia and another from Slovenia. That was facilitated by us accessing EU funding. This comes back to your point, Michael. We are a very resilient sector in that we have very diverse funding. If you were to look at our current budget for that show, you would be horrified to see how many different agencies and funders we have to balance in order to deliver a project that will open for the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry in September before travelling to Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia and then back to Belfast. That is a very big project and very ambitious. It is multi-funded. We do not make the link between the benefits of that with policies such as a shared future. We are working in Bosnia. Over a four-year period, we have created profound links between artists here and in Sarajevo, where we have dealt with post-conflict societies. As a company, we have made links in Bosnia at a governmental level. They are very interested in and want to gain understanding of some of our educational tools, such as how we teach history in Northern Ireland. That is where you can see how our experience of and lessons from Northern Ireland can be taught in an international context, as well as our artists being profiled internationally.

At present, there is no mechanism, for example in the tourist sector, for us to get any money to tour abroad. We were able to lever some money from the Arts Council. It is unusual that our company is working at that level. It is only facilitated because we were able to draw down EU funding for it. Hopefully, it will set an example for the future of how companies from Northern Ireland can export successfully and can work on lots of different levels. We are delivering socially and artistically. We are working with community choirs from all over Derry/Londonderry, Belfast and in every city that we work in throughout Europe. So, we are delivering on lots of different levels and also creating links, on a governmental level, between two places that have an awful lot to share.

**Ms McCorley:** I will not keep you. I listened to all the difficulties. I was just wondering about untapped talent and under-resourced talent. Do you think that there is much of that? Perhaps people do not proceed because of the lack of security in the career path or, for reasons such as social deprivation, it just does not come to the fore. Do you think that there is much untapped talent? What can you do about that?

**Mr V McCann:** One thing that is happening — to go back to the youth theatre model — is that the Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD) is conducting a mapping process of all the youth drama that is happening in the North to see where the needs and gaps are. I was very fortunate in my youth to go through a programme called the Ulster Youth Theatre. It allowed people who were my age — I was 17-odd-years-old then — to work with professional directors and designers, etc, and to perform on a professional stage. Notwithstanding what will come out of the UAYD's mapping project, I would imagine that it will identify gaps such as those to which you have referred. That presents an opportunity to see how to plug those gaps; how we find and engage with those people who are missing out. I think that there are plenty of talented performers, designers, and so on, who may not be found. Hopefully, that mapping project by one of our members will help to identify some of them.

**The Chairperson:** I am not sure whether it came across as well as we would like that there is recognition around the table that Northern Ireland does actually have talent. For me, it is important that we create the conditions in which we nurture that talent and do not lose it. It grieves me when our students leave Northern Ireland to go elsewhere and do not return. That is a massive loss to the country and also to the Northern Ireland brand. I know that they fly the flag very well and that they come back and promote us, but, at the same time, to have them here would be very special.

Last week, a number of Committee members visited the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA). We were very impressed by the organisation there. I know that it is, probably, aspirational for us to think that perhaps we might have something like LIPA, but at the same time, I think that you still have to set your sights high. Do you think that there is a place for a specialist college, perhaps another university or type of institution, that would assist in giving real focus and credibility to the performing arts in Northern Ireland?

**Ms Rossington:** I think that, currently, the way in which Queen's University, the University of Ulster and Belfast Met have developed their drama and performing arts degrees has been a massive positive step. However, I also think that there needs to be more specialist help. On the technical-theatre side, we have been working quite closely with Belfast Met and Queen's and through creative cultural skills to try to help to develop the technical-theatre sector, because there is a serious lack of really good theatre technicians in Northern Ireland. So, we are trying to work at that level. I think that, perhaps, there would also be possibilities to work with existing organisations to actually help the infrastructure in those organisations and bring in specialists or additional mentors from the professional sector to help with that.

**Mr V McCann:** Over the past number of years, a model was developed in Trinity College in Dublin. I studied at Trinity. At that time, there was a diploma course in performance. However, it was cancelled. In the past number of years, Trinity has forged an alliance with RADA in London to develop a bespoke performing arts course in a new facility called The Lir. So, there are certainly models that could be looked at.

**The Chairperson:** You have given us lots of food for thought with your presentation and paper. Certainly, the Committee will return to this issue again. Thank you very much for your time.