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Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Stimulating Support for the Creative
Economy and Social Innovation:
DCAL Briefing

3 October 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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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 Basil McCrea
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Mr Stephen McGowan Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Chairperson: I welcome Stephen McGowan, head of creative industries and innovation at the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), to brief us. You are very welcome, Stephen. Thank you very much for making the journey. If you would like to make an opening statement, members will follow it up with questions.

Mr Stephen McGowan (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): That would be great. I am sure that Joanna is on her way. There were a lot of difficulties with parking. I saw a lot of confused civil servants wandering around.

The Chairperson: And members.

Mr McGowan: It was like one of those team-building exercises. There were people with mats and paint balls, or something like that. I am sure that she will be here soon.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet the Committee. The words "stimulating", "catalysing", "enabling" and "realising" will have a very high word count today, certainly from me. The documentation that you have before you touches on those themes and words in quite a big way.

Let me give you an example of the substance behind what might be perceived to be sound bites. You might already know about this — I actually have no doubt that you will know about it — but it highlights the broad thinking behind the Department's approach. In 2011, Dog Ears, a children's media company that is based here in the city, received funding from the creative industries innovation fund to develop an animated and educational app based on a family of puffins who live on an island off the coast of Ireland. The story concept is a collaboration between Dog Ears and an animation studio in Kilkenny. That was developed to build Dog Ears' reputation as a digital-content creator and to be used as part of

a portfolio of pitch materials to gain international interest. The app itself was built by another company here in the city, and a music business that is based here and in Belfast managed the music production on the app. In total, four creative sectors worked together to produce the app.

In 2012, the company received further funding from the innovation fund to develop the test animation to pitch 'Puffin Rock' to international broadcasters. Later that year, the company used that test animation at the Children's Media Conference in Sheffield. It was shown to a director from the publishing firm Penguin. I am not sure whether the bird connection helped, but it was very well received. Ultimately, that resulted in Penguin's coming on board as an investor and co-producer. In the past couple of weeks, that has led to Dog Ears securing a TV series deal with Nickelodeon and RTE. Work is beginning now with a budget of around €2.7 million. Over €1 million will be spent in this city.

In addition to the innovation fund, ongoing support was also provided by NI Screen and Invest NI. Together, that highlights the impact of stimulating, catalysing, enabling and realising. From the innovation fund and DCAL perspective, it is not just about the provision of small, but very significant, amounts of funding, but that the reason for the significance and impact of that funding can be traced back to the objectives of the fund that were set by the Department: to promote cross-sectoral collaboration; to harness the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of our artistic and cultural base; and to support export-focused growth. Our effort with the innovation fund and a wide range of other initiatives is not only to deliver financial support — to get grants out the door — but to nurture, develop and enhance a collaborative ecosystem that enables our region's talent, companies and creative ideas to compete and succeed on the world stage. That ecosystem — that fertile environment for local companies — and that enabling support for new ideas and collaborations and, crucially, a pipeline of new young talent from all parts of our community is what we are trying to achieve with the guiding principles and initial actions that are set out in the document that you have.

I believe that the Committee has always known the Department's direction of travel with regard to creative industries. The Committee's inquiry into the sector has further shaped and guided the approach. Indeed, more than that, without question, it has contributed to a specific work plan and common agenda on what needs to be tackled and achieved and how we should go about achieving it. No conversions are required at this Committee — no road-to-Damascus moments. We all know the value of the creative industries and creativity to the economy and in tackling other social issues. However, we also know that others do not yet realise the value of this sector. That is why the Department has to move to tackle any notion that what we do and care about is just about nice, fun, fluffy stuff. Often, it is nice and fun, but what you see in your role every single day is the capacity of that work to be life-changing and the possibility of it providing opportunity, delivering growth and transforming business models, communities and how we go about doing things in this place. That is why the Department has undertaken a sustained campaign to secure the role and importance of creativity and the creative industries within the Executive's top priority, which is to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage. That is why our approach is built on the foundation of the Programme for Government, is based on the economic strategy and recognised international best practice, and has made a major contribution to the Executive's innovation strategy.

The draft innovation strategy was launched only last week. It has three key themes: knowledge generation, knowledge exchange and knowledge exploitation. Those themes are to be underpinned by cultural change, which is required to make the region a more collaborative place and one that embraces creativity and innovation at all levels of society. If that is not fertile territory for DCAL and the Committee, I do not know what is, because the creative and cultural infrastructure and programmes and activities that, together, we oversee and support provide a regional infrastructure and network that stimulate, generate and disseminate knowledge. They do so at one end of the spectrum with support to businesses, and also with regard to our contribution to education and lifelong learning. They do so right at the heart of communities, especially those that face disadvantage and other barriers to opportunity.

The paper that you have before you, which outlines the Department's approach to stimulating the creative economy and social innovation, was part of the evidence pack for the Executive's innovation strategy. For the first time, I think, creativity is not used in an economic or innovation strategy as merely a descriptive flourish. Instead, it is embedded as a core priority in recognition of the fact that creativity drives new ideas and new and novel approaches. Creativity is the driver of innovation. Innovation happens when creativity meets market and when creativity is shaped and supported by design to deliver economic and social value.

Our approach outlines our guiding principles and sets out a mechanism to support the further development of the creative and collaborative ecosystem in which creative people, creative ideas and creative businesses emerge and flourish. That ecosystem will be driven by collaboration. It will be supported by STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics). It will be fuelled by the generation and exchange of new ideas, tackling economic challenges as well as those in health, education and environment, and tackling poverty and social exclusion. The context of delivery will be guided by DCAL being a Department for the economy and of equality. It will be guided by the recommendations in the findings of this Committee's inquiry into the sector and by the objective to maximise the economic and social legacy of this city's term as City of Culture.

On that final note in terms of legacy, the work we have already done, the work we are doing and the work we will do with regard to the creative learning centres, the STEAM agenda, the culture tech concept and a focus on knowledge, skills, employment and business creation will reinforce the city's reputation as a city of creativity and innovation. It will reinforce the city's reputation as a regional driver of creativity and innovation. Because of City of Culture, this city is emerging and can be reinforced as the embodiment of the innovation strategy: a place where there is knowledge generation, a place to go to for knowledge exchange, a place to go to for knowledge exploitation and a place where creativity and innovation can be embraced by all levels and sections of the community. Now, a city and region of creativity and innovation will attract international interest as a place to go to, a place to learn in, a place to invest in and a place to do business in. If we get towards that, that will be quite a legacy. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Stephen. Your comments are very welcome this morning. We hope that it is not just words but that there are real actions coming from the Department in the delivery of this. In relation specifically to the work that the Committee carried out with regard to its inquiry, what feedback have you received from the key stakeholders in relation to how the Department is going to follow those recommendations?

Mr McGowan: One of the key recommendations was for the Department to work very closely with Creative and Cultural Skills and Creative Skillset, and we have been doing that on a range of initiatives. I have asked both organisations to try not to reinvent the wheel here, because those organisations are tapped into the sector. Their advisory boards for Northern Ireland cover organisations like Digital Circle, Pact, Craft NI and other organisations. Those advisory boards meet on a regular basis and tackle the issues that were highlighted in the inquiry. I have asked both organisations for their advisory boards to constitute a key means of liaison between the Culture Department, other Departments and their organisations. More than that, it is not just about those two organisations working separately but about those advisory boards working together, and cross-sectoral information and sharing of information.

In terms of feedback, without question, the sector has welcomed the inquiry. It has the same focus as you: how do we move this forward? Look back to 1999-2000, when we had Unlocking Creativity. We had one of the world's leading creativity experts working on that report, and a lot of great stuff was highlighted in it, but a lot of it did not follow through. Personally, I think that a lot of that did not follow through because it was actually government and Civil Service Departments that were tasked with driving it, whereas, in my view, we have to turn that the other way around and let the sector drive that with industry-led, community-led approaches, which Departments facilitate and support.

The Chairperson: You mentioned other Departments, and it is very much a cross-departmental issue. How responsive have they been?

Mr McGowan: I must say — I know that you get this sense — that it has been the case that we have been waiting on innovation strategies or on the inquiry in order to get things happening on the ground. We work very closely day and daily with Invest NI, the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Education and other Departments and agencies to try to get that collaboration. It is highlighted in the document. The major breakthroughs, the major insight and the major steps forward will be through collaboration. I get about quite a lot and deal with a lot of people, but I am still always amazed by the fantastic initiatives that are happening, not only in other Departments but particularly in organisations in the community and voluntary sector. That is why one of the key recommendations of this inquiry is about a central hub to profile the initiatives and links, and, through that, we can reinforce and maximise the impact and reach of what can be achieved.

The Chairperson: How do you plan to track success?

Mr McGowan: On a very basic level, success will be determined by the sector telling us whether it is working or not. Therefore, on an ongoing basis, the feedback provided to this Committee and to the Department will give you a very honest and straightforward approach to whether it is working or not. The initial actions that we have put in place are all within this financial year so that we ensure that we have momentum, that this does not slip any further, that we have the advisory groups and the mechanisms up and running, and that key initiatives are started this year. From the advisory committee, we will get feedback very quickly on whether or not things are working. It is not about saying, "This is where we are going and this is how will be." I have talked to the Committee before about this, and I am always reminded of the Northern Ireland digital media strategy, which was published in 2008. It came out in December of that year, and three months later Apple launched the iPad. It totally changed the context of what that strategy was about. I know that it is a cliché, but this ecosystem is meant to achieve living documents and evolving plans.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning, Stephen. I congratulate you on publishing the draft strategy. How can we ensure that developments arising from this will not be confined to Belfast and Derry and that the whole of Northern Ireland, including the rural areas, will have a stake in the developments?

Mr McGowan: Belfast and Derry are our key regional drivers, but it is a regional approach. I will give you one example. I believe that the Justice Committee is here today. A lot of this is about making connections and connecting things that have not previously been connected. It would be very useful to have a chat with some of your colleagues on that Committee about the plans for the — I know that the name has changed — community safety college in mid-Ulster. What is the connection to the creative industries? I will give you a great connection that is very relevant at this university. Dr Janet Coulter is a fashion designer in the University of Ulster and leads the university's and her faculty's role in liaising with business. Her background is fashion design, and she works on innovative pattern engineering. Her breakthrough work is on the role of body armour, particularly how body armour can be shaped for female officers. We are going to have a £140 million centre of excellence for the police, fire and prison services. The creative industries have a key role in generating new approaches to those services.

Another example that was highlighted in the press only last week was the roll-out in England of predictive policing, where the digital technology sector is working with the police services to monitor Twitter and the social media to tackle and predict crime. It is about making those connections, but at a very basic level. It comes back to the focus of the online hub because, if there is a great idea on how to tackle underage drinking in Fermanagh, I want that hub to disseminate that idea as widely as possible, but I also want to connect organisations throughout the region with initiatives that are happening that can maximise impact and reach.

It sounds very simplistic. The flow of information — we are a small place, but I find that we are very bad at this. We need to connect different initiatives across Departments with the voluntary and community sector, and particularly with the councils. I think that the councils have a key role here, because they are often the first point of call for any creative enterprise or initiative. I work very closely with Derry City Council, Belfast City Council, Craigavon Borough Council and Banbridge District Council. At the moment, there are 26 councils, but, as you know, only three or four of them responded to the Committee's inquiry. What we are trying to do through the hub is profile and connect all the councils' services, initiatives and support for the creative sector — to try to get connectivity between them.

Mr D Bradley: I think that it is sensible to use the councils, because, obviously, they are there, and that is part of their role, and that will be the case even more under the new council model. If you were speaking to an individual or a small private company, how would you tell them that this strategy will benefit them?

Mr McGowan: The strategy will benefit them because we are bringing together all the stakeholders, such as Creative and Cultural Skills and Creative Skillset, which work with Craft NI and Digital Circle, which, in turn, work with one-person bands — the people who work their business out of their bedroom. DCAL is not going to reach down to that very individual level, but we will work with and pull together the organisations that are 100% committed to doing that to enable them to do so and to provide those linkages. I work with many different sectoral organisations, but there are others who are not on the radar yet. I know that there are those organisations out there. Again, it comes back to that core principle of how we can connect with organisations that are dealing with those individuals on the ground. Honestly, I do not think that a departmental approach will be effective in reaching right down to the community, but a departmental approach that enables our stakeholders to do that can be.

Mr D Bradley: So you would connect with people through the guilds, associations, and so forth.

Mr McGowan: Very much so.

Mr D Bradley: What about individual operators who do not belong to a guild or an umbrella organisation?

Mr McGowan: Again, it is about raising the profile of the creative industries at a general level. It is about profiling our successes and profiling the organisations that can provide support, because that will facilitate, encourage and stimulate them to join those networks. We cannot force anyone to join them, but if we can highlight the benefits of doing that, we can get more people involved in it.

Mr D Bradley: You said that the draft strategy was published last week.

Mr McGowan: Yes. The draft strategy is being brought forward on behalf the Executive by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). The paper you have that outlines DCAL's approach is part of the evidence pack.

Mr D Bradley: I have recently met a number of arts organisations — in fact, I met some of them last night — and none of them had ever heard of this. Is there something that you can do, from the point of view of the communications strategy, to get the message out to as wide a group of arts and creative industries as possible?

Mr McGowan: Yes, there is. You highlight a very key point. I do not know anyone outside the Civil Service who waits with bated breath for the publication of consultation documents or any strategy documents from any Department.

Mr D Bradley: There are people involved day and daily in promoting the arts — some in a professional capacity, and some in a voluntary community capacity — who would be very eager to see, receive and respond to those documents. As I say, from the sample of people I met recently — there were quite a number of groups involved — none of them had heard of it.

Mr McGowan: Well, they have the opportunity now. There is a 12-week consultation period, led by DETI. DCAL will drive awareness of the opportunity to provide input into that during the next 12 weeks. At the same time, I think it is also a problem on the government side but also a problem on the sector side. When they heard that DETI was coming out with the innovation strategy — this is a problem that I have faced in the past few years — they asked, "What has DCAL got to do with that?". That is why I talked about that sustained campaign in the past few years to drive home to other Departments the relevance of what DCAL does to economic and social development. You will all be better placed than I am, but I cannot recall DCAL having had such a level of input into an innovation or economic strategy in previous years. We do that because other Departments are saying, "We need more innovation". We base it on the innovation strategy and the Programme for Government and we say, "If you want it, this is how this can help."

Otherwise, without rooting it in that type of approach, DCAL will come out with a paper and call for other Departments to work with us, and some people might say, "That sounds lovely and we will do all we can to help you". However, if we put it as a target in the innovation strategy — I am trying to think of a better phrase than "a big stick" — we have a means to drive other Departments to deliver on what we are trying to achieve.

I take your point. The strategy came out last week, and we still need to raise awareness in the broader sector about how it can have input into the strategy and how the Department has tried to articulate the views of the sector and its importance in the strategy.

Mr D Bradley: I agree that it is very important that it is part of the bigger economic strategy. It is good that DCAL is part of that and that emphasis is being placed on the economic activity that these industries can generate. However, it is very important that as wide a range of groups as possible is made aware of the strategy. If you could do something to raise that awareness, that would be very welcome.

Mr McGowan: We will do that. I will ask for the Committee's help to do it, even in the medium to long term, because of your reach into your constituencies. As part of our core approach, we have piloted

Creativity Month in March for the past couple of years. It has gained momentum and has moved from people's perception of it as purely an artistic endeavour to one that is about the generation of ideas on economic and social issues. I want March 2014 to be the major platform for driving Creativity Month on behalf of the whole sector so that we can show that all the issues in the strategy can come to life in Creativity Month.

In the profiling of our sector and the online hub that we intend to create, with your permission, the role of the Committee will be crucial in bringing all the stakeholders together. I want the Committee's online content — the reports, inquiries and evidence that you publish — to be a key component of the online hub.

Mr Hilditch: Those were fine words this morning, Stephen, and I hope that they ring true. There was a slight delay of a few months in the publication of the strategy. Was there any particular reason for that, or was it just about timing?

Mr McGowan: It was just about trying to get everyone together on the Executive subcommittee from different Departments to approve the final draft. During that period — this shows the catalytic potential of DCAL — when DETI was putting its draft strategy together, DCAL, working with Creative and Cultural Skills and the Northern Ireland Design Alliance, pulled together a seminar for DETI and other stakeholders across Departments to look at the emerging plan.

One of the inquiry's key recommendations was about promoting the value of design and design thinking across government and society. That was one example where it was not just about DCAL submitting a paper. We got Creative and Cultural Skills and the Design Alliance into the early process, working with DETI. We did exactly the same thing with the Delivering Social Change team. We brought the Design Alliance in along with key speakers from the design field and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to highlight the role of design.

The delay was just —

Mr Hilditch: It was just about getting everybody in a row.

Mr McGowan: Exactly; hence the importance of waiting until we had our input into that.

Mr Hilditch: During the inquiry, I raised issues, which Dominic has mentioned, in relation to local councils. You said that things are working well at departmental level, but when you look at arm's-length bodies and local councils, performance may not be as consistent. During the inquiry, I was able to highlight areas that I know about, such as the work of Carrickfergus Enterprise and Larne Enterprise Development Company (LEDCOM). They were doing a fine job. However, Mr Ó hOisín and Mr McMullan countered that by telling us of bad practice in other parts of Northern Ireland, where maybe things were not working so well. How are we going to get consistency across the Province?

Mr McGowan: One of the proposals is to bring forward a forum for councils where they could share ideas and collaborate. A very good example of that is the SEED (South East Economic Development) programme, which includes Newry and Mourne, Banbridge, Craigavon and, I think, Armagh. That is about councils working together and sharing resources and focus in order to support creative enterprises in their areas. Here, everything is about the first and second cities. To get around that, we provided support for councils to make short videos of creative businesses in their areas, profiling the talent within their areas and giving inspiration to young people who live there, showing them that they can do this type of activity where they live.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat. I want to ask a question further to what Mr Hilditch said in respect of the drawdown of potential funding from EU sources and the tie-in with EU programmes, particularly with respect to local government but also with the assistance of Invest NI. What further can be done? You have made a departmental recommendation for an online platform. To use your word, that perhaps sounds a bit "fluffy". Is anything more concrete being looked at?

Mr McGowan: The online platform is one strand. I mentioned, for example, this forum for bringing local councils together. A lot of the EU funding drawdown will be led by the councils. For example, we have also initiated work with the British-Irish Council, which brings together all the Administrations on the island. From the EU perspective, we obviously need at least two member states in order to drive a lot of this activity. That complements the work of the University of Ulster, which has just

launched its Honeycomb Creative Works initiative. I am sure that the Committee has been made aware of it. It is a £3.5 million EU INTERREG initiative, which is about developing networks in the creative industries across Northern Ireland, the border regions and Scotland; research in those areas; and finding ways for more collaborative working across them. I sit on the advisory board of that initiative. Again, it is one way in which a major EU-led initiative, which, over the next two years, can stimulate more opportunities for organisations across these islands to bid for EU funding. The Department is in there, helping to shape and guide it. With councils, we are bringing forward a range of programmes and networking events about, for example, giving more insight into opportunities at an EU level.

Mr Ó hOisín: In fairness, the role of the British-Irish Council, particularly with regard to the City of Culture, is well recognised. It has been very supportive in the drawing down of funds. I am just not so sure of the tie-in that is going on, particularly with regard to local government. I know that, in the short term, everyone is treading water, but I think there should be a more proactive attempt to ensure that we hit the ground running post-RPA.

Mr McGowan: One way to do that is to further enhance the work that we have been doing with the Barroso task force. DCAL is represented on the information technology and social cohesion subgroups. That is about getting Departments and their stakeholders to find new opportunities to draw down EU funding. I think that we can redouble our efforts in that, and we can be more coordinated in it. Over the past couple of years, we have recognised and established the potential of the creative industries, but we just need to do more work on it.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cathaoirleach. Thank you for the presentation, Stephen, and congratulations on the report. It says in the report about how actions described previously highlight concerted efforts to develop North/South, east-west, European and international collaborations, and that those efforts will be strengthened and further developed. When you think about the border regions and natural hinterlands, the North/South connections are probably the most obvious where collaboration can occur and where joint efforts can take place. How do you see those actions being strengthened and developed?

Mr McGowan: Rather than focusing on mechanisms, we want to find out what output those mechanisms can deliver. The British-Irish Council has initiated a creative industries work stream. With guidance from DCAL and the Executive, that work stream will focus on the role of young people and skills and the collaboration between the creative industries and other sectors. The British-Irish Council subgroup will come back to Northern Ireland in March next year as part of Creativity Month. We want to tie it up to an initiative that we started last year with Northern Ireland Screen called Future Classrooms, which profiles the work of the creative learning centres and the role of digital technology initiatives such as the CoderDojo programme, the FabLabs initiatives and enhancing education. We can continue our work in those different cross-border and cross-national initiatives. However, as we did this year by supporting NORIBIC to hold its European Business Network (EBN) conference in the city, and as we are doing in November when we have Cartoon Finance, which is an EU-wide initiative for people working in the animation industry, coming to Belfast for its conference, we want more of the opinion-formers and decision-makers from across these islands and from the rest of the EU coming to this region to make new connections and new opportunities to work together. By working with our stakeholders, the Department can drive and stimulate opportunities to make that happen.

Ms McCorley: What sort of engagements do you have with the relevant Department in the South?

Mr McGowan: We work very closely with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. There is obviously a lot of crossover with regard to the cultural and artistic infrastructure on this island, which can really fuel the emergence of new ideas and new creative content. Dog Ears is a great example of a Northern and Southern company working together and accessing international markets. With the sad passing of Seamus Heaney, we saw the global significance that our arts, our heritage and our culture has, given that it is such a small island. We want to turn that into more creative products, more creative experience and more creative opportunities that can compete in local and international markets. However, in order to do that, everything comes down to getting people working together.

Mr B McCrea: Can you explain to me a bit more about why you think that you are the Cinderella Department? You said that you felt that you needed help to get the information out and that you are really taken [*Inaudible.*] Can you expand on that a wee bit?

Mr McGowan: I have been with the Department for almost four years. I thought that there might be a cake, but it is actually next week. *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea: The cake is probably parked somewhere.

Mr McGowan: I have discussed this with the Committee before: in the first couple of years when I attended cross-departmental working groups on health, on education and on social issues, many times I got the sense that people were wondering — and, sometimes, I was asked directly — why DCAL was there and what role it had to play. That has been part of the sustained campaign that I have talked about, which is about demonstrating that, if we want more young people to have coding skills, then the creative learning centres, CoderDojos, FabLabs, W5 and STEM clubs, all supported and assisted by DCAL, must have that vital stimulus role.

It turned out all right for Cinderella, and that is what we want to see here. Our inclusion in the innovation strategy has shown that that input is working. I always make this point: in the Civil Service, as you know, people move all the time; you could be in DCAL or in DETI one day, and you could be in sewage the next day. *[Laughter.]* I try to avoid management clichés, but we need a corporate DNA. We need all Departments to recognise the importance of this and actively come and seek our help.

I am circulating something that I read in the newspaper only the other night. I apologise; I should have distributed it earlier. It shows that great initiatives are happening. For the record, it is a full-page advertisement from the University of Ulster in the 'Belfast Telegraph'. It highlights — I know I am going to pronounce this wrong — the Confucius Institute and the links between China and the university. The university has announced hubs across Northern Ireland that work with schools to promote the Chinese language, culture and trade links. I worked with the academics that are involved in that, and, for example, they took part in the Belfast Media Festival last year and helped local companies to view China as a new growth opportunity for the creative content that is created here. I saw that article, and it sounds fantastic. However, my immediate reaction was to ask how we could link those hubs into the local libraries, museums and STEM clubs to maximise their impact and reach. It is not just a cultural endeavour. Ultimately, it is about improving trade links between Northern Ireland and China. So, that is one of those things. I was flicking through the 'Belfast Telegraph', and that was the only reason I saw that. I want to work with DEL and the university and connect that to our 98 or so libraries across Northern Ireland. That will mean that young people in schools will be involved in those activities and we will perhaps be profiling Chinese-related material and information in libraries in their local areas. Again, this sounds very 'X Factor', but they will have that journey and progression.

Mr B McCrea: Are you familiar with an initiative called Thinkspace? I think that it was launched a couple of weeks ago. It is a UK initiative, but it was also launched in the Assembly. It deals with the areas that you are talking about here and giving young people the opportunity to be creative and use computer technology and such like. I think that Where Is My Public Servant (WIMPS) was one of the groups that were here and a number of schools were also looking at it. It seems the influence that you might have is not just with DETI but with DE. You spoke about the CoderDojo, and people do not get enough opportunities to be creative at school. I put that to you as one challenge. Do you see yourself having an advocacy role to take on DE? Are those initiatives that you might want to deal with?

The second thing is about providing resources. You, quite rightly, said that you could do those things in a library. It just needs to be a space where people can go and, if you will forgive me, be creative. In other words, it should be somewhere where they can go, take in the atmosphere and do that.

Do you think that we are doing enough at the earlier ages? Everybody tells me that not enough schools teach computer science — real coding. I also spoke to a head of electronics at the 25k awards, who said that one of the problems was that not enough computer science graduates consider a role in teaching. Therefore, we do not have enough teachers to enthuse our young people. I just wonder how we are going to get the funnel filled earlier on.

Mr McGowan: That focus on filling the funnel early on is fundamental. That is a key role for DCAL. It will be in the libraries, the museums, the Planetarium and W5 that a young person captures that fire of imagination, is excited and is fully engaged. They might end up working in computing and starting their own business and can trace it all back to that moment in W5 or whatever. More definitely needs to be done.

An initiative introduced social clauses in the creative industries innovation fund this year, which will, I hope, gain more traction across different areas of DCAL. From the current round, if you get a grant through the innovation fund, your social clause commits you to participating in the W5 STEM ambassadors programme. That is a very simple thing to do: you get a grant from Government, link up with that programme and go into schools in disadvantaged areas and talk about your career and its challenges, and you inspire.

A lot of this may sound simplistic. My first job was working with young people who had come out of the education system at the age of 16 with poor reading and writing skills. We all know the importance of engaging, enabling, enthusing and supporting very early on and allowing young people, if it is an interaction in school, to have a follow-up in a library, to the Planetarium or whatever. Early intervention and supporting young people is a core area for DCAL.

Mr B McCrea: I will not go on because other people will pick up on that.

The Chairperson: That was the final question, so if you want to ask something further —

Mr B McCrea: Thank you very much for your indulgence, Chair. You come across as passionate in what you say, and not only passionate but, if you will forgive me, with a hint of frustration. I do not know whether that is accurate. What would you do differently? What would you want us to do specifically? Rather than just eulogise about this being the great opportunity and this is what we should do, where would the strategy lead you? What can you do or we do? It could be anything. The difficult words here are, "Are you in the right Department?"

Mr McGowan: Yes, because the catalytic base that we have in this Department is in prime place to make those types of breakthroughs, particularly at a very young age. To turn that question around, I do not think that young people or the people who we are trying to help give a damn about what departmental logo is on an initiative. They care about whether these initiatives are joined up and making an impact.

Mr B McCrea: If I can be a wee bit supportively challenging to you, the whole digital entertainment thing is still a complete mystery to most people. It just seems to be a few cartoons or animations or something. People have not got that 'Game of Thrones' is our biggest inward investment project. People from colleges in this area are now designers on the sets. I am not sure that we have been able to up our game enough to say, "Look, whilst everybody is going on about web sites and that sort of stuff, the real action is in different areas."

If you are the section spearheading this, you are a little bit isolated. This is your chance. We promise that we will not hang you out to dry — at least I won't anyway. This is your chance to say that we are, or are not, missing the boat or what we should do specifically to capitalise on the opportunity.

Mr McGowan: If I recall my first evidence to this Committee, I think I said in response to a question by Mr Hilditch that our goal is to get the ships in the fleet sailing in the same direction. I enjoyed that turn of phrase. I thought it worked well. Since then, however, it has become clear that many people in many organisations in Northern Ireland think that they are admirals. *[Laughter.]* What we are trying to do, and what DCAL can do, is provide a map and nurture that more collaborative activity.

Yes, there is frustration from all of us because we see the opportunities. You see the great stuff that is happening on the ground with the organisations that come to you all the time and that you work with in your constituencies. We can do singing, dancing and cheerleading and saying how brilliant this is all together at any stage, but we are trying to maximise the impact and reach of not only what is being done now but what is possible.

I am showing how I pick up a lot of my intelligence by reading papers, but I noticed that Colleges NI held a showcase of FE research in the Assembly last week. I do not know whether anyone from the Committee was at that. I work closely with Colleges NI, and it does great work, but a lot of those sectoral organisations will zone in on just the Committee that they think is relevant to them. So, if it is higher or further education, they will be interested in only the Committee for Employment and Learning. What the Department and Committee can do is demonstrate those linkages and give more meaningful understanding and profile to what is possible when there is a more joined-up approach.

The Chairperson: Stephen, thank you very much for your presentation. You will understand that the Committee is very much behind what you are doing. We are here to challenge and encourage. Certainly, we will keep in touch with you in relation to how you move forward.

Mr McGowan: Thank you for your support. I appreciate that.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.