



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-class
Communities: Arts and Business Northern
Ireland

20 March 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-class Communities: Arts and Business Northern Ireland

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

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| Dr Joanne Stuart | Arts and Business Northern Ireland |
| Ms Mary Trainor-Nagele | Arts and Business Northern Ireland |

The Deputy Chairperson: You are very welcome. I apologise for the delay. We are running a wee bit behind. I welcome Dr Joanne Stuart and Mary Trainor-Nagele. This briefing is one of two this morning. Arts and Business will also brief the Committee on ethical sponsorship. I ask you to make your opening statement.

Dr Joanne Stuart (Arts and Business Northern Ireland): I thank the Committee for inviting us to give evidence today. We will give a summary of our submission.

Ms Mary Trainor-Nagele (Arts and Business Northern Ireland): We are delighted to be here and welcome the opportunity to respond to your inquiry. We recognise the diversity of the arts sector across Northern Ireland and the access work that is done with working-class communities. Our response to the inquiry is based on our expertise, which is in working with the private sector in particular.

For those not familiar with us, I will give you a short introduction on who we are. We advocate and facilitate partnership between the private sector and cultural sector in Northern Ireland. So, everything that we do is about bringing those two worlds together to facilitate an exchange of ideas, creativity and expertise. In practice, that means that we find arts-based solutions for businesses to issues such as motivating staff, connecting with communities and, perhaps, aligning their brands with culture. On the flip side, we work to strengthen the arts by connecting them with business. If arts organisations have skills gaps, we match them with businesspeople by placing businesspeople on their boards. We then have skills training to build capacity in the arts to diversify their income.

The key thing that we reiterate for the inquiry is that businesses will obviously partner with the arts for strong business reasons and because they see the value that the arts make to the creative economy

and the society in which we live. Most interestingly in relation to the inquiry, a lot of businesses partner with the arts because the arts are deeply rooted in communities, and those businesses feel that that association and partnership is a way for them to connect with communities. Another key point to highlight is that a lot of business investment is enabling and extending much of the outreach and accessibility work going on in the sector with working-class communities. Those are the two key points in that regard.

Our written submission contains quite a few case studies for the inquiry — about 18 — of what we feel are different examples of good practice between the two sectors. Hopefully, those illustrate the point about enabling and extending that work. We will take questions later rather than get into that now. Another point concerning barriers to accessing the arts was the issue of few arts organisations having the marketing budgets that a commercial company might have. So, it is about promoting the great work that is already going on and highlighting how accessible the arts can be. We gave U105 radio station as an example of how a business might be able to help in that regard. It had some spare airtime, and it promoted the Test Drive the Arts scheme. We brokered that relationship. The station also gave about 10 arts organisations airtime to help promote the arts. That is just a little example of how the business community is helping in that regard.

We also circulated the supplement on our recent awards, which Allianz funded. That, again, is a great way of extending the value of the partnerships that are out there. It also comes with a 96-page digital image magazine or Imag, in which all the arts organisations shortlisted in the awards have their own page. That is another example of how the private sector might help in some of that.

Dr Stuart: I want to say something about the impact that it is having. One of the programmes we run is the investment programme that is funded by the Arts Council. It is important in the context of the inquiry, because 75% of the projects funded were specifically for outreach and accessibility. That programme is like match-funding. It works out that for every £1 of funding from the investment programme we leverage £5 of investment from the private sector, whether financial or in kind. So, it is an important programme with the majority of its focus on accessibility and outreach.

The other thing that we want to touch on is that when the Arts Council published its strategy, we pulled together our business members. The fact that 75% of them attended underlines the importance that business places on the arts. One of the key themes is about promoting access to the arts. For your information, from a business perspective, businesses feel that it is important that we continue to leverage the private sector partnerships. They see the importance of supporting artistic excellence and, through that, supporting increased access for disadvantaged and minority groups. Businesses feel that they have an ideal and unique place in supporting the arts with regard to that.

Ms Trainor-Nagele: In summary, I will recap some of the things we had in the written submission. First of all, Arts and Business recognises that there is diverse and extensive work going on within the sector on the issue. Obviously, we all welcome ways in which we can work together to increase that access. For the Committee's inquiry, I reiterate that many businesses invest in and partner with the arts because it is a way of connecting with communities, and also, primarily, the business partnership is extending and enabling quite a lot of the access work that is out there. As Joanne said, the investment programme that is funded by the Arts Council really helps to make a lot of those projects happen and is extending that work.

One barrier is the limitation of arts organisations' budgets for things such as marketing. Furthermore, a lot of the outreach work can demand a lot of time. So, it is about ways in which we can extend, develop and support that. I gave an example of the U105 partnership.

Finally, as Joanne said, the private sector is a key vehicle that can help us to widen access. There is an energy and willingness there. We, in Arts and Business, are keen to do our bit to facilitate that, to increase sponsorship to the arts, to encourage more projects to come forward under the investment programme and, finally, to encourage business and promote to business that the arts are a credible way of helping them to access communities through their corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

That was just a quick summary. We are happy to take questions and discuss that before we move on.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you very much. Do you find that there is an appetite among the business community to specifically target working-class communities, therefore encouraging more participation and inclusion in the arts?

Ms Trainor-Nagele: In our engagement with the private sector, I have noticed two of the big trends that are coming forward in relation to arts sponsorship. One is about engaging with communities and that kind of corporate social responsibility. The second one is about motivating and retaining the employees of the businesses. Those two key themes are coming through in a lot of the sponsorship. We gave about 18 examples of how businesses are doing that. What is also interesting is that it is smaller small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are coming forward. Maybe the larger sponsorships are harder to get at the moment. We are seeing a lot of smaller companies coming forward in the £7,000 to £10,000 bracket. Hopefully, you saw some of that in the supplement and in the case studies.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much, ladies, for your presentation and for giving your time to come to the Committee. Are you having much difficulty given the economic downturn at the moment, with businesses having much more pressure than perhaps they would have had five or six years ago? Are you having the same level of interest and participation from businesspeople as perhaps you were having a number of years ago?

Dr Stuart: What has been reassuring is that businesses are seeing a real benefit to themselves in partnering with the arts. Our business membership has not decreased throughout the recession; in fact, it has increased. Businesses are also becoming much more innovative in working with the arts organisations partnerships, so there is much more engagement with their employees and how they outreach to different communities. The other reassuring thing is that we are seeing long-term relationships as well. For example, Diamond Corrugated in Derry has been supporting the Millennium Forum, and Brennans Bread is working with an organisation called Replay. So, businesses are all seeing the benefit of longer-term relationships with arts organisations.

Mr Humphrey: That is really encouraging. In my constituency, thousands of people worked in Mackie's foundries, and the legacy is the sports facilities at Paisley Park or, with Ewart's mill, the legacy is Ewart's playing fields and so on. It is different now in that people are giving of their time, talents and experience as opposed to largely tangible things. That is very welcome. I do not want you to go into the specifics, but are a lot of the businesspeople who you are talking about people who have come from working-class communities, have done well and want to put something back?

Ms Trainor-Nagele: Following on from the first part of the question, I think that businesses have to make their investment in the arts work a lot harder for them. The benefit is that, when they connect with the arts, it is much more of a deep, two-way partnership that is very much embedded in the business strategy. As Joanne said, they are then in it for the longer term, whereas, in the past, it was maybe a quick in, quick out. It is much more deeply embedded in the business strategy, and that is a good thing.

It is hard to say whether their background is a specific thing, but there is certainly an appetite to give back, and corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility is a very big thing at the moment for businesses. They recognise that they have to invest in the communities that they are in.

Mr Humphrey: I represent North Belfast and served, until September, on Belfast City Council. I know that you have done work with Belfast City Council. What is your relationship with councils across Northern Ireland? Have you got a good relationship with most councils? Is it a bit patchy?

Ms Trainor-Nagele: It is probably a bit patchy. We would be very interested in exploring that. Belfast City Council is more of an exception to the rule, because we are very deeply connected with Belfast City Council. However, we did a presentation to the arts organisations in the Lisburn and Moyle borough areas on how Arts and Business could support them, and we have also done an introduction to sponsorship training. They asked us to go into their area and present to the arts organisations that they fund. We mentioned the investment fund earlier. That is a great vehicle for trying to ignite a relationship for the first time. The more that we can get the message out there, through yourselves, that that fund is available, the better it will be, and we are very happy to see what we can do to get that message out there and spread that engagement.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks for all that you do, and good luck in the future.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks, ladies, for your presentation. My question is similar to the one that I asked of ACNI. Do you have a tangible measurement of the distribution of Arts and Business funding in the context of the urban/rural divide?

Ms Trainor-Nagele: Yes. Because it is the Arts Council's fund, it is a core deliverable for us to make sure that we reach out to regional communities. I do not have the breakdown of the percentages, but I can bring that back to you. We are trying to extend that. Last year, a lot happened, particularly in the Derry/Londonderry area, and it was really encouraging to bring in smaller organisations such as City Cabs, which did a great project with the Millennium Forum involving about 200 taxi drivers and 40 teenagers from the area. Other things are happening in Strabane. There is a huge spread right across Northern Ireland, and we are really keen to go beyond Belfast.

Mr Ó hOisín: I take on board what you said about the fact that, even with the economic downturn, there has not been a tangible reduction in buy-in. A lot of that might be those sexy projects, for want of a better word, such as the City of Culture and the Millennium Forum. Do you find that some of the smaller and more rural and isolated projects are losing out while the overall funding might not be falling?

Dr Stuart: Mary has them, and we can provide more of a breakdown of the different case studies across the different regions in Northern Ireland. We are not finding that, but we are looking at how we engage businesses in those areas, because you find that, when a business is engaged, it works in the local area of where it is based. Just as we were saying about working with the councils, we need to explore ways of maybe working with the different chambers of commerce, for example, to access more of those businesses. That is something that we are conscious of and are working on.

Mr Ó hOisín: You will appreciate that the all-Ireland fleadh was very concentrated, with half a million people in one relatively small urban area. It is very easily quantified, whereas, with a raft of smaller projects and rural community festivals, it is not so easy.

Dr Stuart: We have a number of smaller —

Ms Trainor-Nagele: There are definitely quite a few around the Strabane area and Portstewart as well. Absolutely, we are keen to see how we can promote that further.

Mr Ó hOisín: Chair, maybe they want to come back to us at some point with more detail on that.

Ms Trainor-Nagele: Yes, absolutely. Not a problem at all.

The Deputy Chairperson: No further members have indicated that they want to ask questions.