



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: Community Arts
Partnership

1 May 2014

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
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Witnesses:

Mr Joe McVey	Community Arts Partnership
Mr Conor Shields	Community Arts Partnership

The Chairperson: I welcome Conor Shields, chief executive of the Community Arts Partnership; and Joe McVey, its director and chairperson. Gentlemen, you are both very welcome. You were present for the Minister's presentation. Perhaps you will want to reflect during your statement or in answers to questions on what you heard from her. If you would like to make your statement, we will follow up with some questions.

Mr Joe McVey (Community Arts Partnership): Thank you very much, Chair. I thank members for the opportunity to come here this morning. I am Joe McVey, the chair of the Community Arts Partnership. With me is our chief executive, Conor Shields. We will offer you a very quick overview of who we are, what we do, and why we do it. We will also offer a very quick summary that highlights the key points of our submission, which, as members will be aware, is fairly comprehensive and detailed. As part of that, we will also offer some practical suggestions and recommendations. As it is an inquiry, it is important that we look at practical actions that may be helpful and, more importantly, lead into questions and discussion.

The Community Arts Partnership was established in 2011. It was formed through the merger of the New Belfast Community Arts Initiative and the Community Arts Forum. Both organisations will be known to members as two of the leading organisations in community arts over many years. We are primarily an arts organisation. Our work is around the promotion and delivery of community arts practice to effect positive change. To pick up on what the Minister and members said, it is about positive change in individuals, communities and society. We do that through a whole range of activities, such as policy, research and advocacy. Very importantly, given what we heard about programme delivery, we do that in, with and through communities across the whole of Northern Ireland.

Significantly, our work is free at the point of delivery and where communities are located. In the past financial year, we worked with 5,000 participants in community arts and 78 community organisations

across Northern Ireland. We worked in 34 schools, and we offered assistance through information to 6,000 other individuals. In that year alone, we had 500,000 hits on our website. That shows the level of demand and interest in community arts across Northern Ireland. The type of projects that we do, and the type of work that we do, as the member on my right said, covers the whole range of arts activity, whether it is visual arts; carnival arts; Poetry in Motion Schools, which will be known to many members around the table; Side by Side, which work with marginalised individuals and communities; the intercultural programme; and the intergenerational programme. We do Trash Fashion, which looks at eco-fashion through recycled materials, and we also do work in multimedia.

The key to our work, and this is highly relevant to the inquiry, is recognising the barriers to participation, and how, with support and resources, we can overcome them or try to do something about them. Significantly, for this inquiry, it is important to recognise the level of demand and interest in arts in the community. Like most organisations, we argue that we could do an awful lot more. I know that, on last year's figures, we could run four times the number of programmes if we had additional resources. We are not alone in that. It is about what those resources are and how effectively they are targeted to organisations engaged in front-line delivery.

Our work is around community arts. It is about investing in and supporting communities and, to pick up on your earlier comment, Chair, it is about making sure that there is a legacy and that we are not simply appearing as a circus and moving on. It is about being embedded and supporting work in the community. Our interest is in marginalised communities and building participation.

Chair, with your permission, I will now hand over to Conor, who will say a few words about our submission.

Mr Conor Shields (Community Arts Partnership): Good morning. This is a great opportunity for us to promote our work and advocate the work of community arts, not just for our organisation, but the practice itself. We tried to frame that within the submission that we made. We see ourselves very much as a part of a family. I heard that term used this morning in the context of the DCAL family. We see ourselves as part of the mosaic of the creative arts right across Northern Ireland.

Typically, we do not use the term "working class" because we see that there are very many barriers, challenges and difficulties that one meets in everyday life, so we prefer to use the term "marginalised", which encompasses a whole range of different and very material demands. I used to say that we work with people aged eight to 80, but we have now had youngsters far younger than eight on our programmes, through supported programmes with mother-and-toddler groups. We have just finished a piece of research that worked exclusively with people with dementia and seeing how the creative arts, and community arts in particular — our practice — can work in non-therapeutic and non-medical settings to bring immediate benefit to those people.

We are marginalised for a whole range of reasons, plus the fact that we can be marginalised because of our proximity, or lack of it, to an opportunity. Community arts — Community Arts Partnership in particular — sees itself primarily as developing access that can lead to participation. The next stage of that is the opportunity to author; to make something oneself that leads ultimately to the ownership of the process and, indeed, to the ownership of a whole creative intent and making that central to one's life.

Looking at the situation in Northern Ireland, we have so many difficulties socio-economically, given that 27% of the population is economically inactive, the challenges around educational attainment in many of our communities, and, indeed, the fact that communities and families are up to £1,000 worse off annually in the past few years. We see well-targeted resources, working at the point of need in our communities, as being of tremendous support to increase civic engagement in our society and also to give people new ways to seek creative solutions, pathways and opportunities for themselves.

We do not describe our work as outreach because we work in the community. That is the work that we do; we are primarily a community organisation. We are not bringing people to other venues; we are working where people find themselves and find their need. That said, it was interesting to note that our Poetry in Motion Schools programme, which works right across Northern Ireland, brought up to 700 young people to the main auditorium of the Waterfront Hall for a two-and-a-half hour gala celebration only a month ago. We do that every year. We also look at developing a range of different instrumental benefits to the arts. The agency that we deliver is that we want to enable people to become artists — not to receive the arts but to make the arts and be actual contributors to our creative society. In doing that, we look at a whole range of different impacts that we can bring and different

delivery improvements to health; emotional and intellectual security; confidence; education, which is one of the big areas; and employability.

As Joe said, we could run our programme four times over if we had the resources to do so because the demand across Northern Ireland for community arts activity is staggering. Communities know very well about the creative benefits that good, professional, sensitive, well-trained artists with a good understanding of process can make to local communities. As Joe also said, we offer all our work at no cost at the point of contact. We do that by being supported quite generously by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in particular as our primary funder, but also through various other funders, including Belfast City Council. Because of that, we have a relationship with council areas in Belfast. One third to a half of our programming is external to Belfast.

We dedicate all our work to supporting the transformative power of the arts and to helping everybody to see themselves as creative beings. That gives them a chance to become creative actors in their own lives. We have a range of recommendations that we see as being most beneficial to the development of community arts in particular, but also the greater ecology of the arts across Northern Ireland. We have said that, if we had further resources, we could run our programme many times over, such is the demand. Increasing the resources from the current levels of 9% in respect of revenue funding and anything between 19% and 22% that the Arts Council comment on in respect of lottery funding would be very much appreciated. There is a way to enable capacity out there as well. Streamlining some of the community organisations' approaches to attaining good creative opportunities and funding would also be helpful.

We are keen to consult on and develop new mechanisms to support short-term work in a range of different settings, perhaps in a post-RPA world and perhaps with a range of different organisations because partnership-building and collaboration is key to our practice. We would also be keen to see targets for business support for community arts organisations. Increasingly, we find that the demands and capacity of small organisations to make applications and tenders to develop process can be a barrier.

I also urge more interdepartmental engagement with organisations such as ours so that we can show the mutual benefit and opportunity beyond the DCAL family into other Departments and so that we can have some cross-cutting initiatives. There is also an opportunity to develop and support a dedicated community arts research and development centre with a full suite of on-site art production and performance facilities. I know that that would incur some capital expenditure, and I understand the political and economic climate that we operate in. However, if we are going to support legacy and development beyond a short-term project in a community and see ways to progress and pathways to develop and embed process, a community arts centre solely dedicated 100% towards community practice would be necessary. Indeed, in 2006, we had an economic appraisal of such work, and that did not come through in the Belfast legacy projects that created the Lyric, the MAC and so on.

We also want to see whether there are ways to develop a long-term — maybe six months plus — community arts live-and-work residencies in our local communities. Many would see that as a touchstone for further development. That has been very successful as a European model elsewhere. We also encourage and hope to facilitate new councils to recognise and develop community arts policies and strategies and, indeed, to enable them with some of the facilitation and best-practice development that would increase civic engagement locally.

We would also like to assist community stakeholders, such as community leaders, artists, activists and participants to perhaps undertake study visits elsewhere to see how the richness and connectedness of local community arts practice can feed into the greater mosaic of the arts ecology in various areas. We also say that the narrow focus on multiple deprivation is in itself something of a barrier when one looks at the rural community, because one can live in an area that is materially very impoverished but, due to demographics, one is perhaps lost because of that. At present, we are working, through funding from the Building Change Trust, with the Rural Community Network to develop a piece of research on the gaps, obstacles and the opportunities that exist for community arts practice in rural areas.

Mr McVey: Thank you, Conor. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, first of all, for your patience and attention. We are very keen to take any questions or enter discussions that you feel appropriate.

Mr Hilditch: Thanks. I have a very basic question: when you heard that the inquiry was taking place and we were seeking your participation, what were your thoughts? Did you think that the inquiry was needed, that it was overdue, or that it was just another inquiry? How did you feel about it?

Mr McVey: As an organisation, we were very keen to hear that there was such an inquiry. We have tried to focus our emphasis on trying to break down barriers to participation. Our only concern is that the term "working-class communities" might be seen in a very narrow way and that, therefore, the other barriers to participation may not be taken fully on board. However, we felt that the underlying sentiment behind it, as we understand it, very much fits in with our ethos as an organisation. Is that fair, Conor?

Mr Shields: Absolutely. I have the very great privilege of running the Community Arts Partnership and we have been on various study visits, including one to Stockholm some years ago to look at community practice there. My organisation dedicates itself to every opportunity to talk about the great benefit that community arts can bring to communities, so we welcome any opportunity to sit on a panel like this or, indeed, in local community centres or town halls. Last week, I was talking to culture managers from right across Europe at Belfast City Council. Every opportunity to advocate for the transformative power of the arts is to be welcomed.

Mr Hilditch: In point 26 of your paper, you indicate how funding to the Arts Council is disbursed, and that it perhaps does not reach some of the communities that it should. Could you further develop that point?

Mr McVey: We want to make sure that, when people look at where the funding goes, as we describe it, it goes directly to communities. If funding is judged solely on the basis of multiple deprivation, there is a danger that it is done in terms of postcodes. Sometimes, the postcode of organisations that may be in receipt of funding can be slightly misleading when one looks at the overall figure.

Mr Shields: Just to amplify that point, there is a concentration of funding through postcode because of some very large institutions, so it is perhaps not the best way to talk about the participation value or the felt value of that funding.

Mr Hilditch: In point 32, you indicate that 50% of Community Arts Partnership participants are participating in an art form project for the first time. Obviously, then, a lot of people are not returning. Would it be fair to say that? Is that because of the barriers at that stage? If 50% of participants in each project were new, you should see quite a swathe of people moving towards the arts.

Mr Shields: If we had the capacity to take half of our programme, reprogram that half next year and then build again and again, we would do so, but it also says that we have an additional 50% of applications every year, so we find that there are new populations looking for the work. It is only in the past three years that we have been a fully regional organisation. Would that we had the opportunity and the resources — the point being that we have three to four times as many applications for places on our programme as we have the funded ability to develop.

Mr Hilditch: Are you aware of how those folk sustain themselves in the arts after moving out of your programme into other areas?

Mr Shields: Oh, we are. I do not like to correct my chairperson, but we had more than 500,000 hits on our website. We had 7.9 million hits on our website. The 500,000 figure is for individual visits. We will signpost all those organisations if they have been through a process. Key to community arts practice is that we leave skills. Making art is not rocket science, but you need to get your head around how to do it. You need to be sensitively guided and facilitated in making art in a whole range of different ways.

When you leave a skill behind, which is central to the work that we do, it is pedagogic; there is an element of teaching and learning in it. Those groups then have the capacity to develop that themselves. We see that often. We see groups that said, "This is a great idea. I understand now how we can do that." They develop it themselves or they return to us and ask, "What should we do now?" I will reply, "There's an organisation down the road. It is not far from you. It has just started a project. Why not approach them?" I might say, "Why do you not develop a grant application to the Arts Council, which we will help you with, to develop your process even further?" So, it is a jumping-off point. It is not taster sessions; we have fully formed processes. We also have to be fair-minded so that we give as much opportunity to as many people as possible. We have a turnover of around only £280,000 annually, so we really have to make a little go a long way.

The Chairperson: With the challenges facing your budget, how do you prioritise your programmes?

Mr Shields: We have a range of programmes, as you know, from Poetry in Motion Schools and Poetry in Motion Community, which are hugely successful, to the Trash Fashion, Masque and Landmarks programmes. They all have individual processes. We normally have around 30 school processes and 34 community processes that can be expanded up to around 50 or 60 processes.

At present, we are consulting with groups. We look for groups where we can put some creative ignition into their local community centres; where they are saying that they have never had an opportunity to get involved and that they have local issues that they would like to explore through the arts; where they have a good population; and where they have adequate facilities. We try to build a balanced programme across main traditions, geography, ability, age and gender so that we have a fully inclusive programme every year. Those are the priorities against which we support greatest need — those various section 75 concerns.

The Chairperson: You said that it is all about collaboration, which is really needed on every level. Recently, I spoke at an Audiences NI conference, the theme of which was, obviously, collaboration. Do you believe that there is now a greater willingness among organisations to share, compared with the past? Is that as a result of budgetary constraints or other factors?

Mr McVey: It is a double-edged sword. Financial cuts are putting pressures on organisations. They see that they must work together. Equally, I think that there is a bit of a desperate scramble for organisations to perhaps save themselves. In our work, because we are a relatively small organisation, we have always looked to partner and collaborate. It is still a very difficult climate because of the financial issues. However, where we see collaboration, as the Minister said earlier, is in looking to work across various sectors, such as health, education and enterprise, to try to make things happen in the community. Is that a fair answer?

Mr Shields: Absolutely. It is key to the partnership, as an advocate organisation, to see ourselves as part of the widest understanding of the arts. So, for example, when we challenged the Arts Council's process around its annual application and funding programme some years ago, we had over two thirds of its funded clients as part of our facilitated process in trying to develop new ways to make applications.

Because of the nature of the arts, there are lots of relationships. You try to develop partnerships because you have different expertise, capacities, abilities and perhaps constituencies with regard to the areas with which you work. I am a founding director of Culture Night, which was mentioned this morning. We also are supporting the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival this year with its Open Source programme. Community Arts Partnership is one of the co-funders and co-sponsors of that this year. We have initiated and tried to develop some collaboration with the Ulster Orchestra recently as well, and, indeed, we work with lots of community partners at all times. It is in the name of our organisation; we make partnerships and we see the organisations that we are working with on the ground such as the local community organisations, the local community groups and the schools as partners in a process. We try to develop that at all stages of the work that we do.

The Chairperson: Building relationships with other Departments would mean another source of funding coming into the arts that is perhaps absent at the moment. Are you leading on any projects with a view to bidding to the Health Department or any other Department at the moment?

Mr Shields: Our rural work will very much focus on conversations with DARD and DSD on the areas of development. That work is ongoing. We have also been approached by a range of councils to look at community planning through creative process in the shadow year of RPA and local government reform, and we are very keen to enable the local councils to look at various ways to plan and come up with creative solutions, while maintaining the good creative work that has gone on locally. With the research that we have just done on dementia, we will definitely be approaching a range of different agencies and, indeed, trusts and foundations to see if there are different ways, non-medical and non-therapeutic interventions, that can be made through community arts practice that give far greater opportunity for our older people, particularly the most vulnerable.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thanks very much for the presentation. What do you see as the main barriers that prevent people from participating in the arts?

Mr McVey: We agree very strongly with some of the comments that the Minister made. There are economic barriers, social barriers and community barriers, and people have a perception that arts, as they are sometimes described, are not for them and, therefore, that prevents them from taking part. There is a range of barriers, and that is why, in our presentation, we tried to suggest that there is no one simple definition or simple solution. If you recognise that there is a range of barriers, you have to suggest and put forward a range of approaches to try to tackle those. However, at the moment, the economic circumstances and poverty are clearly the major barriers.

Mr Shields: That is definitely one of the main difficulties in receiving the arts. There is also a barrier that we try to overcome in community arts practice when people say, baldly, "I can't draw", "I can't paint", "I can't sing" or, "I am not artistic. Nobody I know is, and our family is not." In fact, they all are. We can all draw from our imagination. Picasso said that he wanted to paint like a child and that he wanted to unlearn everything that he had learnt.

The barriers to our participation and creativity are, a lot of the time, some of the bad habits that we have learnt or because we have received and taken on board the messages that we are not creative when, in fact, the processes that we develop make people recognise that they have creative power, can enjoy making things from nothing, can own that whole process and take great joy and great pride in making something and contributing to something. There is almost a philosophical barrier that community arts works very hard and very successfully to overcome. You should see some of the responses that we get in feedback from the evaluations that we carry out. I have heard people in their 70s in old folks' homes, who perhaps have never really had an opportunity to be creative, say that it changed their life. If you can change somebody's life at that age, imagine the impact that you can have at various other levels and points. We have had young people tell us that the first time that they had made an animation was the most fantastic process that they had ever experienced. They recognise the thing that they watch every evening when they come home from school because they can make exactly the same thing. Through a 15-hour process, they can make a film where they can depict themselves, their lives and their streets. A lot of the time, the barriers are in our imagination, although we also have serious social and economic barriers.

Ms McCorley: You have probably already answered this, but do you have many inspirational moments where you see people's lives transformed by what you do?

Mr Shields: Constantly. It is a great pleasure to see it. I mentioned Poetry in Motion Schools earlier, and you mentioned developing creativity very young. Poetry in Motion Schools works by bringing a proper, producing poet into the schools environment for six hours of workshop time where they have direct contact with young people. In the Waterfront Hall, on the main stage of the auditorium where our greatest cultural producers, and our big bands or orchestras play, we have young people from De La Salle performing their own poetry without stumbling, owning that space, to an assembled audience of their peers who have come from the west of Derry, from the south-west of Fermanagh, and from Newry and Mourne. It is an incredible moment because of the respect that they show and the recognition that they are all part of the same process.

We recently had an artistic assessment by the Arts Council that said, although I paraphrase, that, in 20 years, it had not seen a better process. That was because of the joy and communication from the group as well, who said that this was a life-changing experience. It is done with sensitivity and a good facilitation of artists: well-trained, appropriate artists and highly skilled professionals.

Mr Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. In your opinion, what is lacking in the Northern Ireland arts infrastructure that would encourage participation in arts in marginalised communities?

Mr Shields: I think that we lack adequate resource to support the demand that my organisation feels is there and is constantly told is there. The headline of a less than £7 per capita spend in comparison with our near neighbours gives us a sense that we do not have the resource or funding capacity. Therefore, we run the risk of not necessarily having the artistic capacity because artists will seek employment and opportunity elsewhere. Every organisation that I know, and I know a great many, is stretched. They are all working to capacity and beyond to develop as many opportunities as possible.

I also think that there is an opportunity for us to reframe the arguments around being more connected and collaborative: actually seeing a community arts process feed directly into what has been called this morning a high-arts process or what others might call a pure-arts process. The key is in lining up adequate resource so that one can develop a suite of opportunities and see proper progressions. That needs to be resourced as well, because someone has to manage those opportunities, and it is

difficult to co-ordinate. Generally, if we had more subvention and if we had more resource in funding capacity, we could do more. We could see real, material change for many working-class communities, socially and economically.

Mr McVey: In support of that, Chair and Mr Irwin, there is an issue around the new councils and RPA. We have a concern that, because we are in a period of transition in the councils, community arts and community development may fall way down the agenda. It is important that the new councils, through you and the Department, be encouraged to ensure that community arts are kept high on the agenda and are adequately funded.

Mr Irwin: In other words, trying to get in all streams of funding in that.

Mr McVey: I think so, because that would go to the point about collaboration. Ms McCorley mentioned Newry and Mourne. If there are resources, if there are venues in Newry and Mourne or Ballymena or other areas that people want to use, part of the difficulty for many venues is that local councils and new local councils are saying that that is all that they have and that they cannot afford to support or subvent the venue any more than they already are. Collaboration at local council level will be very important.

The Chairperson: What are your thoughts on the community festivals fund and how effective it has been?

Mr McVey: We are very supportive of it.

Mr Shields: Absolutely. Indeed, the Community Arts Partnership has just got money from the fund to develop a programme in north Belfast. There are difficulties around some of the processes. Some of the eligibility criteria of the community festivals fund can preclude some processes as well. I was heartened to hear what the Minister said about looking at the heart of that and seeing whether there are, perhaps, ways to be less restrictive. The fund is to be welcomed; it is another boon to the limited capacity that many organisations and areas have. However, like anything else, it has to be developed and supported well. There are perhaps opportunities to target some of the groups that may not have the capacity to make applications to see whether there are other ways that we can encourage participation through an instrument such as that.

The Chairperson: There will also be the concern that the capacity may be lost if it becomes very professional.

Mr McVey: I think, Chair, that it is recognised as being a broad church, and that smaller organisations involved in community festivals need support as well as very large ones. It is about recognising the capacity and support that they would need so that we do not end up with a two- or three-tier system that leaves behind smaller and local festivals.

Mr Shields: Yes. We support many smaller organisations to make applications. It is not, necessarily, that we make applications on their behalf, but we encourage that capacity, so we do a great deal of handholding through much of the process. Indeed, that is one of our key roles. We would get — I am trying to think of the actual breakdown — thousands of enquiries annually about help with funding applications, looking for funding or signposting towards new opportunities to develop small, low-key events. We are not at all talking about huge amounts of money, but enough to make a significant difference.

Mr D Bradley: Morning. Is the Arts Council conning us in saying that it is spending 80% of its budget in deprived areas?

Mr McVey: I would not use that term, but there is a concern that if you judge where your funding is going simply on postcodes, it is inevitable that there will be a sense of, "We are doing very well here". Perhaps we need to look more deeply at where the money is going. Is it going, as we describe it, into communities directly?

Mr Shields: I have to hold my hand up here and say that I am a member of the Arts Council board. I am the most recent appointee, although I gather that there is a new ministerial appointment to come onto the board.

The Chairperson: Are you declaring an interest?

Mr Shields: I am declaring an interest and saying that I could not possibly say that the Arts Council was conning anybody. As part of the oversight structure there, I know that that is not the case.

Mr D Bradley: Your paper nearly says that.

Mr Shields: There are ways of describing where the money is going that perhaps reflect participation rather than receipt of money. That is crucial when talking about working-class communities.

Mr D Bradley: Are you saying that the big venues are eating up the biggest slice of the cake and only crumbs are left for the rest?

Mr Shields: I am not saying that either. I am saying that the big venues are located in areas that also have populations with very high multiple deprivation poverty indices and socio-economic challenges. That is just the situation. That is just because of the geography; it is just because of the postcode. I am not saying that it is necessarily being disingenuous in any way, but that is where some of the big recipients of our funding are situated.

Mr D Bradley: OK. So the Arts Council is conning us. Anyway, we will move on. What can you do when an arts group in my constituency goes to you?

Mr Shields: We work with quite a few groups and, indeed, schools in your constituency. We can assess where they are, based on the work that they may have done in the past and opportunities that present. We go through a detailed consultation process with groups that come to us in order to understand and identify their needs and creative opportunities. If we cannot programme a piece of work, perhaps because we have reached our funded capacity, we will definitely help the group, first, with 'Community Arts Weekly', which is the most-read digest of community-related arts information that there is. It goes out to 3,000 people on a Tuesday evening. We can reflect the work that those people may be doing, and we can help them to recruit artists. We have an artist database called the CAPtabase, where they can register and look for artists who can develop their processes.

Mr D Bradley: Let us say that I advised Newpoint Players in Newry to get in contact with you. What could you do for it?

Mr Shields: There is a variety of things; it depends on what they want to do. I can help them to develop an application; I could help them to think about devising a process with local schools or other communities; or I could encourage them to take part in an intercultural programme to reach out in their local community to new migrant populations and see that there are new opportunities for them to work in that way.

Mr D Bradley: Have you had any engagement with Irish-language and other language arts groups?

Mr Shields: Yes, we have. Indeed, we have Gaelscoileanna on some of our programmes through the Poetry in Motion Schools. It has had some Irish-language schools. We have had some very Ulster-Scots flavoured work from north Antrim as well. A range of different organisations has come to us. Sometimes, we struggle to find facilitators in particular art forms who are also Gaelgeoirí or Ulster-Scots speakers, for example. Invariably, we will find some way to support that work. Last year, we had 125 artist placements across seven different art forms.

Mr D Bradley: It is clear from what you said that resources, funding and money is the biggest issue. Apart from that, what is the biggest issue that community arts groups have from the engagement that you have had with them? Is it money, money, money?

Mr Shields: No, I do not think that it is. As I said, we have tried to develop best practice and good, supported processes not only for the artists who work and not only for the host organisations that receive the artists but for organisations that are making applications. It is not just about the money at all. The barrier is, I think, that there is a certain sense that, because it is a community arts process, it perhaps does not have the same artistic integrity or quality of another process when, in fact, the processes themselves can be of incredibly high quality and the engagement can be incredibly

sophisticated. The work that is produced at the end of it — the product from that process — can be great as well, but it may not get the same column inches as a production in a local playhouse or big auditorium. People locally need to celebrate the work, and we need more champions for community arts because, beyond being an economic driver, it is a community and a civic driver.

Mr D Bradley: Some of the groups are very proud. I know that those in my constituency are very proud of the fact that the standards that they reach are, if not professional, quite close to professional.

Mr Shields: We are a professional arts organisation. Everybody who works with those community groups is paid a professional rate. They have to have professional rigour. So we anticipate that the outcome, whatever it might be, will be every bit as good as any other. We have produced pieces of public art. Indeed, in the very near future, a piece will go into Botanic Gardens right at the front gate, opposite Kelvin. It has been produced by community groups, and it will, hopefully, sit there for decades or centuries. The quality of the piece is absolute.

We have other beautiful pieces of public sculpture that are signifiers of communities coming together to develop something. That is the great impact of community arts. There is the intrinsic power of making something that is artistic, beautiful, colourful and creative, and then there is the additional impact of bringing communities together or working with people who have never had an opportunity to work in the creative arts before or with those with low educational attainment or a mental or physical disability.

Mr D Bradley: What is the name of the magazine that you mentioned?

Mr Shields: The 'Community Arts Weekly'; it is an e-newsletter.

Mr D Bradley: Can we get that sent out to us?

Mr Shields: Yes, absolutely. It is a free subscription. You just have to hit the big button on the front page of our website. It is free of charge. Every Tuesday evening, it will arrive in your inbox. Indeed, 'Cash', the monthly funding newsletter, goes out today. It is tailored to community organisations so that they can see what is on offer right across not only the North but beyond. We have linkages with cross-border initiatives and with Scotland and Wales, so we try to bring them all together to give the greatest opportunity.

Mr D Bradley: Grand. Thanks very much.

The Chairperson: I thank you both for coming here this morning, for your very detailed paper and for your presentation. Members have found it very useful. If there is anything further as we move through the inquiry, I hope that you will be willing to communicate with us.

Mr McVey: Thank you very much, Chair. Conor and I would like to thank you very much for your time and attention. Again, we would be delighted to come back. We direct you to our website where you will hopefully find a rich source of resources. Thank you very much, Chair and members, for your time.

Mr Shields: You may see me next week; I have been invited to Omagh as well.