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Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: Mr Martin Lynch

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Ballybeen, which followed shortly after. When the community arts people set up the Community Arts Forum, I was its first director, and I ran it for about five or six years.

In the past 10 or 12 years, I have run two companies. Green Shoot Productions, which is a not-for-profit organisation, commissions writers such as me, Gary Mitchell, Marie Jones and others to write plays that we think might be important or have a contribution to make. I also run GBL Productions, which stands for Gráinne and Briege Lynch — my two daughters — to try to earn money; a man does not live by play writing alone. We do plays in the Grand Opera House and other places, and we have been very successful with that over the past 10 or 12 years.

I saw that there are four areas on the website that you seem to want to address: the general accessibility of the arts, venues, examples of good practice and recommendations. I also took the opportunity to read through quite a number of previous submissions. I do not know how much unparliamentary language I can use here, but there was a lot of bullshit in a lot of that stuff. In other words, it was not the truth or anywhere near the truth.

Access to the arts is still very limited to a relatively small section of our population. I am talking about real access to the arts, not just about whether you can go to see a play as an audience member. I am talking about whether you feel that you are able to write, act in or design a play. Generally speaking, I think that the other arts have the same arrangements.

The last survey that I was involved in, which was a survey by Myerscough back in the 90s, stated that 27% of the population regularly attended arts events. As far as I know, no survey on the creation of the arts has ever been done, but that figure would be about 3% or less. When you divide that up, you see that the majority of the 27% who attend the arts come from the AB sectors, meaning that, in places like where I come from, the vast majority — 90-odd% — do not go anywhere near the arts, except in exceptional circumstances, if at all. I think that that is the reality.

That is not to say that there have not been marginal improvements in the past 50 years, since education became more prevalent in working-class communities, and particularly in the past 10 years — in fact, since the Community Arts Forum in Northern Ireland created the politics of arts in the community. Prior to that, there was no politics. I have just read on your website that the Arts Council has submitted that — I hope that I have got this right, but, if I have got it wrong, I stand to be corrected — 74% of its budget has been spent in the 20% most disadvantaged areas. Wow! I would love to know where that money is going. I have not seen it, and I do not see it. We can talk about the Arts Council specifically. It has improved and changed over the years, but when we, as the community arts movement, came across it in the early 1990s and looked at its budgets, we estimated that it was spending 3% in working-class communities under the banner of community arts. Knowing what I know and where I hang out, I cannot imagine that that has jumped from 3% to 74% in 15 years. From my personal experience, I can say that there is no question in my mind that there is a huge gap between accessibility to the arts as audience members and as creators or participators. It is still there in a very big way.

Where improvements are concerned, when the Community Arts Forum arrived at the Arts Council, it was spending 3%. We campaigned for five or six years until we got that changed. We were successful, but the Arts Council that came along at that point was very trenchant. The director of the Arts Council told us that we were engaged in social engineering and you had to be born exceptionally talented to be a creator in the arts. My father was a poet as well as a dock labourer, but he left Earl Street school in the docks at 12 or 13 years of age. How was he going to compete with Seamus Heaney or Michael Longley? How was he going to become a great poet? He perhaps had the talent, but he was not going to get there because of the social and economic, cultural and identity circumstances that existed and that largely still exist today.

The Arts Council has changed. Our campaign coincided with the introduction of the Blair Government. They made huge policy decisions that ensured that lots of arts organisations had to have either a community remit or an education and outreach remit. That has continued right through to this day. The Arts Council is spending more money in working communities. As director, Roisin McDonough was a huge improvement on the previous director. Some of the boards around that time were very good, but I think that the board has regressed again in its representation of this society. I think that the Arts Council has a problem there.

There is also a caveat in all that, which is that it is my understanding that, at the moment, Catholic working-class communities are accessing the arts more than Protestant working-class communities. I can give a few examples of that. On the professional actors front, the Falls Road is pouring out young

professional actors as though it is a Ford factory. When I held auditions for 'The Titanic Boys', which was a large-scale play in the Grand Opera House a couple of years ago, I had hoped to get a cast of at least 11. I had also hoped to get at least half that cast from the Protestant working-class community, but they were not there. I think that I got one working-class Protestant boy. I was looking for young lads between the ages of 19 and 30, and I think that I got one lad. 'The Titanic Boys', which was about the history of the Belfast shipyard and so on, was acted out by kids from the Falls Road. That is a problem.

In my days in the Community Arts Forum right through to the 1990s, I did not need to do much work on the Falls Road, because significant structures were already there, such as the west Belfast féile. We decided to set up the Greater East Belfast Community Arts Network, which was the bane of my life for the next five years. It kept collapsing through lack of interest. I had to go in and dig out community people on two occasions to resurrect it. It eventually collapsed, and we never got it functioning again. There was a general lack of interest, with people saying, "The arts are not for me" and that sort of stuff. There is an issue there between Catholic working-class areas and Protestant working-class areas in their contribution to the arts.

For me, arts venues are where we begin to look at the core problem. If you look at the Arts Council's biggest funded organisations, you see that the Ulster Orchestra got £2 million out of — does anybody know what the latest Arts Council voted Exchequer funds are for the year? I cannot remember, but it used to be around £10 million. I think that it might be about £13 million at the moment. The Ulster Orchestra gets a huge percentage of that. It gets around £2.1 million at the moment. The Lyric Theatre is in receipt of £1.1 million, and the MAC is in receipt of £1 million. A few others, such as the Grand Opera House and Northern Ireland Opera, get around £500,000. It is those organisations, which get a large wallop of public funding, that should be doing more.

About 15 years ago, when my kids were at Holy Trinity Primary School in Turf Lodge, my daughter Gráinne came home one day all excited. She said, "Daddy, the Ulster Orchestra is coming tomorrow". I thought, "That's great. Brilliant". She went to school the next day, and the Ulster Orchestra stayed for about an hour and a half. They put a trombone in her hand and then a cello, and then they played a tune at the end. That was it — gone. Gráinne has never seen the Ulster Orchestra since. I do not know what its education outreach dimensions are like today, but, if it is anything like it was then, it is teasing. That is called parachuting. There is a whole problem there, and I will deal later with examples of good practice. The Blair Government forced professional arts organisations to engage in the community, but it has resulted in a lot of parachuting and ticking of boxes that organisations have to do to get their funds. I think that, when it funds, the Arts Council makes it a prerequisite that you have to do education and outreach.

In our last couple of productions for Green Shoot, we had the play 'Meeting at Menin Gate', which was about a policeman's daughter who met her father's killer many years later. It was a post-Troubles issue looking at victims and so on. We did our normal thing, as the Arts Council suggests we do, and we went round the community groups. The tiredness and scepticism of those groups when we arrived at their door was palpable. All the professional arts organisations from the Ulster Orchestra down to Green Shoot Productions and loads of others — that may be 8 or 10 professional theatre companies in Belfast — are hitting the same groups, and we are going in and doing six workshops for them. However, like a train passing, we are away again. There is no genuine arts activity going on, and there is no sustainable arts activity going on. It is time to change that system.

The MAC has probably been the most disappointing of all for me. The MAC cost £14 million or £15 million, and, although nothing is ever a panacea, I thought that it would make a huge contribution to much wider access to the arts in Belfast on a very broad level. That is because it is not a theatre-producing company or one single thing but could be a range of things. My experience of working with it in the past two to three years — I am talking about the year before it opened when we were proposing stuff to it — has been extremely disappointing. I do not accept that the MAC has a wide enough approach to the arts. I think that it is elitist. I think that an elitist smell comes off the building. There is a middle-class ethos about the place that does not make it particularly comfortable or a warm house, if you want to use those political terms, for working people. I come from York Street, which is right beside the MAC, and I have a lot of family still living around there. From my experience, most of the people who live 500 yards from the front doors of the MAC barely know that the building is there. Yet, I see submissions by the MAC saying that it does this and that and that it has got this and that. From my personal dealings with it, I know that they did not want too many working-class plays in the building. They like the latest trendy thing from Edinburgh or London, and they like what they deem a nice sort of person to come in to the MAC. They have denied this to me to my face and have fought

me over it and blah, blah, blah. They have said, "We did this, we did that, we did the other": look at their programming.

There is also a question about their competence. Four years ago, this organisation was running a 100-seat theatre in a small gallery. It was handed a huge complex, and, in our dealings with it over three or four plays, we have found a lot of incompetence and a lack of knowledge of basic stuff such as marketing and ticket sales. Because I thought that my board did not believe me, I brought my chairperson around during the time that we had 'Meeting at Menin Gate' on at the MAC. That was a two-and-a-half-week run in a 350-seater. It was quite a big outlay for us. To put on the average professional theatre production, including outreach, costs range from about £90,000 to about £130,000 or £140,000. So, we do a lot of fundraising. In a big way, we need bums on seats to top up public funding. The MAC's notion of marketing was atrocious. There was one small poster inside the MAC advertising our play, and we were running there for three weeks. It has two glass panels out the front, and they were both advertising a DJ — John Peel's son — who was coming for one night. It was the same inside, with advertisements for these one-night stands. We were sitting there for two and a half weeks. We asked whether we could put a banner up in the foyer, because the one thing that the MAC has is a lot of people using it during the day. People come in for lunch and drinks and all that sort of stuff. So, it has good footfall, and there is a wonderful opportunity to promote what you are doing. They would not let us put a banner up, because, they said, it would not look right. If you go into the MAC, you see all these concrete walls, which I think look worse than any banner going up.

I will have to limit my views on examples of good practice to theatre. I am interested in all the other arts, but my main knowledge is of the theatre. In its first two or three years in the 1980s, Charabanc Theatre Company was a good example of what we need in this city right now: a professional, community-based theatre company that is professionally organised with paid actors, directors and administration. They go into communities and get stories and then play the stories back to the people through the arts — through the medium of the theatre. They do not have to play professional theatre venues if they do not want to. They can if they want, but they should be based and perform in the community with decent ticket prices and levels, etc.

A further recent example would have been of another company that Marie Jones was involved in. She was involved in the Charabanc Theatre Company, as well as in DubbelJoint Theatre Company in west Belfast. They produced quite an explosion of work in west Belfast over a 10-year period. It had a strong community ethos and basis, but it was done on a professional level.

If you go just a bit wider and look at ticket prices and so on for our professional theatre venues, you see that there are examples such as the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, which, I think, charges a fiver in every Monday. It was a fiver a few years ago; I am not sure what it is now. On a Monday night, it was quite a cheap price, and people who were unemployed or whatever went. The Citizens Theatre in Glasgow is right beside the Gorbals — I do not know if any of you know the area — and a lot of Gorbals people got into the habit of going to the theatre on a Monday night, because it was cheap.

The National Theatre in London has huge budgets. It gets around £23 million from the Arts Council in England, but it has a brilliant ticket price structure. You can go and see the best theatre in the world at the National Theatre for £15 or £16. I could go further to companies such as 7:84 Theatre Company in Glasgow, and there was also an English 7:84 Theatre Company. Those were left-wing theatre companies that perpetually and permanently toured communities. I am not asking for a left-wing theatre by any stretch of the imagination; I am asking for a professional community theatre. That means theatre companies that are based in the communities and that would also be a conduit for all kinds of people to come through at all kinds of levels of professional theatre making.

As a recommendation, I suggest that the Arts Council review its educational and outreach dimension, because it is not working. It needs to look at it again, instead of having all this box-ticking for organisations that do not really want to be there. They do not really want to be in Turf Lodge or Rathcoole, because they want to do their professional theatre. I could talk about that for ever, but we should be finding professional arts practitioners who want to be in the communities and find the way to form organisations that could be community arts, visual arts, theatre, dance or anything. Taking a new approach to delivering professional, high-quality arts to working-class areas would have a huge array of benefits for all the targets that the Arts Council says that it has and all the targets that DCAL has for getting people involved in the arts, in audience attendances and in getting people to make arts and all the rest of it. It needs a general rethink.

That is probably it. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Martin. It was actually quite interesting to hear your perspective of this from a practitioner's point of view.

You made the point that there is very much a difference between Catholic working-class communities and Protestant working-class communities in their ability to access the arts and their interest in doing so. Could you expand on that?

Mr M Lynch: Michelle, you can throw in things such as religious difference and the whole Calvinistic approach to the arts that say that you do not go to the cinema, you do not go out dancing on certain days because it is a sin, or, as our Brian used to say, you have sex on Sundays and immediately regret it. That Calvinistic approach to the arts might be dangerous, so there is a strand there that goes right back in the Protestant community. I am not saying that the Catholic Church is miles better, but in the Protestant community, there is that issue.

Secondly, and this is mad sort of notional stuff, but why does Ireland have more artists for each person in the population than, say, England or Switzerland? These other countries were industrialised and had a lot of work objectives and of achieving that type of approach in life. Ireland had — I do not want to use bad language — not very much. W B Yeats said that people sat around writing poems, creating the arts and becoming good talkers and good storytellers. I am exaggerating; I am not saying that this is the exact truth, but there is a stronger tradition in native Irish communities for storytelling and articulating yourself through the arts through music, dance and that sort of stuff. So, there are those traditions that stretch back many, many years. I am not saying that Protestant communities are devoid of that, but, going back many years, a son there would be encouraged to go and work and to go out and get a good job, rather than to play the piano. I am not saying that we were all playing the piano in Turf Lodge, but it was not frowned on so much to either be a creator of the arts or to attend the arts.

Look at the correlation in what happened in the past 20 or 30 years in the Troubles. When TV cameras went up the Falls Road, people opened their doors and said, "Hey, look at this. Look at what the British bastards did to this, that and the other." They welcomed the TV cameras. When the same TV cameras went up the Shankill Road, the doors were closed. Again, that is a generalisation, but there is this notion that we can be corrupted by this, that or the other. That bleeds all the way down to creativity.

In the past 20 or 30 years, in Catholic west Belfast, there has been a political articulation through the Sinn Féin movement that has bled through to the arts. People in those areas think, "If we can do this through politics, we can do it through theatre, dance or paintings." It is giving people the confidence and the authority to do that. That is why people in the Catholic areas of Belfast and, indeed, Derry make a burgeoning contribution to creating and attending the arts or simply to using the arts as another vehicle for articulating who and what they are.

There is less of a tendency to do that in Protestant areas. Now, there have been some changes. The Lyric Theatre, for instance, has to be commended for commissioning the work of a range of writers in recent years. Quite recently, you have seen new plays in the Lyric Theatre by Gary Mitchell, David Ireland, Rosemary Jenkinson and Marie Jones, all of which articulate some dimension of the Protestant community. That is to be commended. However, in the past 30 years, the main body of playwrights, actors and directors to emerge from not just west Belfast but Northern Ireland have been from the Catholic background. I am not a Catholic, but I come from the Catholic background and was reared a Catholic. Most of them have emerged from those areas.

The Lyric Theatre came from Mary O'Malley and a kind of Republican ethos back in the 1950s and 1960s. It was our main theatre. Before that, the Group Theatre in the 1940s and 1950s was probably more balanced and mixed in its cultural identity. In recent years, there has been a stronger output from Catholic communities.

I have given some broad generalisations and my own notions, Michelle. I know that this stuff is recorded here, but these are my own personal notions, and I do not have any scientific basis for saying these things.

The Chairperson: When we asked the Minister what she perceived to be the main barrier to accessing the arts, she said that it was finances. Do you accept that that is the main barrier?

Mr M Lynch: I do not think that it is the main barrier. It is a significant barrier for many people, but I do not think that it is the main barrier. I think that it is a question of cultural background and identity. It is about the plays and the product that is put on, and this is where I have trouble with the MAC. I used to write a lot of my plays through the filter of my mother or sisters. I would say, "Would they like this? Would they go and see this? Would they get anything out of it?". Most of the stuff that goes on in the MAC attracts the young, trendy, middle-class kid from south Belfast, who goes down to the MAC and sees edgy arts activity. Does it attract our Mary who lives in Upper Meadow Street? No. Does it attract our Lorraine who lives in Atlantic Avenue? No. Those facts speak for themselves.

The Chairperson: That said, a couple of weeks ago, you, like me, were in the audience when 'Tartan' was put on in the MAC. That came very much from the community. It was very raw and told a very real story.

Mr M Lynch: I will talk about 'Tartan' very briefly, because it is a good example of what is going on. William Mitchell and Bobby Niblock, the creators of 'Tartan', had been talking for over 10 years. I first met the two of them 10 years ago and they wanted to do professional theatre. I have been beating those two around the head and encouraging them. I have been making myself available as an editor, director or whatever. They finally got their act together 10 years later. I do not think that I am insulting them — I am friends with both of them — but it took them a long time to get to the stage where 'Tartan' arrived. It was an excellent production, and the more of that the better. However, there was a lethargic approach. They obviously put other things above it on their agenda of things to do. I am not criticising them for that; I am just saying that that was the case. Whereas, a young lad in west Belfast called Tony Devlin came to me 10 years ago when he got out of drama school and asked me for advice on what to do — blah, blah, blah. Two weeks later, he had a play on in the Black Box. The man has not stopped since. He is churning out theatre in west Belfast like there is no tomorrow. Vroom — he is going at it. Those are some of the differences between Protestant and Catholic approaches to the arts at this point.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning, Martin.

Mr M Lynch: Hiya, Dominic.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. You mentioned the Arts Council's claim that it spends something like 74% of its budget in the most deprived areas. I questioned that when the Arts Council was here. Part of the reason for that is that the Lyric, the Opera House and the MAC abut areas that are economically deprived. So, in theory, the money is spent in those areas, but, in practice, it goes into those big venues. So, I agree with you that there has probably been no change from your original perception.

I remember the Charabanc Theatre Company did a play about the linen trade. Was it called 'Tie Up Your Ends'?

Mr M Lynch: It is 'Lay Up Your Ends', which I wrote.

Mr D Bradley: It came to Newry. I took my mother to it because she used to be a worker in the linen mill, and she really enjoyed it. It is a good example of how, as you say, community-based plays or plays based on the community story can appeal to a wider audience. You mentioned DubbelJoint. Is it still in existence?

Mr M Lynch: No, it went out of existence about four or five years ago.

Mr D Bradley: That is the sort of model that you are proposing as a means of breaking down the barrier. Why is it that companies such as Charabanc and DubbelJoint seem to have a relatively short lifespan and then go out of existence?

Mr M Lynch: It is a difficult question to answer. John McGrath, the great innovator of professional community theatre in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, said that, from a creative energy point of view, every professional theatre should not last longer than 10 years. He had to be voted off the board 30 years later, but that is another issue. *[Laughter.]* I think that what happens is that the people with passion who create those exciting theatre companies burn themselves out. Charabanc burnt itself out. 'Lay Up Your Ends' is the only time in the history of theatre in Belfast — in my time and probably ever — when we performed in every single geographical community in the greater Belfast area,

including the Malone Road. We performed 'Lay Up Your Ends' in every single district, in community centres, in 1983 and 1984. It was never done before and has not been done since. That takes a huge amount of energy.

I know that I am being recorded, but professional actors like dressing rooms with lights, their names in lights and a bit of comfort and all, and after they have done a certain amount of time at the coalface of community theatre, they want to move on to the Abbey or the Lyric and so on. People move on.

DubbelJoint ran into financial difficulties, and it is the same again there: certain people will have moved on. I think that Marie Jones had written herself out at that stage, because she was churning out play after play every year, and she wanted a complete change of environment for a variety of artistic and creative-energy reasons. Anybody who does community theatre should get double the money that you get for working in the Lyric Theatre because it is much more difficult, much more energy-sapping and much more difficult to create. Instead, the wages are lower. It is hard to keep it going. A lot of other theatre companies have been going 10, 20 or 25 years in Northern Ireland and — well.

Mr D Bradley: I was thinking of the local drama societies throughout Belfast, in the provincial towns and even in the rural areas. I have been a member of a few of them in my time. I noticed that the rural societies seem to be able to relate very closely to the local community, and the people you get in the casts are from various backgrounds. It is not your typical Belfast drama society make-up. Not only that, but there seems to be a more varied selection of people who come from the rural community to see those plays.

Mr M Lynch: It is right across the board.

Mr D Bradley: Yes. Is there something to be learnt there from the point of view of working-class communities having their own drama group on the ground?

Mr M Lynch: I think that it would be a good thing, Dominic. There is absolutely no tradition of amateur drama in working-class communities. It is very low. The city and the rural set-ups are very different. I do not want to be disparaging towards rural life, but if you do not have a lot to do, and there is an amateur drama company in the nearest town, you will get involved. It suits rural life to have an amateur drama company. I have seen some of the best theatre in those companies. I opened the Carrickmore drama festival and the Larne drama festival, and there is a huge amount of talent. It is a great activity for people who enjoy that. My biggest problem with it is that they do other people's material, and that is where I part company. It is brilliant to do Alan Ayckbourn, Neil Simon and so on. However, I am not sure how much the local communities get out of those things socially, politically, culturally and all the rest of it. It is a really good worthwhile activity for a lot of people, particularly in rural areas.

Mr D Bradley: There might be some merit in examining that sort of model from the point of the view of the urban setting as well. My experience of it was that the people who were involved and the groups that I was in were all quite busy doing other things during the day but, for one period of the year, made time for the theatre.

Mr M Lynch: I think that it is worthwhile, but I am not sure it would catch on very quickly in urban areas. That is my point.

Mr D Bradley: It would be a long-term project.

Traditionally, even going back a long time historically, the working class, the ordinary people of London, were much involved in the Globe Theatre. In fact, a section of the theatre was reserved for them. Coming right down to the present, you had music halls as a form of theatre that working-class people went to all the time. Why do you think that sort of tradition came to an end?

Mr M Lynch: Dominic, I am not an expert in these things, but I understand that when great wealth came about and a strong, well-educated middle class emerged during the Industrial Revolution, the arts were created by them in their image. So, you had a new society in an industrial age that came after the peasant age. There was, if you like, a more egalitarian society. The industrial age brought about the class system and the arts followed and are reflected in that.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for the presentation, Martin; it was very interesting.

Mr M Lynch: Thank you, Oliver.

Mr McMullan: There seems to be a disconnect between the arts that you are involved in and what little I know about the Arts Council. That comes through clearly in what you have been saying today. Is there no contact between you and the council? When you talk about the likes of the MAC being elitist, would it be right in any way to say that the Arts Council is, in some way, elitist?

Mr M Lynch: The Arts Council has improved. It has varied over the past 20 years. As I said; when we arrived at it with the Community Arts Forum in the early 1990s, it was, for me, an elitist and arrogant organisation that believed that only really hugely talented people from the middle class should get funded. We broke that and got the board changed. It became a much broader-based organisation, led by Roisin McDonough. Great changes were made in the funding for community arts and so on. Its representative make-up seems to be drifting back a wee bit. For instance, I do not know whether there is still a community arts representative on the board. In the 1990s and early 2000s, two or three community arts activists were on the board. I do not think that that position exists any more.

The Arts Council has a difficult job. I have clashed with it many a time over the years. It has a difficult job in satisfying the need to create great art — whether opera, a professional play, dance, music or whatever — while allowing a woman from Rathcoole to perform in a community play. It has a wide remit that it has not yet got right. There are some really good people there. As I said, I have a lot of time for Roisin McDonough. Damian Smyth, the drama officer, is progressively greater than previous drama officers.

They do not come to listen to me, Oliver. That is one of their problems. I am joking, but they have a view of things and they consult with and talk to people all the time. At the end of the day, though, they would not have my radical approach for the changes that are needed. That is where, for me, they would be slow in creating the change that I think is needed.

Mr McMullan: One thing that comes into my head is the Ulster Orchestra, which you mentioned earlier. When we looked at its junior branch, I think that only one local person came through that. We import most of everything.

Mr M Lynch: The main orchestra is largely populated by non-Northern Irish people.

Mr McMullan: Is that elitist or is it us losing contact? I am not sure about labelling areas, but if we are looking at the arts being disconnected from working-class or rural areas, from which I come, there is still that perception of elitism in the arts. You can apply to the Arts Council for painting projects and that, but my village has silver medal winners at the Belfast Festival and things like that years ago. However, it has not progressed at all. That elitist tag is still there.

Mr M Lynch: Is the Lurig Drama Group still going?

Mr McMullan: Yes, it is still going on down at the golf club.

Mr M Lynch: As a greatly enhanced number of people from working-class backgrounds have been involved in the theatre world, the make-up of the creators of theatre in Belfast is fairly broad based. The Ulster Orchestra has not got there yet. It is a product of the old system, where it was only middle-class kids who went to Methody and Campbell College who got access to classical instruments. That did not happen when I went to Bearnageeha school on the Antrim Road. The only instrument that we came across was a Bunsen burner. All of that needs to change before you get an Ulster Orchestra that is populated by Northern Irish people.

I do see any reason why the Ulster Orchestra board cannot put an academy or system in place that gets people from working-class areas. The ultimate argument that I make to these venues is that, if they had the working classes coming as well as the middle classes, they would make more money. Why are they programming their events to exclude three quarters of the population? It does not make common sense. Similarly, the Ulster Orchestra will never have a strong enough complement of Northern Irish musicians when the systems do not exist in our schools and other outlets to encourage working-class kids to learn musical instruments.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for that.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Go raibh maith agat, Martin. I enjoyed the presentation. I am reflecting on all the things you said, and I have comments rather than questions, because I come from a similar background to you. I am from west Belfast. People, even from the same community, have had different experiences. I think that there have been opportunities to access some form of the arts, and that it might have depended on the ethos of the school you attended. I went to St Genevieve's High School and Holy Child Primary School, and we did get opportunities and ways. Maybe it was just down to the school. I am interested to see whether you share my view that schools should have a much more intense focus on giving children access to different kinds of arts experiences so that they might find a future career or enjoyment. Enjoyment is probably a key factor. Do you take that view?

Mr M Lynch: One hundred per cent. Our schools play a crucial role in determining whether we experience the arts or, indeed, literature at that age. You mentioned your schools, and I have to say that, over the years, the most prominent school in Belfast for turning our professional actors is St Louise's Comprehensive College on the Falls Road in Belfast. It has a very strong drama department. It is the only school that has dance at O-level standard, or GCSE standard. It is another school that has shown great vision. I agree that schools must use the arts, and not just for art's sake. I believe that the arts are liberating for the head, mind and body and are a terrific way of learning practically any subject. There has been a cutback in the curriculum of arts activity year on year, as I understand it. I am not an expert on this, but I fully endorse increasing arts activity in schools at all forms and levels.

Ms McCorley: You are very intensely critical of the MAC. Is there some way to address that? I believe that if a new theatre such as the MAC is to have all of that funding poured into it, it should be delivering. If you are saying very strongly that it is not delivering, then there is something fundamentally wrong. How do you think that can be addressed?

Mr M Lynch: The Arts Council is the main funder of the MAC, although I think that the Department, which funds the Arts Council, obviously has a huge say in things. A proper audit of what the MAC does is probably in order to go through those box-ticks and statistics and see who is actually using the place and who is not. They claim to me that there are lots of different BTs, as they call them, using the venue; I am utterly sceptical of that. I think that the Arts Council and DCAL would do a great service to the citizens of Belfast if they made sure that such a facility was serving all the people of Belfast

Ms McCorley: Yes. I agree. OK. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thank you very much for your presentation, Martin, and I apologise for missing the beginning of it. You mentioned the professional community theatre. The word "community" has been mentioned quite a few times. Dominic and Rosie did so, and I will continue in that vein. The arts as a means of good community relations are very important. I wonder what your view on that is. Rosie mentioned schools. Many children's first experience of a production is their P1, or even playschool, Christmas play. Often, that opens doors for talent, and I have seen that recently through a local programme that has been put out by Newry and the Mourne District Council, called Sticky Fingers Arts. In a short film that has been produced there, you can see stars in the making.

What is your view on local government's contribution to the arts, particularly in communication between groups and maybe even professional groups? I know that there is room for improvement. What about investment? I think of Newry Town Hall, or "city hall", as it is now known, and the lack of investment that it has suffered over the years. Such investment is necessary to attract people into it. I am not just talking about local groups; we would welcome professional groups into it as well. What are your views on local government's role?

Mr M Lynch: We have played in Newry Town Hall many a time, and the arts centre. The town hall is a bit dilapidated now, as you know.

Mrs McKeivitt: It is, yes.

Mr M Lynch: The performance of councils in Northern Ireland is mixed, as it is in many other areas. Belfast City Council had a zero approach to the arts when I started. I remember trying to get a Short Strand community play done in 1989 or 1990. The city council was going to give us £5,000 but

Sammy Wilson objected to that because he thought it should be spent on something else or that the community was too small to warrant that amount of money, or stuff like that. When I first queued up to hire the Group Theatre in 1979, I had to stand in the gas department's queue to do so: that is what they thought of the arts. That all changed when the arts committee was set up in Belfast City Council. Now, I am delighted to say that there is a range of councillors from most parties who acknowledge and appreciate the impact that the arts can make.

I want to touch on what Rosie said about education. The arts affect health and community relations. The arts, and particularly the theatre in my opinion, are one of the best vehicles for going into an empty space — and I mean an empty space in our heads, a neutral space — and allowing us to say things in those spaces whereby people might change. Any change that I have made in my head has been mostly done in the theatre, as I watched plays and thought, "that was important", or, "that was neither one nor the other". The arts are also great at personal development level. When a person gets involved in the theatre, they become rounded. They get a new vision of who they are, what the world is and who the other side is. I have loads of anecdotal evidence of those experiences.

The Arts Council did a great thing in the 1990s and 2000s when it said it was going to build an arts centre or theatre within a 30-mile radius of where anybody lived. I think it has done that. So, we have a brilliant string of theatres around Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, some councils are not as active as others. When we put on a play in the Market Place Theatre in Armagh, it is invariably packed to the gills, because there is a brilliant theatre team there, and the council knows what the arts is all about. When we put on a play in the Strule in Omagh, only 20 or 30 people turn up. There seems to be no real approach to the arts as a commodity for that community. The Braid in Ballymena is similar; there is a very poor approach to the importance of the arts. It swings and changes depending on which council you go to. You can look up and see what resources different councils spend on the arts, and I am sure that it ranges very widely.

One of the other things that I have been gratified to see happened when we created the political space for a term "community arts" in the 1990s, which had not been there before. I got great pleasure in lifting the 'Belfast Telegraph' and seeing Lisburn Council or somewhere else advertising for a community arts officer. That has gone into the mainstream now and it is a good development.

Mrs McKeivitt: I have one final question. Will you describe what a professional community theatre would be to you?

Mr M Lynch: A new thing has emerged in Britain called the National Theatre of Scotland and National Theatre Wales. You know that there is a National Theatre in England, which is on the South Bank. It has a huge building that cost blah, blah, blah, but the other two organisations said that they did not want a theatre; they wanted an office. Their notion is that they will go out into their territories in Scotland and Wales and that all they really need is an administration base with a really good professional administrator, an artistic director and a marketing person. After that, everybody is hired per project. All they need is an artistic director and a board, and they have to have the ethos — the political ethos — of what the arts do in the community and what can be achieved by doing that. The artistic director then programmes around that. So, there is a core staff of around four or five, or even three or four: they take it from there and everybody is hired casually after that.

Mr Ó hOisín: Martin, you were critical of the competency of the MAC specifically. Are you of the view that that competency, or lack of it, is endemic across the sector in places?

Mr M Lynch: No. I do not think so. The Grand Opera House has hit a patchy stage in the past two years, but when I first came across the Opera House, working with it on a professional level, it was easily the most shit-hot arts organisation that I had come across. Derek Nicholls ran it, followed by John Batley, followed by Michael Ockwell, and their level of competency was terrific. They could bring you into their office and tell you, in a split second through the computer, which BTs attended which play and how much money came in that night. They knew who was coming to the theatre and who to target for the next show. If a Martin Lynch play was on, they knew who to send a specific letter to; if an Ulster Orchestra show was on, they knew who to tell. I think it is a really highly developed and competent organisation.

The Lyric Theatre tends to be a wee bit civil-servicey, and the administration and marketing level seems to be not very shit-hot. Admittedly, the MAC was brand new, and I hope they will learn, but after I got so frustrated working with them, Cathal, I looked back and said, "I am being very hard on these people; they are new at the job, they came from a 100-seat space with a small gallery to run this

pretty significant complex", and they were not trained for that: they had no experience of doing it. A lot of the basic, simple things were not working. I know that from my arguing with them that, hopefully, they will have taken quite a lot of that on board and will begin to improve, but I think it was just a question of their not having the experience for that particular job.

Mr Ó hOisín: Coming from local government, Martin, I think it is good that most larger towns have the space and infrastructures in place. You mentioned Omagh, but I am not convinced that there is that degree of buy-in to the arts across the board, even though the infrastructure is there. We all have great new arts and cultural centres.

You are also calling for the Arts Council to review its education and outreach. Do you see those two issues being married to try to deliver that into the communities?

Mr M Lynch: I am not sure what you mean: is it two issues — education and outreach — or is that one?

Mr Ó hOisín: Education and outreach has the opportunity now, if it is properly bought into, particularly with local government and the new theatres. Do you see that as an opportunity?

Mr M Lynch: The term that we have at the moment is "education and outreach" because that is a kind of add-on to a professional arts organisation doing its main activity. We have to break that down and stop that. We have to acknowledge that arts happening outside professional theatres is a legitimate activity on its own. You have to create the structures that allow that to happen, and that might mean a professional theatre company in Omagh, on the Shankill Road or in Turf Lodge that serves its geographical community. It could be a professional theatre company of interests, such as a women's company that tackles women's issues. The notion that we simply put companies in buildings and that is the end of it, or that their main work is to create brilliant art, and education and outreach is a wee thing on the side that they have to do because the Arts Council tells them to do it to tick boxes — we have got to break that notion down.

Mr Ó hOisín: I was shocked to hear that the youth orchestra has only ever provided two members to the Ulster Orchestra. There was no sort of apprenticeship or any of that. Is there an option for those from working-class communities to get apprenticeships with professional companies and the like?

Mr M Lynch: It is the same principle in the theatre right across the arts. If you do not believe in your head that the talent is here, you very often get notions from people in the theatre that you have to bring in people from London to be really good. Charabanc Theatre Company came out of that notion because, in those days, the Lyric Theatre was bringing in professional actors from England to play the smallest parts in Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw plays, and people like Marie Jones and Eleanor Methven were standing left scratching their toys — pardon the vernacularism. They protested and formed their own company, and, as we know, people such as Marie Jones, Eleanor Methven and Carol Moore have become some of the greatest practitioners of the arts in this country. Eleanor Methven works mostly in Dublin and is held in the highest esteem by the Abbey Theatre, RTÉ and others. Marie Jones has gone on to worldwide fame. She was being excluded from the arts at that point. It is about believing in ourselves that we can achieve the highest standards.

Mr Humphrey: Good morning, Martin. You are very welcome. Apologies for missing the start of your presentation. As someone from north Belfast from a working-class background, I hugely admire the work that you and Gary Mitchell have done, not just in the arts but in speaking out for working-class communities. It is not always easy. When I did so last year, the arts establishment attacked me, but I stand over what I said because, for me, it is about working-class people getting access to the arts as patrons, but also about young people getting access to the arts, whether at school —

Mr M Lynch: As creators.

Mr Humphrey: Absolutely. I am pleased to hear that what you have said today bears that out. The chair and the chief executive of the Arts Council were recently in front of the Committee, and I made this very point. Have they anyone from working-class communities with an arts background on their board? They have not. Part of the problem is that those sorts of boards go to public advertisement, and there may not be the capacity. People in working-class communities may not even know that they can apply for those things. That is a huge weakness. I read your comments about your play 'Over the Bridge' when you said that you could not get young people from Sandy Row or the Shankill.

Mr M Lynch: It was for 'The Titanic Boys'.

Mr Humphrey: Sorry. That shows that we have a problem. When I came in, you were talking about the 'Tartan' play. I went along to see that in a full house on the Shankill. It played to a number of full houses on the Shankill and in other venues across the city. There were young people from across the city, and, for me, the best character in the play was a young fella from the Shankill. He played a great part. It was hugely encouraging, and we need to get more of that. From my perspective, there are good-news stories such as you and Gary as playwrights, and then people like Derek Thompson who is in 'Casualty' and is a Boys' Model old boy, and a young fella called Glen Wallace who was in 'Hollyoaks' and more recently in 'Eastenders' and, again, is a Boys' Model old boy. In fact, there is a guy who plays the violin in the Ulster Orchestra who is a Boys' Model old boy. Those are great role models.

Mr M Lynch: But they are exceptions, rather than —

Mr Humphrey: Absolutely, they are exceptions.

The Chairperson: Of course, you are an old boy.

Mr Humphrey: They are exceptional because they went to the Model. The thing about it is, after I made those comments, I know that there was activity behind the scenes. The Ulster Orchestra, DCAL and the Arts Council were in touch with the Spectrum Centre about what they could do in that community, because there was clearly an acceptance that they had not been doing enough.

Mr M Lynch: When did that happen, William? After you had had your public —

Mr Humphrey: After I raised it at this Committee. This piece of work is part of that. People contacted me from the Spectrum Centre and the partnership and so on to tell me that that was happening. I welcome that happening, but it should have been happening in the run-up to it. You mentioned the councils, Martin, and that is what I want to get to. The Arts Council — I was a member of the arts committee in the City Hall — does great work and you are right, there are councillors across all of the parties who support that. Do you agree with me that there is a real opportunity with the new super councils, which will have bigger budgets and more resource? Do you agree with me that there should be a collaborative approach between the Arts Council, community playwrights like yourselves from a particular perspective, and the new councils with those budgets? Working together collaboratively, you could actually achieve more.

Mr M Lynch: From what I know — again, I am not an expert on it — there has been a good deal of cooperation down the years between, for instance, the Arts Council and Belfast City Council. I apologise to other council areas, but that is the only one that I really know about. William, I need to go back to three or four points you made that I want to address. First of all, you took flak when you spoke out publicly. I disagree with you on the Lyric Theatre thing. The Lyric Theatre has actually commissioned quite a number of Protestant playwrights recently, and the plays have been on the stage — Gary Mitchell, David Ireland, Rosemary Jenkinson — but your broad thrust was spot on. I have spoken out, and it has caused me problems. I have a very fractious relationship with the Arts Council as a result. There are people in the Arts Council who hate my guts because of things that I say. The drama officer who is supposed to work with my company removed herself from it a couple of years ago because of her relationship with me. I was given the combined arts officer, Damian Smyth, who works with us very well.

I have just criticised the MAC heavily in this Committee. I do not know where the reports are going to go, but I have to work with the MAC and try to put plays on there. I have already been arguing with it fiercely about its approach to programming, not only with my own work but broadly speaking as an arts organisation. I really want to work with the MAC. I think it is a brilliant facility for this city. It is in the centre of the town. It is actually in a district that I grew up in. I played about in those streets and I find that, when I go into it, it is hard to get my work on. The people from those streets, as I also said earlier, do not go to that theatre. The people I know in the New Lodge Road and the York Road — I was speaking to some Protestant neighbours recently, people like Jim Nesbitt from Michael Street — do not know the MAC exists, and they are only 500 yards down the York Road, New Lodge, Shankill or wherever you care to mention. Again, the MAC is in the early days and I do not want to be too hard, but the early signals are that it is not doing anything like what it should be doing to attract a wider audience.

I was talking about when the Community Arts Forum was formed in the '90s. When I came across the Arts Council board it was Captain this and Lieutenant that. It was really a problem. Just after that, we kind of smashed the Arts Council approach to the arts, got a load of money for community arts and got Roisin McDonough in as director, who has been a huge improvement on what was there before. The previous director said that we were engaged in social engineering and not engaged in the arts at all. He believed that you had to be born talented and all of that kind of stuff. When that was changed we fought, through a guy called Eddie Rooney. He was fantastic through all of that. He bought into what we were doing straight away. He had the Labour Party policy that had just come out at the time behind him, which said A, B, C and D. He, along with us, made major changes to the Arts Council, including having three representatives from the community arts sector on the board. That has since dwindled and dissipated. As I think you said yourself, the board may not be as representative of this society as it should be. That needs to be looked at.

The new super councils are a fantastic opportunity. As I said to William, the City Council has gone from a zero situation 20 years ago to a pretty good situation today, when there is a broad understanding of the arts. I was pretty encouraged by what I saw in Belfast City Council's policy document, saying that it was way behind in per person funding compared with equivalent city councils in England. They want to enhance their money, and have been doing that. My own company, Green Shoot Productions, got a bit of an uplift this year because Belfast City Council is spending more money on the arts than it has ever done. It would like to think that that would happen with the super council, taking in a bigger area.

The difference between the Arts Council and city councils is that when you get a city council that is clued in to the arts and understands that it is not a wee elitist thing for some middle-class people to make arts and drink wine but is actually a great weapon, tool and enabler for ordinary people, the councils are more in touch with ordinary people than the Arts Council, by their nature. The Arts Council is a small organisation with a board. The new super council in Belfast will have —

Mr Humphrey: Sixty.

Mr M Lynch: Sixty councillors, who are entrenched in all those communities. People cannot live in those communities, like yourself, and not know what is wrong and what is right. Therefore, I hope that that will continue to grow. I think we are winning the argument, William, broadly speaking, that the arts are not — Frankie Miller used to object to every penny spent on the arts, many years ago. I think all that has gone and we have a whole rake of progressive councillors at Belfast level, and, I am sure, in other council areas, who know what needs done.

It can get only better and better, but we all need to keep the pressure on. Great change is needed. As I said at the top of my presentation, the last study that I saw on participation in the arts in Northern Ireland showed that 27% of the population attend the arts. The vast majority of those are from the AB population, therefore you can probably deduce that 90% or more from working-class areas are not regularly attending arts events. That is a huge gap. That is a wrong in our society, and that needs fixed.

Mr Humphrey: Michael will remember this: there was an arts subcommittee in Belfast. The subcommittee system was done away with, and they just created an overarching committee — in that case, the development committee. That brought tourism, the arts and so on under one committee, which meant a better joined-upness.

Tourism is not all just about people coming from across the water or from down South or wherever to the city. It is about people coming from Lisburn or Bangor or wherever, spending and having a meal. You were then able to get the chamber of commerce involved, because then you had meal deals and everything. A number of restaurants are now feeding into the theatres and the Opera House, which helps tourism and this city's economy tremendously.

Mr M Lynch: I run two companies, Green Shoot Productions, which is not for profit, and GBL Productions, which is called after my daughters Grainne and Briege Lynch because I need to earn a living to feed them. I work the Grand Opera House with commercial plays. In the past 10 years, I have probably brought into the Opera House at least one million people with 'The History of the Troubles (Accordin' to my Da)', 'Titanic Boys' and 'A Night In November'. The amount of money that generates in the general area is extraordinary, and I welcome that and know that to be true. If you go into Robinson's, the Crown Bar or the Europa before shows and after them, they are packed with the people who were just in there watching shows. Then there are taxis and all kinds of things. The arts

is a great enabler. Repeating myself, on the creative side it is a brilliant neutral space for people to say what they want.

Just while you are here, William, I want to repeat that while the Protestant community thing is true and there are a load of reasons for that, there is also a need for the Protestant community to get off their own arses and do it. The people who created 'Tartan', for instance, have been talking like that for 10 years. I mentioned that earlier; they have been consulting me for 10 years, and it is only now that they have got their act together, but look what they have achieved. It is fantastic. We need more of that.

Mr Humphrey: 'Crimea Square', which Jo was involved in, was another example of all the actors being local from the Shankill.

Mr M Lynch: Again, William, I have to say that Jo Egan was an outsider who came in, planted that idea and created it. That is not good enough; it is good to start with, but I am delighted to say that I am working with the Heel and Ankle group, which is working towards creating its own work from here on in, which is a fantastic thing.

Mr McGimpsey: Thanks, Martin; I apologise for missing a lot of your presentation. Eddie Rooney was a grade 5 in DCAL when I was there, and we revamped the Arts Council. I am disappointed to hear you say that things have drifted away again. As you know, the central strategy was very much about unlocking creativity — the creativity inherent in everybody, particularly children. It has been taken over as a sort of a jobs creation thing now — it has become the creative industries. Rather than unlocking creativity, we are just looking to create jobs, which is putting the cart before the horse. It is about participation as well as audiences, and about how to get that. You got that, and Marie Jones got it, from similar backgrounds, and it is about how we tap into that through the unlocking creativity agenda.

I was involved with the Donegall Pass loyalist community in south Belfast, who did their own plays through the Crescent Arts Centre about 15 years ago. A writer came in with the local community group, wrote, acted in and directed the play and put it on in the Crescent Arts Centre. It was sensational; it was a very funny piece of work. It seemed to me that that was an example of how we get that participation and get the audience at the same time. I wonder whether the Arts Council is doing anything like that. I know that the Crescent Arts Centre continues to make those efforts, but I have to say that in communities around there, such as the Markets, Sandy Row and Donegall Pass, they do not really know any more that the Crescent exists. How do we get that outreach?

What was it that spurred you and Marie Jones? Not everybody is going to be a writer, but it is about getting the participation; if you get that, then you get the audience. It is about how you get that rolling through. It is like the magic seed: where is it, how do you find it and so on? It is there, and Donegall Pass proved that. You see it in other arts endeavours in those communities that are maybe not as formalised as we expect to see, but it is there. How do you tap into that?

Mr M Lynch: No man is a rock; we all learn or are inspired by other things. I was inspired by a play by an English theatre company that arrived in Turf Lodge. That was what first made me go, "I could do that". Marie Jones saw my plays and decided that she could write, too. Gary Mitchell said that he started writing because he saw my play, 'The Interrogation of Ambrose Fogarty' in the Lyric Theatre. He went home and wrote a play as a result of that. We all influence each other.

One of the sad things that has happened recently is that, from the Arts Council point of view and from the community — I think the community arts sector is a brilliant ground-floor level access point for people into the arts. It does not matter whether they go on to be a classical pianist or an actor or whatever, we need a structure that creates the access points. The Community Arts Forum, which we founded in 1994, was in the process of doing all that. Unfortunately, a few years after I left it, the Arts Council disbanded it and pulled the plug on it. I felt it needed developed; I thought that the Community Arts Forum should be like a trade union that had an organiser in west Tyrone and an organiser in Derry/Londonderry to make sure that access points were being created in every wee rural community and housing estate. I used to say to the Arts Council, "Tell me what is happening in Rathcoole for the arts", and I would get a big, blank stare back. I said, "We are trying to do something. Give us the funds and resources." Instead, the Arts Council has cut those resources. It was a great mistake by the Arts Council to cut.

That said, there are some great Arts Council funding streams and schemes that mean that anybody anywhere can do a theatre or arts piece. If you live on the Doagh Road and you want to do a

community play, there is funding for you to go and do it. The problem, particularly in Protestant communities, is that there is not enough history and not enough people inspiring each other. As William says, things like 'Crimea Square' have started a whole explosion of activity on the Shankill for theatre and the arts, and I hope that that continues. The structures are not there at the moment for that, Michael.

I believe that as the working classes get more access to education — a lot of people have got educated later in life in the last 20 or 30 years — the arts are coming more into all our pictures. We all understand the arts more. I grew up in the dock. The only theatre that I ever knew was the Mater hospital's operating theatre, where my da was having an operation for haemorrhoids. The only gallery that I knew was when he said that the dockers' union was a shooting gallery and he was going to blah, blah, blah. That is the bottom line that we all started with in the 1950s and 1960s. That might not be the case any more.

In the 1990s and right through the 2000s, people had the Community Arts Forum to go to, and it had a network across Northern Ireland. I used to say to people who came into me from whatever district, "The answer is yes. What is your question?" That was my attitude. I knew that that community needed arts and the job had to be done. The Arts Council obviously did not have the same view, and it folded the organisation a few years later.

We need to put structures in place at a community access level. What we are talking mostly about today is the need for professional arts organisations to restructure what they do. It should not be just a tick-box education outreach exercise that they have to do but do not really want to do. There needs to be professional arts in communities, for the communities and by the communities to as much an extent as there can be.

Mr Irwin: You may have covered this in your last few words, but in relation to the fact that 90% of working-class areas just do not seem to be getting involved in or associated with the arts, you have said that the MAC seems far removed and even people close by hardly know that it is there. There is no simple solution to this, is there?

Mr M Lynch: No.

Mr Irwin: It is going to take time. That would be my view. You said that working-class people will become more aware of the arts as they get better educated. It will take time to bring that forward.

Mr M Lynch: Yes, but immediate things can be done by people like the MAC. We are talking about the Arts Council board — is the MAC board representative of the city of Belfast? Does it have any representatives from local communities in north Belfast? I doubt it very much. Those things could be changed pretty quickly. Do the people who programme the MAC really want to bring in people from Rathcoole, north Belfast, New Lodge Road and Tiger's Bay? If they did, they would be programming for it, but in my opinion they are not really doing that.

The Chairperson: We have spent a bit of time discussing the Arts Council and the need for it to look at its education and outreach dimension, but there is also clearly a role for the Department of Education, given the comments that St Louise's is one of the only schools that is really producing quality actors. Have you got any other comment to make on that?

Mr M Lynch: I do not know who brought out the scheme a couple of years ago. I was only vaguely attached to it because my daughters were at St Louise's at the time. It got a big grant from the Education Department to start dance. Three schools from around Northern Ireland were picked, or 10 from the whole of the UK. St Louise's was picked to bring dance to a certificate standard level, which was a fantastic development at school level. It was run alongside our already strong drama department. Kids were going into St Louise's — remember that a lot of those kids are from Turf Lodge, Ballymurphy and Andersonstown — with no real career paths powerfully in their heads and suddenly being told, "You might become a professional actor", "You might become a professional stage manager", or whatever. It is a different way of learning and a different way of creating self-esteem. That was fantastic. The Department of Education could look right across the board at what secondary-level drama resources there are that might be comparable with St Louise's.

The Chairperson: During our previous inquiry on the creative industries, it came across very strongly that, although there was a focus on STEM, we should be putting the "A" for the arts into that and giving it a further dimension.

Mr M Lynch: I do not know what STEM is, Michelle.

The Chairperson: STEM is very much around science and technology in schools, but it was felt that there should also be an arts dimension to it.

Mr M Lynch: Absolutely. Everybody has talents. Some people in this room might be good at hanging a door or putting up shelves. I am not. Somebody else might be good at writing. Everybody has different talents. Schools need to be able to identify young people's talents at a very early age instead of doing the 11-plus thing and saying, "Academically, you are out".

The Chairperson: That is very controversial.

Mr M Lynch: I know that, but, for me, schools generally do not seem to have the flexibility to find the best in a kid. Nobody at school identified that I might be a writer. I am not criticising anybody, but there was no system whereby anyone said that I might do something in the arts. I was turfed out at 15 to work at the dock.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your time and for freely expressing your thoughts on this. It has been thought-provoking for us. We will need to ask a number of questions as a result of the comments that you have made today. Thank you very much.

Mr M Lynch: Thank you all very much for taking an interest. There is a high level of awareness around the table that you would not have found among our elected politicians 20 years ago. That is not an insult; it is a compliment on where we have got to in relation to the arts. I will now get into a lot of trouble with the Arts Council, the MAC and other people. *[Laughter.]*

Ms McCorley: Closed doors all round.

The Chairperson: Thank you.