



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: Stakeholder Event

12 June 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Mr Mac Pollock	Ballymoney Borough Arts Committee
Mrs Margaret Edgar	Ballymoney Borough Council
Ms Louise Rossington	Big Telly Theatre Company
Mrs Brigitte Le Boulleur-Spotten	Coleraine Borough Arts Committee
Mrs Karina McCollum	Coleraine Borough Council
Mrs Lorna Gough	Coleraine Education Community Project
Mr Malcolm Murchison	Flowerfield Arts Centre
Mr Anthony Toner	Flowerfield Arts Centre
Professor Harry McMahon	None
Mr Bruce Robinson	None
Ms Doris Peden	Northern Regional College
Ms Desima Connolly	Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre
Mr Ross Parkhill	Stendhal Festival Ltd

The Chairperson: I will introduce myself. I am Michelle McIlveen, and I am the Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. I welcome you and thank you for coming along to participate in our stakeholder event this morning. I will pass you over to Peter Hall, who is the Clerk to the Committee. He will outline what the next hour or so will entail.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you, Michelle. As Michelle said, this is essentially a way of creating a discussion with local people involved in the arts for the Committee's inquiry into inclusion in the arts of working-class communities. Because of the size of the group today, it probably will lend itself best to a direct discussion. If we had a lot of people, the round tables and coming back for the feedback session would have worked, but, because of the number that we have, we will do a direct discussion on the four questions. I hope that most of you are here because you received the invitation and are aware of the terms of reference for the inquiry and the four questions that we will look at today. I am not using this microphone because I am celebrity-struck but because we are recording this. It will be transcribed by Hansard, the Assembly official record, so that everything that is said can be included in the Committee's report on the inquiry. So, it is really important that, before anyone speaks, they have

a microphone in their hand and say who they are and whom they represent so that we get it all recorded. It is really important for the Hansard guys to hear that.

In front of you, you have a little bit of background on the inquiry. You will also have our terms of reference and the four questions that we want to discuss today. I will give you a wee bit of further background. The Committee has been taking oral evidence on the inquiry for quite some time. A lot of the major bodies have been to the Committee to talk to us about the inquiry, including the Arts Council, and we have had representatives from some arts venues such as the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast, and so on. We have had a playwright and various other groups, but a key part of an inquiry is always talking to people at the coalface. That is, people who work in communities with arts or people who are involved in arts in the communities. We also really wanted to hear voices from outside Belfast and the other main cities and urban centres and rural voices as well. That is really important because the Committee is very conscious that not everyone has the same access to the arts and to venues. It is really a case of hearing what you, in your area or in the wider area, have as issues and barriers to people being included in the arts and having access to the arts.

Annex 2 lists the four questions that we will look at today. As I said before, we will go through those questions and get your feelings on them. You should basically answer those questions. Before you speak, make sure that you have the microphone and make sure you say who you are and who you represent so that we can get it all for the record. I sound like a broken record, but it is so important that we get that information recorded for transcription so that we can put it into the inquiry report.

We will start off with question 1, which very much gets to the nub of what the Committee is looking at. What sort of barriers and challenges tend to prevent members of working-class communities engaging with the arts? Are there differences between urban and rural dwellers? We will do this the traditional way. If you want the microphone, raise your hand. We will work on that basis. Again, give your name and who you represent. Who wants to start us off with a response to question 1? There will be somebody, I am sure. I will put you on the spot, Malcolm. You could give us a feel for some of the information that you gave the Committee in the session earlier about barriers that people have to accessing the arts, particularly when they come from a rural area and a working-class community.

Mr Malcolm Murchison (Flowerfield Arts Centre): I am Malcolm Murchison, arts officer and manager of Flowerfield Arts Centre, Coleraine Borough Council. One of the comments that I put in the written submission was that I noted DCAL's research that one of the biggest barriers to attending arts, culture and sports events was educational qualification, more so than location. One of the barriers is about aspirations and about people knowing what is available and having a desire to take advantage of it. I talked strongly about the increased opportunities through education and connected with education as happened previously through the Creative Youth Partnerships, which offered opportunities for young people to engage in arts activities. In some of these classrooms, we found that there were groups of kids coming in, doing arts activities, and they said that they do not do any art at school at all. That was a major point of concern, given that we know that the arts, through creative industries, can lead to significant employment opportunities, and it is about giving aspirational opportunities to young people.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you for that, Malcolm. You mentioned a couple of key points that the Committee has been hearing in some of the oral and written evidence that it has taken. We have had more than 40 written submissions to the inquiry thus far. If anyone wants to make a written submission, it is still possible to do that.

I will pick up on the aspiration and the schools elements. On the aspiration element, we have been hearing that people are not necessarily being given the opportunity to know what the arts are and to aspire to be involved in the arts. The Committee had a creative industries inquiry previously and found that a lot of young people, as you say, were not getting an opportunity to be involved in the arts. You will have heard of the STEM agenda, which is about science, technology, engineering and maths, but we want to introduce an A for arts into that and turn it into STEAM. How do you work that into schools? Another interesting comment was made during the oral evidence that people can be intimidated by arts venues. They do not know what goes on there, particularly in theatres and especially in the bigger and more established theatres. We have had the comment that, "It is not for the likes of me" and so on. We will widen the discussion and hear what other people want to say on the question of the barriers and challenges.

Ms Desima Connolly (Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre): Hi. I am Desima Connolly, and I am the arts officer for Limavady Borough Council and manage the Roe Valley arts centre in Limavady. It

is a really interesting question and an age-old one, but I think that the key is outreach and familiarity. There are various perceptions with community groups to do with the arts. I worked as an outreach officer for many years and, often, when I went out to community groups and asked, "How many of you do arts?", most of them said, "I do not participate in any arts". Then, when I asked whether they had read a book, enjoyed music, or did craft, hands would go up. So, it is about ways of bridging that and breaking down those perceptions.

I think that outreach work is key, and I know that the other arts officers here will agree that resources are very difficult. Outreach work is key to bringing in the communities, creating that familiarity and building the relationships with community groups on a wider basis. Most communities also have their own culture and heritage. We have an obligation to build on that and draw that out through various arts means. There is a lot of potential there.

Mrs Margaret Edgar (Ballymoney Borough Council): I am Margaret Edgar, and I am the cultural services manager for Ballymoney Borough Council. I echo what Desima said. There is still a perception out there among many people that the arts are seen as very highbrow, very elitist and, "not for me". I have used this example many times: a councillor said to me, "You are doing a good job, but I do not really understand the arts". I said, "But you play a musical instrument in a band. That is taking part in arts activities. You are musical". He did not recognise that that was an art. Do you know what I mean? The perception is still that it is very highbrow, despite all the work that is being done. It is about outreach and resources, because we are very short on those.

The Committee Clerk: A key thing is the idea of people who already participate in the arts but do not know it. It is about bringing in people's culture and heritage as part of the arts as well. That is also something that we have heard quite a lot in the inquiry.

Ms Doris Peden (Northern Regional College): I am Doris Peden, the community education coordinator at the Northern Regional College. I work in the department that is concerned with outreach. I know from our statistics and the facts show that, if we take education out to their community centres, on their terms and make them feel comfortable, it works. It is about getting the message out that that provision is there, but that is easier said than done.

The Committee Clerk: Again, a message that has come from some of the oral briefings is this: how do you reach the communities in the first place to let them know what is accessible to them? That is definitely an issue that needs to be tackled.

Mr Mac Pollock (Ballymoney Borough Arts Committee): I am chairman of the Ballymoney borough arts committee. I am not sure who was responsible for title "Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-class Communities." I am not so sure that the term "working-class communities" is very helpful to the whole discussion.

The Committee Clerk: That has been an issue. I will talk briefly about that. We could have used a statistician's or sociologist's definition of C2, D, E and so on. The reason that we used the phrase "working-class communities", which was explained in the info that went out, is that it is common parlance. It is a phrase that people use. The idea behind the inquiry is that people can talk about what we are looking at rather than, from the word go, making it about research, sociology or whatever. That is why that phrase was used, but I appreciate what you are saying.

Mr Pollock: To return to the question of education, our local elected representatives in the existing councils, those who will be in the new councils and Assembly Members need to be educated about the arts and what is available. If I were to ask local councillors about sports and leisure, there would be no difficulty in having a discussion or with them providing a lot of finances to support that. However, if we start to talk about the arts and arts venues and support for that, we do not get any engagement with them. I sometimes feel that that is because those who seek election or have been elected do not see votes in the arts.

I had a discussion with the Minister and outlined to her the question of funding for amateur drama and amateur drama groups throughout the country. She said that she would have a look at that. While there are one or two very good examples, particularly in Belfast — I would point to the Belvoir Players, which has studios in an area of housing on the edge of Belfast and has been able to work very successfully with the whole community there — the same opportunity has not been given to some other groups throughout the country. Following the discussion with the Minister, it seemed that my view was borne out because it turned into sports and, all of a sudden, there seemed to be lots of

money from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure going into boxing clubs. There did not seem to be anything coming to the arts area. The skew seems to go to sports as opposed to arts. An education of the elected Members is probably needed. Then, hopefully, we might get some support in other places.

The Committee Clerk: That is a useful point. Thank you for that. It is certainly something that we will take back and discuss.

Mrs Lorna Gough (Coleraine Education Community Project): I work hands on in schools. I am qualified as an art teacher, but I am not working as an art teacher. I work very much as a link person with families who come under the classification of working class. I have gone out of my way to try to introduce arts activities to a lot of the parents I have worked with, as well as the pupils, because it helps to build their confidence. As Malcolm pointed out, the lack of education, awareness of their own capabilities, confidence and finance are always issues that come up. It takes a lot of struggling from me to give people the confidence to do even something very simple like taking part in a wee mural project in a community house. When I say mural, I do not mean the sort of mural you might see on walls; I mean an artist type of mural that they have devised themselves. It is about giving people the confidence to come out and take part in activities and go to the local areas. I have taken parents to the local Riverside Theatre. They maybe live on the other side of the road from the theatre, but they have not felt that it was their right to access what is on their doorstep. It is all about education and changing people's mindsets, but how we go about that is a challenge.

The Committee Clerk: Is that something that needs to go back into schools from an earlier age to make people comfortable with the arts and so on?

Mrs Gough: Yes. I work in three post-primary schools with quite a high art ethos. It is a great way of engaging pupils who maybe do not have an academic side to their nature and helping them to develop other skills. It might be that the more academic schools do not develop the arts better. I am speaking from that side.

Mrs Karina McCollum (Coleraine Borough Council): I am the community development officer from Coleraine Borough Council. I am looking at it from a different perspective from most of the people who have an arts background. When you talked about the barriers, I thought that it is about accessibility, particularly for rural communities. One of the things that have grabbed communities in this borough is the Arts Council's re-imagining programme based on the good relations agenda. That has grabbed the imagination of local communities in areas where they can see benefits from the environmental impact of what they have come up with, and they are very proud of the outcome. The way the programme is organised, there is a professional artist attached to the community, and there are a lot of workshops on the ground in the communities looking at what they have and deciding what they will base their project on. It is usually around a historical theme of the area, or latching onto something that they identify their area with. It gets rid of eyesores at the same time. From the accessibility point of view, I suppose the lesson is that, if there are professional services there, you need to take away the mystery of the skills involved in art and, from the other perspective, latch onto something that is going to have a visual or physical impact in their own areas.

Professor Harry McMahon: I have recently retired from being chairman of the Coleraine Borough Arts Committee. One of the things that I feel is absolutely critical in this is the engagement of both professional artists and amateur artists, and looking at the way in which amateur artists are progressing through their careers and, on the way, experiencing professional or semi-professional work in communities. There is a whole periphery of practice between the artistic community and the practice of the community specialists; here is someone practising at that interface, and this is another person, Lorna Gough. These are professional people working on that interface. There is a huge potential resource in the artist community that has to be inducted into working on that interface. There have to be training opportunities; opportunities for people to move from not being a member of the working class, or maybe who are long past being a member of the working class, now practising in a different kind of middle-class artistic community which can be stereotyped, and getting back into that kind of work with confidence to do it and an understanding of the problems they are going to face, accompanied by people who have been working for years on that interface. It is about shadowing opportunities and so on.

As well as having an individual artist, you could maybe have a team of two or three other artists living in the area who have never done that kind of work before, tagging in and contributing, making friends in the community, coming up with their own ideas of what they can do with their fellow artists. There is

a whole nexus of communication, training and opportunities for practice that has to be developed in there.

While I was a member and then chairman of the Coleraine Borough Arts Committee, I was very conscious of the mechanism that we used to attract people into the arts, which was to advertise opportunities for small-scale funding. The people who applied to us were, on the whole, already well-favoured. They were people who could make applications and stand on their own feet and make a case; they could go off and work with a group, or whatever it was. We could not reach the people whom we wanted to work with, and I was terribly conscious of the outreach problem. We needed professional people to link between us amateurs and enthusiasts and the communities we wanted to serve.

The Committee Clerk: That is something we are going to return to with the third question about best practice. The idea of putting professional artists into communities is interesting. That will probably come out more in number three, with best practice and the ideas that people have.

Mr Anthony Toner (Flowerfield Arts Centre): I just wanted to make the point that it takes a lot of time, particularly in outlying areas like here and Strabane and various other places, for these things to bed in. There is a culture in Coleraine in particular; I come from a working-class background, and I grew up on a housing estate in Coleraine. As far as we were concerned, the arts did not exist in Coleraine until about 30 years ago when the university was here and the Riverside Theatre was here and this place opened. Prior to that, there was no culture of going to the theatre or an art gallery or anything like that happening. That takes time. When people who are still making decisions are from that generation, it is very difficult for it to become part of a mainstream way of thinking to go out and enjoy an artistic experience or to participate.

Mr Ross Parkhill (Stendhal Festival Ltd): Just very quickly on schools and grass roots, we should be encouraged that there is a shift in focus, a bit like Ken Robinson, if you know who he is. Schools have sports days, so why not have arts days, where everyone is a winner, essentially?

Ms Louise Rossington (Big Telly Theatre Company): I am the general manager of Big Telly Theatre Company and the chair of the Northern Ireland Theatre Association. We have submitted evidence to the inquiry already. There is a misconception about the arts, as several people have already mentioned, which is that people think it is not for them. There is also a lack of value placed on the arts and what the arts can achieve; not just art for art's sake but for health and well-being, social inclusion and education. I am a very strong supporter of the STEM-to-STEAM agenda, and I think that it is fundamentally important that all children at a primary-school age are introduced to the arts by being taken to a venue, whether that is a professional venue or a community venue, to see an arts event, so that they are not just experiencing art in their own environment but also have that experience and have some of that barrier broken down by being taken to that venue, which, in later years, may otherwise be seen as this big, scary place that the person has never been to in their life nor wants to go into.

I think that confidence is also a big issue, and I think that there is a big difference between urban and rural dwellers. We have certainly found that, particularly with our older peoples' programme of work, where we work across the whole of Northern Ireland. In urban centres, confidence levels are much, much higher, even for people who have never done any artistic activity, than they are in rural areas. That is a big issue, and that requires a different kind of work and a different way of working. I also think that price can be an issue, and that is where schemes like Test Drive the Arts are a big incentive. I also think that those sorts of schemes need to be expanded. They need to be given the funds to be able to expand into more areas.

The other big thing for me is about data capture. Data is not captured for non-ticketed events and non-ticketed venues, and we need to start to be able to try to capture that data. Those free events are the sorts of events that people tend to take their families to, and they tend to engage in an artistic event that could be free. You need to then find out who those people are, and then target them to more traditional venues.

The Committee Clerk: There were a lot of useful points there. I will move on to question 2, which I think has already been touched on to an extent. Involvement in the arts can tackle specific social issues. What are these issues, and how does engagement in the arts help to resolve them? Do the issues vary between urban and rural dwellers? We have already had some hints of this. Have we

anyone who wants to kick us off on question 2, which is about social issues that the arts can help to resolve?

Ms Connolly: Speaking about the community work that I used to do and continue to do in Limavady, I can say that the arts can definitely tackle specific social issues. Having worked on large-scale community arts projects with various community groups, including very disadvantaged groups and a remote island community once upon a time, I know that it is about confidence and skills building, which various people here have already mentioned. That should never be underestimated, because even registering for one simple eight-week course in something can open up a whole new world for people. The art regeneration schemes have brought a sense of pride to neighbourhoods and housing areas, and there is a sense of ownership among the participants of those projects. I think that it has been statistically proven also that, when public art, such as those projects, takes place, there is less vandalism and more of a sense of cohesive community and that the long-term sustainable benefits are plenty. So I think that there are lots of specific social issues, and that is not even touching the educational aspect, which we were talking briefly about earlier, the skills development and, of course, the economic impact for neighbourhoods like that. I used to bring artists into schools, and a number of schoolkids did not recognise when I introduced an artist that these were people who making their living from animation or film work or visual arts or writing. It is about opening those doors to that whole area of potential career development, which, thankfully, is being tackled through the creative industries fund etc, and I know that that will be an ongoing thing.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you for that. It is very useful. Does anyone else want a go on question 2? I am sure that there must be somebody else who wants to say something.

The Committee has also heard about the health benefits of art as a therapy. We have not had a lot of information on it. If anyone has any particular views or details on that, it would be useful to hear them.

Ms Rossington: We are now in our seventh year of running our arts and older people's programme called Spring Chickens. The programme was initially funded through Atlantic Philanthropies and has since been funded by a range of funders, including the arts and older people's programme, which is run by the Arts Council. Our artistic director, Zoe Seaton, was involved in the development of the Arts Council's programme because of the Spring Chicken work that we had started.

To date, we have worked with over 7,000 older people across Northern Ireland, and when I say across Northern Ireland that is everywhere and in all communities — urban, rural, working class and non-working class. The health and well-being benefits have been incredible. Some of the people who started work with us six or seven years ago are now at a point where they are having their own plays funded by the Arts Council, and those people have been through our programme year on year on year.

The other thing about that programme is that there are various levels at which older people can engage, from people who cannot leave residential homes to those who are very active within their communities, and aspects of the programme cover all of that. I have and can provide data and statistics aplenty on well-being.

The Committee Clerk: That would be very useful, actually. Those are the sorts of things that I was hoping to hear about — the multi-level access. So you have people, as you said, in residential care, right up to active older people.

Professor McMahon: I spoke earlier about being chair of Coleraine Borough Arts Committee. I have another role that I have played for quite a few years. From time to time, I tutor art classes, and they have always been held here in Flowerfield. One of the nice things about Flowerfield is the attitude in the institution towards access. Put it this way: we were lucky enough over this past year or so, when I was tutoring a class, to have a person suffering from dementia attend. I was totally fascinated by the development of the relationships between the 10 or 12 largely older people in the class — let us say 60-plus-year-olds — and this person. I felt that this particular person benefited greatly from the awareness that developed, the sense of caring and from being in a community of people whom she did not know but who cared for her. Her son reported back to me the extent to which that was of value to her.

I go back to the same point: a lot of people are keen to have an influence on bringing people into the arts. They are all amateurs, but they are all people and a lot of them care a great deal. So the notion of getting people in disadvantage of various forms working with able people in the arts is, I think,

critical. I know that there are societies that do that, focus on it and produce great work. You see it on television every now and then. I am talking about the everyday, run-of-the-mill stuff that goes on all over the place and having some sort of welcoming attitude in every single thing that we do.

Mrs McCollum: Harry said something that triggered in my mind an example locally. I suppose I do not think of myself as an artist so much, but we have a local project that has been going on for 18 months and has just been nominated for a Pride of Place award. The projects that we develop through community development usually come about because there is an issue — some sort of unrest locally, or whatever. This issue was that Coleraine Football Club approached us about its outreach. I know that it is predominantly a sports club, but one of the issues was on working with the PSNI on a lot of antisocial behaviour happening outside the grounds, to the distress of the local elderly population.

Part of the programme was on the arts, where there was an intergenerational focus to get those young people and the older people of the community to start to talk together. They came up with an arts project based on a historical timeline of the club, and ended up with a mural. I know that the artwork was an output, but so much of it is the actual getting together and the things they do together, like the discussions and workshops, all over a period of time, and the fact that a number of agencies are involved and help to support it, like the council and the PSNI, with positive outcomes for each of those agencies. Obviously, the police were looking at the antisocial behaviour. The club had been criticised by its parent body for its lack of outreach to the community. The local community was annoyed at being disrupted on a Saturday or whatever. The young ones themselves did not have an understanding of the older community and the effect their behaviour was having. I am just trying to give an example of a project that might have been centred around what some people saw as the big issue, but so much can come out of that, and the arts can play a part in that.

The Committee Clerk: Art in unexpected places, yes. That is a good example.

Mrs McCollum: But I did not think about that as an arts project. It just triggered something in me. Art was part of it, but I did not consider it to be an arts project. I saw it as an initiative to tackle antisocial behaviour.

The Committee Clerk: I think that is what has been coming out generally — not always identifying things as arts initiatives or projects, or art in the community where it already exists. It is really a case of looking for it.

Mrs McCollum: It came out as a natural vehicle for people to express their thoughts.

Mrs Brigitte Le Boulleur-Spotten (Coleraine Borough Arts Committee): I am here as somebody involved in Flowerfield Arts Centre as well as a member of Firsty North Coast. Like Harry said, I think the arts can include people as well. What I have found from going to the classes in Flowerfield is that a lot of women who had given up work to be stay-at-home mums were attending classes. Half of them have now started their own business.

I am a mum who gave up my career. I cannot find a job, because they always ask for experience in the past three years or the past five years and that excludes me, but through the arts I can see myself starting my own business as well. It breaks the isolation. The criticism I have is that the classes are very expensive, and that excludes a lot of people. We talk about the old and the young, but I think women are a group that needs to be targeted. If you look at the figures from Flowerfield you will see that the majority of the students are ladies who are not at work or whatever.

The Committee Clerk: It seems as though it comes back to that confidence issue as well — giving people confidence to pursue their creativity in the arts that they are interested in.

Mrs Le Boulleur-Spotten: Breaking isolation.

Ms Doris Peden: I just want to add to some of the anecdotal experiences. One morning I got a phone call from a lady who was a carer. She asked me if I knew anywhere in the area where there would be a calligraphy class that she could join. I managed to match her up to one. We work with community groups. They try hard to get enough learners, because we are a college and we have to have minimum numbers — it is a bit of a gripe, but that is the way it is — so community groups are happy for people to come in and join. There are new friendships created. I gave that lady the information,

and before we finished talking she said to me, "To you, you are just doing your job, but, to me, that time is my time". She really was quite expressive on the phone. You really felt that you made an absolute difference to somebody's life because she was prepared to join a local community. There are many more like that. I have worked in the college for 17 years. I know people who started off in the community, maybe doing some type of an arts programme. Some of those people are now lecturers or have their own business; they are making money from what started as a bit of a hobby. It makes a difference to people's lives.

You talked earlier about the expense. That is an issue. A few years ago in the college, DEL decided that the whole focus was to be on vocational, economic and outcome. We were told that there would be no more hobby classes. We lost community groups en masse, especially when the legislation came in to do with the senior citizens not being allowed reduced fees. Groups that had people going to three classes a week had to cut right down to one, if at all. All those things impact on accessibility. Now, thankfully, as a college, we had this last year, and it proved its worth. We can waive the fee and take at least 25% off the senior citizens' enrolment fees. That has increased enrolment; the data shows that. All those little dynamics make a difference to people feeling part of the arts and having access to them or wanting to have access to them. If they cannot come into us or they do not feel comfortable doing so, the better we can take it out to their doorsteps, the more it will make a difference.

The Committee Clerk: Certainly, a theme of a lot of the evidence we have heard is about getting into the communities. We have the venues and so on, but not everybody can get to those. As you said, cost is sometimes an issue. That has definitely been a recurring theme.

Mrs Le Boulleur-Spotten: What you said about taking the arts into the community is great, but, once you have done that, there is the potential to revive town centres by taking the art into them, where you would have a common shared space in which communities can get together and have the arts as a common theme. That is very important.

The Committee Clerk: It comes back to re-imagining communities and the confidence that has brought, as well. There seems to be a strong connection.

Ms Rossington: We have an empty shop initiative. You may or may not have seen it; it is on Portstewart prom. It has been running for two years now. Basically, we took over an empty shop that used to be a bank, gutted it and developed it into a shared creative space for not only the local community but everybody who visits. It has been so successful at engaging with the community. It can be something as simple as somebody walking in, pinning a luggage label on a map and writing on the luggage label where they have travelled as part of the world, all the way through to active participation in the weekly drama club that we run, which is very much intergenerational. All our professional work rehearses in it, and people can pop in or view things from outside the window. Just recently, we got funding to extend that programme for the next three years; we will be opening up a new shop in three different areas across the North every year for the next three years. We are currently working with economic development departments and arts departments across the North, because we have found that it regenerates the town and reinvigorates town centres. Traders in Portstewart have recorded record trade on days where we have had activities. As a result of the Big Sunday event we ran last year, the PSNI wanted to talk to us about the issues around St Patrick's Day and antisocial behaviour in the town. We got involved and worked with lots of different community groups and introduced arts as part of that event. As a result, there were no arrests that day. That is what can change in town centres.

Mr Parkhill: I go back to harping on about schools and the different dynamics of the market, giving free arts but also trying to get artists a wage over the macro level, and opportunities at schools, because creativity is the seed of innovation. Northern Ireland is very reliant on public sector employment, so increasing the overall after-school opportunity, from base level, for engineers and entrepreneurs will help.

Professor McMahon: One of the fascinating things about Big Telly is how it got its name. A group of children attended an art event at a theatre, which had a proscenium arch. Afterwards, one of the 8-year-old girls said, "It is just like a big telly". Out of that came the name of a very successful theatre group. I have worked in the shop that we were talking about. I put on an exhibition of portraits of 25 traders along the prom. I managed to produce them for about £30 and persuaded the subjects to buy them — I should make it very clear that not all subjects bought their portrait but about two thirds did. There was enough profit to feed back £1,000 into a fund, in which one of the people from Big Telly and

I are involved. That money is being recycled into community-based events in Portstewart. Amateur artists — those precious people who will do, for nothing, things that cause them to be excited and enjoy themselves — will spend some of it on community-based art activities. My general point is that, where there is richness, as there is in Big Telly, it has to be, and excuse me for using the word, exploited. It has to be exploited from the top, with money coming down from public funding inside big policies. It also has to come from the bottom, from people like me and other colleagues here.

Mr Bruce Robinson: I am a freelance artist based here in Coleraine, and, in addition, a specialist training consultant. At a very base level of the specific social issues that the arts can assist in tackling is sectarianism. I know that everyone will probably want to go to sleep now and move rapidly on, but the fact is that it is there. My background is that, in a former existence, I spent time in the Middle East in the oil and gas industry. There, I became a general manager of a health and safety company, which is what enabled me to try to become an artist. Part of the work that I was involved with focused specifically on looking at problems from a different perspective. At one point, I worked on the Shell Pearl gas-to-liquid project, which is the largest gas-to-liquid project in the world. We had approximately 65,000 workers from over 60 different nations. The biggest element in that was that the CEO of Shell for the project stated that there would be no fatalities on his watch, whereas the prediction had been that, given the numbers involved, there would be eight fatalities in the first year.

One initiative in tackling that project was cultural awareness, and another chap from Northern Ireland and I ended up running that programme. It was felt that we were the experts, whether that was right or wrong. We set about it and looked at it in quite an interesting way. The classroom that we were given was probably about twice the size of this one, and it was empty. We were asked what we needed. My background from art college days was that I had studied film, drama and art, and we ended up turning the classroom floor into a map of the world. We transformed the classroom into countries and came up with a game. Where I am going with this is that you can state that the social issue is sectarianism and get everybody together and say, "You draw your pictures, and you draw yours", but it is smarter to use the arts. As much as I am an artist and painter, I can see the bigger benefit.

It is interesting that I have been placed beside Ross, because he is focused on a music event. The gap in the community that art could assist with is that people need to express themselves. As we heard in response to the first question, people do not understand art, or they feel that it is too elitist and that they are excluded from it.

Today, we have all expressed ourselves by how we chose to dress. People in working-class communities — that is the given term — dress and express themselves accordingly and, ultimately, that will come with symbology. That is not a bad thing, and trying to repress it would be forcing people into something. At the moment, the big move is to take songs out of football matches, but those songs release pressure. Where does that pressure go if you cannot release it? An art programme could work by coming at that from a slightly different perspective. In Northern Ireland and Ireland, music is part of the lifeblood. You can bring people together through a festival, such as the one that Ross talked about, and integrate artists such as me into that. When I got involved with Flowerfield recently, my eyes were opened. I am not saying that I was not aware of other artists, but there are ceramicists and photographers, and if you bring those types of folks together at an event, you could, in a very clever and subtle way, make really big achievements. It can be under the art programme but without people realising it.

That was my proven success in the cultural awareness programme in the Middle East. The majority of people with whom I was working were Indian and Pakistani, and my biggest insight was that, over here, we only think that we do not like each other. People on the gas-to-liquid project could have lost their life at any second: it was one of the most dangerous environments that I have ever focused on. However, because of that, people become aware of the dangers. The message on that site was that, if you are not looking out for your buddy, no matter what nation he is from, somebody will get seriously hurt, and that will impact on you. That was a way of bringing people together.

The gap in the community is people not being able to express themselves. If you do not fill that gap, others will do it in a less productive way. It is about getting people together. BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend events, for example, bring people together without politics, and, suddenly, you have moved people forward. That is where you can have a shared future, almost in an art-controlled way.

The Committee Clerk: Art bringing communities together is a theme, and we have heard other interesting stuff on that as well. I am conscious of the time, so I will move quickly on to question 3. There is a great deal of good practice in the field of engaging those from disadvantaged and deprived

communities in the arts. Rather than giving examples of best practice, because we have heard some of those already, what are the key elements of good outreach work that focuses on access? It is not so much the examples themselves, but why do they work? Why are those examples the ones that work? Can we try to tease out the elements of those rather than the examples themselves?

Mr Parkhill: We finished our second run of free community arts-based workshops just recently. Coming from a rural environment, I think that they simply worked, and the key element was that they were available.

Mrs Edgar: Engaging with people and building relationships is very important. You cannot just descend on communities and tell them what is good for them or what they need. It is very important that you build relationships and work from there.

The Committee Clerk: That is an interesting point because the term "parachuting" has been used: a project is parachuted in and disappears after the funding or time frame ends. There needs to be a legacy that simply does not seem to be there. That is an interesting point and one that we need to think about.

Ms Connolly: From my experience working as a dedicated outreach officer for many years — it was unique for a local authority to employ a dedicated outreach officer — as well as my other experience, I felt that I had a responsibility to get to know the area and the communities. That was very important. One of the first things that I did was to go out and about and meet the communities, research the heritage of the place and find out what was going on. Effectively, I did a cultural audit of the area.

I agree with the point that was made. Too often, I have seen short-term festivals, projects or activities parachuted into communities. Once they have been delivered and the funding has been spent, there is no follow-on or further sustainable developmental work. That leaves the communities high and dry. First, you have to establish trust and relationships with the communities, find out who they are and what they are about, and use that as a foundation to deliver high-quality cultural arts projects. You also have to acquire funding and work on more sustainable long-term projects that will follow on from the initial work. I find that to be the most successful method.

The value of local knowledge is often underestimated by people working in the sector. Getting to know the communities, even if it is just going to a senior citizen group's luncheon and chatting to the people there, is very important. Having done that, I ended up developing a great many projects that uncovered some wonderful stories and doing creative projects that dealt with the local history of the place and the local identifies of the community groups. I think that that is key.

The Committee Clerk: Again, that is similar to what we have been hearing. Does anyone else want to come in on the elements of good practice that led to success, rather than with stories of good practice? We have had a few of those that were very good.

Mrs Edgar: I want to add that it is important that there is joined-up thinking across Government Departments and, particularly from my end, across council departments. In councils, we tend to work very much in silos, but there could be other council departments that already have relationships that we could link into and work together. We need to start to work across the board.

The Committee Clerk: Joined-up working is a theme that has come out of just about every Committee inquiry that I have been involved in with the Assembly. It is a point well made and worth making.

No one else wants to come in on the elements of best practice, so I will move on to the final question.

We have talked a lot about resources being a vital part of any kind of arts outreach, embedding art in the community and so on. It is a given that everything costs money and that funding is essential. If we set that and increased funding to one side, what actions can be taken by Government and statutory bodies, including councils and the new super councils, to support access and engagement in the arts?

Mr B Robinson: Through contacts made over the last couple of years, I recently joined a couple of locally based committees, and, from that, received invitations to various shows. In the last three weeks, I have attended a number of shows, this being the time for end-of-year shows. It struck me

that Peter Johnston, the director of the BBC here, came to Flowerfield. It was phenomenal to see him here, and it was, in fact, the second time in about two weeks that I had seen him. He had opened a show in Coleraine, which was almost like a second premiere of the 'Road' documentary about the Dunlops.

The question that comes to my mind is about the potential synergy of bringing organisations together. As a struggling artist, for example, I am one of, no doubt, thousands who try to produce work and get it to market. In a government programme, the prestige of an organisation coming on board will, arguably, be of more value than money. So, if you can bring in, for example, the likes of the BBC, UTV or Channel 4, people will think, "Wow". It is not about the money that you make now; it is, if it is done right, about the prestige.

In the Coleraine area, there was a show called 'The Estate'. Whether that was a success is for people to make their own mind up on. However, out of that, there were, arguably, local celebrities. Again, you make your own judgement, but the point is that, if you can give artists and others in those communities a vehicle to achieve more or achieve some prominence, it may spark success in their personal career. That is an advantage. I could probably not get to Peter Johnston, whereas someone from government could and they could ask whether he is interested. If I have seen him twice in a couple of weeks, he must be doing the rounds, one would have thought. If people of his prestige are open-minded to the potential of adding weight to a programme, that could be really amazing.

The Committee Clerk: Absolutely, it would add that level of credibility.

Mr Parkhill: I come from a more rural setting in Limavady and focus on the 18-to-25 age bracket. When I was that age in Limavady, everywhere apart from pubs closed at 5.00 pm. That was pretty much as standard, and that is a massive issue because people just go home.

The Committee Clerk: There is nothing for young people to do at all.

Mr Parkhill: It is not only young people; it is across the board. If even a coffee shop stayed open, as in Belfast or any other city, it would help. In Limavady, the pub is the only option.

The Committee Clerk: That is the only social opportunity.

Mr Parkhill: Yes, in the town centre, which is an issue.

The Committee Clerk: Absolutely, and it is common to a lot of towns.

Mr Pollock: I want to follow on from what Desima said about a project ending when the funding comes to an end and that being the end of the group involved in it. There is an opportunity for training one or two of the representatives in the group to enable them to know how to move on. Part of that training might involve how to make funding applications, and the Committee could possibly look at making those applications simpler and easier to access, rather than people being thrown a 40- or 50-page document. Sometimes, if a document has 40 or 50 pages, it is probably designed that way to put you off making the application. There is a training aspect, but the streamlining of applications needs to be considered as well.

The Committee Clerk: That point has come up in a lot of contexts. The worst offenders are probably applications for European funding. I know that European commissioners are aware of it. We have invited them to the Assembly and discussed that with them. It does seem to be a grindingly slow process, but, locally, with councils, government and the Assembly, there are definitely ways that it can be made a lot more straightforward. As you say, people can be trained, and capacity can be built into communities because the bigger and better-funded organisations have people doing that full time.

Ms Rossington: I will reiterate what Margaret said earlier about cross-departmental working. I think that there is huge scope for DCAL to look at working with other Departments such as DEL, the Department of Health and DSD. We are running a programme with DEL. Under its youth employment scheme for the 16- to 24-year-old age bracket, we have just taken on five creative arts trainees. The scheme is already in place and costs nothing to run. We decided that, rather than taking on people on an individual and ad hoc basis, we would take people on as a group. They are forming their own little shadow company and being mentored by professional artists and staff from the company. They are also being allowed to develop their own practice and their own work. That is where cross-

departmental working can come in. Our work with older people has been very heavily influenced through working with the Department of Health, and our empty shops work is with DSD. There is massive scope. Departments, as well as local councils, need to look at the wider picture.

The Committee Clerk: Absolutely, more joined-up thinking.

Mrs Gough: My funding will run out in September, with the possibility of an extension to April. I have spent three years building up relationships with parents and pupils and getting them involved in things that they would not necessarily have been involved in otherwise. If that continuity disappears, what happens?

The funding guidelines have changed through the years. After working with one set of guidelines, they suddenly decide to move the goalposts. Where does that leave you? I always try to put in a bit of qualitative experience at the end of my reports. I think that it is really important for people to read about the qualitative experiences, rather than looking at facts and figures that relate to Government targets. Let us look at people on base level, which is what a lot of people here are doing.

The Committee Clerk: That is a very important point.

Mr Parkhill: My point on funding is a bit of a funny one. Our organisation is quite different from a lot of the bodies represented here. When we started out, we found it very hard to get any kind of seed funding, which is of primary importance to us. We set out with a 10-year plan, at which point we hope not to require any funding. I think that that should be encouraged across the board. Obviously, it does not apply to every organisation or community group, but I think that the current system displaces new organisations and new ideas. That is what we found, and it is paramount to what we are trying to do in the design of our model.

The Committee Clerk: You need longer-term funding so that you can become sustainable before it ends and maintain that continuity afterwards.

Mr Parkhill: Yes, it is about capturing more data, as Louise said, that can feed into how funding is having an impact on the ground and whether there is a sustainability plan. It does not relate to every organisation, but it does to certain organisations.

Mr Murchison: I have been sitting on my hands to avoid interrupting any of the wonderful information that has come forward. It has been really interesting.

We know that no more money is coming in, but perhaps we are looking for the cake to be a bit more equitably divided and then making better use of what is out there. In the previous RPA, money was to be top-sliced from the Arts Council and given to local authorities for arts projects in local areas. I think that it was about £1.5 million, which is not a massive amount, but it would certainly have been very useful. Obviously, that has disappeared. I know that DSD money is coming to local authorities, and that is great.

Joined-up practice is a major issue. For many years, there was an annual arts conference for local government and the Arts Council. While that might have been an imperfect event, it did a lot to raise the profile. I am sure that any MLAs who were councillors and involved in the arts will remember it. The conference was a good opportunity, once a year, to get some really good international input of what was happening in the arts. It maybe made local authorities think that they should be doing that and ask themselves why they were not doing a bit more. We are really missing out by not having that sort of event to remind people. Like every good advertising campaign, it is more about reminding people of the product than introducing the product. We have to keep reminding our locally elected members about what we do. For too much of the time, we end up just being a cost centre, rather than being of benefit to the community. We need to look hard at the relationship between the Arts Council and local government. Local government spends as much on the arts as the Arts Council. It is a massive amount, and we really should be working strategically together. It is an absolute crime that we are not, and that needs to be addressed.

The Committee Clerk: Good point.

Mrs McCollum: Part of my role is administering grants at a local community level. Coleraine Borough Council has taken a view about its limited funds for community-based organisations. Usually, our

funding programme funds the annual running costs of area-based, community development-type organisations. We encourage the groups to look elsewhere for project moneys. Unfortunately, the people who have the money to give out in grants do not want to fund core costs and running costs. We see it as a success story if we can manage to keep groups in existence so that they are there to apply for the other costs. Unfortunately, that cannot extend to all arts groups, youth groups and the whole gamut of the voluntary and community sector. Given the budget, our funding is limited to community development-type organisations. We hope to follow that through in the larger council.

I want to respond to Mac's point about bureaucracy. We try our very best to design forms that do not put people off. However, we are administering public funds and have a lot of boxes to tick from that point of view. DSD has produced a document on tackling bureaucracy in funding, which is available on its website. It has a number of recommendations for action by Departments. I do not know how much that is shared across the Departments. However, that can be looked up on the website and applied to government funding organisations. We are looking at it from our point of view as well. I have now defended the forms. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Edgar: On actions, I think that there needs to be a major PR campaign to demonstrate how valuable and vital the arts are to delivering all these other agendas. In councils, the arts are an easy target. They are a quick win if you need to save money. They are seen as nice to do, but people ask, "What do we really get from them?" They are so important in delivering all those things to do with health and well-being, social inclusion and good relations. We know that, and everybody knows that, and it is about getting other people to take that seriously.

Mr Parkhill: I was late this morning because I was writing my fifth letter to my local council in a matter of weeks. I want to back up a bit of what Malcolm was saying. There is a large proportion of ignorance about the arts among elected members. It would be very interesting to see what money goes from local council pots, in Limavady and other places, into sport compared with the arts — I have in mind the sports day versus arts day point that I mentioned earlier. That would be a very useful piece of work.

The Committee Clerk: As has been said already, it is harder to see the tangible benefits of the arts, but the benefits are there. With sports, it is a case of building something that everyone can see, so it is, perhaps, easier.

Professor McMahon: I want to reinforce the point about the need for a campaign targeted at cultural change: from the notion that the arts are some sort of cost to the community; that we keep rates down by keeping arts down; and that we cannot afford the cost. It has to be changed so that the arts are seen as a cultural investment. The investment in STEM is a good example of the way in which there has been a cultural change in government, education institutions and so on. We know that investing in STEM makes sense. In changing from STEM to STEAM, the "A" is in there because the arts are an investment.

The Committee Clerk: I will end there because lunch is downstairs. Thank you.