



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities:
Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast (MAC)

19 June 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Mr Ciaran McQuillan	The MAC
Ms Anne McReynolds	The MAC
Mr Len O'Hagan	The MAC

The Chairperson: I welcome Ms Anne McReynolds, the chief executive of the MAC, Mr Len O'Hagan, the chairman, and Mr Ciaran McQuillan, the learning and participation officer. Who wants to lead — Len or Anne?

Mr Len O'Hagan (The MAC): Thank you, Chair. I thank the Committee for inviting the MAC to engage with the inquiry. We fully recognise the importance of the work and look forward to sharing some of our experiences with you.

The MAC has been involved in the broadest possible cross-section of the Northern Ireland populations since we opened two years ago. The chief executive, Anne McReynolds, will make the first part of the presentation, and Ciaran McQuillan, our learning and participation officer with special responsibility for youth and communities, will address the second half. The presentation will last for about 20 minutes. We will give you a short history of the MAC, update you with some of our examples of reaching out to communities, give you a snapshot of a typical week in the MAC and, finally, share some of our ideas and recommendations as we go forward.

At its core, the MAC is an outstanding building in the centre of Belfast in which life-enhancing art is created and enjoyed by individuals and communities. We are focusing today on the community cohesion part. It is important to note that the MAC plays a vital role in inward investment and in tourism. Belfast has to be a vibrant city and needs to be taken seriously by the inward investors that we are trying to attract. They are primarily trying to bring young people in to work in their offices, so

they audit the quality of life in a city. I will put on my Belfast harbour hat on to say that we are having some very interesting discussions with our new City Quays development. They talk about the restaurants and the art offering, and given that the MAC is young, vibrant and in the digital era, it links into the age group of the people who will be working in the new industries. Twenty per cent of those will come from overseas, so it is important that the infrastructure is there.

We changed the dial for tourism in Belfast with Titanic Belfast, which has driven tremendous tourist traffic into the city. We want people to stay, and, for them to stay, we must have a complete arts, culture, restaurant and entertainment sector. The MAC plays a vital role in that. We work in partnership with the Tourist Board. The international Andy Warhol exhibition was financed with the Tourist Board. We have a number of joint projects with it, including the MAC International, which is an international Turner-type prize.

Those are some of the issues that are important in the wider context, but we are here to talk about community cohesion, and I will pass over to Anne McReynolds.

Ms Anne McReynolds (The MAC): Thanks, Len. I add my thanks for the opportunity to tell the Committee a little bit more about the MAC and the work that we are doing.

Slide 3 of our PowerPoint presentation allows me an opportunity to give you some headline figures about the MAC's performance to date since we opened in April 2012. Since then, we have welcomed over 690,000 people to the venue and presented over 1,000 live performances and 20 art exhibitions. We did this with the help and commitment of 100 active MACTivist volunteers. In so doing, we won seven local, national and international awards. We have worked with 46,380 participants in our community and outreach programmes, including 50% of the 20 primary schools and 75% of the 20 post-primary schools with the highest percentage of free school meals. It is estimated that the MAC has contributed £10 million to the local economy, and the fact that we have sold more than 70,000 cups of coffee since opening shows that we are busy from morning to night, seven days a week.

It is critical to the MAC that we involve as many people as possible from as many backgrounds as possible and positively impact on their lives. We take seriously the fact that too many people in Northern Ireland think that the arts are not for them. Our artistic programmes and learning and participation projects in schools and communities with young people and families have been designed directly to appeal to the broadest possible audience while always striving to be excellent.

In the map on slide 4, we wanted to show that we are dedicated to the idea that the enjoyment of participation in and creation of art is everyone's right, regardless of economic, geographic or physical challenges. Given that commitment and belief, we have invested heavily in a wide-ranging schools programme throughout Northern Ireland, because extensive research shows that early engagement in the arts can make all the difference in the development of an individual's understanding of and appreciation for the arts.

The map shows our level of engagement with schools across Northern Ireland. That is what we have achieved in just two years through the work of Clare Lawlor, our learning and participation officer with special responsibility for schools, communities and families. Clare visits an average of seven schools every week throughout Northern Ireland to explain to teachers how the MAC can help them in the delivery of the curriculum and to encourage schools to take part in our activities, most of which are delivered to them at no cost. Those activities with schools include gallery tours, building tours, Northern Ireland-wide primary school competitions, creative workshops and the upcoming Great Writing competition to commemorate the Great War. We also publish free resource packs for teachers, which help them to understand and interpret almost every performance we stage and every visual art exhibition we present.

One example of the practical ways in which we remove the barriers to participation is evident in our Passport to the MAC scheme, which we developed directly in response to feedback that we received from teachers. They told us that the price of theatre tickets was prohibitive, so we reduced the price of the tickets and introduced a special schools rate. The teachers also explained that the price of transport was a major impediment to large numbers of their pupils taking part in MAC programmes, so we raised funds and gained sponsorship from one of our key corporate supporters, the Ulster Bank, which, along with Arts and Business, funded a special subsidised transport scheme that has brought 2,816 schoolchildren from all over Northern Ireland to the MAC who otherwise would not have been able to attend. Some of those children came from as far away as Strabane, Armagh and Dundrum. To reiterate: in all our schools work, we target primary and post-primary schools with higher than average numbers of pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

Even before children go to school, we want them to feel at home in the MAC in our specially designed family room, where they can enjoy our free weekly storytelling sessions or take part in an art workshop. Our commitment to delivering services for preschool children has been so successful that the MAC has been voted the best venue in Northern Ireland by Netmums users. Netmums is the UK's fastest-growing online parenting organisation, with over 1.7 million members and eight million unique users each month.

There are a number of ways in which ordinary people from a broad range of backgrounds enjoy the MAC, either through our theatre programme, by visiting one of our free exhibitions or by simply enjoying lunch or a meeting in the shared space that we have created in Belfast city centre. Slide 7 demonstrates that, despite the fact that the MAC is a brand-new venue, we have managed, in two years, to attract audiences from throughout Northern Ireland, with the densest location of ticket buyers being in Antrim, Down and Armagh. That is particularly pleasing to us, because, before we opened, our research showed that we could reasonably expect audience members to drive up to 45 minutes to the venue. The slide illustrates that there is an audience base for the MAC that extends far beyond that 45-minute drive time.

I will hand over to Ciaran now. As Len said, he is our learning and participation officer with special responsibility for youth and communities. Ciaran will share with you a few examples of the kinds of ways in which we are working with a number of communities.

Mr Ciaran McQuillan (The MAC): Since opening, the MAC has been fully committed to engaging working-class communities directly and having the broadest range of people using the MAC daily. We have been extremely proactive in involving local communities in our work and, indeed, supporting them in their own development. The first community project was Sounds of the City, a music and heritage project that reflected the histories of the communities located directly around the MAC. Participants from Sailortown, New Lodge and Dee Street worked closely with us over six months to create soundscapes and songs that reflected the rich history and character of the areas supported by the docks and the shipyard.

The resulting interactive exhibition and events involved 1,500 participants and were seen by over 3,000 audience members, including hundreds of local people from the participating communities of Sailortown, New Lodge and Dee Street. This level of quality, depth of engagement and exposure to a public audience is testament to the value that we place on the work we create with communities. Other examples of that are Common Ground, a community garden project that involved 20 young people from Tiger's Bay and New Lodge; MACHord, a multicultural music project involving ArtsEkta, Cloughmore Male Voice Choir and St John Bosco Youth Centre from Newry, and Cranmore Integrated Primary School; the Amal project, a visual art exhibition created by female refugees and asylum seekers, in partnership with Mediation NI; and Belfast Rocks, a cross-community drama project involving teenagers from Springmartin, Highfield and Clonard, delivered with the Belfast Interface Project.

Our MADE festival each October is a unique event, when we hand the building over to our Den Collective youth group, which programmes a week of arts performances, exhibitions and workshops for the 14-18 age group. The Den Collective contacts and books the artists, provides the brief for our festival design and marketing, and is active in involving young people in the festival. The collective is a fantastic group of 12 young people, mainly from north Belfast and a range of backgrounds, who meet weekly at the MAC and put a huge amount of effort into programming a fun, eclectic and ever-growing festival.

To date, over 2,500 young people have attended over 80 MADE events. Groups that involved their young people in MADE in previous years include the Upper Springfield Development Trust, Action for Children, the Blackie River Community Group, Duncairn Community Centre, Tiger's Bay, the Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB), Larne YMCA, Dee Street Community Centre, Tar Isteach and North Belfast Bytes.

Plans are well advanced for MADE 2014. The festival has established itself as one of the key events in our autumn programme.

One of our most successful exhibitions was Andy Warhol at the MAC. This was the first time that the work of Andy Warhol, arguably one of the most famous artists in the world, had been shown in Northern Ireland. We programmed the exhibition because we knew that it would be of interest to

people who normally do not go to art galleries. There is no question that, among the 100,000 people who saw the exhibition, large numbers were not regular arts attenders.

The exhibition was a huge coup because it meant that people who could not afford to travel to London or Paris to see the work of an artist of the calibre of Andy Warhol could come into our free galleries and see this world-class art in Belfast. Independent research showed that the Warhol exhibition generated a £1.5 million return to the local economy. That was one exhibition, and we have curated 20 since we opened.

Slide 12 demonstrates the nature of the relationships we are building with working-class participants, using the example of our work with the NOW project. NOW provides training, employment and volunteer support services for people from deprived areas of greater Belfast. Its youth service members have been using the MAC for eight months and now meet every morning in the venue. For its young members, many of whom have learning difficulties, the MAC represents a safe and welcoming place for them to meet, work and access the city centre.

Over a number of months, we worked with the young people to develop a drama piece aimed at building their skills and confidence. They performed their work in May in our upstairs theatre to an audience of friends and family. The NOW staff were truly amazed that these vulnerable and marginalised young people performed with such courage and confidence. We are planning to develop this partnership to integrate better the MAC's arts provision with NOW's training programme and establish clear paths to employment for its members.

Our provision goes well beyond our statutory responsibilities in removing boundaries to participation for all disabled people. Naturally, the building is designed to the highest standard of physical accessibility for our customers, artists and staff, who regularly programme interpretative performances and talks for people with hearing and visual impairments. Guide and hearing dogs are welcome in our theatres and galleries. We have gone further, however, by being one of the first venues in Northern Ireland to programme relaxed performances in our theatres, which are designed to welcome people with learning disability, Down's syndrome, autism spectrum condition or sensory and communication disorders. During our relaxed performances, there is a stress-free attitude to noise and movement among the audience, and small changes are made to the light and sound effects to minimise the potential upset for customers who may be disturbed or frightened by loud noises, flashing lights or dark places.

We have extended our commitment to full accessibility by developing projects in tandem with people with mental health needs and learning and physical disabilities. We have developed an access charter that aims to help us to do all that is possible to meet the particular needs of our customers, whatever those needs may be. We offer touch tours and Twitter tours. We have three team members who are MAC disability champions and who help us to make sure that we meet the high standards that we have set ourselves on this issue.

March saw the launch of a photography exhibition created by a group of men from traditionally separate communities in north Belfast who have been affected by suicide. It was created in partnership with Lighthouse, which is a suicide prevention charity. The men worked with professional photographer Kelly Morris to create original photography on the theme of hope. The men involved not only have found the artistic process hugely beneficial to their mental health but have been amazed that their work has been valued and given a public space by the MAC. The men, many of whom are from the Tiger's Bay area, have become frequent visitors to the MAC, independent of any outreach programme. They regularly buy tickets to performances, attend talks and workshops, come to visual art exhibition openings or simply meet friends in the MAC's cafe. All of us who worked with Lighthouse gained as much from working with those people as they did from working with us. We hope to be able to continue the MAC's relationship with this group of men.

Similarly, our work with the equality and diversity unit of the Belfast Education and Library Board has been long-standing and fruitful. Since January, a group of multi-ethnic and multi-ability young people from across the city has been meeting every Wednesday night in our dedicated community space, the Den. From their work, we developed the idea of a day on which we could encourage a large number of young people to engage on the idea of identity. This became ID 2014. For ID 2014, we involved 120 students from specially targeted schools across Belfast in a day of discussion and creativity on the subject of identity. Wellington College, St Joseph's, St Dominic's, Malone College, Mercy College, Ashfield Boys', the Girls' Model and Coláiste Feirste, six of which rank in the top 20 of the free school meal index, questioned a diverse panel that was chaired by William Crawley and included politicians, musicians and sportspeople from Northern Ireland who talked about their personal views on their own

identity. Workshops with drama and visual artists, and musician Brian Kennedy, gave students an opportunity to explore their own sense of self creatively. Broadcaster William Crawley said:

"There are few more important questions for our society than those that we explored together at ID 2014."

In many ways, the event modelled the way forward for Northern Ireland by creating a safe and open space for learning about ourselves and one another. The event received incredibly positive feedback from schools and students, and cemented the idea that the MAC is a neutral place in which to discuss important and sensitive topics. Planning is already under way for ID 2015, and we predict that the event will grow year on year.

Ms McReynolds: Thank you for your attention. I appreciate that we have been talking for quite a while, but we are nearly finished — the end is in sight. We want to tell you about a typical week in the MAC. You will see from slides 16 and 17 that there is a lot to talk about, but you will be glad to know that I am not going to take you through absolutely everything. This was the week beginning 2 June, which was two weeks ago.

Alongside our two visual art exhibitions and 17 theatre performances that were attended by the public, including groups from the East Belfast Mission, the Ballynafeigh Community Development Association and Mediation NI's ethnic women's group, our family room was open all week, as always, and our homework club continued to attract students who were revising for exams. We also ran an early years art workshop, the Den Collective's weekly meeting and a planning day to progress the young people's planning for the MADE festival. The NOW project ran a training event, the Springmartin youth group took part in a drama workshop, and the Falls Road suicide prevention group had a gallery tour. We hosted a community arts discussion group, welcomed the Clonard/Woodvale young women's drama group and had a BELB ethnic diversity and equality workshop. That is a typical week in the MAC.

While that was going on inside the venue, Clare Lawlor, our learning and participation officer with special responsibility for schools and families, was outside. She was visiting Cliftonville Integrated Primary School, a primary school at Donegall Pass, Edenbrooke Primary School, Glenwood Primary School and St Patrick's Primary School. As I said, she averages seven school visits every week. There are arts and parts of Northern Ireland where Clare is known as the "lady from the MAC".

As we look ahead to the next few weeks, we will be working with cross-community groups from Springmartin, Highfield and Clonard, which will be presenting a drama performance together at the start of July. We will be delivering summer activities for young people with caring responsibilities in partnership with Action for Children; those will take place in August. We are planning workshops in visual art with Men's Shed, an organisation in north Belfast that addresses isolation in men over the age of 55.

We are planning a cross-community exhibition of work with Community Dialogue's north Belfast-based Aisling project. We are awaiting a funding decision on a collaborative project with the Spectrum Centre to deliver workshops with participants from the greater Shankill area in the autumn. We are working with our Den Collective to programme the MADE young people's festival and engaging with schools throughout our Passport to the MAC scheme to provide low-cost access to our Christmas show.

I hope that you have found what we have told you today informative. Before we conclude and offer you some thoughts and recommendations on how we should move forward from here, I want to take a minute to note that this presentation has not mentioned the activity that is core to everything we do in the MAC, which is the art that is created and enjoyed there. Our starting point is always concerned with finding ways to support the creation of outstanding visual art, theatre, dance and music by Northern Ireland artists. It is only after having achieved this central mission that we can create the kind of participatory projects that we talked to you about today. The men who took part in the Lighthouse project, for example, responded first and foremost to the work of the professional contemporary artists whom we had curated as part of our Mystery of Tears exhibition. ID 2014 was a huge success because we had live musicians, poets and artists on stage talking to young participants about what it is to be an artist in 2014.

In the absence of support for Northern Ireland's living, breathing artists, there will be nothing to hang community engagement and learning and participation work on. The MAC was funded by DCAL, the Arts Council, DSD, the Laganside Corporation, Belfast City Council, the private sector and other funders to be a centre of artistic excellence that would positively change people's lives. We take that

responsibility very seriously. We do not mean only some people of a certain income bracket from a certain part of Belfast or Northern Ireland or people of a certain skin tone or religious background. We mean everybody. I hope that you can see evidence of that commitment in some of the examples that we have chosen to talk about today. I am pleased to hand back to Len, who will share some thoughts on how we might go forward.

Mr O'Hagan: Thank you, Anne. I have a couple of thoughts that the Committee might consider. Unlocking Creativity was a really interesting policy initiative in about 2002. It was an ambitious cross-departmental approach that outlined a coordinated strategy for the development of the full creative and cultural resources of the people of Northern Ireland by linking new approaches to education and cultural development. It stands the test of time and is still an excellent document for what we are all trying to do. We see Together: Building a United Community as a significant opportunity for change, particularly for ideas on connecting young people, especially those who are in danger of being left out. We look forward to further policy developments and participating with our arts colleagues on how we can drive that agenda forward.

One specific example that might be worth looking at is the Dukes theatre in Lancaster. It has developed a means of better integrating the arts into service provision for marginalised people. The Lancaster local authorities have entered into service level agreements with the Dukes and a number of community organisations. That means that the Dukes works with young people referred directly from the community and places arts services on the same level as health, education and social statutory providers. It is a very interesting model that might be relevant to Northern Ireland. This is linked to our final thought, which is that, in considering how to address inequalities in cultural participation most effectively, the Committee should consider the adoption of a broader, more needs-based approach to include the kinds of groups that we deal with in the MAC, such as young people with learning difficulties, people with physical difficulties and people with mental health needs, refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I hope that it was not too long. We welcome your questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your detailed oral presentation and written submission. The MAC has been the focus of press interest in recent weeks as a result of this inquiry. I know that we have received a paper responding to comments that were made. Is there not a lesson in this for the MAC in that you need to tell people about what you do and your excellent work in the venue?

Mr O'Hagan: You are absolutely right; that is a lesson that came out of the last couple of weeks. There is so much going on that we probably do not communicate it as well as we might. With just two years under our belt, having developed so many programmes, we have not put resources into communicating what is happening in the MAC. It would help to attract more people, so it is a very good point.

The Chairperson: If it goes some way to helping you, we have received quite a number of emails and letters in support of the work that the MAC is doing.

Mr O'Hagan: Thank you.

Ms McReynolds: That is why we were so delighted to accept this opportunity. In the MAC, we fall foul of the fact that we are so committed to what we are doing, and so interested in doing good work in as broad a context as possible, that we tend to do the work rather than talk about having done it. The MAC is a seven-days-a-week, year-round venue that closes only one day a year, so it can be difficult to find the time to do that. You are absolutely right that we need to find ways to shout about the great successes we have had so far.

Mr C McQuillan: One of the barriers is that we often work with very vulnerable people, such as young people with learning difficulties, or asylum seekers or refugees, who do not necessarily want their pictures in the paper or their names in the press. We need to find better ways of publicising those kinds of projects in a sensitive way. Some of the coverage we have had of our learning and participation projects has been down to the bravery of the participants involved. The men from Lighthouse were very brave to say that they wanted to highlight their work. They were working through a suicide prevention charity and had experience of that. They wanted to shout about it, and it was great to see that.

The Chairperson: It has been said that the MAC is elitist, but to say that the arts generally is elitist is not new to any of us. How do you propose to break down that perception?

Ms McReynolds: This is a great frustration for all of us who work in the arts. During your inquiry, you have probably got lots of proof of the huge amount of community-based practice in the arts sector. I can think of very few venues or theatre companies that are not deeply connected and embedded with a broad range of communities in which they work. We were very aware of that in the MAC; we knew that we were building a brand new arts centre in a part of the city that had never had one before. Given the contemporary nature of the design of the building, we knew that it ran the risk of being a little off-putting. We know that people who do not work in the arts think that people who do are part of a clique that they are not part of. We actively put measures in place to mitigate that.

We sometimes underestimate people. We thought that, because the MAC was a beautiful building designed by Hackett Hall McKnight that has won numerous national and global awards, people would be a little put off by it. In fact, the vast majority of the feedback from our customers is that they absolutely love it and that they feel proud that Belfast and Northern Ireland are sufficiently evolved to create something like the MAC. Still knowing that there was a chance that people would be a little anxious about coming to this new venue, we put in place the MACTivist programme, which is our volunteers' programme. What do you want when you come into somewhere? You want somebody to greet you and help you to feel at home. We put our MACTivists in lovely bright blue t-shirts, on the back of which it says, "Talk to me", and we asked them to stand at the two doors into the MAC and smile at everybody who came in. Those are ordinary people just like us, who dress like us, think like us and talk like us; none of them is an artist. It was about helping to break down barriers.

The MAC is not the kind of place where you would ever see a red rope; we do not have places for posh people and places for the rest of us. We are a very democratic organisation — that even went into the design of the theatres. Our 350-seat downstairs theatre space was designed to be democratic. There are no good seats or bad seats; there are no seats for the rich and seats for the poor. It is totally democratic. More than anything else, the way in which you break down misconceptions about elitism is by your actions. This is just a snapshot of some of the work that we are doing in communities. We do not have time to tell you about everything.

We are more than interested in, and are deeply committed to, delivering programmes across our visual arts theatre programmes and our learning and participation programmes, which are relevant to ordinary people. It would be silly of us not to do so. It is of deep regret to me that this concept of the arts and arts organisations and venues being elitist is still being discussed in 2014. We have worked so hard to counteract the mistaken assumptions that only a certain kind of people goes to the arts. That is what the MAC was all about.

The Chairperson: It is incredibly important that young people get to engage in the arts as early as possible. The challenges for schools are financial, especially with regard to transport. I welcome your initiative with Arts and Business and Ulster Bank in creating a sponsorship programme to alleviate that problem. That has allowed you to engage with some rural communities as well; you highlighted Strabane as an example. What other work are you doing with rural communities, given that you are very much Belfast-centric?

Ms McReynolds: The MAC is a Belfast venue; there is no denying that. It was built and funded to be such. It is also true that there are lots of really good arts centres throughout the rest of Northern Ireland. However, we work in partnership with many different constituent groups, and we are very interested in ways in which we can break down barriers, not only rural/urban barriers but those that exist in the urban centre of Belfast.

One way to answer that is that we go out all the time. Once you give somebody a desk, a computer and a phone, their natural inclination is to sit at it. Very few people in the MAC sit at desks. I want to stress that. We have two learning and participation officers, and given the breadth of Northern Ireland, the breadth of our work and our commitment to getting as many people involved as possible, we could do with 22. Those two officers are out in communities all the time. It was, maybe, slightly unfortunate that the examples that I gave of the work of Clare Lawlor, our learning and participation officer with special responsibilities for schools and families, were on 2 June when she happened to be concentrating on Belfast schools. Every week, she is out visiting schools that are, more often than not, well outside Belfast.

Mr C McQuillan: We are making real attempts to involve schools and communities in rural areas. In schools, our Masterpiece for the MAC competition is specifically designed so that it is not based around transport and having to get to the MAC. A lot of the work happens in schools; we have had schools from as far away as Garrison on the western tip of Fermanagh, where transport is a problem, involved in that process. On the community side, we have engaged with community groups from Newry, community choirs from Downpatrick and groups from different areas of Antrim that have been involved in projects in the building. There is an automatic thing to make connections with communities on our doorstep, but we are looking to go beyond that.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning. Thanks very much for your interesting presentation. Congratulations on your great success to date, and I hope that you will be able to get your message out far and wide by whatever means necessary.

I have been to the MAC a couple of times. I went to see 'Summertime' and was very impressed by the production; I think that it was by Tinderbox. The play was written by somebody from Northern Ireland, the actors were from Northern Ireland, and Ryan McParland won a nomination to the Irish Times Theatre Awards for his performance, which I was very impressed by. I was very impressed by all the performances and the high standard of production. Although the audience was predominantly young people, I met a couple of well-worn theatre people there, such as Martin Lynch and Ian McElhinney. You have probably heard of them at one stage or another.

Is that type of performance, using a local playwright, a local production group and local actors, part of your policy?

Mr O'Hagan: That is core to what the MAC was set up to do. It is to encourage Northern Ireland playwrights and actors and to give them the venue and the financial support and mentoring to move them forward. This is Anne's area of expertise; she is the brains behind our theatre approach in the MAC.

Ms McReynolds: It is, Dominic; it is absolutely critical to what the MAC is there to do. As a centre of artistic excellence for Northern Ireland, it is so important that we support local artists. Before the MAC was created, our local theatre companies were peripatetic. They had to travel around by necessity, and it is difficult to build an audience base whenever people are not really sure where you are going to be. We have worked closely with them. We do not just give them the space, we do not just give them a fee, but we have co-produced and co-commissioned work with local theatre companies. We provide all sorts of help for local artists. It is not only established theatre companies: it is important that the young guys coming up are given help, just as in any natural ecology; otherwise people would go to England or to Scotland where in many ways there is a much more supportive environment for young emerging artists who are not receiving any funding.

We have a whole series of schemes. One of them is the HATCH scheme, where, for 18 months, which is quite a long time, we invest in five artists who are theatre or dance practitioners. They do not get any funding from the Government, but we work with them and give them free space in the MAC and free support around fund-raising, marketing, cultural development, the kinds of things that we can do to help them and what they need. That is an ongoing scheme. We also have our artists in residence space, so for three to six months at a time, artists come in and work at the MAC. They are artists you probably know: Damian Gorman; Jimmy McAleavey; Connor — I cannot remember Connor's last name; he is going to kill me. *[Laughter.]* Connor Mitchell: he is a fantastic composer. You would know these artists, as they are incredibly successful in their field; nevertheless, it is hard for them. They are still independent contractors working in a difficult arena. They come into the MAC and we give them support, we link them with other artists, and we work with them in a way that is critical for an arts centre to do.

'Summertime' is a great case in point. It was such a fantastic production, and it was not easy theatre. A commercial theatre would not take 'Summertime'. It was absolutely gruelling. It was one of the best pieces of theatre that I have seen created in Northern Ireland in a long time, but that is what the MAC is there to support. It is there to take risks on the kind of work that you would not get to see in the West End, for instance. Those actors, producers, directors and lighting designers cut their teeth in places like the MAC and go on to do great things for Northern Ireland after they have received support from us.

Mr D Bradley: Thanks very much. What about music, song, dance and Irish-language events. Are they all catered for in the MAC?

Ms McReynolds: They are, and that is one of the things that we are most proud of in the MAC. We see our audience and potential audience — we see people — as very diverse. Not everybody likes the same thing. Just because you happen to come from a particular area of a city does not mean that everybody who lives in that area thinks the same way, likes the same things or has the same motivations and the same barriers to attendance. There is not a particular demographic group that likes a particular kind of play any more than they like a particular kind of book or a particular kind of music. Our entire artistic programme is based on the idea that, if you are going to get lots of different people to come and see lots of different work, you have to create lots of different opportunities.

The MAC is not just theatre, visual art, dance or music; it is not just workshops, and it is not just a place to go and have lunch: it is all those things. It is not just one particular kind of music; we do all sorts of things. We have fun things as well, which is something that people sometimes forget about arts centres. It has been known that you can have fun in an arts centre. For instance, we deliberately programmed Warhol, as Ciaran said, because we knew that people who would normally never darken the door of an arts centre would be dying to see Andy Warhol's work, but alongside that we also programmed a recreation of Studio 54 in our downstairs theatre. Studio 54 was the disco where Bianca Jagger came in for her thirtieth birthday on a white horse. We did not have a beautiful woman on a white horse, but we did have glitter bombs and we flew the last surviving original DJ from Studio 54 over from New York. We had professional dancers on roller skates. The place was absolutely thronged. We had to increase the capacity three times, and we could have sold the event 10 times over. It was full of people who, if you asked them now, might well say, "The arts aren't really for me".

Mr D Bradley: You mentioned outreach to schools and you had statistics on the good work being done by the education and outreach officer. What about arts groups in places such as Strabane, Newry, Omagh and so on? Do you have any interaction with them or give them a platform?

Mr C McQuillan: We do. We have regional community music and theatre organisations that perform in the MAC, but we also go out and work on projects with them. I mentioned Cloughwater Male Voice Choir in Newry, which was involved in our MAC Core project. We have had Antrim Community Choir and a community choir from Downpatrick involved in projects as well. It is actually [*Inaudible.*] So it sort of marries what Anne was talking about: quality professional production and community engagement. The community choirs performed onstage as part of a production that is a 'Guardian' five-star rated professional show. Those kinds of interactions are really important, because not only is it a great experience for them, but it gives back to the community, and the feedback from the choir is that it strengthens their capacity, skills and confidence. We do engage with those kinds of community groups.

Mr D Bradley: If I went to a group and said, "I was at a meeting today at which the MAC said that you're welcome to participate", what could you do for a group like that?

Mr C McQuillan: There are a few things. For those who just want to put on a show, we have a community hire rate, which makes it accessible for such groups to use our professional-standard facilities. We also run many different kinds of community schemes. They could get a free tour of the building to see the backstage areas and talk to our team. Every week, I meet representatives from the community arts sectors and different community backgrounds to find out about their group, tell them about the building and then arrange where the appropriate interactions can take place. That is an ongoing process from week to week. It is often unique to a group. That is what we try to do. We do not do off-the-shelf programmes; we talk about the needs of a group and how we can help it to address them.

Ms McReynolds: We are incredibly open and keen to work with anyone from any part of Northern Ireland from any background. As Ciaran says, it depends entirely on where a group is and what it wants to do. One of the ways in which we try to be as cost- and time-effective as possible is by working in partnership with people who are embedded in their local communities. It would be nonsense for the MAC to try to duplicate or replicate work that already exists. Certainly, in neighbourhoods where there is little or no arts participation, we want to do more to kick-start some kind of cultural activity. We work in partnership all the time in order to extend the reach and the impact of our work.

Mr O'Hagan: Sometimes, however, we get it wrong. At the Christmas before last, Anne's idea of a Christmas tree was cabbage and broccoli and other green things.

Ms McReynolds: It was the most beautiful Christmas tree. All the young folks photographed and tweeted it. It was a roaring success. *[Laughter.]*

Mr D Bradley: I will take your word for it.

Ms McReynolds: I promised him that we would not have a scrap in front of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

Mr Irwin: Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very good, and we are encouraged by your work. In life, perceptions are a problem sometimes. There may be a perception, and some people feel, that there is a bit of a middle-class ethos about the MAC. Maybe the building sounds like that: there may be such a perception of the very building. However, have you taken any particular actions to encourage working-class communities in particular to overcome that perception?

Mr O'Hagan: I will ask Anne. We do not see communities as working class, but I understand the point and the perception. You are right: perceptions are people's realities.

Mr Irwin: That is the problem.

Mr O'Hagan: It is hard to deal with it.

Ms McReynolds: Thanks for the question, William. We have worked really hard. When you say working-class people, I think about people who just do not feel comfortable in an arts centre. That is a large proportion of the population, and we fully appreciate that. We have done so much. One of the ways in which we are pleased that we have managed is because the figures stack up. All the data and all the empirical research that we have done tell us that we are succeeding in attracting a non-traditional, hard-to-reach set of communities. Forty-six thousand three hundred and eighty people have taken part. Those are real, hard numbers; we count everything that we do. We may not tell anybody about it after we have counted it, but we count everything. In audience data, ticketed attendance at the MAC is one of the easiest things to track. When somebody buys a ticket to the theatre, you have their postcode. Although postcode analysis is not necessarily a panacea, it is the only tool that we all have to determine the breakdown of audiences. The evidence is irrefutable. It shows that in our top 50 — the people who come most regularly to see things in the MAC — are Donegall Pass, Cregagh Road, Newtownards, Belfast city centre, the Markets and lower Ormeau, Turf Lodge and Andersonstown, Cliftonville/Oldpark, Annadale, Ballynafeigh, Ballyhackamore and Orangefield.

Mr C McQuillan: Anne talked about the audience, but we also have participation. You saw that this week at the MAC we are involved in a cross-community project. That is not just in the building: on Monday night we had an arts worker in Springmartin delivering a drama workshop. Last night, we had groups from Highfield and Clonard in the building, giving a drama workshop, and they got free transport to come. We are pushing the boundaries and breaking down the barriers of perception and access to the building, and work is taking place in the communities.

Ms McReynolds: Sometimes, you have to take things with a pinch of salt, but it has been said to us so often, in so many different ways, by so many different demographic groups that they feel welcome in the MAC. The welcome that they get when they come is so overwhelming that it puts them at their ease. We must be doing something right.

When trying to measure where somebody comes from and how they are, there is also this fact. One of the productions that we put on — in order not to be perceived as elitist and because we thought that it was an important piece of new writing that needed to have a platform — was 'Fifty Shades of Red, White and Blue'. Sometimes we underestimate people's sophistication in Northern Ireland. I was in among the audience on many nights, and it was entirely mixed. You could not possibly say: "That is the type of person who came, and everybody in this audience is the same as them." There are different strokes for different folks, different programmes for different people, and different ways of engaging and talking to different people. We are mixing it up and trying to be as inventive, welcoming and open as possible. That is core to what we do.

Mr O'Hagan: In answer to your point, whilst we have very impressive numbers going through the MAC, a lot of people have not been. That is our biggest difficulty. Our marketing budget is restricted, like that of all arts groups. We have to find a better way of getting the message out. Once you get

people in, they feel comfortable. If you are not in and you have not been, it is very easy to say: "Well, that is that old place." That is the biggest challenge that we have, without a doubt.

Mr Irwin: I wish you well enough.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for your presentation; I really enjoyed it. Do you agree with me that the arts — I do not know how to put this — family is sort of, in a way, authors of their own doom? Is not the people who are going through the doors that are the problem; it is themselves. They seem to do nothing but fight with each other. I do not see the MAC in competition with arts out there. I will not mention any names, but they have their role or niche market, and you have yours. What is all the in-fighting about? That is the way I look at it, as a non-arts-type person. It is not the ones going through the door. You have your role to play. I have been in your building and, I must say, you do not realise that it is an arts venue at all when you go in. I saw the Andy Warhol exhibition and was totally fascinated by it. However, I do not understand what all this fighting is about. This thing about working class and "Your place is not for working class; it is for middle class" and all that. When the message goes out from the leaders of arts, it gives a bad impression to schools and communities.

Mr O'Hagan: I think that you are right, and it is very hard to defend. We have excellent working relationships with the Lyric, the opera house and whatever, because we complement one another. It is about trying to increase what is available for people in Belfast. I have to say that we have not come across a lot of that, but, when it becomes vocal and public, it does us all a lot of damage. It is unfortunate. So, what we try to do is deal with it in a professional way and put the facts forward.

Ms McReynolds: Oliver, if you would not mind my saying, it is a matter of deep personal regret to me that that is the case. I completely agree with you. The arts sector — not recently, but in years gone by — did itself absolutely no favours by tearing itself apart in public around issues that were stoked up from within the arts sector about what was "community" and what was "professional". I thought that we had moved far beyond that kind of conversation, because the truth is that there is no segregation. The same artists who deliver community-based projects can be seen on the stage of the MAC that night. That is why they are so exhausted: they are working in communities and working professionally. The idea that this kind of non-productive debate should be in the public domain is utterly at odds with our experience. We work so closely with every independent theatre company in Northern Ireland, every dance company, every venue. I could pick up the phone to any venue in Northern Ireland and have a fantastic conversation with my colleagues, and the same in the UK. The MAC, as one of the trustees said some time ago, is entirely a force for good, and we will not contribute to this utterly retrograde — although unfortunately well-deserved reputation — for the arts being too *[Inaudible.]* I think that it might be to do with the fact that we are all very passionate about what we do.

Mr McMullan: I do not know. The other thing that I want to ask about is the creative industries and those young people who go through them. Do you see your role there as pivotal in helping young people come through that?

Mr O'Hagan: I wish that we could say pivotal. That would be over-extending; however, it has a significant role to play. If you are designing software, you are being creative, and the skills that you need to do that are creative skills and creative skills live particularly in places such as the MAC and those who work in it. It is important to have the right climate and young people who will go to school and be interested in creative things because that is what inward investors want. We are having a boom in the film industry, software design and gaming in Northern Ireland. Those skills are completely complementary with the arts sector.

Mr McMullan: We have a diverse and growing ethnic community. I will not say that this is a haven, but it seems to be an excellent place for them to show their diverse cultures.

Mr O'Hagan: And celebrate them.

Mr McMullan: That is growing.

Mr O'Hagan: Absolutely. That is what we feel very strongly. Everyone can come in, feel comfortable and share and educate. They can feel that they are part of the MAC and, therefore, part of wider Northern Ireland society and not excluded.

Mr McMullan: I have been on the board of governors of a school for the past 15 years and have never seen anything come through about the MAC. That might be something that you could look at, getting through the education boards to the boards of governors, and maybe through social media because of the way that young people use social media now. Certainly for special needs groups, which I have a great interest in, I did not know you did that.

Mr O'Hagan: We will follow that up.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thanks very much for your presentation. It is great that you have such a wide range of activities and initiatives to provide as much variety as possible. I have been in the MAC several times and have always had a great experience. It has been very positive, so I was surprised at the criticism levelled at it. I love theatres, and compared with other theatres that I have been in, you go the extra mile to reach out to as many different people as possible. Have you heard that before? Were you surprised?

Mr O'Hagan: Yes, we were. No, we had not heard it before. That is why we welcome the opportunity to come here and put the facts on the table and let people make up their own minds. We cannot gain anything from slagging each other off. What will that do? I am sure that we will see more of his productions in the MAC. We have had them in the past. I would rather leave it at that, if you don't mind.

Ms McCorley: I just wanted to commend and congratulate you on all that you are doing.

Mr O'Hagan: Thank you.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks very much for your presentation. I declare an interest as a governor of Edenbrooke Primary School. You have been doing work there. A gentleman from America was over last year working with schools in north and west Belfast teaching ballroom dancing, if you remember. The culmination of that was in the MAC. The television was there. That was the big event that night because also that night NI21 was launched at the MAC, and I thought that would have been part of your presentation. *[Laughter.]* I made comments in the autumn of last year around disconnectivity. This inquiry is part of the outworking of that. I welcome it for this reason: I got heavily criticised for those comments, but I stand by them because they allowed discussion to be generated and people like you to come to the Committee and give presentations and testimonies of the work that you are doing with hard-to-reach communities, which is clearly impressive. However, I did not know that. As someone said earlier, a lot of people would not have known that. With all due respect, you need to look at how you tell the story and let people know what you do in a better way.

The Spectrum Centre is in my constituency, and I work closely with it. I know that, following the comments, the DCAL family was told to reach out more to the community, so we have had the Ulster Orchestra working out in the community, making connections with schools and with the Spectrum Centre. The Arts Council and the Armagh Planetarium have done similar work. I know, Ciaran, that you have been working with Mervyn Bell, who will be in front of the Committee next week. I welcome all of that hugely, but you were in the Gallery when you heard the comments made by Roger Courtney about people not crossing the bridge. We have had situations in my part of the world in which people talked about Culture Night and would go down from the Shankill to go to events there. We managed to get money for buses to go down and had some events in the Spectrum that people came up to. This is not a criticism, but I am asking generally whether there is anything more that we can do for events such as Culture Night. You are part of the Cathedral Quarter Trust, I read here. Is there more that we can do to reach out to those communities to get a bigger buy-in?

Mr C McQuillan: You are right about making greater connections with communities. That is absolutely an ongoing process for us. It is about making connections with key organisations in those areas. We are in partnership with Belfast Interface Project, which is fantastic, and that enables us to make connections on the ground in communities. The partnership that you talked about with the Spectrum Centre is really important, because the model there is that people come to the MAC to learn skills and experience skills that they then bring back to their own communities, and that bears fruit there.

As for access, we have very low priced community ticket rates for them to come to see work there, and there is transport assistance as well. We also talk about follow-on projects, which can build capacity and skills in those communities. Making that connection is all about the relationships that we

have built and the relationships that we are seeking to build further. We have been open for a short time, and to build really solid, worthwhile and meaningful connections takes time.

Mr O'Hagan: I think that there is a capacity issue here. You are very good for not saying it, Ciaran. We have just one of you, and we could do with a second Ciaran. That is what we need. It is hard to deliver much more with the limited number of people that we have, so we have to look at capacity.

Ms McReynolds: The bottom line, William, as you have recognised, is that this is a very complex issue that goes into all sorts of different areas, such as housing, education and employment. When places are particularly poorly served by the arts, they are poorly served in other ways, too. We recognise that, as an arts centre, we have a real responsibility to be relevant to people where they are in their lives — not where we think they should be, but where they actually are.

What happens every time, and Ciaran drinks more tea than anybody in this room, is that, when we eventually, after a whole series of meetings, get a community-based group to come into the MAC, the first thing that we do is to sit down and have a cup of tea with them and have a conversation to explain and show that the MAC belongs to them. The MAC belongs to the people of Belfast and of Northern Ireland. They own it, they largely built it, and that drives everything that we do, but it is a long-term process, and it is all about investment. The more money that you put into this, the greater the fruit that we will bear.

Mr Humphrey: We are obviously in very difficult economic times. When politicians have to make decisions, invariably it is the arts that will suffer, whether at council level or at government level. I think that, given the economic climate that we are currently living in, complementarity is hugely important, whether money comes from the council, the Arts Council or DCAL.

You referred to the disconnect in the sector. I am talking about Belfast, because it is the only place on which I know any sort of detail. Can more be done to have everybody work in a more collaborative way and in a complementary way to ensure that we get a bigger bang for our buck?

Ms McReynolds: We do. The impression that you have received, very understandably from recent events, suggests that the sector is a great deal more fractured than it is. It once was, but it no longer is. In the MAC, we work in partnership with every producing company and every visual artist of note in Northern Ireland, and we work as much as we can with every community-based organisation that is interested in involving itself in arts activity. We also work with the other venues. We tour our work to other parts of Northern Ireland in partnership with other venues. You can take some comfort from the fact that things are nowhere near as bad and as fractured as you might think, given recent events.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks. May I just say that the caramel squares are excellent? *[Laughter.]*

Mr McGimpsey: Thanks for the presentation. I congratulate you on the process that began many years ago in an old building and on where you are today. The achievement in getting the MAC to where it is and the sort of facility that you have is in no small measure down to your personal effort over the years. I have been impressed by what you are about.

An important issue is Unlocking Creativity, which is one of the strategies that you talked about. How do you deal with that and take that agenda forward among, for example, young people in schools? Are schools receptive? How does the initiative reach out to tap into young people's creativity and get them to understand that everybody has in them that creativity? How do you get there, and how do you support them and facilitate it?

Ms McReynolds: Of course, you were so closely involved in the development of Unlocking Creativity, Michael. I had one of my first meetings with you when you were Culture Minister about this idea for a big arts centre in the centre of the city.

Unlocking Creativity probably was not fully implemented because it was so difficult to implement. Cross-departmental working, as you know, is incredibly difficult to achieve. However, the process that you led created a space in which extraordinary and really ambitious and exciting ideas saw the light of day. The fact is that, in my experience, since 2002, the demands on teachers in schools have increased significantly. The schools that we connect with and that come to the MAC do so on the back of really deeply committed teachers, who understand and value how their teaching to the children will be enhanced through cultural participation at the same time.

I think that this is too big a nut for any one Department or any one organisation to crack. If only there were some way in which it could be recontextualised for 2014, because all the opportunities that were identified in Unlocking Creativity still hold true. Children are every bit as creative now as they were then, but teachers are slammed. They are delivering the national curriculum, and not only are their schools stripped of budgets but they find it so difficult to carve out space for anything that is not directly focused on the delivery of the curriculum. So, is there anything that the CAL Committee can do to create a space and provide some kind of opportunity to see whether there are six things that we can do out of Unlocking Creativity that will make a real difference really quickly? I do not know anybody in the arts sector who does not think that Unlocking Creativity was a brilliant policy initiative and that really great thinking went into it. I do not think that there is a huge amount of need, in revisiting it, to start again.

Mr McGimpsey: The deal was, of course, among four Departments — DCAL, DETI, DE and DEL — and the problem was always in getting them all to gel. We seem to have moved to a purely DETI initiative to provide employment in the creative sector rather than the genesis of where we meant the sector to be, where jobs are a consequence, not the actual gain. You reckon that six steps are needed. I am giving you one. What is the next one?

Ms McReynolds: What about three? We appraise our staff in the MAC over not over 12 months but six months, because it is very hard to hold your attention for anything more than that length of time. So, let us go for three within six months. I think that getting those people around the table again would be a great success. Is that two? Let us get together.

Mr McGimpsey: I am asking you to be creative here.

Ms McReynolds: I need time to be creative.

Mr McGimpsey: I know.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thanks very much for your presentation. It was very enjoyable. You have in the MAC what a lot of us would love to see in our own city or town, and we are all very jealous of it. It is a fantastic building, and I have been many a time. I am sure that I am included in the people who drank the 70,000 cups of coffee. I have not tried the caramel squares yet, so I need to go back. There you go: that is a wee bit of marketing on the Committee. It is already sold on the caramel squares.

I am looking at all that was in the diary for the week commencing 2 June. It seems to be a very busy place and quite open, particularly with the family room and the common room. It is great to see that young ones are coming in and using it for their homework club, etc. To me, that is the beginning of delivering on that shared space that has been talked about in the Assembly. There are open doors there for the MAC to take a lead of some kind and to be creative with that shared space. I am sure that there are children attending the homework club who would never have gone in and looked at a show or a performance of some kind. Doors are opening for the first time to give them an introduction to the arts.

Your presentation was excellent. There was a lot of talk about the lack of marketing or the lack of knowledge on what you deliver. You have agreed that that could have been worked a wee bit better. Success can sometimes get lost in transit, so it is up to you to sell your brand in the MAC, and I would encourage that. You spoke about the Lighthouse programme, photography and all of that. You also talked about how you deal with young adults with learning disabilities and what you supply and offer to them, and about men and women with mental health issues. That triggered something. Have you had any communication with statutory health bodies around delivery of the arts and the health benefits that it could have?

Mr C McQuillan: We have done some work in that area. We have spoken to some of the health partnerships around Belfast, in particular about providing services for senior citizens. We are putting together a programme to involve older people in the building, so we have taken some steps towards doing that. That is my knowledge from my time there.

Ms McReynolds: That goes back to one of the recommendations that Len mentioned. That is the whole idea behind the model of good practice that we mentioned in Lancaster, where they have sewn it all together. Lancaster has got health, education, employment issues, housing and the arts all as part of service level agreements. Nobody thinks — certainly nobody in the MAC — that all the

difficulties that we experience in Northern Ireland can be solved by holding a few arts workshops. However, if you were thinking about taking a holistic approach to some of the most disadvantaged members of our community, it would be so much more effective and long term if you thought about them and their needs in the round. Part of that would certainly be a lifeline — a sort of cultural engagement — but it would also be around other issues that I mentioned, such as housing, employment, health and other social services. We would love to work in that way, but that feels like a very strategic shift. We are probably not ideally located to do that. If the Committee had some practical ideas about how we could move that agenda forward for the whole arts sector and the whole sector of strategy providers, we would very much like a place at the table.

Mrs McKeivitt: I think that that would be very welcome.

Mr C McQuillan: If you need reassurance on that, we simply work with partners that have a skill set to deal with mental health issues and to improve young people's employability. The NOW project is fantastic at that. Lighthouse offers a counselling service for the members that it deals with. So, working in partnership with organisations that have a great skill set outside of what the MAC has is really important in delivering a holistic service to the individuals whom we work with.

Mrs McKeivitt: Your presentation was flowed very well. You slipped into a conversation, Anne, about a group of vulnerable young adults who first met when they began and now they come every day. You obviously have the social skills to make them feel comfortable about coming in, but we are not hearing about that.

To go back to marketing, I think that you have to invest. You talked about your long-term investment. I think that it is time to do the marketing end of that. You are busy. What could you achieve if the level of marketing went up a wee bit more? Thanks very much and congratulations.

Mr Hilditch: I want to say something in the same vein about good practice examples that you have learnt from other places. You mentioned Lancaster during the presentation and elaborated on that there now. Is there anything that we should look at in other areas that you have come across to find something that we might bring back for Northern Ireland? Lancaster seems to be the perfect type of —

Ms McReynolds: Great things happen in places where there is belief and where people genuinely value whatever it is, whether it be sport, art or music. It is driven by people in your position. You are the ones who set the agenda, and the rest of us fall in behind. That is one way of doing it.

I am going to throw what you said back at you, and I know that may not be satisfactory, but the MAC could not help but raise your spirits. I know that the CAL Committee has already met in the MAC, but I would be more than happy for the MAC to be used as a resource in whatever way, whether to inform or to inspire a series of thinking exercises. Obviously, William is totally right: we are looking into such a serious public funding environment. I fully appreciate that, but, if we are to preserve the great investment that has been made already in Belfast and in Northern Ireland as a whole and allow it to continue to grow, we have to find a way to turn up the pilot light so that the creativity that is here is allowed to shine.

The Chairperson: I thank you very much for your time and for the amount of detail that you have presented to us today. I wish you well in the future.