



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

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

18 September 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Chairperson: Mr Peter Hall, Committee Clerk

Witnesses:

Ms Jeanette McMillan	Annadale and Haywood Residents' Association
Ms Mary Trainor-Nagele	Arts and Business NI
Ms Brona Whittaker	Arts and Business NI
Ms Margaret Henry	Audiences NI
Mr Conor Shields	Community Arts Partnership
Mr Arthur Scott	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ms Mags Byrne	DU Dance
Ms Jenny Ruddy	Mencap
Mr Matt Faris	Prime Cut Productions
Ms Una Nic Eoin	Prime Cut Productions
Ms Ruth Cooper	Replay Theatre Company
Ms Jenny Bell	
Ms Jan Branch	

The Committee Clerk: We are going to start the feedback session. My name is Peter Hall. We have just come from our weekly meeting downstairs, so you will see that a number of MLAs from the Committee have joined tables around the room. From the Committee's point of view, this is an opportunity for members and us to listen to your views on the inquiry. You have already had a discussion session around three issues. Those are issues that came out of a number of the written submissions and presentations that the Committee has already received on the inquiry.

We have received almost 50 written submissions and around 10 to 12 briefings in Committee session from a wide variety of groups, including theatres and the establishment — if you want to call it that — but also community groups. One of the things that we want to do today is to hear more from people who are working on the ground in communities. We also have people here from the arts infrastructure who are listening to what you have to say. We want this to be as interactive as possible. I appreciate that we are already running a bit late, but we want to do this by getting feedback on the issues you talked about earlier.

We are recording the session for the Hansard report, and it will then be transcribed so that we can absorb it into our inquiry report as evidence. So, for everything that you say in response to the issues, you need to be on the microphone and say who you are and what organisation you represent so that the Hansard transcript can be done. I have some helpers who will circulate with microphones. I will simply go through each of the issues and try to get around as many of the tables as we can to get as much information as we can, but I guess that people have other things that they need to do this afternoon, and I appreciate that. We thank you for your patience thus far. I thank Louise and her team

from Assembly Community Connect for putting a lot of the infrastructure in place and getting a lot of you here today, and our own Committee team.

As I said, we are basing this around three issues that surfaced in the written submissions and briefings that we have had. One of those is hearing about the barriers to inclusion. A key term of reference for the inquiry is ascertaining the barriers to accessing the arts for working-class communities in particular. We have heard a lot of different barriers mentioned, but we are trying to pin down the key barrier. If you had to set other barriers aside, what would be the one that you would focus on most, and how do we overcome that?

What I would like to do now is take a raised hand from someone who is feeling brave and wants to report the table's discussion. Do not overwhelm me at once. I used to be a teacher and am used to this, so I will persevere until someone says something. You do not want to put me in that position. We have Margaret from Audiences NI. If we get her a microphone and she says who she is, we will go from there.

Ms Margaret Henry (Audiences NI): So that I am not called out by the classroom teacher, I will go first. I am the chief executive of Audiences NI, representing the discussion at our table.

A number of things came out. There was certainly a lot of consensus around the idea of perception as a barrier and of people not thinking that certain arts activities are for them. We talked a lot about the work that needs to go into overcoming that type of perception problem. Interestingly, flowing from perception, once you are able to do that — we talked about a number of examples that we have all been involved in — the practical things start to come through. I know that you mentioned the most significant barrier, but it almost feels as though there is a bit of an ecosystem or interplay involved. If you get over perception, you get into some of the practical issues around physical access, transport, and some issues around economic impacts and economic barriers. It seems that one opens up a lot to the other.

The other thing that came out around the table from people who are involved in working in the area is the kind of bureaucracy that you encounter. If, as a community organisation or an arts-focused organisation, you work to try to engage some of the hard-to-reach audiences and communities, there is a huge amount of bureaucracy. By that, I think that people were suggesting that, if you want to go to work in a particular community, where do you start? There are community groups, youth groups, health groups, perhaps a mental health group and Sure Start groups. There are so many things, and, after you have talked to about five people, the fifth person tells you that you should talk to So-and-so. So, there was a lot of talk around the bureaucracy involved.

There was a really interesting example from Greenway Women's Centre, which is running drawing classes for women in its community to raise self-esteem, raise confidence and help them to get out of the house and back into the community again, enabling them to play a full part in their community and perhaps even move into employment. However, it is being stopped by DHSSPS, which is saying, "This course isn't going to give women skills to get a job. You are teaching them how to paint". Greenway Women's Centre is replying, "Yes, but it is actually about more than that". People are having to withdraw from the course because they are being put under pressure. There is bureaucracy getting in the way of a very clear need being identified and the arts having a clear role. There is that, along with the perception issue and the practicalities that come out of that.

The Committee Clerk: That is very useful. Thank you, Margaret. The Committee has heard a lot about the perception issue and psychological barriers to accessing the arts. It has also heard a lot about the potential bureaucracy around it. We have heard a lot of organisations talk about how we can cut across Departments to look at other sources of funding. We heard this morning from the Lyric Theatre about how tiny the overall funding budget for the arts is and how it might be useful to be able to access funding from other Departments, such as DHSSPS, DE, DEL, and so on, and to look at the arts and at participation in the arts in a more holistic way. That is something that the Committee has been hearing about and will pick up on in the recommendations when the inquiry reports.

Do any other tables wish to add to that? I see a hand at the back.

Ms Brona Whittaker (Arts and Business NI): I do not want to repeat what Margaret said, but we used the exact same terminology. The community's perception of what the experience might be was a big issue for us. Keara from the Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD), who is with me today,

used the analogy from Philip from the Lyric that it is like going to the gym for the first time. You know that feeling of not wanting to step across the door and how it might feel when you get there.

We talked about the need for a more joined-up approach between Departments and the idea that, if schools and education had more of an opportunity for young people to experience the arts, there would be a better opportunity for that to continue. We talked about the notion of habit and about helping people to acquire the habit of experiencing and engaging with the arts. Amusingly, we all thought about getting rid of the word "arts". Perhaps the term in itself is a barrier, because there is that notion of a catch-all experience.

There is the factor of helping people to engage. Nisha from ArtsEkta talked about how she has worked in partnership with some of the venues to programme activities that encourage people from certain communities to come out and experience the arts as a gateway experience. That could lead people back in. In her case, it was programming minority-ethnic experiences in the Lyric and the MAC and then showing people that the venues are warm, open, accessible and somewhere that they can come back to again.

Anne from New Lodge Arts is working in partnership with people in venues to get the first experience under the belt. It is about partnership experience and working together to seed a habit and to get beyond the perception that there is a barrier to certain communities coming in.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you. Again, that is very useful. I see other hands —

Ms Whittaker: Sorry, to add to that, Jan and Nisha have drawn a big pound sign from all sorts of points of view. That pound sign keeps recurring.

The Committee Clerk: It is the elephant in the room always. I appreciate and understand that.

Ms Una Nic Eoin (Prime Cut Productions): What we talked about has a lot to do with and will back up what the other two contributors said. It was not so much perception that we came up with as the lack of real and genuine relationships between two sectors: the arts and the community and voluntary sector. It is naive to say that there is one barrier, to be perfectly honest, but it seems that there are relationships based on short-term, one-stop-shop projects versus long-term sustainable relationships. What we need is greater investment in the creation of such relationships. What we perceive might be less of an investment in consultancies and in researching all of that and perhaps more investment in creating the platforms from which those relationships can happen on a practical level.

The Committee Clerk: That is very useful. Thank you for that.

Mr Conor Shields (Community Arts Partnership): We echo near enough everything that has been said. Our consensus was that there are myriad barriers to this thorny issue. Valuing the arts was mentioned a lot at our table, as was putting the arts at the core of everything that we do as a society so that we see their relevance and benefit. That would demand some cross-cutting initiatives across government and, indeed, local government. Moreover, looking at the terminology, we can definitely be alienated by perception. Are we active participants or are we receiving audiences? The action of including needs to be supported in a very real way by the elephant in the room.

Inclusion is also about making the educational understanding more accessible. We talked about the experiences that ignite our creativity in schools and about relating that to a wider sector and showing real pathways to develop as artists and individual creatives.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee has heard a phrase that probably fits in with what you are saying. It is "wraparound arts" so that the arts are a daily part of people's lives and they are not being intimidated by the idea of the arts being some huge monolith that they cannot access. I appreciate that the Committee is hearing a lot of information on how that can be broken down and those issues met and dealt with.

There was a lot of discussion in this morning's Committee meeting about experiences of the arts, the theatre and so on from schooldays. It does not seem to be the way that it used to be, as it were. The access is not there. The schools are not going as regularly as they might once have done. There are issues around transport costs. There may also be a lack of willingness generally, and that is something that the Committee has heard a lot about and will definitely look at in its report on the inquiry.

Ms Jeanette McMillan (Annadale and Haywood Residents' Association): I am a community development worker down in Annadale. Before we can even get into the arts, we have multiple barriers to overcome in Annadale, as well as multiple issues on the ground. Key for any arts company or venue before it can deliver is the need for local knowledge of each individual area. The needs are complex, and they are creating barriers. I think that the only way in which we can do this is to address those needs first and then tailor the specific programmes. That is to give us any chance of being successful. The way in which it stands at the minute, and from being on the ground, I think that it is very much a perception by all means. It is a them-and-us situation. I feel that myself. I am here today to try to overcome that today, because I know that it is a perception. There are lots of things to do before we can get delivery, but it is all to do with research and about knowing to where it is you are delivering on the ground and what all the barriers are before we talk about communication. It is about existing issues, tensions and divisions — our history. There are lots of things stopping these programmes being 100% successful, but I believe that we can overcome that if we have a joined-up approach. That is just a starting point, but I echo everything that has been said here. I am sure that a lot more will come out of it as well.

The Committee Clerk: We are very glad that you made that step, overcome that barrier and came here today. That is what this is all about. It is about hearing from people on the ground. This is the best way that we can do that, because we understand that not everyone will want to come and brief the Committee and that not everyone necessarily wants to put in a written submission. So, what we hoped to do today was to hear from voices that we had not heard from before. We take on board what you are saying about the relationships that need to be developed to get people on the ground and to understand better what the needs of those communities are. That is very useful, and, as I said, this will all be transcribed, so it is stuff that we can reflect in the report on the inquiry and in the recommendations that the Committee decides to make.

Ms Ruth Cooper (Replay Theatre Company): I am the executive director at Replay Theatre Company. The conversation around our table absolutely reflects everything discussed so far. Perception is really the key thing for us, and I want to be careful about saying this, but there is almost a need for education on what the arts is, what it can do and the value that is placed on it — the personal, social, societal and economic benefits. We have looked at this extensively in terms of the interdepartmental recognition of the work that the arts are doing and the delivery on the range of agendas and how important that is. One of the things that we thought about and reflected on was matters raised on affordability and access. On communication, that is again about perception of the arts, but, at a very practical level, there is a lot of great work happening on awareness of those projects by the public and other organisations. We discussed whether there was a need for a resource to look at the range of existing networks and perhaps new opportunities to get the message out there.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee is very aware from the evidence that it has gathered so far that there is an issue with communication, drawing people together and building networks. In the evidence this morning from the Lyric Theatre, we heard that it desperately wants to plug into the networks that you represent, but it is about how to bring people together and how to know where to go to find people to talk to. There is a lot of work to be done on that. It is certainly something that we are aware of and that will be reflected in the Committee's inquiry report and some of the recommendations that are made.

I am going to see whether anyone else wants to comment on the first theme. If not, I will move on to the second, because I am conscious of time. The second theme is about supporting resources for artists and performers. We have heard from the groups that have spoken to us when they have come before the Committee and from the written submissions that we have received that a lot of the artists and performers would love even to be working-class. A lot of them are either working for free, working out of their own pocket or working for below minimum wage. They do not even effectively qualify as being, in an abstract way, working-class.

We have also heard how vital those people are to bringing the arts right into the heart of communities, schools, and so on, so that things can be done on people's doorsteps, in people's schools or in the community centre down the road. How do we develop and support programmes so that those people are supported properly and not having to work voluntarily, and so that we can have them as a resource for people who want to access the arts and for communities that want to build participation in the arts but that need people to guide them and act as a lead in showing them what they can do themselves?

We have heard a lot in various briefings about how the arts can build confidence in people and how a lot of community efforts are being put into using the arts as a confidence-builder and a way of getting people to realise their potential. We are really trying to get ideas around how we support those professionals who are doing that. Again, I am looking for hands for this one, and we will rush a microphone to you. Conor has his hand up.

Mr Shields: This is a huge area. We did not necessarily focus exclusively on community, but we did look at the various issues that touch on the life of a professional artist or artist facilitator. We looked at issues such as the affordability of the artists themselves and the setting of a rate. A few years ago, we heard that artists were perhaps earning £7,500 per annum. I contend that a lot of them are earning less. If that is the case, that means that, across a year, they are earning less than minimum wage. We look at schemes such as tax breaks in the Republic, for example, where up to €47,000 can be earned by artists before they pay any tax. That is very different from what it used to be, of course, but still allows for greater opportunity.

We need to attract artists here, but we also need to maintain the existing infrastructure. We were concerned about the pulling — not "pooling" — of resources, because we need ways in which to support the networks that exist. We also need to value the artist. We are very keen as a society to reflect the genius of our legendary artists and to see their value, but how do we value the newly developing artists who are there to inspire and be creative supporters of new populations and new generations? We felt that more collaborative partnership-working and more opportunities for artists to work was necessary to support the artist and therefore support creativity at the centre of our community, because, at the moment, demand is far outstripping supply.

The Committee Clerk: It sounds as though this is a particularly complicated issue. That was one of the reasons that we wanted to have this as a discussion item today. Clearly, there are ways of helping professional artists, arts facilitators or however else they work in the arts, but it is not straightforward. Obviously, it is going to be like some of the other issues that have been raised, one of which was around proper networking and communication. It is about cross-departmental funding as well. A lot of the key areas that we are hearing about are probably health and education. They have the huge budgets. If you compare the arts budget with their budgets, it is a tiny drop in the ocean. Those are the places that the Committee has heard that it may need to look to for resources for this kind of thing.

Ms McMillan: I am not sure whether this directly relates to the question, but it is what came into my mind. Regarding the artists, it is key for people working on the ground that we see not just the work being done by them but their work being promoted. It needs to be promoted day in, day out to replace all the negative publicity out there. They are doing all this great work, and I have seen the progress, but it is no good that it be shown in just a wee clip on the TV that I do not even know is coming on. There needs to be something there that is in our faces at all times. Long before I got really involved in doing some of the positive work, I thought that it did not happen in other communities, because there are a lot of sensitivities. There is a barrier for people as to why they choose not to do that, but, from seeing it happen in a community that was similar to ours, it gave me an inspiration to start something. I am sure that there are other people like me sitting thinking about the way in which it works. It is not happening often enough. The arts need to be promoted and televised, and then others will see that and come on board. I am talking about the ordinary people — the residents on the ground. They will want to be part of that. We need to go from our communities out into the city centre or across Belfast. The work that communities do definitely needs to be promoted to get others on board.

The Committee Clerk: We have heard some ideas around using the theatres that we have and public spaces, museums and other exhibition facilities for that kind of community work to be shown. We have a lot of evidence, written and in the briefings that the Committee has received, that a massively useful way to build confidence in a community is through seeing something that they have created being put on in a public place, such as on the stage or in a gallery, museum or other exhibition area. Again, it is going to come down to communication, building networks and relationships, and community groups and, for want of a better phrase, the arts infrastructure coming together much more. It is about the people whom we are talking about being able to facilitate that and helping people to bring out the artistic potential that they all have. A big issue that we have heard about is that we all have artistic potential, but, in so many cases, it is just never being tapped. It is not necessarily being tapped in school. If it has not been tapped there, it probably will not be tapped later, because people give up on that as they look to other responsibilities in their life, and so on. It is a very important area. The Committee will have to look at how that can be done and how it can make recommendations that will facilitate what has been said today.

Mr Matt Faris (Prime Cut Productions): I am Prime Cut Productions' outreach manager. We talk about support and resources for artists. A lot of the time, because we have less money, our futures are so uncertain that it is difficult to know what we will be doing in the future, never mind starting to create relationships, networking and stuff. We are not sure what we are going to do, so it is about, first, having the time and space to create connections, be that with a community group or another arts organisation. Then, it is about having the space to have a clear plan, as opposed to delivering project by project. It is about having more certain futures so that we can talk about the next three years of work, see who else can be tied into that and then go about creating the relationships and delivering something that includes everyone, including a community and an arts organisation that is promoted so that it makes further impacts for that community.

The Committee Clerk: That ties in very heavily with the third issue that we are going to look at. We will come to it in a minute. Before we get too far into that, we will hear from this lady. We will then come back to that issue.

Ms Jenny Bell: It is a bit like what Matt said. We had thought about a website to reach the community leaders, who will then reach someone like you, Jeanette, on the ground. The theatres and the arts could create that website, because nobody wants to get emails every day.

Ms McMillan: Our table came to the same conclusion. There needs to be a central point of information and a website, and, initially, a central point for stuff that can be uploaded and everything that is going on. We did have a website, but we soon did away with it because it was not going anywhere on the ground. So, we came up with a Facebook page. Again, it is another barrier. A lot of people come up against the issue of not being able to take photographs. We are fortunate that, because we work with the local residents, their kids are up for the photographs being taken. That is brilliant for us. Everything that we do is uploaded, and we get the approval. If the likes of the central place had something similar, young people or anybody else could add and upload, if that is possible, to the website and comment on it. You will have that feedback. It is up to the arts people, the venues and the community workers, and it is then up to us to let our young people, because they are linked to, say, Facebook, get as many people as possible on to that. They have that opportunity. The tool that they use is Facebook.

Ms Jenny Bell: I am hearing today that there is not that awareness from people on the ground. You could not have a Facebook page for everybody on the ground, but you could have one for the community leaders.

Ms McMillan: I have one, and I am saying that I could link into that other one.

Ms Jenny Bell: Link into the arts, because at Reclaim the Agenda and International Women's Day, we link with Falls Women's Centre, Shankill Women's Centre, Greenway Women's Centre, the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) — all the other women's centres. We have a link to Women's Link, and anybody can put their tuppence worth on there. This could maybe be something like that.

The Committee Clerk: That is the sort of idea that we are looking at with Assembly Community Connect. I do not want to cut across Louise and the ideas that she has, but it was always part of the intention of Assembly Community Connect to develop that online presence and connections, and so on. Whereas a Committee has only a limited resource to do that, Assembly Community Connect's purpose is to connect with the community and voluntary sector to build up a database for events such as today's so that it can support the work of the Committees and the Assembly in getting down to the roots of the communities and talking directly to people on the ground.

Ms McMillan: I am thinking about the Facebook page that is set up. The arts people set it up, and we link into it. But there is a way of setting it up. Sometimes, if you create a "like" page, it does not have the same impact. You have to create it as though you are an ordinary user on the ground, and you then have more scope with it. That is important, too, because the "like" page seems to disappear again. It is maybe about how the page is set up most effectively.

Mr Shields: No conflict of interest at all, but I am here to plug the Community Arts Partnership's website at comartspartner.org. It is one of myriad resources that are represented in this room. Every Tuesday evening, a free newsletter goes out to over 3,000 users, primarily of community arts, in Northern Ireland. Any community group can use that as its resource and can feature itself and see

funding news, events news, opportunities, tenders for artists and how to connect into a phenomenally active, phenomenally energetic community arts network right across Northern Ireland and, indeed, beyond. Voluntary Arts Ireland, Audiences NI and Culture NI are in this room. Lots of people are working very hard to try to get that message out. If you link in through social media to what is going on tomorrow as part of Culture Night, you will see the host of resources that are out there on social media. I know that having everything on social media could in itself be part of the problem, but it is one of the very accessible ways in which we are all trying to get the message out. It is an absolutely free resource. Information on all of the organisations that I have talked about is freely accessible.

The Committee Clerk: I have to agree with that. Until we developed a Committee Twitter account, I had never looked at Twitter. I have learned a huge amount, even from the remit-based groups that we follow in the Culture, Arts and Leisure remit. It is a tremendous resource, as Conor said. You find out a lot about what is going on. There are definitely ways in which we can develop that so that there is much more of an online presence.

Ms Henry: I want to pick up on the point on valuing. We talked a lot about having information resources. If you are a community organisation and want to engage an artist, where do you start to look? We also talked about having some idea of a common standard. Not every artist will be a successful facilitator, which requires a different skill level and skill set. Also, particular artist facilitators work in particular areas but not in others, so how do you know where to start to get the right person?

We were also talking about — I do not want to bring everything back to money, but we have said it often enough — people offering artists such low rates, sometimes because they think that when applying for funding, a prospective funder will welcome that. Delivering for such little money is almost seen as a good thing. Funders and funding organisations should challenge that by asking, "Is it fair to pay that amount an hour for a professional artist to work with your community group? What are the benchmark rates in the Republic, the rest of the UK and beyond?" Until we get some sensible, open and transparent discussions on rates and value, we will be stuck in the situation of undervaluing, in financial and other terms, what professional artists offer and deliver.

The Committee Clerk: Absolutely. It is useful to hear that.

Ms Nic Eoin: I echo what Conor and Margaret have just said. First, the Community Arts Partnership's newsletter is outstanding and is, without doubt, my weekly go-to. Margaret, you also talked about the value of the arts and wages. You said that one rate needs to be set, and there is no doubt in my mind about that. There needs to be consensus across Government for that — a minimum wage, if you will, that reflects the number of hours worked. It is not per-hour delivery. That is not what an hourly rate pays for; it pays for all of the preparation, evaluation and any and all of the administration that the artist has to do. So £20 an hour suddenly becomes £3 an hour. That is how it works, and there needs to be recognition of that.

At our table, we talked about the development of — I do not want to be flippant — something along the lines of a web dating service between the arts sector and the community sector. The aim would not be to double up on any of the important resources that we have now, but there are community resources and there are arts resources, and there is a lack of knowledge between the two sectors about where to go. I am not talking about giving news on funding or anything like that. Rather, it would be almost a mini social network, in which each person could have a place. It would incorporate venues; arts organisations; arts facilitators; the artists themselves, community organisations; community workers who want to work in the arts on an independent basis; and even a volunteer section. In that way, the next time that we decided to seek funding for a project, we would not have to make a load of cold calls asking people whether they were right for our project. We could look up that resource and say, "These are the subjects we are thinking about. These are the things that are useful and relevant to these guys here. Now, now let's have a conversation". It would give us a little information before making the first phone call.

It would be easily enough set up, and each organisation or individual could easily keep their information refreshed. As I said, it is basically a way of getting to know one other. It is not about the kind of training opportunities that come through the Community Arts Partnership. However, if, for instance, our organisation got some money for training, we might be able to offer that training to other organisations, which might benefit from it on a community or arts level. We have had situations in which we have had the money to deliver training to upwards of 50 people but have had only 20 recipients, simply because we did not really know how to get the word out or it was not reaching the right people. It is that kind of thing that we are talking about.

The Committee Clerk: We are very much tuned into the idea of better networks and how we do a lot more of this online because, compared with other means, it is live and much more instantaneous.

Mr Arthur Scott (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I want to pick up on the theme of the value of the arts, which plays into how artists are valued in the work that community groups do, particularly across government and the wider public sector in Northern Ireland. It is a message that the Minister and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure have been very keen to try to advocate in government and across the public sector. Often, the focus, particularly now, in a time of scarce resources, is on economic value, but the arts are worth so much more in terms of their educational potential, social inclusion, and health and well-being. The arts will not provide an answer to the problems or challenges that we face as a region, but they can provide very important staging points in the development of skills, self-confidence and personal realisation, and even perhaps by creating and inspiring personal ambition. The pitch for the community organisations that the Department uses across government is that those non-financial wider benefits have to be recognised. Sometimes, in the debate for the allocation of resources, there is too much emphasis on the economic value of arts and not enough on the other very important aspects, which tie in very clearly to agreed priorities in the Executive's Programme for Government.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee has certainly understood that, and it will be reflected in the inquiry report. The arts have an intrinsic value on which you cannot necessarily put an economic figure. They certainly have huge benefits for health, inclusion and so on, as you laid out.

Ms Jan Branch: I am a freelance producer and consultant. I worked in the arts in Northern Ireland for 40 years. I endorse very much the remarks about the value of the arts. Unfortunately, in Northern Ireland, the artists have very little value in public and social terms. There have been references to the levels of pay, or the lack of pay, for freelance artists.

The arts as a career are not rated. There are people doing arts degrees in the University of Ulster and Queen's. When they leave, of a group of 40, probably two, if they are lucky, will find a job in the arts. The rest will take a piece of paper — their degree — and move into something else. For those who want to stay in the arts and are prepared to earn not very much and persevere, there is no training programme. They leave with a degree, but there is no training programme or system of progress. There is no bursary system for working with a company to learn the trade as an intern. You can work as an intern, but you will not be paid. There is no system for providing the future core group of quality freelancers trained to a level that will produce the results that you seek through the inquiry.

The Committee Clerk: That is an important issue and one that the Committee picked up on in a previous inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries. It is being worked at in government, particularly with the Department for Employment (DEL) and Learning trying to create arts-based apprenticeships and so on. It is a slow process — there is a lot of bureaucratic slowness to it — but it is an issue that has been picked up on. We will certainly reflect that again in this inquiry. The Committee has been a huge supporter of the STEAM agenda — adding the arts to the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. As you say, it is all very well getting young people to study arts subjects at school, college and university, but they must have somewhere to go. We are very much alive to that.

The final question brings funding to the floor, but in a much more specific way. I know that at the forefront of all your minds is the thought, "If only we had more money". The Committee knows and gets that. Every submission has said that and every briefing has emphasised that, but what we are trying to get at today is how a funding model can be developed that works better. It used to be that funding ran over a longer cycle, but, over the past number of years, funding cycles have got shorter and shorter. You are talking about a year, if you are lucky, and potentially less, maybe six months or three months.

The lead-in periods are shorter and more bureaucracy is involved in trying to get funding. We have often heard in evidence through our sessions with stakeholder groups that a project that has worked really well in an area cannot be repeated in the same area because conditions of funding mean that it has to be done somewhere else. So you build a community up to a point and then have to back away. The phrases "parachute programmes" and "parachute funding" have been used.

We are looking for ideas for an ideal funding model. What do you need for funding to work? What do you need for funding to do the things that it should do?

Ms Nic Eoin: It needs to be sustainable. The reality is that, if you have shorter funding periods, you increase the administration and cut down on the delivery. It is as simple as that. It is a self-perpetuating monster. Eventually, instead of, say, 10% of the time being spent on fundraising and 90% on delivery — commensurate with that are the investment in time and, therefore, money — it is about 50:50 and will get worse and worse.

I suggest — I am not speaking on behalf of the table — that, if we are going to talk about the value of the arts in education, health and across every sector mentioned so far, including employment and the rest of social welfare, do we not need those Departments also to start recognising that and releasing money, as was mentioned? In that way, there would not only be joined-up thinking at government level but in the administration that is part of that, so we would not have to fill out between six and eight funding forms for one project versus the one that we can and should do.

Even at local government level, there should be joined-up thinking between the councils and Stormont so that we could do one return whereby you have the same information that you need for all your information and feedback. I am very much a believer in rigorous analysis. We need to see whether things are working or not, but we do not need to be spending 90% of our time ticking boxes, especially ones that have no relevance to anyone — for example, the gender preference of children aged six to 10, which is common.

There is an awful lot of time and, therefore, money wasted. That needs to be cut back on — 100%. Once there is a funding model that is about delivery, the arts and the work getting out to the people who need and benefit from it, as opposed to a cycle of administration that seems to be purely about keeping people in positions of analysis, we might get down the business that we are all paid to do.

The Committee Clerk: Absolutely. Thank you for that.

Ms Whittaker: We covered the issue of sustainability, but we also wanted to talk about the wider issue of support across Northern Ireland and the notion of rural and urban communities. As Una touched on, we talked at length about joining up with the super-councils and the fact that, in a very short time, there will be 11 councils versus the 26 councils that we have now. We will have to engage with a smaller number of councils, and the funding model will have to work in that sphere as well. This venue in Belfast will have a very different model from the one that might exist in, for example, Larne or Ballymena. The approach that we will have to take is to encourage those councils to look at a strategy that engages the entire council area — not just the lead council area but the rural areas as well. That might give us a funding model whereby we could work within areas that are not resourced. We talked about the likes of Moyle, which is a very small area that might not have a venue within 20 miles. Therefore, it is not necessarily just about sustaining the bricks and mortar of existing venues; we must also sustain the quality of the arts engagement that goes into them. It is a question of how we can get the groups that are in the room to engage in those areas and how we can seed that activity.

The Committee Clerk: Today, the Committee has picked up on the issue of capital investment and infrastructure versus money for programming and ensuring that you have —

Ms Whittaker: That is it exactly. We need quality programming.

The Committee Clerk: Also, I am getting the idea that no single funding model suits everyone and that you will have to look at variable models, depending on the context.

Ms Whittaker: We did not think of this as an answer, but we have talked to Damian Smyth from the Arts Council about the notion of an outreach or engagement fund. Organisations could look at that to apply for access and participation funding in a way that engages the councils, and it could be an overall approach. Looking at rural and urban areas beyond Belfast, we felt, controversially, that the nine councils outside Belfast could start to think about the activity that happens there at a more strategic level and maybe apply to a central fund for access and participation work specifically.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee has thought about that. Obviously, we do not want a battle of urban versus rural; we want them to complement each other, and we want those connections to be made. The Committee is looking at that and has returned to that issue a number of times. I like the idea of a central fund and getting everyone to contribute to that and cooperate on it.

Ms Whittaker: We liked the notion of councils and organisations pitching in together and having a real partnership approach.

The Committee Clerk: It is certainly an interesting idea that is worth thinking about.

Ms Jenny Ruddy (Mencap): I want to come in on that point. I represent people who have a learning disability. Often, there is a lot of good community work specifically with groups of people with a disability, but it is about inclusion and moving them more into mainstream arts activities. On the question of the funding model, we should not make people work together or force collaboration; rather, we should give them flexibility. People should look, for example, at whether they are already working with minority groups in their area and then continue to fund that, rather than making people work across areas in which they do not already work. When we talk about deprivation, we tend to talk about deprived areas rather than deprived groups. That geographical split does not work for everyone; people with a disability live everywhere. Therefore, when we talk about areas, sometimes those who live across different communities get left out.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee is very conscious of the issue of how to make sure that everyone is included and ensuring that activities for people with different disabilities are more mainstreamed so that we are not isolating them as a group and then trying to work round that. As you say, artificial cooperation for the sake of reducing bureaucracy is not particularly useful; it is time-consuming and will waste funding.

Ms Mary Trainor-Nagele (Arts and Business NI): I want to reiterate the points made about value and impact. If we start by getting better at telling our story and capturing our value, that might help us to unlock funding from the other Departments mentioned today. It might also inspire people who have not engaged with us before to do so.

A point was made about partnership. We talked about engagement with the business community, and a lot of businesses are engaging with the arts because they can see that it is a way of connecting with communities. There are some great examples of projects with the companies that we work with addressing that issue by taking a three-way approach.

We also talked about trusts and foundations and whether there is an opportunity to look at an arts fund. We could look at the likes of community foundations, which Arts & Business would be keen to explore. We are encouraging the sector to look more at trusts, but, if we are talking about a strategic approach, we would need a fund, or maybe a philanthropist such as the one who came forward this week, which could dedicate money to the arts. It is about us getting better at shouting and making our case. From the trust and community foundation perspectives, we are certainly happy to lead on that conversation.

The Committee Clerk: That message seems to be coming out of what we are discussing today. It is about a fund that people can access rather than having to go through all sorts of other very complex bureaucratic hoops, meaning that people are tied up doing that rather than working on the ground.

Ms McMillan: In addition to the administration and time spent on funding applications, I have experience, over the last couple of years, of how complex the applications are getting. They are meant to be for the community sector but use so much jargon that, to be honest with you, sometimes you are simply trying to understand. That is not down to any one funder in the arts; they all seem to have their own jargon, and it does not always make sense to those of us who work on the ground. Their use of percentages and so on is difficult. That needs to be reviewed and made more user-friendly so that we understand it.

Some funders have started doing something that I think is fantastic. I have seen a big difference and saved a lot of time. For large applications, which they usually are when it is a large programme, you have access to somebody in the arts, so you can ring up and arrange a meeting. You can sit down together with your application so that you know that you are going in the right direction. The last thing I want to happen is to have come at an application from a different angle, because I am thinking in a certain way, and then realise that I have done it wrong. Those are wee things, but it is time-consuming to be constantly wondering whether you are getting it right. With these SMART objectives and all of that, it is getting ridiculous. It feels like I am becoming a robot, moving away the English that I was taught to talking in another language. We need training as well. It is easier to get somebody to come out and guide us, and we will then be able to submit applications much more quickly.

The Committee Clerk: Potentially, it is about the focus of application forms being to cut to the chase and get to the point rather than people having to do all these other things in between.

Ms Henry: I want to pick up on the discussion on monitoring. There is an absolute need to monitor the results of various types of funding, but, sometimes, as was expressed at our table, there seems to be a black hole: people submit monitoring information and it is never seen again. So, there might be a question about the value and usefulness of the information supplied and where it is being held and correlated. In that way, when we come to tell our story, we will have already supplied the data individually and by sector. However, nowhere is all that data pulled together to bring out key insights, key areas for development or key ways of telling our story. It is about being cleverer and maybe asking for less information, but information that we know will, ultimately, have a use, so that it is not just time spent filling out forms. Some work could be done there.

The Committee Clerk: That is very sensible. We will take that on board and reflect it in the Committee report.

Ms Mags Byrne (DU Dance): My point reiterates and underlines exactly what Jeanette and Margaret have just said. It is almost a plea to the Committee to do anything that it can to lessen the administrative load on community and arts organisations, big and small. The administrative load involved in application, reporting and operation is huge. Anything that can be done to lessen that load would be hugely appreciated.

The Committee Clerk: Everybody is speaking with one voice on that.

Ms M Byrne: I want to underline something that was said much earlier and came up a lot at our table, which is that it takes time to build relationships. I am not talking about over one or two projects, which goes back to what you said about parachuting, but over years. Sometimes, that work is not necessarily "very sexy", but it is ongoing. There seems to be a sense that, to get funding now, we have to invent something magnificent that will be wonderful and tick all your and everybody else's boxes forever. The real relationship work is ongoing and day to day.

Mr Shields: I reiterate everything that was said at this table. We have people here from Play Resource, Arts for All, the Belvoir Players, the Arts Council and the Community Arts Partnership. We know that demand far outstrips supply. In funding, more is more. All these organisations are competing for pots of funding, and each application that fails represents a failed opportunity for communities that want to take part in the arts. This year, we have experienced unprecedented cuts in the arts, so that fragile ecology is being made even more fragile and difficult. We talked about inappropriate levels of bureaucracy and absolutely agree with and reiterate the points made about that, but we are also scared about the lack of statutory obligation to provide for the arts. Perhaps there could be such an obligation on our new councils. We want to have some surety on that.

However, most of all, we want to have appropriate escalating funding models so that people can be funded where they find themselves, not just community groups but mid-scale artists, top artists, whoever it might be, so that we have ways of getting into a funding resource process. We looked at other mechanisms that could support the arts in a more complementary way. Steps to Work programmes were talked about, as were other funding models — perhaps not direct funding models but supporting a more nuanced funding model.

That was as quick as I could be.

The Committee Clerk: That was very good; I am impressed. I suspected that we would finish on funding and we have. As I said at the outset, it is always the elephant in the room. We will draw to a close because lunch is waiting, and I know that you are all probably starving.

On the Committee's behalf, I would like to thank you for coming today, having such a useful discussion, allowing us to be part of that and providing feedback. Only by hearing from you can we know what is happening on the ground so that we can reflect that in the Committee's report on this inquiry and in the recommendations that it makes.

There are a few other things that I want you to do. Do not forget to tweet about today, and, if you use our Twitter address, @NIACALCommittee, we will see your comments. The Committee does not necessarily follow all of you. Once you follow us, we will follow you, which is a great way for us to find out what you are all doing. If you also hook up to Assembly Community Connect, your tweets will also

be on that stream, so more people will see them. Our hashtag today, and I think that it is very reflective of how we all feel, is that there is plenty to think about. That has been our hashtag throughout this inquiry. We have been given a lot of information today, which was what we had hoped for.

If you are involved in Culture Night tomorrow, tweet about that. We monitor all tweets to see what is going on and will retweet as many as we can. Thank you again.