



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: The Talent Tribe

16 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Nelson McCausland (Chairperson)
Mr Gordon Dunne (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Leslie Cree
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Basil McCrea
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Ms Fedelma Harkin	The Talent Tribe
Ms Jean Mallon	The Talent Tribe
Mr Paul Simpson	The Talent Tribe

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I welcome our visitors from the Talent Tribe to the Committee inquiry. We have the director, Fedelma Harkin; Paul Simpson, who is a member of the advisory panel; and Jean Mallon. It says Megan Thompson, but it is actually Jean Mallon stepping up to the mark today. You are all very welcome to the Committee. Would you like to make an opening statement and tell us a little about your work?

Ms Fedelma Harkin (The Talent Tribe): Yes. Thank you very much, Chair. Because we have been here before, I will just give a very brief refresher for those who have not met us and are yet to have that joy. I will lay a bit of foundation. The Talent Tribe was founded in 2008. So, we are a relatively young organisation, but, as you can see, Paul and I are recycled. As an organisation, because we are young, we draw from an advisory panel, and that is the wisdom that Paul brings from his background. He will explain that when he takes over with the presentation and looks at our strategy. The Talent Tribe is a registered charity. We train for the arts and creative industry using the industry to train. We work with everyone but particularly target those who are marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable. Our mission is to make the arts and the creative industries accessible to everyone.

I have read all the evidence presented to the Committee as part of its inquiry, and I realise that you have already been furnished with so many sectorial stats that they could probably do you a lifetime. So, I thought that we would concentrate more on the human-face impact and focus on one project that we are delivering that exemplifies the sort of work that we do. It is a creative arts engagement with very talented young women between the age of 16 and 24 who are not in employment, education or

training. They are typical of the people whom we are trying to give access to. The project is called Gateway to Progression and the lead partner is the Training for Women Network.

I will give a little bit of background on the young women we have interfaced with. There are 139 young women so far, 128 of whom are single mums. We have worked in Derry/Londonderry, Kilcooley, Short Strand, Poleglass, the Falls, Sandy Row and Taughmonagh to date. Of that group of young women, we met 28 in homeless hostels; 111 required childcare assistance because they had no extended family support; 39 had previously been diagnosed with forms of depression, anxiety and mental illness; 53 had experienced some form of domestic abuse; and 20 had more than three children and were under 24. So, that will perhaps give you a flavour.

As you can see from the leaflet, there was a range of potential choices. We adapted around the interests of the young people so that the project became more bespoke. None of the young people I am going to focus on in the group was interested in the creative industries when we met them. I cannot let you see the rest of the projects that were crafts and skill-based and the theatre experiences because, once they show, they have gone. I cannot show you a fabulous project that happened in the Playhouse theatre, and I cannot show you the project now, either. It is on film. I wanted you to evidence that film because you will find that you have seen much less quality on your screens made by professionals. It is outstanding. For us, the product is as important as the process because of the impact that it has on the young people. You can put "excellence" and "community" in the one sentence, and we can prove it; we do it every day of the week.

We met the 10 young women involved in a homeless hostel in Belfast. That meeting was arranged for us, because we work through the community, by the Falls Women's Centre. The group chose film-making, and, because we are committed to giving them a voice through these processes, we used the form of storytelling

That is not new; it is used in so many different facets of life now. We already supplied you with some random stories. We purposely did not supply you with the stories from the film because we did not want to ruin it. They are examples of the point of entry; the sort of personal stories that we start to get from the young women. Our 10 young women in that group were all single mothers. None had a particular interest in that world at all. I honestly believe that they were enticed because the project offered childcare. When I asked one of them at the start, I expected her to say that she would love to be discovered or something similar, but she said, "If I could just have a shower without a child holding onto my leg, it would be a result".

Let us look at the process that they went through. In stage 1, they completed their stories. That takes a long time because they have to trust; there is a lot of building up and engagement. We then issued them with the transcripts of their stories with their names changed. I changed all the names so that at no stage can anyone's personal story be taken back to them. When they read their personal stories, we had a really interesting reaction: they kept telling us, "These are too sad". I said, "Well, there's pens there. They're your stories. Let's start changing them". They said, "No, they're right, but they're too sad". I agree with them: when they told their stories to us, they had us in convulsions laughing, but I suggested to them that maybe it was the way in which they were telling the stories, not the content of the story, and that perhaps their manner of telling the story using humour was a coping mechanism. One of them immediately said, "This film has to be a comedy". They have ownership of it, so I said to them that I had a group of mentors — we use the industry to train — in mind, and that, if they approved them, I would approach them and ask. I suggested the Hole in the Wall Gang

The girls were very excited about that. The Hole in the Wall Gang agreed. The process that followed was an interface. Their work with those young women was incredible. It was a journey, but because the young women were working with people whom they saw on television who were working in the industry, they just kept growing and growing. I asked them, "If I were giving a brief to the Hole in the Wall Gang, what would you want it to be?". This was after about eight weeks. This group of young women who were practically monosyllabic when we started our interface with them came back with the sentence, "We want the audience to realise that we are strong women". The journey, at that stage, had already been incredible; the journey that followed with the Hole in the Wall Gang was immense.

At this stage, I was hoping to show the film. It came about because one of the girls said, "You know, society sees us as zombies. It really does. It thinks that we are trying to work the system. That is how it describes single mums", and all the rest of it. Michael from the Hole in the Wall Gang said, "Maybe we should make a horror comedy, then. That is an interesting model and genre". One of the girls immediately came back and said, "That sort of works — horror — because we are mummies", so

the project became 'Mummies V Zombies'. It is only around three minutes long. I hope that you get a chance to see it.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): We will circulate the video, so that everybody gets a chance to see it.

Ms Harkin: I think that what I was purposely doing was leading you down to how you interface with these young women at first. Damon said to me as we went into filming, "We are going to have a problem with people". When you see them on the screen, you cannot see the join between them and the professional actors. These were young women who said, "We're not going on camera". It just was immense. Jean continually told me that I had to stop wearing mascara because the panda look was not good. I spent my whole time gurning because they were doing so well. It was just incredible to see the transformation in those young people.

As regards the actual outcomes for those young women, three of them have gone on to get employment in other jobs outside the organisation. The transferable skills are bound to have helped them on that interface and interview. One of them got pregnant again. One has too many commitments at the minute, but is writing and being mentored on a continuous route by the Hole in the Wall Gang because they think that she has real potential. One is on hold because her children are so young. One of them we now employ in make-up and have got her work in the industry. You should see the make-up. It is phenomenal and is done by this woman who is mentored of course by the industry. One works with us now on an internship. Two of them are being written in as cast for the Hole in the Wall Gang's new series called 'Number Twos', which I am sure all of you will enjoy as it focuses on Stormont.

That was a snapshot of a doorway that we opened into the magical world that we live in — this world of creativity and of applied creativity and skill. I think that it is the art of the magic. The project is now 18 months old. At two years, the funding stops. I know that you have already heard before about parachuting in and the lack of continuity in delivery. So, although we struggled to find a route afterwards for these young women, it does not exist at the moment.

I would like to bring Jean in. She was going to talk after the film. Because she has come through the process, she will briefly give a personal view.

Ms Jean Mallon (The Talent Tribe): I came into the Talent Tribe through an internship in 2011. It was through a volunteer scheme for people who could not find jobs. I came in through a completely different discipline as a graphic designer. I fell in love with it immediately. I was working with young people, going out and doing projects. In the first week, we were filming with an American film company. I thought that this was a world that I really wanted to get into. Like many of the girls in this project, I did not know half of the jobs that are available in the creative industries. I thought that a production manager was someone who stood by a conveyer belt. When I realised just what you actually had to do to become a production manager, I took it on on top of the job that I had. I built up the skills, trained on the job, made all the mistakes, and then worked with the young people. I have been doing it for four years now.

The film that we were going to show would be my fifth film credit. The magic of the industry is something that I loved to share with the young women who came through this because they know that it works, not only with regard to being able to production-manage my own film, but because I am also in a position in the Talent Tribe that I otherwise would not have had the opportunity to be in had I not come through an internship and really fallen into it.

Ms Harkin: Hopefully, that gives you a slice. It is about going forward with a strategy. What we are doing is proving that the model works every day of the week. I am not overstating that; I really mean it. However, we are limited because we do not know what happens next. We have all that worthwhile stuff happening here, we have the industry happening here, and there is no join-up. That is really what I would like Paul to take over on as he looks at our suggestion for a strategy.

Mr Paul Simpson (The Talent Tribe): Good morning, Chairman and members. Really, what we want to do is get from a position where transient support is being offered in passing to a position where there is permanent support in place for communities like this and the young people in them to give them a chance to show their talents.

We gave evidence to the Committee at your inquiry into the potential of the creative industries last May. At that point, we explained our vision of having a creative-industries or performing-arts school — call it whatever you like — permanently in place to provide the ladder for people at the bottom, in a sense, to get to the top. We asked the Committee at that stage for its support to make an approach to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to basically — it is fairly modest — carry out an economic appraisal into the deliverability, feasibility or possibility of having some sort of creative-industries school in Northern Ireland.

We were very happy indeed that the Committee supported that and, in fact, wrote to the Minister in July 2013 supporting our proposal. That, in turn, produced fruit because then we had a meeting with the Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín, in October 2014 to present our proposals to her for an economic appraisal. We were delighted when she said that she supported the concept and would indeed commission an economic appraisal. DCAL officials then asked me if I could provide them with terms of reference for an economic appraisal, which we did. We provided that shortly after our meeting. Then we waited for something to happen. Nothing did. I have to say that.

Despite several enquiries from me, we heard nothing more from the Department for nearly a year. Fedelma then prompted the Minister by writing to her in July 2014. We got a reply from her on 29 August 2014, which was very disappointing. Basically the letter said that a feasibility study could not be carried out during the 2013-14 year due to budgetary priorities. We waited nearly a year to hear that there was no money for a feasibility study. So, the Minister suggested in her letter that Fedelma should make a presentation of her proposal — basically what we had taken to the Committee last year — for the school to a newly formed ministerial advisory forum.

I understand that its membership consists of the local board membership of Creative and Cultural Skills and Creative Skillset. It is chaired by the Department. I believe that it had its first meeting on 2 September, although I have no details about what it discussed. It is not on the website. The Minister said that if Fedelma would make her proposals to the forum, the forum's advice, together with the views of other Departments and agencies, would inform any decision by her on a feasibility study. So, basically, we have just marked time for a year: nothing has happened. She also warned us that any funding decisions now would have to be taken against the backdrop of, as she put it, unprecedented budgetary pressures across the board. We all know what that refers to, and we understand that. Times are very difficult. It is just a pity that, when money was perhaps not so tight this time last year, the opportunity was not taken. It will be much more difficult to get it done now.

Fedelma has now agreed to make her proposals; she will do that to the ministerial advisory forum next time it meets. I have to say that we are both very concerned that this will lead to further delay, even in getting to this first step of an economic appraisal. We consulted the creative industry stakeholders, and their views already reflect the findings of Creative and Cultural Skills, as was reported by your inquiry last year. The report said:

"There was overwhelming written and oral evidence pointing to significant skills shortages and skills development within the Creative Industries here."

We are already at the point where the people and the players who count have recognised that there are significant skills shortages.

The universities and the FE colleges undoubtedly carry out some good work in this area; we are not questioning that. However, the message coming through strongly from the industry is that there is a lack of relevant, project-based practical skills that young people can demonstrate in their portfolios and bring to the table when they are looking for employment. The industry has told us that it would much rather have people with practical skills than people with academic qualifications, and that certainly has been our experience in the Talent Tribe.

I was looking at some of the evidence to the inquiry, and I want to pick up on a point that registered with me from Bob Collins's evidence. He commented that:

" the imaginative capacity of children is dissipated as they advance through the education system, and their ability to perform and to realise the fullness of their own potential is not equally enjoyed."

That is a very telling comment. Fedelma and I, of course, understand the Minister's point about the financial situation and the pressures on budgets. However, until an economic appraisal is carried out, we cannot even be assured that the resources spent on education and training in the performing arts are being used to the best effect. We do not know that they are, and the evidence suggests that they are not. When resources are tight, it seems to me to be all the more urgent that we take a

fundamental look at the issue. I know that the Department is working on an arts strategy, although, again, I have not been able to find out an awful lot of detail about it. I know that it is doing some work on it, and I do believe that it is vital that this issue of a new focus on coordinated planning, management and delivery of education and training in the performing arts should be addressed as part of this work. Again, I look to the Committee, hopefully, for its support in taking that forward.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Thank you indeed for the presentation and the points that were made there. Paul, you made the point about the difference between transient and permanent. The work that you do is, in a sense, transient because it is for whatever number of weeks, I assume.

Mr Simpson: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): However, there is even more transient work sometimes that is only a dipping in for almost like taster sessions. Have you any views on the effectiveness or otherwise of that very transient dipping in? Sometimes, when organisations are doing outreach, in some ways, the very transient is the easiest, but is it the most effective?

Mr Simpson: Fedelma has more experience and can answer this. Personally, my reaction to that is that to create expectation in young people and then to disappoint them is worse than never having started in the first place. You then start from behind the step, and you are further back.

Ms Harkin: I have been involved in both now. I spent 17 years teaching theatre and media. In fact, I will talk about one of my past students. That was in a deprived area, a profile that I am working with now. I was very proud to read what one of my past students said in a presentation to the Committee. That is an example that this does work. I think that her exact words were that, in the school that she attended — St Louise's Comprehensive College — creativity was "at the heart" of the curriculum. It seems to happen in some schools but not in others. Frequently, it happens only because of interest in that school area. My former student felt that creativity permeated all the other subjects, and I feel that strongly, too. You can be a scientist, but, if you are not creative, where do you go? What employer does not want an imaginative, creative and innovative person? All of those qualities are transferable.

Chair, you asked about the taster sessions. It is good for young people just to see them, and they awaken something. However, you cannot run taster sessions and just leave it there; there needs to be a strategy. Using the model of the Talent Tribe is the easiest way that I can think of explaining it. Loads of kids engage and play in sport and may continue playing every week. They have a wee manager, competitions and all of the rest of it, and some move to the next level. It is the same with us. In the same way, these young women run taster and introductory sessions for the ones below, and they manage the little teams. At the top of the pyramid are those who engage in the industry and take it forward. Obviously, you will never get a six-year-old playing for Man United, whereas a six-year-old can play a main role in a film. Maybe I chose the wrong team. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): The way that Man United are playing at the minute — *[Laughter.]*

Ms Harkin: I know. Why did I pick them?

In answer to your question, there is a place for all of it, but it needs to be within a given development. It cannot be just, "Here we are with a bit of funding — wahey!", and then we are away. That is criminal.

Mr Dunne: Thanks very much for coming in today. I welcome and appreciate the work that you are doing in Kilcooley, an area of social need in North Down. Generally, how do you convince young people to engage in the arts? You have told us something of the background of these young people. Surely housing and childcare priorities must be more relevant to them. How do you convince them that they should engage in the arts? How difficult is that challenge?

Ms Harkin: It is not difficult at all because we work through the community groups. We do not parachute in and say, "Look at us. We are here." We go into a community and set up. We now have a network of trust with community organisations, which has taken us years to build. When we engage, we are brought in by organisations that already have the young people's trust. The range that we offer is great. It covers everything from someone who is interested in joinery and set building to sparks who do the lighting.

There was a lovely quote on the day that the Hole in the Wall Gang was filming. The girls had said to me that one of the reasons that they wanted to make a film was that there would not be an audience. They did not think that they could cope with an audience. As we went into the room to start shooting scenes that were set in an office, one of the girls turned to me and said, "You promised me that there would not be an audience." I said, "That is not an audience; that is a film crew for a proper film." It dawned on them only then, "Oh my goodness, there is such a list of potential input." Some of the girls did make-up, and others were involved in costume and photography. The cinematographer loved the girl who took photographs with her iPhone and parked her car on the middle of a roundabout to get a good shot of the cranes. However, she had never seen herself as a photographer. She had thought that she could do make-up. Every single person has an inherent talent, and it is up to us to draw it out. We have to infect them with our love for it. I think that you guys have missed that element. I know a lot of the people who presented to you, and I read the transcripts. It all came down to facts and justification. However, I know that those people love what they do. I know that they infect people with their love for what they do. Groups such as Arts and Business make things happen for us all. There is a real infrastructure, and we do not all fight.

Mr Dunne: It works.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning, and thanks very much for the presentation. I had heard of the innovative drama work that St Louise's College was doing many years before it reached other schools. It is great to have your expertise involved in this project, Fedelma. You are seeking a grant of about £20,000 to £30,000 to carry out the business case study. Aside from that, how is your group funded?

Ms Harkin: We have had project funding. The terrible thing about that is that we are always juggling.

Mr D Bradley: That is tied to a certain period.

Ms Harkin: At the very beginning, the Arts Council gave us a grant to start up. It took a business-style look at the whole thing, which was essential. We would not have got off the ground had it not been for that. However, since then, we have fundraised. We spend so much time filling in funding applications that we are getting a bit better at it. That is fuelled by a determination that we will hang in here, and we will do this. I talked about the numbers, but, when we start our engagement, I cannot walk away from Mairead, Megan or Sam. Seeing their potential is what drives us. We have an excellent board, and it does a lot of pushing. We are young, and we are getting better.

Mr Simpson: I guess that the short answer to your question is that the Talent Tribe has no money to pay for a feasibility study or an economic appraisal.

Mr D Bradley: What benefit would the business case bring to the group? How would you use that to get further funding?

Mr Simpson: The purpose of the economic appraisal would be to investigate whether the proposal for, or vision of, having a creative industry school in Northern Ireland would work. The appraisal would go through all aspects of that. Who would support it? How much would it cost? Who would attend? How long would it be for? It would identify and cost all the various options that might be available. It is fairly standard in the government green book process to do an economic appraisal. You will never get any government money for a project unless you have done an economic appraisal and can demonstrate the benefits. It is a fairly rigorous, economically based process.

Mr D Bradley: So, you really have to do this in order to move the project forward.

Mr Simpson: We do. We really need this.

Mr D Bradley: It seems to me that the work that you do is very much at the core of our investigation, insofar as you are reaching groups that are hard to reach. You are having a very positive impact on them and giving them new horizons to aim for. I very much commend you for that and support the work that you are doing.

Ms Harkin: This is not false modesty: we are facilitators but the young people are incredible. It is just about people. I remember people saying to me when I was at St Louise's, "The work that you are doing for those young people is wonderful." However, there was a perception of those young people that was totally wrong. All that we had to do was set the bar, provide the opportunity and then try to

keep up with them. Last week, I was in the Abbey watching one of my past students, and I went to the MAC to watch another one. I have told Geraldine Hughes that I want Richard Gere — her next film is with him — but not for the Talent Tribe, just for me. *[Laughter.]* When people like Geraldine say to me at the age of 11 that they want to go to Hollywood, we cannot do that for them. All that we do is take them on the journey and create that platform. I feel privileged, and I know that we all do. When the Hole in the Wall Gang met those girls, having read their personal stories, they had great respect for them because of what they were coping with.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks for your presentation, and apologies for missing the start of it. Paul, you talked about being asked to make a presentation to the ministerial advisory group.

Mr Simpson: Yes, we have just been asked to do that.

Mr Humphrey: Do you know the make-up of the ministerial advisory group?

Mr Simpson: It is a ministerial advisory forum as distinct from a ministerial advisory group. It is a newly formed forum.

Mr Humphrey: Is that the forum for creative arts?

Mr Simpson: Yes. My understanding is that the membership of the new ministerial advisory forum is made up of the local board membership of Creative and Cultural Skills and Creative Skillset, and is chaired by the Department. However, there is precious little information available at the moment on their agenda, what they have been discussing or, indeed, when the next meeting is. We do not even know that yet.

Mr Humphrey: Is the idea that practitioners of those two organisations are chaired by a civil servant?

Mr Simpson: That is my understanding. All I know is that the forum is "chaired by the Department", which I assume means that it is chaired by a civil servant from the Department, rather than the Minister, but I am not sure because there is very little information available.

Mr Humphrey: Before I continue, Chair, perhaps we could write and ask for the make-up of that organisation and who is chairing it.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Great minds think alike.

Mr Simpson: It had its first meeting on 2 September, if that helps. I managed to get that much out of it.

Mr Humphrey: You said that you went on to the website looking for information and there was nothing there.

Mr Simpson: Yes. It said only that they had met, not what they discussed.

Mr Humphrey: I work with young people and have done all my life, and you are quite right about the expectation. My concern is that asking you to make a presentation to that forum creates, I imagine, a feeling in your organisation that you might be getting somewhere and that there is a potential opportunity to get some of the funding that you are looking for. I hope that people are not being brought along to present to that forum without there being any chance of getting money. We need to get clarification on that point, because it could create a false dawn.

Mr Simpson: Yes, it has that risk.

Mr Humphrey: As an organisation that works in a practical way in the arts, especially with young people in deprived areas, like many of those whom I represent in North Belfast, do you know who is helping to shape the Department's arts strategy? Is the sector aware of who these people are?

Mr Simpson: Again, I really do not know. All I have been able to establish so far from the Department website is that a paper went to the departmental board in June and was noted. I cannot access the

paper, so I have no idea, frankly, what is involved in the arts strategy, how much work has been done or who they are consulting.

Mr Humphrey: What is the departmental board?

Mr Simpson: It is the board that runs the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure: civil servants chaired by the permanent secretary.

Mr Humphrey: Chair, I ask that we write and ask for the make-up of the group shaping the strategy. Is the strategy being shaped by people who are not practitioners, are not at the coalface and do not know what the problems and difficulties are? As a former member of Belfast City Council, I know that it has, to its credit, been very supportive of the arts in a way that other councils have not because, to be fair to them, they have not had the resource. However, potentially, they will have that resource. The uncertainty surrounding local government means that certainty cannot be created for you. It is important that, in all contexts, communication with groups such as yours is good. The funding is not just from the regional Government here but from councils in the areas in which you work. We need to get that tied down. Listening to the evidence that Paul gave, I think that people are operating in the dark. That is not good enough when there is the pressure of some organisations potentially going to the wall, which would mean no more young people like Geraldine Hughes, and the only Holywood that they would see is the one in County Down, with the greatest of respect to Mr Dunne.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): For clarity, we will follow up on that and ask about the process and timeline for developing the strategy.

Mr B McCrea: Paul, will you give me a wee rundown on your background?

Mr Simpson: I was a career civil servant. I have been retired for about five and a half years now. I was chief executive of the health service. My last couple of years were in DOE, leading the reform of councils. I left all that behind me five and a half years ago, and this lady has been annoying me ever since. *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea: This lady knows me as well.

Ms Harkin: I know him, too.

Mr B McCrea: You probably know everybody.

I have come across Talent Tribe. In the past, we held functions in Stormont, so I am supportive. What do you reckon the chances of getting £30,000 are in the current financial climate?

Mr Simpson: At the moment, capital is not as big an issue as revenue. My understanding is that capital is not necessarily short. Frankly, £30,000 is nothing in the capital context. I think that £30,000 to deliver a feasibility study is modest in the extreme. The real test would come should that feasibility study or economic appraisal result in a recommendation for a creative industry school. That would beg all sorts of questions about the revenue stream for that. It would then bring into question, as part of the process —

Mr B McCrea: I want to ask you a few questions, so I will just come in sharply at this point. I think that you should do your own green book appraisal. You have the expertise. Do you really need somebody from outside to do an economic appraisal? I agree with you that there will be opportunities to take advantage of unused capital. I will talk to you about the revenue stream in a wee moment, but can you not look to the expertise of your board and just do the appraisal?

Mr Simpson: If only that were true. Unfortunately, I have no expertise in economic appraisals. You really need an economist to do an economic appraisal, and I am not an economist. You probably also need somebody who has experience of working in the performing arts area, which I do not have either. I do not think that I could do it, and I do not think that Talent Tribe has at its disposal —

Mr B McCrea: I do not want to be alarmist, and you will probably prove me wrong by getting the money, but we were down at the Lyric, and it has had to implement cuts of £50,000. It is cutting £1,000 from —

Mr Simpson: Small amounts.

Mr B McCrea: Yes, small amounts. I am telling you that, if you get £30,000, an awful lot of other people will be running around asking why and how. I am very supportive of what you do and wish you well, but the reality is that, in the current financial climate, I would be surprised if you get that result. However, I think that funding will become available for other areas.

I notice that in your submission you talk about keeping the fee structure within £3,500 a year. Have you approached DEL? There are a number of issues that you might have approached DEL about.

Mr Simpson: Yes.

Mr B McCrea: What was the outcome of your discussion with DEL?

Mr Simpson: We had a very unproductive session with DEL. Frankly, the Department's view was that it was delivering the creative industry skills and training that DCAL wanted it to deliver and that there was not an issue as far as it was concerned. Basically, we had a closed door from DEL. It did not think there was an issue and its question was this: "What is wrong with what we are doing?" DEL was doing what DCAL asked it to do. So, we got nowhere with DEL.

Mr B McCrea: There are a couple of points that I think you should approach, and that we might approach, if the Committee considers it right to do so. The Minister said that he is reconsidering funding for fees and suchlike for non-accredited bodies. We looked at Chiswick and some other things. You should write to the Minister on that basis and tell him to look at the good work that you have done. That would give you a funding stream; it would give you your revenue; and they are looking at it, so you should take that approach, if you do not mind. If the Chair is so minded, it may be that we can ask the Department for Employment and Learning or the Committee for Employment and Learning whether they are considering ways of giving funding for students who come along to such a thing. This is in light of the Minister's statement.

Your issue with funding at the moment is coming from where?

Ms Harkin: The project I used as an example is DEL funded, although it comes from Training for Women Network; it is part of a much bigger project and we —

Mr B McCrea: What funding do you get from DEL — just ball park?

Ms Harkin: For one year, I think that it was £79,000 to deliver what we did this year.

Mr B McCrea: Do you get anything from the lottery?

Ms Harkin: The lottery gave us money to draw up a business case. So, we are now focused on us as an organisation.

Mr B McCrea: How much, approximately?

Ms Harkin: It was about £8,000 to do a complete business plan and look at us going forward. That was very useful.

Mr B McCrea: Have any FE colleges approached you about their outreach programmes?

Ms Harkin: No. We have had conversations with FE colleges but they have never come to anything. We have done the approaching.

Mr B McCrea: I think you should write to them. The sort of work you are doing — and I am coming to the end of my questions — with hard-to-reach people and getting them involved is outstanding, and FE colleges have budgets for outreach or at least they did a year ago, when I was on the Employment and Learning Committee.

Ms Harkin: That is interesting.

Mr B McCrea: They have budgets that may help you. You should take up that funding, and it is DEL function. So, you should look at that.

My final question concerns the CVs of Emily and others: are they real?

Ms Harkin: They are absolutely real. We have changed their names to give them anonymity. The Hole in the Wall Gang were in during the second month, and the girls told them — they actually argued, but by that stage they had turned into the monsters we had bred — they said to Damon, while he was trying to work with them on the direction of the whole piece, "You can't tell me how to be me. I'm playing me". They were amazing, because they knew those characters.

Mr B McCrea: You just read the stories and it is heart-rending. Jean, I am sorry, I did not get exactly where you are in all of this. Will you just tell me?

Ms Mallon: I am now production manager for the Talent Tribe. I have been working for the Talent Tribe for four years, delivering projects and interfacing with the young women who are doing the projects, which give them the opportunity that I had.

Mr B McCrea: Was it a surprise for you to get into the thing as well?

Ms Mallon: Yes, very much so, because I initially came in just to design a wee newsletter.

Ms Harkin: It was Steps to Work, was it not?

Ms Mallon: It was on the Steps to Work programme. It was for 13 weeks, and I did not think it would lead to anything at the end of the 13 weeks, certainly not to being employed and going to work every day and loving my job. It is magic; you can be in Londonderry one day doing theatre, and the next week we could be in Castlederg surrounded by sheep doing film.

Ms Harkin: And lost.

Mr B McCrea: That gets me to the final bit. I am not sure whether it is for Jean or whoever to answer. Part of the issue in the whole arts set-up is that an awful lot of people are doing similar things. Cinemagic might be doing film, and people down in T13 are doing some sort of theatre. There is an argument that DEL thinks that it is doing what is necessary. Is there any way of getting a bit more coordination in the work that is going on?

Ms Harkin: I totally know what you mean. It is very fragmented, a bit like government.

Mr B McCrea: No, it is probably better than government. *[Laughter.]* We may have to send you to Hillsborough.

Ms Harkin: We collaborate and have done work with Cinemagic. I have sat on the board of Cinemagic, and it does amazing work. It is a children's festival to show film, and they do amazing masterclasses round that festival. They see themselves as offering opportunities but do not see themselves as RADA meets the National Film and Television School.

Mr B McCrea: I do not want to go on, but I will reiterate the point. I am really impressed with the work you do, the stories, and the people on your board. The sector is crying out for some form of strategic leadership, and, frankly, if it is not coming from somebody else, it needs to come from you. I think you need to put some effort into getting a forum that government can deal with. That is my observation. You cannot be in a silo any more than government can be in a silo.

Mr Ó hOisín: Folks, thanks for your presentation. I declare a part interest because of my background with the Irish Language Broadcast Fund, where I saw small amounts of money trickling down very far and being very effective. Having said that, the whole medium is quite expensive to produce funding, pitching and that type of thing. Correct me if I am wrong, but some project funding came from the Arts Council. What was that?

Ms Harkin: That was to the Talent Tribe when we were starting off.

Mr Ó hOisín: How much was that?

Ms Harkin: It was £10,000 in 2009. It was to give us some funding for two staff members for a period of time.

Mr Ó hOisín: Likewise, because of my background, I know that a lot of other organisations and private interests are involved in this sector. I am thinking of people like Northern Visions and the Nerve Centre. How much collaboration exists? Is there anything that exists?

Ms Harkin: We have not worked with the Nerve Centre yet but we have worked with Northern Visions and there is certainly overlap.

I collaborate. I spent years in the BBC, and it is about collaboration. So, I welcome it. At the minute, especially, some people are nervous about collaboration or see threat in it: I do not. I think that, as Northern Ireland plc, we are stronger. The essence of what we do is that we do not try to replicate what schools are doing, and we are not trying to set up a television channel. We are trying to train for the creative industry. So, in terms of engagement, there is overlap, and I think that we should be doing that. In fact, at the minute, we are in the process of developing a major project with the Grand Opera House, which is being very supportive about giving the Opera House over to the community. That will be in 2016, and we will be involved, as the trainers, for them to go into the industry. There are loads of projects in development, but it is really difficult for us to do that because we are only ever project-paid, so we are trying to juggle all of this stuff.

Mr Ó hOisín: That is the very nature of the industry. The ultimate aim here in some cases, not in every case, would be placements, commissions and even careers in the sector: is that the way that you see it?

Ms Harkin: Yes. There is a lot of that in it. The thing is this: if I were sitting here now as a producer, and you came to me and said that you would like to direct, I would ask for your showreel. Where does someone who wants to do this start? A person from the industry said to me one day that this is the only profession he knew where someone could come to him and say that they wanted to be a director, and, when asked for their showreel, was told that they had made a film when they were at Queen's. He said, "Name another profession where you can try to use your homework to get a job.". It is a fair point.

Our idea for the creative school is to use that industry. The money is not to build an edifice, it is to have a virtual relationship, which means the regional aspect is taken care of. You can study wherever you are, and we can sell that around the world. We are known around the world for turning out talent and all the rest of it, and not just in this; we have Peter, who has been nominated for four Oscars for sound design. There is so much stuff going on.

We have got a brand around the world that we are not pushing yet. With the Talent Tribe we will need funding, but we spent all day yesterday working on a model of social enterprise. We accept that we cannot continually ask for funding, so we are trying to find ways to create a social enterprise to support. We will always need to go looking for work, but we are not just talking about academic study; we are talking about the hands-on placing of people in situations where they are learning, not at the making-the-tea stage, but actually involved. So, yes, that is part of it.

Mr Ó hOisín: Paul, you were critical of the Minister for the year's hiatus between your presentation and further contact.

Mr Simpson: I did not get any kind of response.

Mr Ó hOisín: Did you get in touch with her during that time?

Mr Simpson: Not with the Minister, personally; I was in touch with civil servants, emailing back and forward.

Mr Ó hOisín: In the Department?

Mr Simpson: Yes. I got nothing.

Mr Ó hOisín: OK. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): I have a couple of points. DEL made a comment about further and higher education provision for creative industries. What is your assessment of what the Department is turning out at the moment? Is it meeting the needs of the industry? What kind of people, skills or experience are coming out? Some people will study creative industry at university and some will do it in college. You see the school as a third option. What is the relationship between the three? We sometimes hear that universities and colleges are not producing people with the right skills for a whole range of areas; it could be technology or whatever.

Mr Simpson: Well, as you know, Creative and Cultural Skills does workforce surveys; in fact, it has just kicked off another one. Last year, your Committee looked at the previous study carried out by Creative and Cultural Skills which said, in quite clear terms, that the industry's needs are not being met. The phrase used in the Committee's report was that:

"There was overwhelming written and oral evidence ... significant skills shortages".

Those needs are not being met at the moment and that is at the heart of our problem. The infrastructure to organise training and deliver the kind of training that the industry needs is just not there. Fedelma, with Talent Tribe, is doing what she can within her very modest resources. However, we are not talking about Talent Tribe taking this on: we are talking about creating a new infrastructure —

Ms Harkin: That we feed into.

Mr Simpson: And other groups like the Talent Tribe to feed into.

We are not dismissing the training that is being done by the FE colleges and the two universities. Much of it is good work, but it needs more tailored commissioning to meet the industry's needs.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): If someone is going for a job as a make-up artist in the BBC or wherever, what sort of things are the employers looking for when selecting people?

Ms Harkin: They will say, "Let me see your portfolio." One of the things we discussed with Susan George was what happens in South Africa when films are made. The Government there require them to take on a certain number of people who are disadvantaged or do not have opportunities, as part of the package to get Government money. She was advising me to position ourselves to give them the sort of support they need, because we understood the needs of the industry. She said she would welcome that and would love to be part of that, but she did not have the time to make sure that our people had the necessary family support.

The girl we employ has children, so we are tormenting people to get built-in childcare behind her to give her the opportunity. A make-up artist's basic rate is £250 a day. It is not bad money once you get going. She would be able to have a good life and give her children a good life on that money. However, at the moment, my children would have access to that opportunity because I would financially support them through the process. Many of the kids we work with do not even have a role model never mind support. That increases the divide and it means that the communities they come from do not have a voice.

We know that it is a powerful outlet for people that they feel listened to. The young group that I quoted twigged that immediately. They said, "If we do comedy, people's reserves will be down. We will be able to make our points much better if they are laughing." That is true. The Hole in the Wall Gang put the proposal at Berlin to make it into a full movie, because it is a teaser for a film at the moment. They had interest in finance, so we want to try to pursue that, because it would make such a difference.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for your presentation. I found it very interesting. However, as someone from the countryside, it seems to me that this is centred around the city. Are you developing this in the countryside?

Ms Harkin: We have been interfacing. The groups that are in development, which we have not worked with yet, are in Limavady and Castlederg. We are already working with groups in Bangor and Newtownards. We have worked with a group in Magherafelt. An awful lot of this depends on there

being someone for us to interface with in those places. If we can find people out there who are singing our song with us, we will work on projects together. We are developing projects at the moment with people who are going for funding to deliver them.

We have to pay the industry: they do it with so much goodwill, but what we are doing would not be a sustainable model if we were not paying them. We cannot ask the industry to work for us, give up other work to do so and not pay them. That would not be sustainable. The budget would not even have touched what it would have cost to get the Hole in the Wall Gang to write a script. The industry does so much and is so far behind what we are doing. We are going to keep knocking on doors and pushing this: we are not sitting waiting on Government and saying, "Please, Sir. Can we have more?" If necessary, we will use a battering ram. We cannot let this go, because the people we are working with cannot speak for themselves.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Finally, finally, Cathal Ó hOisín.

Mr Ó hOisín: What group are you working with in Limavady?

Ms Mallon: It is the Roe Valley Community Education Forum.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): Oliver, do you have another point to make?

Mr McMullan: No, thanks.

The Chairperson (Mr McCausland): OK. Thanks very much for your presentation. It has been very informative and stimulating, and it raised a lot of questions, as you saw.

Ms Harkin: Thank you very much for listening.