



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE
FOR EMPLOYMENT
AND LEARNING**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Developing and Supporting Young
Leaders: Boston College**

18 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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AND LEARNING**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Sammy Douglas
Ms Michelle Gildernew
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr David McIlveen
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Pat Ramsey

Witnesses:

Ms Maria Doherty) Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship
Ms Suzi Jarvis) University College Dublin
Ms Carol Fitzsimons) Young Enterprise Northern Ireland

The Chairperson:

I now call the participants from the developing and supporting young leaders programme. I invite the young leaders to come forward; you are all very welcome. I know these friends from my trip to the States. It would be useful if you give the Committee a quick introduction of your title and the organisation that you represent. Having listened to what Steve said, I am quite happy to have a free-running conversation. We will try to make it a bit snappier; I know that you can do that. Who would like to lead off?

Ms Maria Doherty (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship):

I will start. My name is Maria Doherty. I work for a youth organisation called Foróige, which is based in Dublin but has representatives in 26 or 27 of the counties in Ireland. I manage Foróige's youth entrepreneurship programme, which is called the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship. It is an international programme that came from New York; it started in the Bronx over 20 years ago. We work in low-income and disadvantaged communities, and we have a programme in Belfast.

Professor Suzi Jarvis (University College Dublin):

I am Suzi Jarvis. I am the chair of biophysics at University College Dublin (UCD) and I am also the UCD director of the innovation academy. The innovation academy is a collaboration between UCD, Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast (QUB), so it is an all-island activity. Our primary purpose is to nurture entrepreneurial thinking in our PhD students. I was up here yesterday talking to the University of Ulster and QUB about extending that to our undergraduate cohort. One of the reasons why I have come here today is because I do not see that there is room for two San Diegos on the island of Ireland, so one of the things that I would like to talk about is how we might work together more.

The Chairperson:

For goodness sake, Suzi, that has just blown the whole thing. *[Laughter.]* Suzi is also a professor; she did not manage to slip that in.

Ms Carol Fitzsimons (Young Enterprise Northern Ireland):

I am Carol Fitzsimons, and I am chief executive of Young Enterprise Northern Ireland. Hopefully, some of you are aware of our work. We work with just under 100,000 students in schools to inspire them to take an interest in entrepreneurship and to build their employability skills. You may have visited some of our trade fairs, at which the companies that the students set up and run sell their products. We work with the workforce of 2030 that we are all talking about, and we work on the economy that we want to create for them. It is very important for us to look to the future and then track back to understand what we need to inform our young people about now.

The Chairperson:

Having listened to what has been said, do you want to give some observations about what you thought of the Boston/San Diego experience? We will then take informal questions.

Ms M Doherty:

We work with young people who live in disadvantaged communities, and we have about 1,000 of them in the programme. A lot of them have challenges in their own lives, and we are an entrepreneurial education programme that is about taking responsibility. One big thing that came from the trip to the States was the emphasis that the future is very much in the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and maths. While we are not directly doing that, we are encouraging young people to think critically. We place a big emphasis on financial literacy, with the students figuring out whether or not they made money. However, there is a gap; I do not think that any of the education systems in the South or the North are strong enough in that area. We are an NGO, and we are in there running an educational programme.

The other thing that struck me is that, as much as we can, at times, be critical of our own education system, in some ways we are light years ahead, particularly in the area that I work in. For example, 50% of African Americans will drop out of school and will not have a high school diploma. In the California region alone, 20% drop out. In the Republic, the figure has dropped from 15% to 9%, and it is similar, if not lower, here.

The Chairperson:

I am happy if people want to ask questions and chip in. If it does not work, we will change it again. Michelle, you wanted to ask Maria a question.

Ms Gildernew:

I am happy to leave it until after Maria has finished speaking.

The Chairperson:

I will try to lead it, but I would rather that if people have a burning question, they come in and ask it.

Ms M Doherty:

In Boston and in San Diego, it came across very strongly that the indigenous SME sector is pretty

much the backbone of the economies, in terms of how many jobs are created. The learning for us coming home is that it is important, both for what we do and from a policy perspective, that entrepreneurship be embedded in a cross-curricular way through education systems and through people's thinking, because the young people we work with, and young people in general, should be given that opportunity. Whether they take it up or not is a different matter, but it is about how they think. So, the importance of the SME sector — that is, small businesses of fewer than five staff — was an eye-opener. Steve mentioned that as well, but it was one thing that struck me.

Ms Fitzsimons:

For me, three core things came through. The collaboration, which Steve talked about, was striking. Education, government and business were all working together with a common focus towards a common goal, with a common ambition for their area and the belief that they could achieve the goal. Steve used the term “collective ambition”, and I very strongly took away the idea that we have the makings of that.

Another key theme was capability. We are not as far away from the San Diego model as I had expected us to be. We have a lot of things set up and quite well established, so it is about pulling them together. We need to collaborate and work together using the likes of the economic strategy. For example, if we are talking about a knowledge sector economy for 2013, we should message that back through all aspects of society so that we all understand what a knowledge economy is and what we all individually need to do, be that in education or in creating the right culture, as Maria talked about.

The other aspect is the culture, and that is the big challenge for us. In our culture, the approach is, “That is great, but we will not be able to do it because of resources and finances.” We need to move past that and get some sense of belief that, to an extent, we already do a large amount of entrepreneurialism. We have a large number of SMEs, and we should message back that those SMEs are there and are successful, and we should let our young people see that that is a very viable career option. We talked earlier —

The Chairperson:

I want to get on to the bit about the young achievers, and we will do that in a wee moment. However, what was the difference between, for example, Boston and San Diego? Was there any difference? What was the benefit of the trip?

Professor Jarvis:

Boston networks; San Diego collaborates. I think that came up a lot.

The Chairperson:

Which did you think was more suitable for us?

Professor Jarvis:

The collaborative model. Also, Boston did not really need to make that much effort at any stage. It is completely dominated by Harvard, which has pretty much always been there. They were more concerned about whether everybody was aware of how great they were; they did not have to go out and build anything, really.

Ms Fitzsimons:

Boston is already very good; they are just building on it. San Diego came from a very challenging place and had to address a lot of issues.

The Chairperson:

I want to ask you one more question and then I will keep to the format. My innovative bit obviously did not work, so we will do it the way we have always done it.

Professor Jarvis:

Can I say what I thought of the trip as well?

The Chairperson:

The trip itself involved quite an interesting group, I suppose. What are your views on your expectations before you went out, what happened and the actual learning experience?

Professor Jarvis:

As you get older, it is always more difficult to get to know people. On a personal level, it was great spending two weeks with these wonderful people and getting to know people from across the island of Ireland better. On a professional level, there were real eye-openers, especially the dominance of the higher education sector in the US in driving what happens locally. The influence of Harvard almost goes without saying, but the University of California, San Diego —

the state university — really dominated the whole process of economic recovery after the military pulled out. For example, it had a “troops to engineers” programme to retrain people who lost their jobs.

The Chairperson:

That would be an interesting concept here.

Ms Gildernew:

Or the other way round. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

I am sorry about that. We are most apologetic. That is interesting. Maria, what was your view? What did you think?

Ms M Doherty:

As Suzi said, in a personal capacity it was great to meet eight new people from all different strands of life: academia, civil servants, NGOs, a politician in the midst of us and a Dutch entrepreneur. It was great because none of us knew each other before. People are wary. As Suzi said, as you get older, you say, “I won’t bother. I know what I’m doing.” On a professional level, it created the opportunity to work with people whom I would not have had access to. For example, I met the head of the international department in Dublin Institute of Technology, who is now interested in running workshops for young people from disadvantaged communities that are probably across the road from him, where people think that they could never go to college. Suzi in UCD is going to do collaborative work with Carol on Young Enterprise Northern Ireland. Invest Northern Ireland was there and thinks there is a role for our programme with NEETs; that is, young people who are not in education, training or employment. There are quite a number of them here: about 13,000. That would probably have taken years to achieve, if ever.

The Chairperson:

Do think you could have done that without the trip?

Ms M Doherty:

It would have been slower and done piecemeal, bit by bit, and you would have needed introductions and referrals.

The Chairperson:

So the trip sort of accelerates —

Ms M Doherty:

It accelerates the process. It pulls it all together and is intense. You also see how others have done it. So, as Suzi said, you see that Boston is probably much more established in some ways than San Diego. It has a big university: it has Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, so they network and have that concept, whereas San Diego really had to work together. Maybe that is something for us to say: we really should just work together to make it happen much faster.

Professor Jarvis:

There is a residential aspect to it that is also important. That came out in the set-up in Boston with a programme called MassChallenge for new businesses.

The Chairperson:

“Mass” being Massachusetts.

Professor Jarvis:

They combined it with trying to start off this new innovation hub in the seaport region. An empty property there was half luxury apartments and half offices. They gave that empty building to the MassChallenge winners for a year, so that they could live on the site and work together. There were then a lot of new companies in the same space and also living together. That was another important aspect of the trip: we were having breakfast together and were together all the time. That is hard to duplicate when it is not a trip.

Ms Fitzsimons:

When you set any strategy or strategic plan, you always ask: what is the vision? What do we want to achieve? It is important to have the end in mind, and being there let us have the end in mind, because we saw something that was almost completed to the way we want to be. So it allowed us to have discussions on the sort of initiatives we saw in programmes. There is a huge amount of financial investment and, from my point of view as a representative of a charity, there was a level of philanthropic giving that we will not replicate. So it allowed us to have

conversations about how to transfer that to Ireland or Northern Ireland and how we produce that within our climate. It was really helpful because everyone was not from the same sector, and I was getting feedback from entrepreneurs about how I should approach that or from someone from further education about how we could work together. It emphasised how we could all collaborate and do great things together to work towards that positive outcome.

Ms Gildernew:

You are all very welcome and it is lovely to have you here. I am very interested in what you are saying. Carol mentioned working with schools and Suzi mentioned her work with universities. However, there is a part of it missing — maybe it was just not in your opening comments — and that is further education. We rely very strongly on the college network for R&D, training and employment opportunities for young people, particularly in rural areas. For young people who may not be ready to go to university, colleges provide a very important education. It is sometimes transitional, but the education provided there is what they rely on and they are not interested in going further. I mean that they have enough: that sounded a wee bit disparaging but it was not meant to be. I would like you to tease that out a wee bit.

I went to school in Armagh, where there were three boys' post-primary schools. Two were selective and one was non-selective. It was interesting: the doctors and lawyers came out of the two selective schools but the entrepreneurs came out of St Brigid's High School. There seemed to be far more practical, hands-on development in that school. There was much more entrepreneurial spirit, and it provided the businessmen. It is interesting that that school provided entrepreneurs, but we are going back a couple of decades.

The Chairperson:

We will not embarrass you. We get the general point.

Ms Gildernew:

I want to develop that line further. How many girls are involved? I know that you are talking about disadvantaged communities, but how many young women come through programmes such as yours and consider running their own business as a career option?

Ms M Doherty:

There are about 1,000 young people in the programme throughout Ireland and both genders

participate equally. We work within schools, in the non-formal youth sector and with alternative education providers in Belfast and in the South. We also work in community centres.

We have started a smaller alumni programme. It is mostly women, or young girls, who have continued their businesses to date. For example we have a young woman in Killybegs who is now 16. She started making muffins at 14, and she now supplies three shops and the hotels in Killybegs with her products. She is still in school. Her mum lost her job as a chef and she helps with the business. The young woman was profiled in Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur Of The Year programme. For us, that entrepreneurial stuff is coming out of the schools that do not have the higher end of students.

Ms Gildernew:

A lot of them are focused on academia.

Ms M Doherty:

There is a focus on academia. For us, it is the points race. There is the same focus here. It is the rote learning. That is one of the things that we saw in both Boston and San Diego: responsible adults, teachers and educators have to move away from pushing young people into medicine, accountancy, law and all of that. It is a riskier business to become an entrepreneur, but the rewards may be bigger in the end. It is about the education system and how they think.

The Chairperson:

Would somebody mention the bit at the end for me? Perhaps Carol might. I thought it was fantastic.

Ms M Doherty:

The BizTown camp?

The Chairperson:

Tell them about it. I have a video of it. It is fantastic.

Ms Fitzsimons:

BizTown is run by Junior Achievement and Young Enterprise as part of the Junior Achievement family. We work cross-border with Junior Achievement Ireland. BizTown is one of those

ambitious programmes that anyone who works in Young Enterprise or Junior Achievement would love to have. It literally sets up a small town or city in a large warehouse. The students go for the day —

The Chairperson:

What age are the students?

Ms Fitzsimons:

They were about P6 age. It is about embedding the concept of enterprise early on at school, which is what we are always trying to do. That is how you change the culture and the ambition. They have six weeks of programming before they go and they are interviewed for the different jobs. Some are appointed chief executives and some are appointed as journalists, depending on their skills. On the day, they run a town. The people who are working in the newspaper interview different people and create a newspaper that they have to sell to everyone else. Throughout the day, each little business gets paid. Once they get their money they can spend it in the town.

It drives home very simply what an economy is and what it is made of: people doing different jobs to earn money and spend it. Some will make a profit and some do not. That learning is then embedded. Young Enterprise is about having the experiential learning, taking it back to a classroom, looking at the theory and asking the students what they learned. Those children whose parents run their own businesses start to understand how to make a profit. It has a huge impact, and because of that, they learn so much in, effectively, an eight-hour day. It was the highlight of the trip for me, as a member of a partner organisation.

The Chairperson:

It was for me.

Ms Fitzsimons:

It was interesting. The others were laughing at me, because it was the last visit on the last day, and they told me that I could go on my own because it was not to do with proper business. If any, it was the one that had the most impact on people, because you saw the lights being turned on in those young people's heads, and, very quickly, they understood what business is about.

Professor Jarvis:

Ms Gildernew touched on a very important aspect of entrepreneurship, which is to do with the attitude towards resources. Most people will look at the options in front of them and pick the best one; that is what most of us do. Entrepreneurs try to envisage the best possible option and make it available. Entrepreneurs are often willing to start from nothing. People from poorer backgrounds often have nothing to start with, and are entrepreneurial almost by birth. I grew up in a council house in a single-parent family and went to the local comprehensive school, but I was lucky enough to get a free education and be the first person in my extended family to go to university. I was very lucky that that university was Oxford. That entrepreneurial mindset is something that is inherent in a lot of the young people we are working with, and we need to give them the opportunities, because they already have that mindset and they are ready to go.

The Chairperson:

I want to bring in a few more things, but since Suzi got on to that, you will find some benefit — particularly this side of the table — in these things. Suzi, tell them about your microscope.

Ms Gildernew:

What do you mean by “this side of the table”? That is very patronising.

The Chairperson:

It is not patronising at all. Wait until you hear about it.

Ms Gildernew:

“Taigs won’t know how to do this, so you listen” — *[Laughter.]*

Professor Jarvis:

What is the difference between the two sides of the table?

The Chairperson:

Listen to what it is first.

Ms Fitzsimons:

Suzi does not know about our politics.

Professor Jarvis:

I am completely oblivious to all of this.

The Chairperson:

When I got back from the trip, I was glad to be back.

Mr McElduff:

Chairperson, I propose that Pat Ramsey chair the meeting and that you sit down there beside the witnesses. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

Tell them about the microscope.

Professor Jarvis:

The microscope is what brought me to Ireland initially. I moved to Ireland in 2002 with funding from Science Foundation Ireland. I was in the second round of principal investigators. So I am here primarily as a scientist, not as the UCD director of the innovation academy. The microscope is a tool for visualising and manipulating at the nanoscale. Nanoscale processes underpin a lot of fundamental work in the areas of ICT and biotechnology. That is why it is such a powerful tool to have. The tools have been around for about 25 years, but my group, which is a multidisciplinary team, breaks down every component of the microscope and builds it up from scratch to be optimised for sensitivity and resolution. We borrowed a piece of technology from CD and DVD players — technology that you all have in your homes — and put it into the microscope. That has given us the most powerful microscope in the world, in terms of resolution for looking at biological processes at the nanoscale. We looked at the commercial opportunities for the microscopes —

Mr P Ramsey:

What has that got to do with this side of the table?

The Chairperson:

That is most patronising. I cannot believe that you do not think that this is to do with you.

Ms Gildernew:

It is to do with all of us, not just us.

The Chairperson:

I just thought that you would be interested in a microscope.

Professor Jarvis:

Who are you?

Ms Gildernew:

Barry and I are from Sinn Féin, Pat is from the SDLP, and the members across the table are unionists. It has not been planned that we sit like this. Basil is a unionist.

Professor Jarvis:

Can I ask a favour of this side of the table? I told you that we have an all-island of Ireland activity where the Irish Government —

Mr B McCrea:

Hold on; I am going to save that for last. This is another patronising thing I am going to give to them 'uns. *[Laughter.]* There is a serious side to this. This is part of sharing information, so I want to get back into it. Pat, would you like to ask a question?

Mr P Ramsey:

I agree with Barry; I thought the extra chair beside the witnesses was for you, so that you could be part of it. We are waiting for the punchline to some of the comments.

Anyway, you are all welcome. It is reassuring to see an all-female panel, and one that is so articulate. I have a huge interest in young people, and I am very knowledgeable about Young Enterprise and the work that it has done. I am not familiar with Maria's organisation, but I realise that she is here to talk about her Boston experience. I suppose that those participating in the programme have already achieved some form of excellence and are doing well in their own projects. How does that work out with regard to increased capacity for the youth group, Maria? Carol from Young Enterprise and Maria referred, directly and indirectly, to NEETs. We are keen to hear about how that is progressing. Maria mentioned financial literacy for young people,

which is an interesting concept. What work is being done to ensure that, going forward, young people have greater business acumen? How have universities improved the likelihood of young people setting up their own enterprises and being entrepreneurs?

Professor Jarvis:

I was interested in some of the comments you made in the earlier discussion. We need to realise that there is a difference between training people to enter the workforce and work for the likes of Qualcomm, for instance, and educating them to create a workforce. That is a different process. My role in higher education is to help educate people to create a workforce and to be entrepreneurial. We recognise that what we currently do in universities, primarily, is train people to be academics, but only a very small percentage of them, perhaps 10% or less, will be academics. Now, we are trying to look at how we train people who are going to work for somebody else and, just as importantly, educate people to think about working for themselves.

The Chairperson:

Did you learn anything from the trip? What did you learn from your experience in Boston and San Diego?

Professor Jarvis:

I got more from Boston, because we met people such as Heidi Neck, who has developed a very experiential way of promoting entrepreneurship. For example, they do not teach business plans any more. They try to create an environment where they are training their students to deal with uncertainty, which is what entrepreneurial activity is all about. However, it takes some thinking as to how you put students in a situation where there is uncertainty and where they have to take calculated risks and can learn from that process. We will have to rewrite much of the education system because much of it is about transferring knowledge, and that is very different from entrepreneurial thinking.

Ms Fitzsimons:

We will have to look at careers counselling in particular. That falls within the remit of DEL, but we need to do a huge piece of work, not necessarily talking to young people about the careers that are available for the next three years, but educating them in how they can look at the workplace and the landscape and realise what skills they need.

Further education colleges are starting to develop much more vocational-style courses that link, as Steve said, into the needs of the workforce. We need to educate our young people to look forward to that landscape. A huge number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics jobs are not being filled in Northern Ireland, yet we continue on the same path. Therefore, it is not necessarily about getting careers teachers to talk to them; it is about empowering them to look to themselves to see whether they can set up their own business, think about entrepreneurship and about subjects that they were good at in school, ask whether they could do that themselves, or seeing that there are plenty of jobs in particular areas and finding out how they can go to further education college and reskill to get those jobs. The bit that is missing for us is that it should be less about careers education that tells you what it looks like now and more about educating people to look forward and work out how they can transfer their skills into that sector.

You mentioned NEETs. We silo it all. One of the things that interested me on the first visit to San Diego was the constant talk of STEM subjects and business, and they are all very separate. He said that one of the first things that he does is to bring his STEM students together with the business students and tells them that they need one another and that STEM and business are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, a sense of what business and enterprise are about should permeate through all roles, particularly vocational roles. Again, further education colleges are working to do that where people undertake vocational training. If someone studies hairdressing, ultimately, their goal will probably be to set up their own hairdressing business. However, we do not necessarily teach the business aspects, and that is what will make or break them. It needs to be more holistic; it is not just academic, vocational, business or STEM. There needs to be elements bringing them all together. The collaboration approach struck again.

The Chairperson:

I want to bring in Sammy, because he has a pressing engagement.

Mr Douglas:

Thank you very much for your presentation. Steve spoke earlier about a whole range of sectors. We ran out of time, but I was going to ask him whether there were any examples of social economy and social enterprise initiatives in job creation. They are probably called different names, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or whatever. In many areas of Northern Ireland, there is a growing and thriving social-economy sector. Are there any examples that we could bring back to Northern Ireland?

Ms M Doherty:

In some ways, what we do is social entrepreneurship. The vast majority of our businesses will be lifestyle businesses; there is not a huge amount in the technical end of things. Some young people have set up websites and apps, but, in some respects, our business teachers probably do not have the capacity; they are not maths teachers, but they may be youth workers who have now trained in our curriculum. Last year alone, more than 450 businesses were set up and generated sales of almost £200,000. That involved young people aged from 11 to 18 selling cookies, making jewellery or doing something else. We told them to find something that they loved, for which they had a passion. Only a small minority will continue with that, because the core of our programme is about staying in school; we tell them to finish their education so that they will have more options, because education is the most progressive route out of poverty.

We hope that doing the programme will plant the seed for some stage in the future. We know of a young person aged 25 or 26 in Coolock in Dublin who lost her job and has gone back to doing what she did on the programme when she was 16 or 17, which was making and selling hampers. That plants the seed. Karen is probably more familiar than I am with the social entrepreneurship element of it.

Another part of what we do, which I have not yet mentioned, is that, where possible, we will link with corporate and business organisations so that they bring mentors into the classroom. That is for two reasons: first, they give their time to young people in need of extra resources and support; secondly, the young people get a sense of what it would be like to work in Citibank, Ernst & Young or Accenture. They will take them into their boardroom and help them with their business plans, which we still use. There was a question of whether we use them, but for us it is a process, and it is a way of measuring what students have learnt. However, that could be up for debate. What we do is social enterprise; it is about developing the young person to give them opportunities at some stage that they may not otherwise have.

The Chairperson:

Did you find it interesting, given that you and Carol were from more of a young enterprise background? Did you have a learning experience?

Ms M Doherty:

Yes, huge. We heard and read that the emphasis was on STEM, but we had 18 meetings with people who pretty much one after another told us that science, technology, engineering and maths was where it was at. We were awestruck to hear that there were so many job vacancies. There were 3,500 vacancies in Boston and 6,500 in San Diego. Michelle mentioned further education colleges. I am not 100% sure what they do, but I would say to them that, like post-leaving certificate (PLC) colleges in the South, they should reorientate. STEM is where the future is. That is something for us to look at in our own curriculum, in how we work and whether we can incorporate it.

The Chairperson:

Absolutely.

Professor Jarvis:

Mr Douglas has gone.

The Chairperson:

In fairness, he has a very serious issue to deal with. He passed me a note.

Ms Gildernew:

It will be reported by Hansard, so say it anyway. He can read what you say.

Professor Jarvis:

He talked about NGOs and social entrepreneurship. Particularly in San Diego, I picked up that, under the broad heading of “philanthropy”, a huge number of successful people in the community do not just — in fact not even — donate money; they give of their time and expertise. Almost everybody that we met seemed to be post-retirement; they had returned to give something back. We went to a free, privately supported incubation centre for new companies. That led me to think that many of the companies that they talked about are in Ireland. Why are we not getting Google more involved? Many such companies have their European headquarters here. They do it in the States, so perhaps we should try to get more of their time, expertise and resources into projects that we are trying to get off the ground.

Mr D McIlveen:

My question is not as pointed or loaded as it may sound, so please do not feel threatened by it. Suzi said that this island is perhaps not big enough for two San Diegos, and I largely agree. However, that puts us in the position of having to look elsewhere to see if we can find collaborative projects. I know that you are keen to stay away from politics, but we cannot ignore where we are.

For example, when Confucius opened here —

The Chairperson:

The Confucius Institute for the Chinese issue.

Professor Jarvis:

We have one in UCD.

Mr D McIlveen:

You will be familiar with it. When it opened here, there were a few question marks over our relationship with China, because of the political sensitivities around human rights. I am sure that you are aware that there are boycotts of countries in the Middle East as well. I am not suggesting for one minute that we should collaborate with North Korea, for example, but do you feel that when it comes to economic development we should probably take more of an agnostic approach to politics in the interests of the greater good? It probably sounds as if I have a pointed supplementary to come back at you with, but I do not. I am just curious about your opinions on that.

Professor Jarvis:

Economic prosperity for everybody decreases some of the unpleasant elements of society. If everybody has a job, people are apathetic when it comes to hating their neighbour for being different. In the States, we kept hearing the phrase: a rising tide floats all boats. That is my response to your question: if every region of the globe starts to rise economically, many of the other issues will disappear.

Ms M Doherty:

The short answer is yes. You do not have to be that agnostic. If you agree on whether you

should have one San Diego or two or on how you want to develop our economy, you will not disagree, irrespective of your party or political philosophy. If it is about the development of all young people, it benefits society ultimately.

Mr D McIlveen:

At risk of sounding repetitive to my colleagues, if we cannot have a San Diego, I will settle for a Tel Aviv.

Ms Fitzsimons:

We also have to look at who the economic strategy is for. For the young people of 2013, who we work with already, the economy is global; they do not see the boundaries that we would have. They Skype and talk with people internationally all the time. That is how the world is for them, and that is a huge opportunity for us in exports if we can harness it. The more aware young people are of what the world is like, the more likely it is that when they start a business they will automatically think to export to the wider UK, the Republic, the States or wherever, because that is how they have been set up to think. That goes back to our culture. We need to send a message to our young people that they are part of a global economy instead of telling them that they are part of Northern Ireland and should sell only in Northern Ireland. The cultural aspect will probably be the most challenging one for us. It needs to be led by all stakeholders: education, government, business and parents.

The Chairperson:

There is one last question that I want to ask. However, Suzi has a particular issue that she wants to raise. Will you explain the issue that I stopped you talking about before? The Committee might want to help. My final question is about those who ask whether the trips like the one you were on are value for money or some sort of jolly. You are all senior executives in your respective organisations, so I am interested to hear whether you think there is value for money in such trips in these straitened times. I will come back to that. Suzi, you have a particular issue.

Professor Jarvis:

Do you want me to go with that first?

The Chairperson:

Yes.

Professor Jarvis:

The Irish Government recently made a large investment under the programme for research in third-level institutions. Three quarters of a million of that funding has gone to Queen's for an all-island activity with the idea of promoting integration. The aspect that I am working on is, as I explained earlier, the promotion of entrepreneurial education among PhD students. However, that funding has a strange limitation on it: students and staff can go North but only staff can come South. We had one student who came South, and we then recognised that there was no mechanism to pay for that student. The whole thing has fallen a bit flat. We would love to have more students coming South, but there seems to be a restriction.

The Chairperson:

What would happen if those PhD students did not go South?

Professor Jarvis:

We want to broaden the student mix. We do not feel that integration takes place through staff alone.

Mr P Ramsey:

Who placed the restriction on the students?

Professor Jarvis:

It came from the higher education authority. It seemed strange to us, because we were not asking for more money; rather, we were looking for flexibility with the money that had been awarded. We had a scheme through which a student had a fantastic experience and he went back and talked about it. Many people around him also wanted to take part, but we had to put a halt on the scheme.

The Chairperson:

We get the general point. Seven hundred and fifty thousand was made available, but those funds cannot be drawn down. Perhaps the Committee might like —

Professor Jarvis:

The funds can be drawn down but only in ways that place a restriction on learning.

Mr P Ramsey:

Is it the higher education authority in Dublin that imposed the limitation?

Professor Jarvis:

Yes.

The Chairperson:

Without wishing to be patronising to anyone, I know that certain members will have an interest in this matter.

Professor Jarvis:

Or patronising to any part of the table. *[Laughter.]*

Mr P Ramsey:

Chairperson, we could, individually or collectively, take a political stand on the issue. However, if there are advantages for our young people and our PhD students in going South, we all have a collective role. I think that we should —

The Chairperson:

It was a joke, Pat.

Mr P Ramsey:

I know.

The Chairperson:

I allowed Suzi to raise it, because I think that there is value in it. It has been drawn to our attention and we may want to look at it. If it meets with the Committee's approval, we will invite Professor Jarvis to send the Committee a communication on the issue and we can take it up through the appropriate channels. Would that be satisfactory?

Mr P Ramsey:

Yes.

The Chairperson:

It is a serious point, and it shows the benefit of coming together.

I thank the witnesses for appearing before the Committee. I know that you have had to make a special trip to meet with us, and the counterpoint with what you said and Steve said earlier was useful. To close this session, will you sum up the question that I asked you in whatever terms you feel relevant?

Ms Fitzsimons:

There were huge benefits in seeing the vision of what we can be, and, given what we do, it is important to convey that to young people. Seeing it as a reality was helpful. However, the work starts now; it is what we do with the collaboration and the networks that we have created. There is an obligation on us to get value out of the trip by making the changes, by doing things differently as a result, and by establishing working partnerships.

Professor Jarvis:

I echo that. The fact that we went on the trip gives us a responsibility for action on our return. I particularly liked the fact that, in San Diego, they have action teams rather than Committees. That was a nice summary of how they do things and the way that we want to do things.

Ms M Doherty:

I agree with Carol and Suzi. The programme worked well because it was structured and we had many meetings. Those who made the selection selected well, because the nine people who went on the programme will be able to work together. From a professional perspective, ours is an all-island programme; we have only one programme in Belfast, but we would like to have more. I have made links and there is capacity to develop those partnerships with Invest Northern Ireland, Young Enterprise Northern Ireland and Junior Achievement. The trip was hugely beneficial.

The Chairperson:

Thank you all very much. Our meeting is being recorded by Hansard and will be on public record for scrutiny. I intend to send a copy of the transcript to the US Consulate, as it has asked for a copy because of your work with Boston College.

We have only a few short evidence sessions, and I am more than happy to see you after those.

However, you do not have to sit and listen if you do not want to.