



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

**Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of
the Creative Industries in Northern
Ireland: Kabosh**

19 April 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Inquiry into Maximising the Potential of the Creative Industries in Northern Ireland: Kabosh

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Ms Paula McFetridge Kabosh

The Chairperson: I welcome Paula McFetridge.

Ms Paula McFetridge (Kabosh): I am the artistic director of a theatre company based in Belfast called Kabosh. We are the only site-specific theatre company in the North, which means that we perform in unusual locations. We do not perform in traditional theatre spaces.

We were founded in 1994 and are office-based in the cathedral quarter. We have two full-time members of staff and one part-time member of staff. For an investment of approximately £95,000 we have a turnover of £325,000. That means that for every £1 invested in the company, we generate £3.25.

The bulk of our work is divided into four main strands. One of those is major site-specific projects. Our latest was in Limavady looking at poverty in the Limavady workhouse. We also created a major project that told the story of the Jewish community in the North of Ireland, which we performed in synagogues and took to a synagogue in New York.

Another strand of our work is cultural tourism. We have a walking food-and-drink tour of Belfast called 'Belfast Bred'. We were commissioned for the opening of Titanic Belfast and did a massive site-specific project there. We also created another Titanic project on the Belfast Barge.

Another strand of our work is social cohesion. We are members of the Trauma Recovery Network, and we work with healing through remembrance on projects that look at dealing with the past. We do a lot of work on commemoration. We also have a project that looks at sheltered accommodation for young single mothers called 'Hostel'. It is being performed at the Department for Social Development (DSD) conference next Friday.

The last strand of our work is international. We have just launched the first ever theatre app for phones in Texas at the South by Southwest festival two weeks ago, and it has just been launched through the Apple App Store. We have also been invited to go back to America with our project looking at the Jewish community and will do a three-month tour of America.

That tells you a little bit about ourselves. A lot of the submissions that you will have received will be about the impact of reductions in arts funding and looking at it from a possibly more negative perspective. However, I thought that I would come to you with nine recommendations. Being a County Antrim girl, I thought that I would make nine recommendations, as we have the nine glens of Antrim, which keeps it all vaguely rounded.

My first recommendation concerns the Forum for Local Government and the Arts. We have done a lot of work with it over the years advising local borough councils on how we encourage arts activity and heighten participation. For example, over the past 12 months, for a small investment from government, Kabosh has created product that 15,000 people have seen. We have had 1,500 participants and 150 freelance employees, and 95% of them are from the North.

The Committee can take a lead as regards the Forum for Local Government and the Arts, and we can look at the cross-departmental value of live arts activity, particularly theatre. We have worked in health, tourism, social development, education, creative industries, the built environment, regional development, employment and learning, enterprise, trade and investment, and it is possible for us to look at the diversification of income strands by working with you to work with other Departments to create portfolio-specific arts projects.

My second recommendation concerns Committee attendance at events. If you are unable to attend, you could nominate somebody to attend on your behalf, or maybe a member of your constituency could attend. They could come to see our work and become an ambassador for arts activity, so that we can all start being more vocal and more informed about the impact and value of arts engagement.

My third recommendation is to invest in people who are working in the industry. By that I mean that we provide bursaries and workplace internships, and that we allow those who are currently working in the sector to train new people coming through, to improve the quality and quantity of our output. That means that we are investing in our own employees.

My fourth recommendation is that we reinstate theatre on the creative innovation fund. When Kabosh wanted to create an app for 'Belfast Bred', we knew that the potential was there and that a theatre app had never been created before. We had to lobby hard to get theatre on that fund. For a direct investment that was matched by Invest NI and was supported by Belfast City Council, we were able to create an app that was launched in Texas and has just been launched in the Apple App Store. That means that people can take a virtual theatrical food-and-drink tour of Belfast from anywhere in the world. The investment was £10,000. By putting theatre back on that fund register, we can develop more apps and create and diversify the audience base for theatre in the North.

My fifth recommendation concerns how we look at tourism, and I know that that is one of the priorities of central government. One of the issues as regards the tourism fund is that the minimum amount that a tourism arts project can be before it can apply for funding is £50,000. Over the past four years, we have created tourism product for budgets of £25,000. We need to have a tiered system of funding whereby you can create small-scale animations that are more attractive to our local government, local borough councils, small tourism industries and funds. We have been approached by everybody from the Bangor business development body to Limavady council. When we were up there, that council talked to us about how we could create something specific for that town. If there were a fund in the tourism structure that allowed for £25,000 projects, more of those would happen, and we would

increase participation, increase employment and undoubtedly prove the worth and the role of high-quality theatre in the North.

There is also an international dimension. I know that there are priorities, but in the past two years, the Arts Council's Artists Abroad fund has been withdrawn. That fund invested £3,500 in Kabosh to go to New York. When we were in New York, we performed at the Tourism Ireland conference in Grand Central Station, we played to capacity crowds and won the First Irish Theatre Festival best production award. We have just been invited to do a three-month tour of America. However, that fund, which was a small Arts Council fund intended purely to facilitate product from here going international, no longer exists.

Similarly, there are organisations, such as Culture Ireland in the South, which have proven their worth over and over again in how they take high quality arts into the international market. We need to forge better links with them and we need to do some joined-up thinking. We need to look at how we work with bodies in the South so that we have North/South engagement in arts activity. The Druid Theatre Company in Galway and the Abbey Theatre Company in Dublin tour extensively internationally and they have the experience, the knowledge and the skills. We should pair them with arts organisations in the North. That does not cost money. All we are saying is that they are the best at what they do, so we should pair them up with the best in the North. Let us do some joined-up thinking in the same way as we look at cross-departmental investment.

For years, the British Council has been doing showcases at the Edinburgh Festival. Culture Ireland does showcases all over America of the best high quality theatre that exists. That is how we get promoters to see our work and how we get international journalists to write positive articles about here. It is how we increase our profile, provide better employment and increase the quality and quantity of contracts. It is a win-win situation with those showcases. Organisations such as Culture Ireland and the British Council fund showcases. The Belfast Festival and the Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA) have constantly been talking about why we do not do that in the Belfast Festival, and about having a weekend dedicated to the cream of our local arts activity, particularly theatre, to which we can invite international journalists.

I am just back from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. I was invited on a three-week tour to look at conflict zones and how we use theatre to reanimate contested space, give people new possibilities and how we help people imagine new futures. I have been invited to go to Russia, Poland and the Ukraine in August for another three-week trip. I had never done those types of trips before. I was approached because of the work that we do and because I sit on the Maze/Long Kesh arts reference group.

We are the best at conflict resolution when it comes to arts engagement. It is an unbelievable way for us to stop the cycle of violence, improve education and research internationally, nationally and locally, and take a lead on that. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Assembly invested in three people from here being part of that international Intercult trip. All that we need to do is to remain at the table. I got a phone call the other day to ask me to do the City of Culture for the next three years, starting in northern Sweden in 2013, heading to San Sebastian in 2014 and doing the next one in 2015. It is an incredible opportunity. All that we need to do is say that we are committed to Intercult and international arts engagement. Let us take the lead in it; we have the people who can do it. It does not cost us money; it is purely about us saying that we are committed and that we are going to promote our artists in that area.

The Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have a scheme whereby they pay for international journalists to come here. They provide travel and accommodation if those journalists are going to write articles about the North. Let us do the same thing for reviewers — for people who critically analyse high quality arts. Let us pay for them to come and review our shows and send the word out to the rest of the world. A scheme exists, but theatre is not on that agenda when it comes to critical analysis of our work.

We have schemes for audience development. Audiences in Northern Ireland have been introduced to a scheme called Test Drive the Arts, which has been running for two years and has been a massive success. We have developed our audience through the Kabosh mailing list and friends of the company. Our audience has gone up by 50% in the past year and a half because of the

communications skills that we have and the tools that we now use, and because of schemes such as Test Drive the Arts. We must invest in our communication tools, such as how we archive our shows, how we digitally animate our shows, how we use the World Wide Web and social media to send out newsletters and improve the quality of how we communicate with our audience from grassroots to international.

As has been flagged up before, our local media is an issue. We need to encourage our local media to subsidise listings. In the South, you go to the back page of the 'The Irish Times', and every single show that is happening in the South is listed. That is subsidised. If something similar could be done in the 'Belfast Telegraph', 'The Irish News' or the 'News Letter', that type of profile would become a regular thing that people would get used to, similar to the way that there is a sports round-up on the news every night. If we knew that, for two minutes before the end of the news every night, there would be one arts story, it would start to get into people's mindsets. In the same way that you become ambassadors for the arts, we encourage our local media to become ambassadors for the arts. We provide the training for them to become more knowledgeable about what they are writing about.

Similarly, look at our heritage sites and our contested spaces. Then look at what the Office of Public Works does in the South. Because it does not have the resources to invest in ongoing theatre and arts activity, it works with arts organisations to create site-specific projects to animate those sites. That includes everything from Kilmainham Gaol, to Famligh House, to Spike Island off the coast of Cork. We can do exactly the same in the North. Kabosh has worked with National Museums Northern Ireland, and we have done projects at Stormont regularly. As I said, we did a project in the synagogue in north Belfast and saw the number of people who had never been in that synagogue before. We can work with organisations that actually exist and not ask them for money but say that, if they work with arts organisations and give us the site and work with us to create something that meets their needs and those of the arts organisations, we can access new audiences. We can bring people into those spaces who do not normally go to them. Then, we are hitting various agendas. We are looking at cross-departmental engagement, yet again.

My ninth recommendation concerns economic stability. Again, I go back to the cross-departmental aspect of it. Let us work with the other Departments and say that they can use the arts to enhance their portfolios and meet their needs. Let us look at investment from different Departments, rather than it solely coming from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

I am a big champion of a revival fund. Inevitably, the initial investment in an arts project is high. That is the first time you commission a play or a design or go into rehearsals. You can rehearse for three or four weeks and revive that show. You already have the script, set and costumes. You can re-rehearse it in a week. A revival fund makes economic sense. What you are then doing is multiplying the contracts, increasing employability and ensuring that more people see it. All of that equals value for money. A revival fund has existed through the Arts Council in the South for many years. Culture Ireland has championed it for a long, long time. It is simple enough for us to get advice on where the pitfalls are with it and what its strengths are. Let us look at how we can possibly introduce that in the North.

Also, let us look at how we can have high quality theatre at international conferences and events. Every time Kabosh has produced or performed our work at any international or national conference or event, we have been invited back. We have been asked to go back and do it again, and we have been asked for advice.

'Two Roads West' is a project that we did in a black taxi in west Belfast for an audience of five that travelled through the peace wall and looked at conflict resolution. The model for that show is currently being looked at in places from Quebec to the Gaza Strip. Those are places where people move from one zone into another that they do not feel that they have ownership of. Theatre is seen as a safe, inclusive means of being able to raise questions that are not otherwise being raised.

Please, when visitors come here, try to bring them to indigenous arts events. If you are not sure what would suit them, lift the phone to any of us, and we will advise. We are not likely to encourage you to go an event that will not suit the person who is with you and which does not meet your needs. We understand our work, and we understand our audiences. We are all very good at what we do. Lift the

phone and ask us, and say, "Listen, I have somebody coming over. They or their family are very interested in sport, conflict resolution or musical theatre." Whatever it is, there will be something happening in the North that has been made here, is absolutely unique to here and then you can become an ambassador by bringing them to see our work. We do post-show discussions, we publish scripts and programmes. We can enhance their experience.

Let us work closely with Arts and Business. Arts and Business has been invaluable to us, particularly over the past three years. Kabosh recently won the Arts Organisation of the Year Award. It recently won the Business Enhancement Award. We are a small-scale company. There are two-and-a-half of us. Our annual investment is £95,000. We have become world leaders in site-specific theatre that meets cultural tourism needs and can deal with conflict resolution.

Please re-look at the Per Cent for Art scheme. A percentage of everything that is built in the North, from a road to a building to whatever it is, can go into investing in permanent or semi-permanent art. That could be a play-writing commission or a visual arts sculpture. The visual arts sculptures across the South do not cost money because they are built into the cost of building those things, and that percentage is set aside for arts engagement.

I know I have talked at you, and I am sorry, but I wanted to get through the nine recommendations. I suppose that, like everything, like that sneaky tenth glen, that sneaky Glenravel Glen, my tenth reason is the answer to: why do it? We change people's lives. We make a difference. We make people imagine new possibilities. We make people look with different eyes at contested space and space that they do not feel ownership of. We have helped to break the cycle of violence. We are creating unique, indigenous work here that when visitors come to see it, they are blown away. They send us e-mails constantly, saying, "We would like another trip."

We are good at what we do, and there are a lot of good people doing what they do. We work very proactively within the Northern Ireland Theatre Association and with Equity. We have sat on panels in the Arts Council. We provide mentoring for young fledgling companies coming through. We work with Queen's University and all the regional colleges. We really try to be vocal about the impact and what we have learned through what we do. I have worked in this industry for 25 years. That is me — I will take any questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Paula. You certainly covered a lot of ground.

Ms McFetridge: Sorry, yes; I talk very quickly.

The Chairperson: You are incredibly enthusiastic as well. One suggestion that has been made throughout this process is, perhaps, the establishment of a creative hub for Northern Ireland, similar to that in Scotland. How do you think that could work here and have you done any work with Creative Scotland? Perhaps you could give us a comparison in relation to theatre particularly.

Ms McFetridge: Sure. I was very heavily involved with the National Theatre of Scotland in the early days. Obviously, as I am sure you all know, it is a non-building-based organisation. It is an administrative base that works with existing producers across Scotland to enhance the impact and scale of their work. It has been very successful.

What is interesting is that it is probably more effective to look at National Theatre Wales because Wales has, obviously, a smaller land mass and smaller grouping of people. They learned from the mistakes in Scotland and they have a much more rural spread. They have created projects that have toured to everywhere from working men's clubs to mining villages, youth centres and community centres. It has been very successful. What is also interesting is that it has nurtured the next generation of arts makers, and that has been the massive success of it. It has also encouraged that new generation of arts makers to work within the second and third-level education system. You then develop peer-mentoring schemes. Each of the more established companies also takes on a fledgling company. You are not creating new administrative bases. You are not in places where computers and phones sit and you have endless administrative staff. You are investing in people who have already proved their worth and you have encouraged them to move it on.

I ran the Lyric for five years around the time when we were talking about the rebuild and I was part of the whole process for choosing the new architect, designer and all that, and why we stayed on the same site. One issue that came up was whether there was a place for a theatre administrative base in the North responsible for touring throughout. The regional theatre body in the North recently produced 'Carthaginians', and that came out of the Millennium Forum in Derry and was an amalgamation between the Ardhowen in Enniskillen, the Burnavon in Cookstown, the Riverside in Coleraine, the Millennium Forum in Derry and the Lyric in Belfast. The show also toured to Dublin, and there is a very strong chance of it going to Scotland and being part of the Welsh festival of new Celtic work. It toured for 13 weeks and provided employment for approximately 15 people, including cast and crew, for a 24-week period. It came out of an administrative base and was an example of joined-up thinking. They also put bursary systems and training schemes in place. The models exist, and I support that wholeheartedly. We do not need to create new administrative bases, but we need to be very careful about how we nurture that new generation of talent.

The Chairperson: If there were a Creative Northern Ireland or Creative Belfast, as such, who should take the lead on that?

Ms McFetridge: One of the first things to do would be to have an advisory committee that could include representatives from this Committee. We would need representatives from the independent theatre sector, such as Kabosh, Tinderbox or Prime Cut — those companies that are not building based. It would be important to have the Lyric at the table and to have a couple of the regional venues. The Northern Ireland Theatre Association is very well placed to take the lead because of its membership base: it has everything from individuals to venues and is completely spread across the North. It also does a lot of work with the Irish Theatre Institute, which is based in Dublin, and has links with Creative Scotland.

At the last annual conference, representatives from Creative Scotland and the National Theatre Wales were over to talk at the Baby Grand, and, this year, at the Lyric, Audiences Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Theatre Association and the Irish Theatre Institute are hosting a joint conference for three weeks in the first week in June. It will be a very interesting time to maybe have a side discussion about whether that is possible and how people think that it could progress. I am more than happy to table that if the Committee would like me to.

The Chairperson: We have found that creative industries has a very broad definition and there are so many strands included in it. That is obviously then reflected in the number of Departments and bodies that are also to be included. Do you feel that that has presented a problem for theatre and for the creative industries generally — the fact that it has such a broad definition?

Ms McFetridge: I do not, actually. I think that it is important that we do consider it as an industry. That is one of the issues when we talk about funding, as opposed to investment. I do not think necessarily that we would go cap in hand, looking for funding. It is important that we keep saying that, yes, we are investing in the creative industries. As I said at beginning, £1 invested in Kabosh generates £3.25. I think that, yes, every time there is new terminology, we need to re-educate ourselves and we need to inform ourselves and we need to get used to using that language.

We most definitely see ourselves as an industry. There are umbrella organisations across the North that deal with each sector and, from the outside, sometimes there is a perception that we are all at each other's throats and see ourselves as competition, but we do not. I see that Oh Yeah is here and I have worked with Stuart on a regular basis. Stuart works in music and I work in theatre, but we both recognise what each other does, we applaud each other when we have successes and we are more than happy to talk when things do not work.

There is joined-up thinking between us, and I do not see it as an issue. I see it more as a positive; a benefit. The fact that we are all so vocal and so passionate about what we do is positive. We choose to base ourselves here and to work here because we believe in what we are doing. If we were in it to make money, we would not be working in the creative industries in the North. As I say, I have worked in this area for a very long time. I think that there are a lot of movements to be made. It is very

important that theatre is still one of the genres listed when creative industries is talked about because sometimes it can be digital animation, music, film, visual arts, and sometimes we tend to lose theatre because we do not see it fitting neatly within that. But, as I said, we need to get better at how we mutually educate and inform each other.

Mr Swann: Thanks, Paula, for your obvious enthusiasm and for your promotion of the nine glens of Antrim, which is probably one of the most fantastic tourism attractions in Northern Ireland and a part of my constituency.

You gave us nine points as to what could be done. My blunt question is why they have not been done, and who has been holding them back?

Ms McFetridge: We have been doing them. Individually, we do it within our companies. I am just embracing the opportunity of sharing with the Committee what I see as important. Those nine things exist within the Kabosh business plan. They are nine things that, on a weekly and monthly basis, we tease apart with our board as regards how we do it. As for the Forum for Local Government and the Arts, as I said, I have worked tirelessly over the past 10 years to keep pushing that agenda and to keep saying, "Let us keep arts on the agenda." On North/South collaborations, I have done a lot of work with Culture Ireland and I have been an ambassador for them to America a couple of times. Every time I am there, I wave the flag about here, I talk about branding and cultural development. I make sure that it is on the agenda.

What I am saying to the Committee is that I can continue to do it, but if we all start pushing the same thing, it becomes stronger. The cross-departmental argument is something that this Committee could really take the lead on and work with us to encourage other Departments to see theatre as a means whereby they can promote their own portfolio and enhance their own beliefs, visions and strategies. That is something that this Committee could undoubtedly do.

Mr Swann: There was talk of setting up committees and boards. One of the presentations we were given previously referred to a culture tsar for Northern Ireland.

Ms McFetridge: Sorry. Could you say that again?

Mr Swann: A cultural tsar could be appointed for Northern Ireland to go around and champion —
[Laughter.]

Ms McFetridge: I am just trying to think who that would be. Leave that one with me.

Mr Swann: Taking into consideration the Chair's contribution of the wide range of the creative industries, do you see that as a possibility, or would it become someone who could be too secular, too focused or too one-sided?

Ms McFetridge: Look at what Gabriel Byrne has done in the South. He was appointed by Culture Ireland 18 months ago to become the cultural tsar for the South. He spoke at the launch of the strategy for Culture Ireland and arts engagement from the South internationally in New York. Because it is him, the media go mad. Look at the people we have. Liam Neeson is the patron of the Lyric Theatre. He would undoubtedly push agendas anywhere internationally. Look at Adrian Dunbar or Jimmy Nesbitt. All Jimmy Nesbitt has to do is get into his car and drive to the end of the road and he makes the front page of the paper. There are people who are so proud of being from here and we have the links to them. Again, I reference Stuart, because I can see him sitting there. Stuart has links to the music industry. Collectively, we know those people and, yes, it will be difficult finding a cultural tsar who would have knowledge of all the different genres that exist, but you will find that most of us have a certain knowledge of the cream of visual arts, music and film. Those people are there, and they are more than willing to help. The arts organisations can help you possibly find a handful of them. Maybe we will find four or five different people.

Yes, I think we need to find high-profile people who are prepared to be informed and vocal, but I also think that the Committee can be ambassadors. You have all been elected; your constituencies believe

in you and listen to you — most of the time, or some of the time. *[Laughter.]* You have the ear of grass-roots people, so you can also become those ambassadors. I do not think we necessarily need cultural tsars all the time. I just think that, individually, we need to be better informed, prepared to talk about it and to be seen at arts events. Count on us as people who will work with you to do that.

I hope that that answered your question, Robin. I went off on one again. Sorry.

Mr Swann: You are all right. Thanks.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks Paula. As Mr Swann said, your passion shines out, and I think that that is indicative of a lot of people involved in the creative industries. I was a member of the Forum for Local Government and the Arts for some years. I noticed that you touched on the '1 in 5' project, which was in my borough of Limavady. I do not think that anybody can disagree with the nine-point proposals that you put forward. You are also looking at this in a healthy way, that is, through co-ordination and co-operation across the island, across these islands and internationally as regards best practice.

I am interested in the local one, the Per Cent for Art scheme, which I know has been hit and miss in places. How best do you see that being rolled out? As you said, there is no costing to that if it is put in from day one, and the benefits of it are huge where it has worked successfully. How do you envisage that being done? Should it be on a cross-departmental basis?

Ms McFetridge: Let us look at Arts Care, for example. We can see what Arts Care has achieved in hospitals and in home and community settings across the North. Look at ClownDoctors and the impact that that scheme has on families and on children who are terminally ill. That impact is a testament to the work of the ClownDoctors scheme. The scheme costs virtually nothing and is funded through health and through the hospitals.

Why do we not talk to somebody such as Anne McReynolds from the MAC? The sculpture that was commissioned in St Anne's Square when the building was built was a percentage of the cost of the MAC. It was not additional money. The playwright in residence at the Lyric will produce work over the next 12 months and has to do workshops for young fledgling writers. Again, that did not cost money.

When the Per Cent for Art scheme was first talked about, which, I suppose, could be eight years ago, the one borough council that pushed it forward was Carrickfergus, which created a sculpture at Carrickfergus Castle. The other borough councils found the paperwork aspect of the scheme and how it would work difficult to navigate. We just need to talk to those who have made it work, particularly in the South, where there have been loads of public arts sculptures and so on.

I think we can be inventive about it. For example, why do we not put a dance teacher for a year into each school that is built? It does not have to be a piece of public art. That dance teacher could then be asked to commit to training dance teachers from across the North once a month. They could come to a school anywhere. They would also have to provide training for young people who want to do vocational dance training and create a dance piece that tours arts centres.

We could devise contracts that ensure that the Per Cent for Art scheme has an impact and will work. I am a huge advocate of the scheme. I know there have been teething problems but it would not have continued to happen in the South if it was not working. So, there must be people there who we can learn from.

I spoke at length about it to Fiach Mac Conghail, director of the Abbey Theatre. When the Abbey did the renovation of its auditorium, it was on a small budget. However, because it was built into the renovation costs through the construction firm, he was able to get a playwright in residence for the next 12 months.

Cathal, I would be more than happy to assist in finding the right people to get around a table to talk about how we make Per Cent for Art work.

Mr Ó hOisín: That is an interesting job of work. In fairness, Chair, it is something we should look very closely at.

Mr McGimpsey: Thanks, Paula. I would not disagree with anything that you said. Clearly, it is not just about enthusiasm but knowledge and huge potential. What interested me is how we engage our young people and children, which you touched on. The place to engage them is in school. Again, it is about cross-departmental working. Are we getting the cross-departmental co-operation that we need? I suspect not. Are the schools engaging in the way they should? I suspect not.

You had a notion about a dance tutor going from school to school. It is about how we get into classrooms and get to young people to get them to come forward to learn music, dance and theatre. Here yesterday, for example, the new Confucius Institute, which is based at the University of Ulster, put on a cultural show that included traditional Chinese music and dance. However, the traditional Chinese dance was performed by a group of young girls from a school in Ballymena. How did the Chinese manage to get into a school in Ballymena and persuade all those youngsters to volunteer and learn traditional Chinese dance moves? It was really very good and of high quality. It seems to me that we here are missing an awful lot. We concentrate a lot — and rightly so — on economic benefits, tourism benefits, jobs and money, but there is potential there among our young people. It is about unlocking that potential for creativity and innovation, getting in amongst them and, in your sector, about persuading them to come forward for music, dance and theatre. How do you see that going forward?

Ms McFetridge: I think it is essential that it is cross-departmental. We have to work with the Health Department and the Department of Education. It is imperative that we do that. I also think that we should have the Department for Employment and Learning at the table. There are various strands to it. For example, you mentioned the school in Ballymena. We were invited to Ballymena by the PSNI and Ballymena Borough Council to take a small piece out of the Limavady project called 'Fever', which looked at antisocial behaviour. It is a 15-minute piece of theatre. We performed it in the home economics unit in a school in Ballymena for 20 young people, and then had a post-show discussion about alcoholism, drug abuse and antisocial behaviour. We had no trappings of theatre; we were performing just there. They could see the whites of the actors' eyes. The actors were from here.

There are various things that happen there. One is that we are informing and educating them. We are giving them contact with high-quality arts engagement. We had a facilitated post-show discussion. They are also seeing people from here speaking with their own accents who work as professionals within the field. If we are going to instil a love, knowledge and desire to work within the creative industries, we also have to support the professionals who work within the sector so that those young people who we are instilling all of that desire in can see that it is possible to actually gain employment within the sector. It is key that we do both.

Another thing is that the number of school visits to theatre has reduced, inevitably, because of the economic downturn and because of changing priorities within education, yet the number of young people at second and third level within schools, universities and techs across the North who are actually learning drama, music, media studies and film studies has gone through the roof. What happens is that they are learning within the formal education system.

I mentioned workplace internships and apprentices — all those things that used to work within trade. We should be encouraging our local producers and supporting them to host long-term placements, particularly at third level. Kabosh is very committed to that, but I will not take a student on placement unless I am in production and I can guarantee that they will not be stuffing envelopes but will be in a rehearsal room with me, actually learning something.

NITA has set up a scheme that starts in September and will work for the next 12 months. It invited young people between the ages of 20 and 30 — calling them young people gives away my age — who want to work within the industry and want to understand technically what happens in production. That is one of the areas in which we are lacking personnel because of the talent drain. People have been trained here and have gone away. They will get paid placements for five weeks with a professional theatre company and they will get touring experience. Various models exist, and we just need to be better at working within the Education, Health and Employment and Learning Departments to say that that is the work that we do.

Unfortunately, at times, money is thrown at you and it is easier to get investment if you bring in an outside organisation to work in a school. I am not surprised that there was an international dance company that was able to get investment to work in a school in Ballymena, as opposed to, potentially, a local dance company. On those occasions, I would not turn down international engagement, but, when that happens, let us start looking at how we pair that international group with a local group so that they collaboratively work to create something with those young people. As professionals, they then create a joint project that tours arts centres and theatres locally, nationally and internationally. The investment for that international touring is a completely different pot of money to the money that goes into the local arts organisations. It is about how we multiply and diversify the income and investment strands. That is how we can take the blinkers off and start opening our minds to what is possible.

I completely agree with you. I am a huge advocate of it. We have some great theatre companies in the North that work within schools. The Replay Theatre Company has been going for approximately 30 years. It is the best-placed young people's theatre company. It works with under-fives and in primary schools, secondary schools and third-level education. It also does special needs projects. The quantity of work that it does is incredible. However, that type of work requires an increased investment because of the relationship ratio between adults and children and to ensure quality engagement.

Cahoots NI creates intense spectacles that involve illusion and magic. It goes into schools and works in arts and business and it has performed at Stormont on numerous occasions. It is a world leader and is applauded around the globe, yet we do not sing its praises at home. Paul McEneaney has been invited to America twice this year to direct projects. Work that he has done here has been transferred internationally, and he has also been working in Australia. That is great for a wee boy from Armagh. We need to keep telling him that he is brilliant at what he does and ask him how we can learn from him. DU Dance, formerly known as Dance United, does a lot of work in that area as well.

Organisations such as Cinemagic and Northern Visions have been creating film and television projects with young people. I started out with them when I was about 12; that is how I got involved. Northern Visions's funding has just been cut because it does not fit into Northern Ireland Screen or the Arts Council, but that organisation has been going for 27-odd years, creating film and television projects for young people and nurturing new generations.

I appreciate the question and I think that it is really important.

Mr McGimpsey: You talked about health, and I understand the valuable role that the arts play as therapy for depression and loneliness. How do you engage in the health sector? How do you manage that? You might get a lot of doctors and nurses and health professionals talking health talk. They will appreciate and understand the proposal, but it is about how you make it work.

Ms McFetridge: The first step is to encourage them to have five minutes of a live performance at an event or a conference. I have done a lot of this work in the field of conflict resolution, but I have also done it in the health sector. There is a piece written by Bernard MacLavery that the Tinderbox Theatre Company performs, which is about senile dementia. The company commissioned it three years ago and it was performed at a conference in Belfast. Two delegates had travelled from Scotland to see it. Since then, that particular play reading, which employs five local actors for two days, because it is read, has been performed at international health conferences and is considered to be one of the most incredibly powerful, proactive and engaging means of stimulating discussion at a conference. It has the effect of breaking down stereotypes. You get people to have animated discussion much quicker. That is how we have done it.

We had a piece in the Limavady project that took the form of a simulated operation, in which we looked at how we cut poverty out of people and how we change the poverty cycle. It is a 10-minute piece of theatre, which is very big and brash and over the top. It is mobile and flexible and we can perform it anywhere. That is how we do things in the initial stages. Then, for example, there is a project called 'Hostel', which is a piece about sheltered accommodation. It can be taken into educational institutions where we are training the next generation of those who want to work in the health industry. That is the way that I would do it initially.

Potentially, then, you can start doing work in hospital foyers or outside hospitals. You can look at the site-specific nature of the project. The visual arts sector has undoubtedly found it easier to engage with health than the theatre has done, because it is seen to be easier. However, I am saying that it can happen with theatre and with music, through live recitals. Because of the way that theatre works, we can raise difficult issues that politicians and the media and those who work in the sector cannot raise, because we are perceived to be neutral. We can ask difficult questions because we can take fact and then we can fictionalise. We challenge the owners of the fact and the audience, which makes it a different experience.

We have done the same thing in the area of conflict resolution, and it works. We raise the issues very quickly, so that people have to leave their personal baggage at the door and have to think differently. It makes them imagine new possibilities. Yes, it is possible.

Mr McGimpsey: I think that the key would be the Public Health Agency, which is about promotion, prevention and protection. I think that there is real potential there.

The Chairperson: Paula, thank you for your presentation and for taking questions. It was very enlightening. Thank you very much.

Ms McFetridge: Any time. Much appreciated.