Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

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

3 May 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKevitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Peter Hutchinson	Landscape Institute
Mr Alastair McCapra	Landscape Institute
Mr Peter Mullin	Landscape Institute
Mr Jo Watkins	Landscape Institute

The Chairperson: I welcome Jo Watkins, Peter Hutchinson, Pete Mullin and Alastair McCapra. I am not sure who would like to lead off. Is it Mr Watkins?

Mr Jo Watkins (Landscape Institute): I am afraid it is me; I drew the short straw. Good morning, and thank you very much for inviting us to be here today. My name is Jo Watkins, and I am president of the Landscape Institute, which is the chartered professional body for landscape architects in the United Kingdom. I am a landscape architect. I am joined by my colleague Pete Mullin, who is a landscape architect with a private practice in Belfast. Pete sits on our national policy committee. Peter Hutchinson is also a private practitioner landscape architect in Belfast and is an elected member of our national advisory council. Alastair McCapra is chief executive of the Landscape Institute. In a moment, I will get Peter to talk about some of the issues. Rather than going through our response paper, Peter will talk about some of the issues particular to him and his colleagues working in Northern Ireland. First, I invite Alastair to explain a little bit about what the Landscape Institute is and what landscape architects do.

Mr Alastair McCapra (Landscape Institute): Thank you very much. I am not a landscape architect; I am the only one of us who is not. However, I run the national office in London on behalf of the profession.

There are just under 6,000 landscape architects in the UK. In Northern Ireland, there are 75 chartered landscape architects, and if you include trainees and students, the total is 115. There are 17

registered landscape architect practices in various parts of Northern Ireland, mostly in Belfast or clustered fairly close around it.

Landscape architects work on all kinds of schemes of different scales and sizes. Some examples are included in the documents that we have given you. The scheme with the highest profile in the UK at the moment is the Olympic Park. However, the scale goes right down to squares, public gardens, quaysides, waterfronts, school grounds, new housing developments and anywhere there is a public space where people are going to be moving around and interacting. Sometimes, a scheme requires a hard space to be designed for large numbers of people to go through it and to be able to take quite a beating. Other schemes require is a softer space, and some can be very specific, such as a memory garden for people who have Alzheimer's.

All those things are projects that landscape architects work on. Sometimes they lead the project, sometimes they largely execute it themselves with contractors, but very often they work in conjunction with architects, engineers or other professions. So, it is a very wide-ranging profession, but my colleagues here, who are landscape architects, will be able to tell you more about it, perhaps during the question session.

Mr Peter Hutchinson (Landscape Institute): Hi, everyone. I am going to talk a bit about myself as an example of someone who lives and works as a landscape architect. I will then talk a wee bit about the present situation and how we are finding it. Then, I will maybe talk a little bit about hope, because I do not want to be all doom and gloom.

You can always tell a designer, because you are either a man of the cloth or you wear black. That is part and parcel of the uniform. I have been a designer for 40 years. Although I am a landscape architect, I am also a chartered designer, an illustrator, a product designer, a print maker and an artist. However, primarily, I am a landscape architect.

I have worked in the public sector and the private sector. I worked on Craigavon Development Commission, which I am not too sure too many of you will be able to remember. Then, I started my own practice, which I have been in for 30 years. For 20 years, I was also a teaching fellow at Queen's University, so I delivered design in the school of architecture. I also did a landscape elective, so I am very much into landscape architecture and design.

I am not sure if anybody knows the sort of work that I have done. If you are up at Belfast International Airport and walk from the airport to the car park, all of the landscaping that you see was designed by me. Colin Glen, which is now the biggest linear river valley and the biggest trust in Great Britain, was designed in 1983. That is still being developed and is still providing masses of employment and work. I did the Bow Street Mall, which was the first commercially developed pedestrian street scheme outside the centre of Belfast, and is still probably the most successful one. A recent project was the RUC George Cross garden, which some of you may have been to. It was opened by Prince Charles and has won 10 awards. I am working at present on Castle Hill, Dungannon, where the O'Neills had their castle during the Flight of the Earls. The range of work is wide: it can be industrial, residential or commercial.

I feel passionate about design. I have vast experience but I am not the only one. The institute is made up of a lot of small practices of one, two or three people. There are one or two big international practices but it is still very much a range of practices of under three people because, obviously, we work with 20 companies and have 70-odd chartered members.

The tragedy is that we have been so badly hit by the present economic situation. We are also castrated to a certain extent by the system itself. We lack, could I be so bold to say, an intelligent client. I will give you a couple of examples, and this is not personal, by the way. The procurement process is a wonderful thing but it is like a dinosaur. It is so time-consuming, and then there is the cost. It is geared to the big practices. If you have a machine that fills the form in properly, it does not end up with the best. It had great intentions. Now, no matter many how many awards I have and all the rest of it, I virtually cannot get a job in Northern Ireland. It has nearly become exclusive to all the practices, and some, I know, are struggling, to say the least.

We talked about education. I am at the end now. I have had 40 good years at this, and I have enjoyed it and will still keep working. However, the younger ones are coming in. I offered the course of landscape architecture to Queen's University on a plate. It decided not to take it up for the most spurious of reasons, so we got it into the University of Ulster about four years ago. We got it going for a year, and then there was a bit of a hiccup, so we put it on ice for a year. It was going to be relaunched this year with landscape architecture and urban design, with landscape architecture at the core. One of the things that made Northern Ireland special was its courses. What did they do? Twenty-four hours beforehand, they pulled the plug. We were not given a reason. All the structure was in place and everything was lined up. It seems illogical that we would do that if we want to support innovative and creative design in Northern Ireland. We have fantastic assets and resources here. We are not asking for something special here. All we want is a level playing field so that we can compete like anybody else.

We would hope for investment in design for the return of landscape architecture. The park in Dungannon cost £1 million. The work has been going for four years. There are contractors, fabricators and earthwork contractors. It is generating work for a lot of people, and we will end up with a park that will be part of a visitor attraction. There are 700 people coming for the opening, 400 of them from America. The Irish President, Michael D Higgins, is opening it. The police will here as well and will be joining him. There is obviously something very important in it. The value we give for the very small amount of money that is expended is tremendous.

I want to finish on the issue of the next generation. I got a letter recently, on 30 April, from Terence Murphy, a young student who recently graduated. He mentions PLACE, the centre for planning, landscape, architecture, community and environment, which is on Fountain Street and is run by Conor McCafferty. Terence said:

> *"I recently called into Place on Fountain Street and Conor McCafferty passed me your details in order to get in contact with LINI. My general query is just regarding graduate/junior landscape architect positions in Northern Ireland. Having graduated in landscape architecture from Manchester (having had a previous background in landscape planning/assessment & development control) last June and speculatively sent my cv out to many consultancies I am now of the opinion that the opportunities in the medium-long term are non-existent. Do you foresee any improvement in opportunities or is this a career path that has become obsolete in Northern Ireland?"*

I do not want to be sad, but it affects me in the sense that, because of the amount that you have put into it, you want it to continue, and that is the sort of thing that we have ended up with.

Mr Watkins: Thank you, Peter. I will ask Alastair to conclude with a brief summary of where we think we are and what we would like to offer.

Mr McCapra: We invite you to think about three main points during the inquiry. One is about strategy, one is about attitude, and, as Peter mentioned, one is about procurement. I will start with strategy. A number of countries and territories across Europe are moving very quickly to develop national or territorial design strategies. Denmark, in fact, is quite well advanced in creating a design strategy for the whole country. In effect, the Danish Government regard Denmark as a design business, and they are preparing a market offer, Denmark Inc, that will be going out to the world with a clear brand and a specific offer of what Denmark has that is distinctive from anywhere else. Other places are doing similar things, but they are not always called design strategies. In Wales, it is called an innovation strategy. Right across Europe, smaller countries in particular and territories such as Catalunya are doing the same kind of thing. There is a lot of competition out there, so the question is this: where would Northern Ireland Inc like to be in 2030 or 2050, and how will you pull all of that together and make it work? If you do not have that strategic level of thinking, you will just get elbowed aside.

The second thing is attitude, and this is a slightly delicate topic. I will give you a contrast. If you were to ask landscape architecture practices in England about work in Wales, they would pretty much all tell you that there is no point in bidding for work in Wales. The reason for that is that the Welsh, using the same procurement rules as everyone else and under the same European law, simply tend, on the whole, to give work to local practices. They do that legally and properly, but they have an approach to their public procurement that says that part of their job is not only to offer tax breaks and incentives

but to nurture, build and sustain their local businesses in Wales. Other parts of the world have different views, but many of my members tell me that, in Northern Ireland, in some cases, the opposite attitude prevails, in that, if it is not from Northern Ireland, it is generally regarded as better or sexier or more exciting or more modern. They find that there is an uphill struggle against the attitude that, if it is not from Northern Ireland, it is probably better.

The third issue is procurement, which Peter talked about. It is great to talk about new business sectors such as digital technology and so forth, but landscape architecture is a mature sector. The Landscape Institute has been around since 1929, and, as I said, there are 75 practitioners in Northern Ireland and 17 well-developed, mature businesses. They do not need business assistance. What they need is a public procurement system that allows them to flourish. It is significant that landscape architects have a different relationship with you as representatives of the public authority than perhaps some of the other people you have heard from during your inquiry. Public authorities here are not particularly likely to commission, for example, pieces of jewellery or ballets, but you do commission parks, pedestrian precincts, public spaces and national parks. How you go about that has a real impact on the profession.

Mr Watkins: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chairperson: Thank you. It is incredibly disappointing to hear about the lack of support from our universities for landscape architecture, as well as officials' lack of recognition and understanding of what you do, as you said in your paper. Is that something that you need to take on board as well? Are you maybe not selling your message in the way that you should, or do you believe that it is really a matter for others and that you have done the best that you can?

Mr Hutchinson: I think everybody is guilty in that respect. You look in hindsight at how you market yourself.

Mr Pete Mullin (Landscape Institute): As landscape architects, we are quite often in the background; I suppose it is part of our training. We are not necessarily showy or upfront about the work that we do. Quite often, good landscape architecture goes unnoticed; it is about the stuff that you do not see and that you walk over every day without really realising. It is not necessarily a highly paid industry, but you get a certain amount of satisfaction from producing something that people enjoy. We are sometimes a bit like wallflowers when we are in a room with architects and engineers because we are not necessarily the loudest. You are right; maybe we need to shout a little bit louder and make our presence and value heard a bit more.

The Chairperson: How many landscape architects are there in Northern Ireland?

Mr Watkins: There are 75. There are around 4,000 in the UK. Those are professional members.

Mr Mullin: I think that number is falling. I do not know what that figure is based on, but I know quite a few who have left in the past years.

Mr Watkins: So, it is 75 and falling, we think. It was interesting to listen to our colleagues from Nesta who were here earlier because they are from a related sector. They spoke about how they consider themselves to be a very small organisation with, I think, 90 staff: we have 14. It is a daily struggle to explain that there is so much to do. We can see outside; we look at industrial dereliction, the need for new power, the infrastructure projects that are coming in, rail lines, road schemes and all the rest of it, and there is so much to deal with.

We talked about education earlier, which is a terribly interesting sector for all of us, and yet we are a very small profession. We have to pick and choose our battles to win, which is why we are here today. It is a terrific opportunity to talk to you, and this is part of our programme of reaching out and explaining what landscape architecture is about. I do not want to talk about Armageddon, but we wanted to do that before it disappears off the face of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is unique in the United Kingdom, in that the critical mass is simply not going to be there very soon. It will just not

work, and you will lose those skills. The product, as Alastair was saying, is Northern Ireland. You have this extraordinary place and yet, and yet.

The Chairperson: It strikes me that you have a job of work to do, given the fact that you have professionals based in Northern Ireland yet jobs are going elsewhere. Alastair, the point that you made about a design strategy is common to a number of presentations that we have received over the past few weeks, as is the need for a design policy. Again, perhaps you need to shout about that, too, and be at the table whenever something like that is being developed in order to make your voice heard.

Mr Hutchinson: We have two landscape architects on the ministerial advisory group (MAG) on the built environment. Presently, Emily is producing a landscape document that is part and parcel of that, so there is a paper, but, unfortunately, it has not been submitted yet. So that ministerial advisory group has architects on it. Again, we are so small that the issue is being able to find the energy. We should maybe shout more, but you need public sector support as well. You need to have the legislation, and you need to have the people in place. When a plan comes in that includes something to do with landscape architecture, those who are dealing with it do not always say that that bit has to be referred to a landscape architect, yet they will refer it to an architect or an engineer. So it works both ways.

Mr Mullin: The structures are not necessarily there. I practised for 15 years in Scotland. I was attracted back about six years ago, for family reasons, by the Celtic tiger and all those sorts of things; I thought I had to get over here. When I left in '89, I had no intentions, necessarily, of coming back — I was on the boat and away. I came back with a lot of optimism. I kept my mind open as to how things were progressing, and we have seen quite a bit of progress. However, what strikes me, when compared to my experiences in Scotland, is that we do not have landscape architects embedded in the structures here. For example, we do not have any landscape architects practising in roads authorities here, whereas they have a very key role to play in the roads Departments in Scotland and the UK. There are landscape architects in Forestry Commission Scotland; we have none in the Forest Service. Landscape architects are embedded in all those sorts of structures, whether they involve the environment or water. There is the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the water authority, Scottish Water, and Scottish National Heritage; all those different bodies have landscape architects embedded in the process of developing policy.

We do not have any of that here. The landscape architects that we have at local authority level are working under Planning Service and, nowadays, are very much employed, much to their frustration, just to comment and give an opinion on planning applications that come in. That is not really what their training is for. They are trained to develop policies, landscape studies and a landscape planning approach. If we can start to get people embedded in those processes, industry will then be healthy. To give you an example, in Scotland, we have 500 members. Scotland is obviously a bigger land mass, with a population of 4 million or 5 million. However, there is a disproportionately larger number of landscape architects working there. They filter through from the college courses, and go out and make work for themselves. Some are in private practice and some find a place in local authorities, working for housing associations or planning offices. So, there is a critical mass there, and that then tends to keep itself healthy as regards producing work. Here, at the moment, I see lethargy among members. I find it a bit sad, having come back with such enthusiasm, that some members are wondering what they are going to do. In my opinion, we need to keep a level of optimism to try to up the ante and embed ourselves back into those positions. We are starting to make some headway with that. As was mentioned, meetings like this help and go a long way towards educating our clients, if you like, as to what we are about.

Mr Swann: Thank you for your presentation. I have listened to Peter, and the frustration has come through. You mentioned the ministerial advisory group. Is it effective? Is it helping you at all?

Mr Hutchinson: Barrie Todd was the first chair of the group, a very eminent architect with great insight and a great designer. However, the group is more architecture-led or engineering-led. Although we shout and scream, we play our part. We are never in the lead role in these things; it was set up by government that way and is just the way it always has been. However, we are driving as much as we can in that group. As I said, this paper will help to advance that aspect.

Mr Swann: I hear your frustration with the universities. What do you feel was the key? I am asking for your personal opinion.

Mr Hutchinson: They tend to come down to finance, or some sort of internal structural issue as to what the priorities are and so on. We did actually convert the head of school. We had a couple of wonderful lectures, and he went from being a complete sceptic to having a landscape urban design course. He just said, "Wow." He was absolutely gobsmacked. We have not yet got a thing, but it must be some sort of financial thing. They are struggling.

Mr Mullin: I do not have the figures. My own experience is that I went to Edinburgh to study. In each year there were about five students from Northern Ireland or thereabouts. I would say that there were approximately 20 people from Northern Ireland studying in Edinburgh at the time that I was there. We also were at universities in Manchester and London. If you were to take the pool of people from Northern Ireland who have to head off across the water to get that level of education and you were to work out the numbers carefully, you would probably be able to sustain a course here. That is not to say that everyone would want to study landscape architecture here; they might want to go away and experience it. However, conversely, if you create an environment that is exemplary, you might attract other people to come here to study.

So there are moves afoot. Undeterred, Emily, who is the past chair of our institute and also a member of the MAG, is having discussions with Greenmount college at a slightly different level. That is not necessarily a natural stream through which people would come into the profession. You talked earlier about education pathways, and the standard way to come into the profession is by doing your A levels and an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Having said that, there may be other opportunities to work with students who have come out of the likes of Greenmount and who have certain skills. With a bit of nurturing and development, your might find that some people can come through from that. Even if we were able to develop some kind of diploma-level qualification, that would at least create an awareness and would mean that we have people who are educated to a certain standard.

Mr Swann: Have you any interaction with those College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) courses at all, even at a lower level?

Mr Mullin: Interestingly, when the course was pulled from the University of Ulster after it had just got under way, there was, I think, some level of disappointment. Greenmount has a relationship with the University of Ulster: it is supposed to be a feeder for the kids coming through from CAFRE courses. If you are studying, let us say, horticulture in Greenmount and you have a particular flair for design or a particular interest in that sort of thing, your next natural choice should be to go into landscape architecture. However, when students get to that point they realise that there is nothing there for them and they then have to rethink their career path. So there are a few problems in the system as well.

Mr Hutchinson: For example, I taught design to a small group of students who specialised in garden design in one of their modules, although horticulture was their primary focus. Some students are doing classes on golf-course design and grasses and stuff. I tried to lift the level of design awareness in a much broader sense to focus on garden design. However, that is why the difference is there: garden design or golf-course design.

Mr Mullin: At a different level in education, we tried to produce information to reach that lower level. We produced career information to promote ourselves. It is aimed at school leavers and tries to educate them as to what it is about. A few weeks ago, I had a much more difficult presentation to make to children in primary two. My daughter asked me to go in and tell them what landscape architects do. It was fascinating to see just how excited they were about the simple things, the things that go unnoticed. I asked, "What is the most interesting part of the school?" The playground was the first answer. That is very much a part of it. We have programmes in the industry that talk about learning from landscape and trying to get in at school level to start to educate schools about their environment. It is really about stewardship and ensuring that, as children grow into citizens, they have an awareness and an appreciation of the landscaping spaces around them.

Mr Swann: There is a move in the Department for Social Development (DSD) on town centre regeneration and money is coming through to do up shopfronts. Do you have a role in that?

Mr Mullin: There has been quite a programme of village design statements through DSD recently. Those are excellent, and that is a great, positive move. In the past, you would have had a village with a red line around it to say that that was the development zone without much understanding of the aesthetics and particular requirements of a settlement. Village design statements have been rolled out to try to understand the whole village and the requirements and consultation processes that go on. It is a sort of design tool for planning, rather than the standard that we have all become very familiar with in our systems here, namely a development plan-led approach where areas are zoned with one zone for housing, one for education and another for health. Design statements in a design-led approach integrate those sorts of things. Sometimes there should be connectivity and overlap.

So, those plans are good. There are some issues with them with regard to how they are being procured, and procurement has been mentioned. I will give you an example of what tends to happen. In County Down recently, a single tender came out for 15 design statements. So, you had 15 village design statements all going to one practice at the lowest price. It is almost bulk buying: rather than spreading around a small pot, if we can get the right person on the job, they will deal with all 15 statements. You might get better design if you have 15 design practices working keenly on their individual projects rather than one practice cutting and pasting its proposals. So, I have criticisms of that mechanism. On the one hand, there are positives but, perhaps because of how they are going about it, the resulting documents are not necessarily as good as they could be.

Mr Hutchinson: There was a tender worth £1 million-plus for a park and a small public building in Carrickfergus. It was just the right sort of small, historic urban scheme. I got the application and could have ticked it all except you had to have undertaken and completed three schemes of £1 million in the past three years. That immediately said, "Sorry, any of the local practices are not eligible." We all just threw our hands up. It was going to go to one of the big boys, who just ticked the box and put it into their portfolio of work. That was rather sad. By the way, the park, designed by Robert Carson, who started landscape architecture, is a heritage site as far as we are concerned. It is like Mecca, yet we were not able to bid. The way it was done, it will go to a big English firm that can tick the boxes and fill the forms in.

Mrs McKevitt: Of course, Robin stole one of my questions about DSD and regeneration. *[Laughter.]* I read with concern that no government landscape architectural advice is given to government-led projects such as roads. I was shocked to read that, and I want your opinion on that. More than that, I was shocked to learn that there is no landscape architecture degree programme in Northern Ireland. However, there must have been something in the background long before that because there is talk about renewing the pilot and building a centre of excellence. Were there plans to build a centre of excellence in Northern Ireland some time back and are you looking for them to be renewed, or is it just that you can see plans being developed in the future?

There are a lot of openings. One was the landscaping around the likes of roads and major council-run regeneration schemes. I agree with you totally on that. Although we welcome money being spent on our villages, we do not want to drive through the same village each time. The point you made about bulk buying was a really good point. However, I would have thought that there would have been a major opening for the likes of your profession through planning policy and the recent changes that were made with regard to green space within developments. Obviously, that has not taken place, and maybe developers are getting away with just having a gardener coming in and planting a few trees. Maybe that is not what the policy is about.

Mr Mullin: You raised a few important points. The first one was on the bigger issue of not having landscape architects in the various Departments. My understanding is that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has a role as a design leader in the Assembly, and, hopefully through this Committee, we will be able to voice a greater concern to the other Departments about the importance of design.

A recent well-publicised example is that of a very contentious golf course design-and-build on the north coast. I do not know who was involved with it and who was for and against it, but that is not relevant.

What is important is that it was quite contentious and reached quite a bit of publicity. At that time, the MAG carried out a design review. My understanding is that the MAG was not happy, not so much with the golf course in principle, because the golf course itself is another type of landscape typology that can be made to fit within its environment. There were issues with the design of the building, the built structures. Ultimately, the headlines were that the Minister of the Environment had to make a decision about this and that he would make the right decision. The advice that was coming through the MAG and the design review was that the design of the building was not to a good enough standard. It was not about the principle of the development of a golf course resort, which was fine and was probably acceptable, but the design quality of what was being proposed was felt to be unacceptable. The decision was made that it be passed with planning conditions attached, but it really ought to have been sent away to come back with an exemplar, aesthetically sensitive structure from which we could move on.

It is important that the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure realise their responsibilities as design leaders. They need to oversee the roads authorities in the rolling out of roads. In energy, a significant programme of wind turbines is being rolled out along with associated infrastructure that no one is really talking about. Quite a lot of new power lines and interconnectors will be popping up all over the place. The issue really crosses all the Departments, including the Department of Education, with the building of new campuses and academies, and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, where landscape architects are also involved.

Peter talked a lot about design and about his award-winning design, but landscape architects also have a significant role in landscape assessment work. A lot of the work that I do tends to look at visual impacts, integration and landscape capacity on all our landscapes and how they are able to appropriately change going forward. You will all be familiar with the fact that, a couple of years ago, through planning policy statement (PPS) 14, the plug was pulled on one-off housing in the countryside. Subsequently, after a moratorium, we are now back to PPS 21. I will not say that the floodgates have opened again, but we now have some handle on how we will go about developing in the countryside. Again, no one is looking at the overall landscape strategy to that. I call it hiding houses in the landscape. If they can build a house on a low site and plant around it, we are OK, but that does not look at the greater landscape and its ability to accommodate such development.

Mr Watkins: That type of work is the absolute macro-scale of design. It is about designing regions and looking at things in a vast context. It is the absolute opposite of designing an object such as jewellery. It is design at its biggest; the bigger stuff. People talk about the Titanic, but this is bigger than the Titanic.

Mr Mullin: You are right. DCAL has invested quite a lot of money in the film industry, and we are trying to encourage all these different industries to come in to our beautiful country of Northern Ireland and look at our wonderful landscapes and our wonderful urban settings. Sadly, lots of stuff is starting to erode. Even though there is a new regional development strategy body, the current structures and systems still do not deal with that. As policy representative for the Landscape Institute here, I have found that it has practically become a job of work for me. I do it voluntarily; I do not get paid. I am not being paid to sit here today, nor is Peter.

Mr Watkins: Nor Jo.

Mr Mullin: Nor Jo. Having said that, we are still very protective of our industry and want it to grow. I have lost my track.

Mrs McKevitt: What involvement have you had with new local art projects such as Sticky Fingers, which we are trying to promote, or the "Balls on the Falls"? Do you see that as part of your role?

Mr Mullin: Absolutely. The "Balls on the Falls" were part of a greater strategy. The moneys for that project came as part of the rebuilding of the road. Money was set aside for art on that section. It is a very urban section of road, so it lends itself well to artistic intervention rather than soft stuff.

Landscape architects tend to be involved in identifying locations for art. I have written briefs in which I have assigned art to be in town centres. We may want to produce something on a particularly difficult corner of the site or make a landmark on the site as you come into the town. We set a brief through consultation with the community and the local councillors. We are there in the background on all those sorts of things.

Mr Hutchinson: I will use the park in Dungannon as an example of how the money is allocated. There is £1 million for that park and £4·5 million for the building. There is a £250,000 budget for interpretation in the building, which will have videos and all the Titanic-type stuff. There is £20,000 for interpretation in a four-acre park. That will get half a dozen signs, and we will put a bit of branding up and what have you. However, it is the park that has a view of the whole of Northern Ireland. There is the topography, social history, heritage, ecology, settlement pattern and geology. It is an educational tool. It is a place that, because of its position, will become central. However, that is the way that the money is allocated. When I ask for money to put physical art in it: zero. It is a mindset of how people consider what is valuable and what is not.

Mr Mullin: The point that I was going to make is that, in the last year, as a policy representative, I have found myself responding on behalf of the institute to quite a raft of policy that has come from the Department of the Environment, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and so on. We generally have an input into all of that, and I feel that there are gaps. The Landscape Institute branch in Northern Ireland should really be a social thing as much as anything. We should not have to feel the need to push policy and respond directly to policy. Much of that should have been taken care of already. It goes back to the point about having landscape architects embedded in the policy process. We should have confidence that, when those policies come out, that has been taken care of already. We could then give it a quick read and say that it is great and that such and such is on the ball there and then make a comment. However, as it stands, the policy responses are getting longer and longer, because we are trying to tell them that they need to be looking at this and need to be looking at that.

Mrs McKevitt: The previous presentation touched on the educational part. What qualifications are needed to become a landscape architect? You mentioned homing in on school leavers, but do you think that you should aim at younger than that? After entering post primary, a child must very soon choose their GCSE subjects. They have not even done them, and they are already trying to decide what is next.

It is all about how to sell your profession's brand, and it is not just your profession: I can see major difficulties right across the board. Early intervention with careers advice that encourages children to go down a path should be a priority in achieving any educational ends. Although it is difficult for a child of 12 or 13 to decide what they want to be when they grow up, that is what is happening around my kitchen table and I see it as a major problem.

Mr Hutchinson: We do careers events and we attend schools. We set up stands, as do members of every other trade or profession, be they engineers, doctors or what have you. A number of people visit you in that way; collectively, thousands from schools are looking to their future. Whether you want to go in the direction of becoming a lawyer, a doctor or member of various other professions requires a particular mindset. You talk about selling landscape architecture. Pupils will probably have been streamed earlier than that because of the way that colleges and schools work. They may consider architecture, because they may think that it is something to do with design. It is strange, but a career in landscape architecture does not seem to be celebrated or promoted to children when they are young enough.

Mr Watkins: We have invested quite a lot of our little budget in careers advice. We have dedicated members of staff who provide that, because we recognised 10 or 15 years ago that it was critical for us to do so. We talk to children of quite a young age to draw them into the profession. You can come in through a number of different routes. I have an undergraduate degree, a postgraduate diploma, and there is a professional examination on top of that. It takes seven years to become a landscape architect, so it is calls for quite an investment of our time and effort. There are different routes in, but

it is about trying to encourage children from quite an early age by saying, "Look — art environment — it is a no-brainer, landscape architecture is you career choice". That is what we try to get across.

Mr McCapra: We have put quite a lot of work into the use of new media. Our careers promotional video on YouTube has been looked at about 30,000 times.

Mr Watkins: It was translated into Turkish.

Mr McCapra: It is so successful that people have started nicking it, and just —

Mrs McKevitt: Sorry; is there a reason why it is translated into Turkish?

Mr McCapra: Just because there is no promotional tool in other countries, so they look at ours and think, "That would be brilliant", we will stick Estonian over it. So, if you look on YouTube, you will see that the Turkish one is the second most popular to ours, but they have just taken the video and superimposed new subtitles on it. We thought that was interesting and wondered where else it was. Well, it has been embedded in the websites of universities in China and all over the place. So it is, effectively, the whole world's —

Mr Watkins: It is simply called 'I Want to be a Landscape Architect'.

Mr McCapra: It had a significant measurable impact on the number of applications to universities.

Mr Mullin: In answer to your question about kids coming through, it is a tertiary level profession. That having been said, the work that we do reaches out on the ground to employ contractors, nurseries and people with specialist skills, such as stone masonry or art, as you mentioned. As an industry —

Mr Watkins: There is a multiplier effect.

Mr Mullin: — we generate quite a lot of potential spin-off work.

Mrs McKevitt: Yes, but when it comes to making a career decision, they do not have that choice here. Students must go across the water to study it. So, the message is not getting to the right places.

Mr Watkins: It is not, no.

Mrs McKevitt: Thank you.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for your very interesting presentation. You compare the examples of Wales and here. Are you saying that Wales is doing the right thing by way of — for want of a better phrase — its social clause? Is Wales's social clause to be looked to as an example?

Mr McCapra: Wales is an example of what can be done. I do not know the exact mechanism that is used. I believe that the Welsh language is a significant factor and that they are legally allowed to give weighting in favour firms that can demonstrate an ability to use the Welsh language. However, I do not think that they rely on that entirely; they simply go about their processes with a cast of mind that part of their job in public procurement is to do what they can to not just start people up but keep them going after they have started up. It is not that they will exclusively employ Welsh practices, but, in the general run of things, that is what they expect to do and that is what generally happens. They do not make a big meal out of it, and everybody knows it. That is final.

Mr Mullin: It comes back to the issue of bulk buying, where one practice will get 15 villages to do. Recently, we had the Streets Ahead project, which was very well publicised around the streets in central Belfast. Again, that was a single project. A similar example was from Barcelona during the Olympics, where a firm was involved in the overall strategy, but they fed out. In the Belfast example, you might have the larger company overseeing the Streets Ahead project and setting the design code for that, but, as part of that commission, other smaller practices would maybe be given a square to

design or a stretch of open space to deal with. That gives you variation and diversity, but it also keeps other people involved in the —

Mr Watkins: In a sense, the Olympics in London has been done in a very similar way.

Mr McMullan: Why is it so expensive and burdensome over here compared with other places?

Mr McCapra: I do not think that it is particularly; it is just that the effects are particularly hard. In much of England, for example, the world of landscape architecture is dominated by what we call middle-sized practices, which comprise maybe 15 or 20 people. They have sufficient capacity to keep their hand in with the endless rigmarole of filling out pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) and all the rest of it. The situation in Northern Ireland, where there are sole practitioners or very small practices, is just impossible. The same rules apply: if you want to bid for a piece of work for which the fee will be £5,000, you have to demonstrate that you have £5 million worth of professional indemnity insurance. Those rules apply everywhere, but they are disproportionately having an impact in Northern Ireland and throttling the life out of the profession.

Mr Mullin: It is very difficult. At the peak of things, five people worked for me. I am now back to just me because I just could not sustain it; not enough work was coming in. It is a race to get to a critical mass; if you can get your practice up to 10 or 15 people, you can carry on. I did not get to that critical mass quickly enough; I had five, so I did not get there in time for the downturn. To be fair, a certain amount of blame is on me because, at that time, like many others, I focused on private developers. There was such an easy source of work in the economy and the work that was coming through that I did not focus enough at that time on approaching local authority work and that type of thing. Others did, and, to be fair, are still struggling, but it is about getting to that —

Mr Hutchinson: Do not get us wrong: we do not want to ring-fence Northern Ireland. Other people go to the beach; I go to parks to learn and find out how things are done. It is really good to have people coming in. In the Craigavon Development Commission, we had Germans and Scandinavians here. We have always had that sort of thing. Firms have come here and have showed us different techniques. When a big firm comes here and there is a public lecture, I wonder which job they are going to get next. It seems that people are wowed when they look at things; you can sell something just by showing it. The job may never be done here; it will be done somewhere else. We could be used as a satellite, and they will just suck it out, do it and bring it back again. You have to be careful about that, but do not get us wrong. There should be a balance and a level playing field. We should all have a place.

Mr McMullan: Is it not that, once you are over the set-down figure, you have to, because it is legally binding, go to European tendering? Or is it a confidence issue? Are the Germans or whoever talking a better talk or what? Do we not have confidence in our own market? If you are constrained by the European tendering process, could we not push the Welsh model more? The Welsh model looks at social clauses and looks after its own market. Should you not be pushing at that market? You talk about planning, but what about the European heritage label? You have your heritage here, and this is the only country in Europe that never signed up to the European heritage programme. That was not mentioned. You need to drive more at the Welsh model. I have 20 years of local government involvement and watched councils doing work. They took on architects and landscape gardeners. The architects really did the whole thing, and all the landscape artist did was the bushes and trees in the corner.

Mr Hutchinson: It is about the way it is put out. Quite often, it is an architecture-led competition or project. So, that group has the ability to control it. It is a much more powerful group. We are at fault as well. We have not —

Mr McMullan: We see a lot of European funding streams, and there is money out there for feasibility studies. For example, I worked on one two weeks ago for a new football pitch. That feasibility study is within your remit, but I do not know of anybody in consultancy who ever got one of those feasibility studies for £5,000, £6,000 or £8,000. There is work in there, but there is no landscape consultancy looking for that consultancy work. Usually, the councils have a list of consultants, and any of us who have worked in councils for long enough could nearly rhyme off who the councils' consultants are.

Work is going a-begging there because, usually, they will tell you what you want to know for £5,000 but you get nothing back from it before you start your job. If you are in there at the consultancy stage, you may be in there when it comes down to the contract stage.

Mrs Hale: Apologies for missing the start of your presentation. I have found this fascinating. I spent 10 years living in Germany while the curtain was up, and, when the curtain came down and I went to the east, I saw village after village that looked exactly the same. So, the buy-one-get-14-free idea absolutely fills me with abject horror.

Mr Swann brought up the issue of the Department for Social Development and town regeneration, and one of my constituency towns, Dromore, has been earmarked for this as well. Dromore is unique: it has a cathedral, a motte and bailey and the river runs through it, and I would hate to think that it will look exactly the same as other towns in the region.

The Maze regeneration project is another thing in my constituency. Given that the landscape architecture will have to be right first time and it is in a very rural country area, have you shown an interest in that or have you been approached about it?

Mr Mullin: That tender did come out. It is issue of scale. That is a particularly big project, and if a project is to be given to one of the larger practices, perhaps that is it. A number of firms that have landscape architects embedded in them have tendered for that project. It is like the other examples that I gave earlier. It is one big project that goes to one practice as opposed to there being opportunities within that big project for small micro-projects that could be given to other practices or sub-tendered — I do not know what the term is — to break the cake up a little bit so that it will not necessarily go to a multinational company. We may well bring in experts from England and further afield. For example, I will not name it, but I know one multinational company, which has 40,000 employees worldwide, with a presence in Northern Ireland. That practice has nobody who does landscape or visual assessment and has to use its Scottish people, who fly over to do that. So, although a lot of the bigger companies have a foot in the door and an ability to go for those sorts of projects, when it comes to the structures, certainly for something like the Maze project, maybe there needs to be a little bit more thought about how they are implemented or how the process is broken down.

Mrs Hale: I would like to see some local firms being used so that there are people involved who know the area, will live with the project after all the builders have moved out and will appreciate the long-term viability of a scheme.

The Chairperson: Gentlemen, thank you very much for your presentation and contribution today. You have made your case.

Mr Watkins: On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you all for listening to us. We wish you well with your endeavours and the future direction of this issue. If you need anything else, let us know.