



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Briefing from National Museums NI on
the Impact of Spending Plans**

30 September 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Burns
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr David McClarty
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Tim Cooke)
Mrs Jude Helliker) National Museums Northern Ireland
Mrs Gillian McLean)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

Good morning. I welcome Mr Tim Cooke, Mrs Gillian McLean and Mrs Jude Helliker of National Museums NI. I thank Tim especially for coming, because I understand that he has just come off a transatlantic flight.

Mr Tim Cooke (National Museums Northern Ireland):

That is true.

The Chairperson:

Fair play to you for coming along. Thank you. Tim, will you please state your position, reintroduce your colleagues and make an opening statement.

Mr Cooke:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to come to speak to you this morning. I appreciate that you take the time. I am Tim Cooke, director and chief executive of National Museums Northern Ireland. I have been here several times before, but the membership of the Committee has changed, so I say hello to the new members. I am joined by my colleagues Mrs Jude Helliker, who is director of organisational development, and Mrs Gillian McLean, who is director of marketing, communications and trading.

We sent the Committee some briefing material in advance. I begin by acknowledging the context in which this meeting takes place and the nature of the Committee's inquiry. National Museums Northern Ireland is very conscious of the wider economic situation and that there are many worthy causes, all of which are arguing their cases. We want to be considered as one of those worthy causes and to argue our case.

For the benefit of the new members, National Museums Northern Ireland comprises the Ulster Museum in Botanic Gardens, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, the Ulster American Folk Park at Omagh, Armagh County Museum, and we have a wholly owned subsidiary company, W5. All those museums play a substantial role in tourism. Within the next year, we hope to reach our target of one million visitors a year. Most visitors are local people, but 32% of them are out-of-state visitors. Therefore, we see ourselves as one of the main deliverers of the tourism product in Northern Ireland.

The museums also play a substantial role in the economy. We employ 445 staff, or the full-time equivalent of 310, and an additional 50 full-time equivalent staff in W5. We play a number of roles in Northern Ireland. We hold the national collections, so we are responsible for major cultural assets. We play a substantial partnership role in education, through both formal and informal learning. We play a major role in the exploration of history and contribute to the shared future agenda and social cohesion, and we have a significant role in innovation and inspiration across a vast range of subjects. The Chairman referred to our role in creating a positive image of Northern Ireland in the international arena.

My colleague Gillian and I have just returned from New York, where we participated in an event at Grand Central Station with Minister Foster and Minister McCausland and other contributors from Northern Ireland. We have on display in Downing Street paintings representing Northern Ireland and its cultural assets to a broader audience. We have fantastic assets in Northern Ireland, which deserve to be exploited to the full in contributing to that very broad agenda.

Obviously, we view with a degree of concern the communication from Minister McCausland to the Committee setting out the indicative cuts over the next four years. Those amount to a 23% cut in our revenue. That would have substantial implications for staffing, terms and conditions of staff, opening hours, and levels of service.

The Department has been considering ways in which cuts may be implemented. There is a sense that the Department acknowledges that much of our funding is spent on staff. Therefore, it is not easy for us to implement cuts immediately. At the end of the day, however, that is something of a delayed effect. The accumulative effect is £3.1 million out of revenue by the time we get to year four. That would have a substantial impact on our staffing levels and levels of service.

We have benefited from substantial revenue investment from government and other sources in recent years. The Ulster Museum project, for example, amounted to £17.8 million from 15 funding sources. At the heart of that, however, was a substantial investment from government. We hope that the success of the Ulster Museum, with some 625,000 visitors in its first year of operation, which is a phenomenal response to any cultural project in Northern Ireland, is an indication of the appetite that exists among local people and international visitors for our products. We want to see that investment continuing, particularly at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, and the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh.

The Chairperson:

Thank you. Congratulations to you and your organisation on the recent recognition of the very high standards at the Ulster Museum. There are other projects, but the Ulster Museum was very much in the news recently. How creative is National Museums at looking at other funding streams to gain new funding through, for example, hiring out conference facilities in your

museums? Are you being creative at all?

Mr Cooke:

Very much so. I will ask my colleague Gillian McLean, whose responsibility that is, to comment on that in a moment. It is true to say that we have been on something of a journey in recent years. We have been going through a reform and modernisation programme in the organisation in the past five years, and that has repositioned our staffing levels, reduced our pay bill, and placed increasing emphasis on self-generated income.

Overall, we get £13.55 million in grant and aid, and we generate £2.8 million in income ourselves. That proportion is changing all the time. We have made significant progress in generating much of our own income, some of it through the means that you described.

Mrs Gillian McLean (National Museums Northern Ireland):

Good morning. We introduced a dynamic commercial strategy in 2008. Over a two-year period, we focussed on retail investment, catering investment and venue hire as the core areas. Retail revenue has increased by 145%, and catering by 372%. With Cultra Manor due to reopen in June 2011, bookings have increased by 15% year on year but, because that building was closed, revenue remained static.

The Chairperson:

Thank you.

Mr McClarty:

Thank you for your presentation. Tim and Gillian look remarkably fresh for people who have just arrived back from New York.

The Chairperson:

I assume that you were not on that flight, Jude. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Cooke:

But is looking very well too.

Mr McClarty:

Absolutely; that goes without saying. *[Laughter.]*

Tim, do you have any information on whether museums in Northern Ireland are disproportionately affected by the proposed cuts than museums in any other region?

Mr Cooke:

As you can appreciate, it is an emerging picture. The picture over the past few years is that our revenue position has been much more challenging than, for example, that of the national museums in Great Britain, or, indeed, in the Republic. I have been in my role for seven years, and in that time I have experienced three years of flatline funding followed by two years of flatline funding at a slightly higher level. I have already experienced significant challenges to the revenue position of the organisation. No other national museum director has had to deal with such a situation in that time span. We have already faced a very challenging reconstruction of the organisation over recent years.

The indicative figure set out by the Minister in his letter to the Committee amounts to a 23% reduction. At this stage, I am not aware of any other national museum that is facing such an indicative reduction, though I am not necessarily au fait with all the facts.

Mr McClarty:

I want to follow up on the figures that Gillian gave us in her answer. There has been a remarkable increase in business. Catering has gone up by more than 300%. Did that start from a very low base, Gillian?

Mrs McLean:

We restructured the way in which we approached our catering. Before the Ulster Museum reopened, catering had been managed in-house. We franchised catering out to a catering company, and we get 12% of its turnover. We changed all our catering contracts over the past two years as part of our commercial strategy, and we learned from other museums. We previously had a flatline revenue source, but now we get a percentage of the turnover.

Mr McClarty:

That is a remarkable increase.

Mr O’Loan:

I commend your very considerable cultural and economic contribution. You talked about a 23% cut; obviously, that comes out of the scenario that was presented to us and to you. It concerns me a lot. Yesterday, the Finance Committee talked to departmental officials whose most recent indication — we will have to wait until 20 October for the details — is that, on the revenue side, we will have cuts that will accumulate to 10% across the four years and will peak in the fourth year. On the capital side it is much more serious; we are talking about 40%, which is a major issue. A potential cut of 23% will only happen if the Northern Ireland Executive make a decision that the service that you offer is a much lower priority than other services that are provided by the Executive. The Committee would argue very strongly against that.

I worry about a lot of the discussion that is happening in the limbo period that we are in at the moment. We are in danger of talking ourselves down as a community, and a lot of the media coverage is not helpful at present.

I will lump a couple of issues together in my question. As you say in your submission, you have undertaken significant reform and modernisation in recent years. Do you feel that you have the scope to do much more of that without loss of service? You referred specifically to the renegotiation of terms and conditions of service of your staff. How realistic is that proposal? To what degree do you have control over that? What is desirable and achievable over the four-year time span?

Mr Cooke:

I will defer to my colleague Jude Helliker on that question.

Mrs Jude Helliker (National Museums Northern Ireland):

We have undertaken a sweeping change in our organisation over the past five years. We started off by implementing a voluntary early retirement scheme, which took 40 full-time equivalents out of the organisation. Around half of those were curatorial, collections-based staff, and the remainder were mainly visitor services and other operations staff. That is a lot to take out of the system. We have restructured since then, and our most recent piece of work, which culminated in February this year, changed terms and conditions of employment for all of our visitor-facing staff to try and remove some of the traditional Civil Service terms and conditions that were not really

suitable for staff who worked weekends and bank holidays as part of a regular rota.

There is always scope to do a little bit more, but there is very little scope left because we have made such a swathe of changes already. Renegotiating terms and conditions was a very difficult thing to do with our staff, because they have traditionally been linked very closely to the Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), which represents our staff, is very clear that any renegotiation of terms and conditions would only be done on the basis of consent and what is happening in the wider Civil Service.

The proposals that we have been looking at to deliver the savings targets that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has indicated to us would require us to take the equivalent of 112 staff out of our business. That is equivalent to closing the Ulster American Folk Park. Effectively, it would take about a third of our staff out of the business. That cannot be salami sliced because the other museums would be affected and may open only for three days or three and a half days a week, or four or five days in the summer and three days in the winter. That would mess our visitors around.

We seek direction from the centre in relation to the renegotiation of terms and conditions of employment. We have asked DCAL to position that with DFP. We do not wish to blaze a trail in relation to the renegotiation of terms and conditions for staff who are, essentially, linked to Civil Service terms and conditions.

Mr K Robinson:

If memory serves me right, we were made aware some time ago of potential changes to opening hours and the impact on staff conditions of service. There was a great wrestling between you and others who presented figures as to what the impact of that would be. Are you now in possession of daily figures that prove that either your case was correct or the opposite side of the argument was correct?

Mr Cooke:

No. It is a mixed picture, as we thought that it might be. We always said that we would review the matter as time went on. If you recall that discussion, which was very substantial, part of it involved us facing up to the issues that related to our pay bill and the amount of money that we had. We simply could not afford to operate the museums seven days a week. We tried to

concentrate our resources at the times when most visitors come. For example, the Ulster Museum reopened for full days on Saturdays and Sundays. Previously it was not open all day on Saturdays or Sundays. That was absolutely critical for us.

In a more even situation, we would review that and see whether we could introduce more flexibility around, for example, Mondays in the summer. At the Ulster American Folk Park, in particular, there seems to be a significant appetite for opening on Mondays in the summer and not such an appetite for doing so in the winter. However, there were complications in agreeing the change across the organisation. We decided to do that in a uniform manner, and we are now reviewing it. The problem is that that is by no means the only issue for us.

Any cuts of significance will affect us. Although 10% cuts would put us in a better position than 23% cuts, 10% cuts would eat into our pay bill significantly and into our staffing. So, the issue would then become whether we should close on Tuesdays and Wednesdays as well as Mondays.

Mr K Robinson:

So, in essence, you have not completed the exercise that we discussed a year and a half ago.

Mr Cooke:

We have done a number of reviews, but we have not taken the decision to change the position, because there is no point in going down one road, agreeing it with staff and changing our marketing collateral etc, only to have to reposition it again. So, in essence, it is not such a critical issue this winter, but we want to have it resolved by the spring and summer of next year.

Miss McIlveen:

Thank you for coming here this morning. What discussions have you had with the Department and colleagues in other arm's-length bodies about collaborative working and reducing overhead administrative costs, human resources and so on?

Mrs Helliker:

Through the reform and modernisation programme, we have centralised our finance, marketing and human resources departments. We have whittled them down to a fairly thin level. We provide some support services to W5 and the Northern Ireland Museums Council where they may

not have the appropriate staff. We are looking at having shared internal audit services with DCAL in the medium term, so there are opportunities for us to look at sharing some services.

Miss McIlveen:

Do you work with the Arts Council, for example?

Mr Cooke:

We have not had any formal collaboration with the Arts Council, but it is an issue that has been touched on in discussions that I have had with the chief executive of the Arts Council. However, it is not something for which we have brought forward any developed proposals.

Miss McIlveen:

I cannot overstate the value of museums, from their educational benefit to their benefit to tourism. The Ulster Museum should reflect what goes on in Ulster. Obviously, concerns were raised by the Orange Order and the Ulster-Scots community about the exhibitions and whether they were reflected in them. What progress have you made on that?

Mr Cooke:

We have agreed with the Minister a process that will take place under the post-project evaluation of the Ulster Museum. That will be fairly broad, and we are at the point of agreeing the terms of reference with the Department. The evaluation will do all the normal things, such as look at the financial aspects of the project and its management. It will also explore the extent to which the project has succeeded against its original objectives. Within that, we have agreed a review of aspects of the interpretation, which will look at a range of issues, including those that the Minister raised with us about the 'Plantation to Power-Sharing' section of the museum and in relation to creationism and the origins-of-life display. That process will be completed, I think, over the next three months.

Miss McIlveen:

So, you are still in a process of exploration and review and have not made any substantive changes?

Mr Cooke:

We have not made any changes, and we have agreed the way forward that I have outlined to you

with the Department and the Minister.

Miss McIlveen:

Obviously, there is a very rich Orange and marching band culture, which is unique to Northern Ireland. Have you had any discussions with those groups?

Mr Cooke:

I have had discussions with the Orange Order about the issues that it has raised. I do not think that we have had any discussions with groups that represent bands, for example.

Miss McIlveen:

Is that something that you might look at?

Mr Cooke:

We would be happy to have discussions with anyone, but, to my knowledge, we have not been approached by anyone in relation to bands.

Miss McIlveen:

It strikes me that a criticism may be launched at you that you are scaremongering and headline grabbing when you talk about staff being reduced by 100 and about closing galleries and facilities. How would you respond to that?

Mr Cooke:

We are not in the business of scaremongering. Anyone who knows the organisation, and the way in which we conduct our affairs, will recognise that we take a progressive partnership approach to what we do; that is our philosophy. We believe that we can make a very positive contribution to the community and that that contribution should be made with as much transparency and partnership as possible. It is not in our interest to suggest to our staff, for example, that a huge axe hangs over their heads. The detail did not get into the public domain as a result of anything that we did as an organisation.

We are focused on delivering the best possible service for the people of Northern Ireland and all our visitors. We are completely open to exploring all kinds of ways of doing that to deliver maximum value for money, and we have demonstrated that in a number of ways over the years.

We continue to remain focused on that, and we are open to all kinds of constructive suggestions about how we might do it more effectively.

Miss McIlveen:

I say that because it concerns me that that could be the headline figure coming out of today's meeting. Obviously, it concerns me that people's jobs, futures and livelihoods are at stake.

Mr Cooke:

We share that concern absolutely, but, at the end of the day, the Minister wrote to the Committee with those figures. We are required to work through a number of scenarios as regards the ways in which we could achieve the savings. The organisation's pay bill is £10.3 million, which comes out of the £13.55 million grant. For a national museums service, we spend relatively little on programming, and we do not think that it is enough. We do not spend enough on marketing, collections or exhibitions either. Those are the types of issues that that level of cut would raise for us.

As Mr O'Loan referred to, we do not have control of the levers that would allow us to implement savings of that level. We would need to have that control. It causes me no pleasure at all to say that we would need to implement a scheme of compulsory redundancy, which, currently, we are not authorised to do. We would also need to go further with terms and conditions and working hours. All that would inevitably have an impact on our service level, including opening hours; there is no question about that.

The Chairperson:

Are you pursuing other opportunities for private investment? The Committee has deliberated whether there is a need for a major art gallery of regional or international standing in Belfast. How close does the Ulster Museum's art gallery space come to meeting the need?

Mr Cooke:

You probably know the answer to your first question. I work night and day to try to generate as much income for the organisation as possible. In our experience, it is more difficult in relation to revenue than capital. As I outlined, the Ulster Museum project has 15 different funders, the most important of which is the Government. However, £4.7 million came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and that took an enormous amount of effort. There continue to be possibilities with the

Heritage Lottery Fund for the right capital project, as there are with all 13 other funders of that project.

We have made a number of bids, one of which is for the Ulster American Folk Park. It has an enormous potential that is currently underexploited, not just for tourism but as regards building and consolidating relationships with the United States and supporting the inward-investment drive and reputational management. It is a fabulous story, and the venue is great. However, as you know, the visitor centre was erected in 1975 to facilitate 30,000 visitors a year. It now gets 170,000 visitors a year, with the potential for many more. It needs a visitor centre of global significance.

We are extending the landscaping work there, with the aim of adding another dozen houses brought from America, which would make the Ulster American Folk Park the single most important home of original American frontier structures. That is a fabulous stand-out opportunity for Northern Ireland. The real possibilities are there in capital. However, people tend to support only those capital projects that have a significant amount of initial government funding.

With regard to your point about the Ulster Museum, there has long been a debate about a national gallery, and we would love to see a wonderful new national gallery being created in Northern Ireland. We support that concept. Realistically, at this point, the Ulster Museum operates as the equivalent of a national gallery, with those wonderful spaces on the top floor. In the year since it has reopened, it has staged two magnificent exhibitions. The Sean Scully retrospective drew headlines and critical acclaim from around the world, with the sort of comment on an artistic show that may not have been entirely Mr Robinson's cup of tea.

Mr K Robinson:

How did you guess? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Cooke:

However, Sean Scully is one of the greatest living artists and widely recognised as such, but his work is not everybody's cup of tea, and I acknowledge that. There is also the wonderful show 'Visions — Spectacular Art from the Ulster Museum', which I hope Mr Robinson appreciates more than the Sean Scully exhibition, and I imagine that he does. That exhibition is drawn from our own collections, which are very rich and surprising to all visitors.

The museum has a wonderful suite of galleries. Nevertheless, if there was money available, and I know that it is a big “if”, we would love to see a national gallery developed.

Mr K Robinson:

Having been mentioned in dispatches, as it were, I will quickly exercise a right of reply. My tastes in art are very catholic, so I looked at the Scully exhibition with an objective, critical eye.

You have a fantastic collection of art. The Committee has been exercised by the fact that several bodies, including local authorities and this Building, own collections of art, but the public rarely see them. What is the duplication potential between yourselves, the Arts Council and a potential art gallery for Northern Ireland? Are we going to reinvent all those things again, or is there a way in which you can move into a wider niche and expand on the collections that you already have to attract inward investment?

Mr Cooke:

There are a number of ways. Our body of work is the most substantial and is, in effect, the national collection for Northern Ireland. It is a rich and surprising collection. We would love to be able to display more of it than we can, but there are major security and environmental issues.

A lot of people ask why we do not put our art out more. There are reasons, as there are for most national galleries, why art does not go out more. It requires high levels of security, and you might be the first to criticise us, if we were not to take appropriate care. However, our commitment is to make our art collections relevant to ordinary people. We have a series of strategies in a whole learning and partnership agenda to open up our art collections and allow people to engage with them in ways that they could not possibly have imagined. We have made real progress with that.

The Arts Council has a fabulous, more contemporary collection. The Arts Council is going through a process of gifting that collection. We have made a bid to the Arts Council for the complete gifting of that collection to the national collection.

The Chairperson:

Finally, Billy Leonard may bring us back to the impact of the spending and savings plans.

Mr Leonard:

I was just thinking about the comments about the exhibition: art is in the eye of the whatever.

My first question is tongue-in-cheek. If you reflect on the life of Ulster, do you have any reference to Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan? But we will deliberate on that another day. The real question about spending relates to the point you made about reducing the number of special events. I know that that is only a one-off, and that it is very serious and so on and so forth. It is easier in theory, but if we try to look at the glass as being half full, one of the biggest trends is events. Despite difficulties around the island, some of the biggest things that happened this summer were special events, and I would have thought that you would look at that increasing the number of those events and creating revenue rather than reducing them. I know that it is not easy, and I do not know whether the Bluegrass Festival costs you money, but events should be a very important part of your portfolio to raise money over the next four or five years.

Mr Cooke:

That is a good point. Gillian has recently led a review of our events strategy, and perhaps she would like to comment.

Mrs McLean:

We looked at the full range of events and potential ways to increase revenue, reduce costs and increase visitor number across the group. We know from the in-depth usage and attitude survey that we undertook in 2007 that events make a major contribution to visitor sites. The other issues are the revenue associated with those events and staffing and marketing costs. However, with the existing budget that I have, I cannot afford to advertise all the events that we currently have on offer. That is the bit that we struggle with as a group.

Mr Leonard:

So you cannot get the wheel to move, never mind get on to the wheel.

Mr Cooke:

There is a wheel that is moving, and we have been trying to take a good hard look at the events that cost us money and those that make us money and to do some repositioning around that. However, the problem is that we can afford to run only a certain number of successful events on

our existing budget. In the climate that has been outlined to us, we feel that we would have to reduce the number of events because we simply could not afford the staff time. One of the challenges is to make our events more commercial.

The thing about museums is that they serve a number of purposes. There are all sorts of specialist collections that come within our statutory remit, and there is a sense of obligation that comes with that. They are not all about making money. There is an aspect of providing a museum service to the community at large. There are big events such as the Bluegrass Festival that you mentioned. Our target for that festival next year is to break even.

Mr Leonard:

I know the format of some of that. However, is that not a fertile field for collaboration? It is not just about Gillian's budget or your overall budget; there are other organisations in the same situation. There may be some mileage in combining forces.

Mr Cooke:

That is a helpful point, and it is one of the areas that we are committed to exploring. We certainly take note of that point.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. I am totally depressed by what you have said. It comes on the back of last week's evidence session when Libraries NI appeared before the Committee and told us that they would also need to lose employees. You have told us today that up to 100 of your employees may be made redundant, and that is horrendous. I am not an economist by any means, but I cannot see how that will help, because those people will obviously have to be paid benefits and that will cost money. Museums have done excellent work and have proved themselves. The blame should go to whoever is responsible for putting you in that position in the first place.

The loss of those employees will affect your ability to deliver on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, which our Government is so determined to implement, or so they tell us. How will the cuts affect your ability to contribute to that?

Mrs Helliker:

We do not want to lose any staff: we cannot afford to lose any staff and continue to deliver the

service that we are delivering and that is worth delivering. If we were to close one of the museums or close all of the museums for another one or two days a week, that would start to affect the whole service delivery to the public, and it would be very hard then to turn that oil tanker around. If a museum is closed and mothballed for one year, two years or five years, it is almost impossible to try to open it once money becomes available. Not only is the infrastructure lost, but all of the intellectual knowledge of the staff is lost. Our labour turnover is very low. We keep our staff for a long time because the work is a vocation for a large proportion of the staff. Therefore, it is almost impossible to try to turn it around.

Mr Cooke:

Mr McCarthy talked about depression.

Mr McCarthy:

Actually, it is disgusting.

Mr Cooke:

I acknowledge at the outset that we are in a context, and everyone understands that we are in a context. Things may turn out like that or they may turn out a little or a lot differently; I do not know. We are responding to an exercise that we have been asked to complete by the Department and, no doubt, it is responding to an exercise that it has been asked to complete by someone else. I am not depressed, because we have really fabulous cultural assets in Northern Ireland, and we must find a way to make those assets as relevant as possible in whatever circumstances. Whatever happens, we will remain absolutely committed to doing that as innovatively as possible, and we have demonstrated that.

We are not giving up because we have been asked to do this exercise. We are making the case for the contribution that we make because we believe in it. The situation needs to be looked at in the longer-term continuum without a series of knee-jerk reactions, the consequences of which have not been properly thought out. My exhortation to Government is to look at the situation in the longer-term continuum and recognise that the assets that we have through our national museums stand out absolutely on the world stage.

We are in the very fortunate position that the basic assets are very strong. For relatively small amounts of money — though I know that there is no such thing as a small amount of money in

this climate — we can deliver fantastic traction across a number of sectors: tourism, the economy, education, the strategy for cohesion and so on. There are lots of ways in which museums are relevant and can continue to be exploited for the good of society at large. Our fear, to the extent that we have a fear, is that that will not be recognised enough in this process.

There is a slight structural difficulty. If the museums are looked at as a tourism product — they are more than that, although they certainly are a tourism product — they do not sit in the mainstream of tourism funding: they sit in the DCAL stream of funding. Most of the funding that comes to tourism comes through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Therefore, we want to see a joined-up approach across the Departments — a central government — that is much more strategic and is recognised irrespective of where things sit in departmental funding streams. We would like to see the broad contribution that we make to Northern Ireland as a whole reflected in our revenue and capital position as we go forward.

Mr McClarty:

I want to go back to the cost of staging events. Most of the small regional theatres in Northern Ireland owe their very existence to volunteers, and there are many committed people out there. Have you explored the possibility using those people who would willingly give up a few hours every week to ensure the continued existence of the museums service?

Mrs Helliker:

We have a small number of volunteers already. However, we are in the process of finalising a volunteering policy. One of the objectives in our business plan for the current year and next year is to implement a volunteering initiative that seeks volunteers from a wide range of sources for all of the museums.

Mr K Robinson:

My question builds on your American experience. Do the museums benefit from the increasing number of cruise ships visiting Belfast and passengers looking to go, not necessarily to Belleek or the Giant's Causeway, but to something in the greater Belfast area, such as the museum? Why should such visitors go to your museum?

What about the Titanic anniversary that is coming up? Are you looking at getting rich Americans through your doors and into your catering outlets and revenue stream?

Mr Cooke:

Gillian will comment first on the cruise ships, and I will answer on the Titanic centenary.

Mrs McLean:

We work closely with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau to encourage tour groups and cruise ships to visit the Ulster Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. For 2012, we are in discussions with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau about a number of cruise ships which, I hope, will stay for a couple of days in Northern Ireland because of the Titanic centenary, and passengers on those ships will have opportunities to go to the west of the Province as well.

Mr K Robinson:

I understand that you want to spread the footprint out to the west and north of the Province. However, I am conscious that we have a one-off opportunity with the Titanic. Without giving away any secrets, can you tell us whether you are working on some cunning plan that would see an improvement, not just in the number of overseas visitors, but in your revenue potential?

Mr Cooke:

We are involved in the wider discussions. I am a part of the steering group that is chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment permanent secretary, which is looking at all the 2012 issues, the co-ordination and opportunities associated with that. Gillian is part of a Titanic group, which works in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and others to try to drive the product offering. We intend to fully exploit the Titanic centenary, for example, at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. There has been a Titanic exhibition there, as you know, for 40 years.

Mr K Robinson:

I took my grandchildren there several times.

Mr Cooke:

That exhibition is being refreshed in the context of the wider transport gallery offering, and the centenary will be reflected also in the Folk Museum, where there is a wonderful opportunity to explain what life was like, more generally, around that time in Belfast and in the north of Ireland,

as it was then, as a whole. We have a particular opportunity in the Ulster American Folk Park because of the whole emigration story and the role of shipbuilding and liners in that wider context. We are very focused on that opportunity.

The Chairperson:

I thank the team — Tim, Gillian and Jude — for coming along today and making the presentation.

Mr Cooke:

Thank you, Chairman, for your time.