

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Arts Funding

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members who speak will have five minutes.

Two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to wind up.

Ms Lo: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the critical role that the arts can play in promoting a positive international image of Northern Ireland, attracting visitors and growing the local economy and the contribution that community arts make to social cohesion; expresses its alarm that the arts are relatively underfunded per capita in Northern Ireland compared to all other regions in the United Kingdom; and calls upon the Executive to raise the level of arts funding to at least the United Kingdom average within the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Alliance Party is against the two tabled amendments. The first amendment considerably weakens the motion's request for increased funding. The second amendment, although it supports an increase in funding, does not go far enough; £10 per person is not enough, and the Arts Council is now calling for £11.55 per person.

I thank the Arts Council, the Ulster Historical Foundation, the Invest in Inspiration campaign and others for sending me their briefing notes, which have contributed to this speech. Northern Ireland has a wealth of talent in art, music, drama, film, poetry and many other forms of artistic expression.

Both of our major traditions provide us with rich culture, and that is enhanced by the different people who come to live among us in this beautiful land. We should have a flourishing arts sector of which we can be proud, but the arts sector is facing a serious funding crisis with low morale and job threats. For too long, citizens in Northern Ireland have been denied access and entitlement to the arts at a level that is enjoyed by other parts of the UK and Ireland.

11.30 am

Over the past 10 years, Northern Ireland has moved from a position of near-parity in arts funding with other regions to bottom of the league. The trend over that period shows a widening gap in per capita public funding and the lowest level of growth compared with elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. We invest £6.13 per head of population in the arts sector, which is in stark contrast to the £8.39 that is invested in England, £8.80 in Wales, £11.93 in Scotland and £12.61 in the Republic of Ireland. Not only has the arts sector sustained three successive years of standstill funding, but the decline over the past two years in National Lottery income has been further compounded by the decision to allocate lottery funds from the good causes fund to the London Olympics 2012. As a result, the Arts Council faces a reduction of £4.5 million over the next few years in its lottery-funded arts projects.

Arts funding is not only about funding the Grand Opera House or the Belfast Festival at Queen's — it enables organisations such as the Belfast Community Circus to instil values and transferable life skills to young people. The new Belfast community arts initiative has programmed workshop activity for more than 10,000 individuals — mostly young people — and employs more than 240 artists. Some 84% of its participants come from the most deprived wards.

The development of a social dialogue through the arts offers a real-life demonstration of a shared future in action. However, the proof of need for additional arts funding is not only found in and around disadvantaged urban communities, but throughout urban and rural areas in Northern Ireland. A range of arts activities are promoted in Northern Ireland through such organisations as the Share Centre in Fermanagh, which works with disabled and able-bodied children; the Nerve Centre in Derry, which works in music, film, animation and new media; Altnaveigh House in Newry which celebrates Ulster-Scots culture; piping and drumming schools; and touring theatre companies that ensure that quality theatre is available to the network of new art centres that have been supported by local councils and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Cutting arts funding year in, year out is a short-sighted strategy to save money, whereas investing in the arts brings a multitude of economic, social and health benefits to society. Investing in the arts brings about a vibrant creative industry sector to boost the local economy by generating revenue and providing employment and business opportunities as well as attracting inward investment.

Investing in the arts promotes rural and urban regeneration. Examples of that were seen in Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool in the 1980s, when they turned to the arts to drive urban regeneration following the decline in manufacturing

industries. If they can do it, so can we. Everyone would love to see Belfast crowned as the European Capital of Culture.

Investing in the arts stimulates tourism, and Northern Ireland is already attracting more and more visitors. A high, international profile for the arts, and well-developed cultural and heritage projects and centres, will help the growth in cultural tourism.

Investing in the arts has been well proven to increase confidence, improve behaviour and generate more positive attitudes to learning in children and young people.

Investing in the arts enhances social cohesion by promoting the integration of minority groups, tackling sectarianism and racism and contributing to a more inclusive society. The arts sector is calling for an increase in arts funding from £6.13 to £11.55 per person per year, which is an increase of approximately £26 million for the 2008-10 funding cycle. It is a modest request that represents less than a quarter of one per cent of the annual spend on hospitals and community health, or less than half of one per cent of the education budget. The Executive need to take a strategic view of the overall development of Northern Ireland.

Investing in the arts is like investing in business, in that everyone will reap its benefits in economic and social gains.

Mr McCausland: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after “cohesion;” and insert

“and, while recognising that economic growth must be the Assembly’s main priority, encourages the Executive to explore means of enhancing promotion of the arts in Northern Ireland.”

There is much in the motion with which I agree. Its basic thrust is that we should seek to increase expenditure on the arts, which I support. I will come to my amendment in due course, but there are many reasons for increasing arts expenditure, and the Arts Council has highlighted a range of them in a number of its documents. One is increasing the positive international image of Northern Ireland, and a good example of that was Northern Ireland’s contribution to the recent Smithsonian Festival in Washington, where expressions from the whole range of cultures in Northern Ireland were on display, including very colourful contributions from the Orange Order and the Ulster Scots. That was an example

of how we can use Gaelic, Ulster-Scots and Orange cultural life, in mainstream, high or community art to give a positive international image to our country.

The arts are also a way of attracting visitors to Northern Ireland, and cultural tourism will certainly be one of the main thrusts for tourism in the coming years.

Whatever happens with climate change, people will not normally come to Northern Ireland for sunshine and sandy beaches, but they often come to sample the interesting and diverse cultural life of the country.

There are many ways in which the creative industries can help the growth of the economy, and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has spoken of them. Only yesterday, there was mention of the importance of creative industries to the local economy. It is an area in which there is particular local expertise, such as in the film industry.

We can also consider the benefits of community arts and the role that they have in social cohesion. Many communities find the arts a means of expressing their aspirations, hopes and fears. That is a way of bringing people together, in a shared experience, as a community. Community arts, in all their various forms, represent a sector that needs encouragement and support.

The voluntary arts sector is of particular value and importance, and it does not get as much attention as it should. There are many folk who may not wish to engage in a group activity in community arts, and they may not want to join a theatre group or play in a local band. However, those people can participate in the voluntary arts as individuals, and the benefits include social experience, opportunities for expression and improved self-esteem.

The expression of cultural identity is another aspect of the arts that is often talked about. It is important for people to have an opportunity to express their cultural identity. If we are to create a stable and coherent society in Northern Ireland, all cultural traditions should be treated on the basis of equality and diversity, whether that is Ulster-Scots, Irish or Orange culture — they all deserve the opportunity and equality of support and expression.

The figures that are often quoted refer to the money that flows into the arts via the Arts Council. However, it is important to remember that money also goes into the cultural tradition aspects of the arts through bodies such as Foras na Gaeilge or Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch. Therefore, there are other funding streams into the arts sector that may not be automatically included in those figures.

The aim and aspiration of the Arts Council is that the arts should be:

“at the heart of our social, economic and creative life”.

That is a good aspiration and one that I hope that we could all endorse. The arts should not be seen merely as an add-on or an optional extra, but as something that is at the heart of every aspect of Northern Ireland society.

People’s views of the arts can, sometimes, be a bit narrow. The Arts Council not only involves the arts, but architecture, the built environment and the craft sector. There is a tremendous opportunity for local businesses and the local economy. If we are to invite tourists to Northern Ireland, we should provide goods for them to purchase when they are here. The greater the range and diversity of those goods, the higher the spend, resulting in more money coming into our economy and to the artists who are involved in various creative arts.

My colleague the Member for East Londonderry Gregory Campbell has highlighted the fact that when one arrives at our ports, harbours and airports, the items for sale reflect one cultural tradition only — and not very well at that. Quite often, one finds a cow with a green shamrock stuck on the side, made in China or somewhere. Nevertheless, we want to see goods that are available from the whole range of cultural traditions in Northern Ireland, so that when one arrives at the airport and sees, “A Taste of Ulster”, it really is a taste of Ulster and not a taste of Killarney or Galway.

The biggest community arts sector in Northern Ireland, and one of the areas often neglected, is our bands. There are in the region of 100 pipe bands, although not all of them take part in competitions. We have several hundred accordion bands and an even greater number of flute bands. All those bands have around 20, 30, or more members.

11.45 am

Folk are also involved in a wide range of associated activities in support of the bands. The involvement of all those people means that bands, which do not get the attention that they should, are a large and key sector in community arts. In that sense, I hope that the Arts Council will review its provision of funding.

Lottery funding is tight, but, considering the large number of people who are involved with bands, that provides only a modest amount of money for

instruments. Therefore, I hope that consideration will be given to increasing that funding.

I have mentioned various aspects of culture and the arts and their importance to society. In my final two minutes, I want to concentrate on amendment No 1.

Importantly, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure is about to consider funding for arts and culture and will want to study what is currently being spent in Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, to tie ourselves to any target figure at this time would be premature. I prefer amendment No 1, which:

“encourages the Executive to explore means of enhancing promotion of the arts in Northern Ireland.”

It is not only a matter of direct Government funding, a culture of sponsorship must be encouraged in Northern Ireland. In addition, local authorities must be encouraged — borrowing the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure’s phrase from yesterday’s debate — to step up to the mark.

I am pleased to refer to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s publication, ‘Local Authority Arts Expenditure Survey 2003-2004 and 2004-2005’, which I will not wave around because that would be inappropriate. In 2004-05, Belfast City Council did step up to the mark by setting aside £9,228,487 for the arts. It was the highest figure by far when compared with councils that only set aside about £3,000. People may say that the figure relates to the size of population; however, North Down Borough Council, headed by one of the proposers of the motion Stephen Farry, gave £2·68 per capita to the arts, compared with £33·27 from every citizen of Belfast. Amendment No 2 is tabled by Barry McElduff, whose council gave just £5·83 per capita. One way to increase spending on the arts would be for Omagh District Council and North Down Borough Council to step up to the mark in the same way that Belfast City Council has done.

Mr McElduff: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after the first “Kingdom”, and insert

“and Ireland; and calls upon the Executive to raise the level of arts funding to at least £10 per person, in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review.”

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take issue with Nelson McCausland, not on his final point, but in that he may inflict damage to the tourism industry by suggesting that we do not have sandy beaches. We do have

sandy beaches, and, furthermore, Mr Brolly told me that the sun was shining the day before yesterday.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, cuirim fáilte roimh an rún seo, ach tá mé ag moladh leasú don rún seo ag an am céanna. Is maith an rud é go bhfuil muid uilig ag déileáil leis an ábhar seo - tacaíocht do na healaíona. I welcome the Alliance Party's motion —

Mr McNarry: On a point of order. If a speech is made in a language that is not English, does the Speaker not have a mechanism to interpret what has been said in order to assuage my fears that nothing was said that I did not want to hear? I did not notice that you used any such mechanism, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you satisfy me that you understood what the Member said in a language other than English?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. Rather, it is a correction of the Deputy Speaker, which I do not accept. I was attending to several different matters at the same time; however, I understood what Mr McElduff said.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. I hope that the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr McNarry, will support the procurement of a simultaneous translation system to benefit all 108 Members. He could then rely on that system and no one else. That would be a quare good idea.

It is important for the Assembly to hear the case for increased revenue funding for the arts, and the Alliance Party, by tabling the motion, has done a service for the Assembly and the arts.

We should debate the critical role of the arts in driving the economy; in job creation and, crucially, job retention; in improving people's social lives and uplifting communities; in attracting visitors to our sandy beaches; and in improving the health and well-being of the wider community.

To some degree, everyone is aware that investment in the arts contributes greatly to achieving a range of Government priorities, as does investment in sport, which was mentioned in the previous debate. I wish to re-emphasise that fact.

A key message in the Arts Council's proposal to the comprehensive spending review for more revenue funding is that every £1 currently invested in the arts

gives a return of £3·60 to the local economy. That cannot be disregarded, and the implications must be understood across the board.

Sinn Féin's amendment seeks to strengthen the motion and add to the case, not take away from it. The amendment proposes to add the words, "and Ireland", not only because of the North/South dimension to the political architecture, but because, crucially, in 2006–07, the Twenty-six Counties spent £12·61 per capita on the arts. That is over twice the amount that is spent on the arts in the North. A lesson can be learned from the Twenty-six Counties.

I was surprised that the Alliance Party omitted that fact, because it would be common sense to include it if one wishes to reflect accurately the scale of arts underfunding in the North. I ask the proposers of the motion to accept amendment No 2, particularly the financial dimension, because it highlights further the substantial difference in investment. That is the missing part of the jigsaw, which is why Sinn Féin tabled amendment No 2.

The bottom line is that Sinn Féin wants to secure an increase in revenue funding for the arts in order to avert further funding crises and prevent crucial arts projects having to pull down their shutters. The case is best served by presenting a comparative picture of arts funding throughout these islands.

The amendment suggests spending at least £10 per capita as an endorsement of the Invest in Inspiration campaign, which was launched in January 2007 by the Arts Council with the support of the Forum for Local Government and the Arts.

That campaign outlined 10 great reasons to invest in the arts.

I acknowledge what Anna Lo said about the lottery funding crisis. The double whammy of decreased lottery income and the diversion of funding to the 2012 Olympic Games has caused the figure for average spend to be recalculated. The new figure deemed necessary to invest in the arts will be £11·55 per capita over the period of the comprehensive spending review.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I can tell Minister Edwin Poots that if, or when, he goes to the Executive to seek greater revenue funding for the arts, the Committee will support him. Edwin Poots and I might not always agree on everything, a LeasCheann Comhairle, as you might appreciate, but we have a common purpose in seeking greater revenue funding for the arts.

Society must demonstrate how it values the arts and show that they matter.

The arts enrich everyone's lives and help to provide a more inclusive and cohesive view of society. Nelson McCausland talked about a narrow view of the arts, and we must note that some people feel that the arts are elitist. However, they are not elitist — they are for everyone.

When members of the public are asked when they last attended, or participated in, an arts event, they often tend to shy away from the subject, saying that they are not involved in the arts. They then realise that they might have attended a community play the night before, a concert in the recent past, even a painting class, an exhibition, a scór, a fleadh competition, a céilí, or a dance class. Therefore, everyone is involved in the arts; sometimes people are a bit slow to acknowledge that.

In my community, in mid-Tyrone, my introduction to the arts, in a formal sense, was through the Mid Ulster Drama Festival, which was held in the Patrician Hall.

We were always treated to nine nights in a row of theatre. I commend organisations such as the Mid Ulster Drama Festival committee.

It is important that we acknowledge what the Minister talked about yesterday.

He also previously stated that:

“Having quality arts facilities ... to showcase creative and cultural talent builds confidence and a sense of pride in local people.”

In the West Tyrone constituency, people are proud of facilities such as the Strule Arts Centre in Omagh, the Alley Arts and Conference Centre in Strabane, and the Patrician in Carrickmore.

Our amendment draws attention to the more complete picture of per capita spend on the arts in these islands. The amendment also adds to the context of the motion because the £12.61 per capita being spent on the arts in the Twenty-six Counties during 2006-07 is a significant figure that must be analysed and taken note of. People in the North have the same cultural entitlement as everyone else on this island — in this country. We want to assert that fact.

Sinn Féin notes that the deepening crisis in arts funding means that the amount that is being asked for has had to be recalculated to £11.55 per capita. It is intolerable that, during the comprehensive spending review period, further reductions are planned in funding for the arts. Those cuts total £4.5 million —

that is not acceptable, especially considering what was originally and previously planned.

We want funding returned directly to the arts sector. We also want increasing democratisation of how that money is managed and spent. However, in a general sense, we are supportive of the motion that has been tabled.

Mr McNarry: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I express our sincere gratitude to Ms Anna Lo and Dr Farry for tabling the motion, which highlights the significant comparative underfunding that exists between our region and England, Scotland and Wales.

We readily identify with the proposal to increase arts funding to, at least, the United Kingdom average. It is with eager anticipation that we await the response of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, whom we welcome once again to the Chamber. We look forward to the Minister's giving his view on the scope that he may have to secure extra and additional funding through the comprehensive spending review, which is likely to be in the news today.

Although I accept that Northern Ireland is playing catch-up, and clearly has, from its current position, a long way to catch up on England, Wales and, massively, per capita, on Scotland, the differences in funding among the regions may not be able to be narrowed in one leap. If the case to realise parity of funding with even one of the United Kingdom regions is to succeed, there would have to be much more money than is in the kitty at present, and likely to be in it tomorrow.

I hope that neither the proposers nor the Minister see this proposal as an ultimatum, but as the beginning of a realisation through negotiation to reach — in as short a time as possible — a situation whereby funding for the arts in Northern Ireland is on an equal footing with other regions in the United Kingdom. Of course, if the Minister tells us today that he can meet the increase of funding that is called for in the motion, let him intervene now as the bringer of great news. If not, let us hear what news, if any, he can bring us today.

The Ulster Unionist Party firmly believes that our country's culture, including world-class events, the community arts, and the cultural riches available in our libraries and museums, enrich our common lives as a society. As such, they require support and strengthening, with no dithering.

We see investment in the many facets of arts and culture as investment in people and in their quality of life. My party is pleased, therefore, to support the motion. The House should set down some markers for the Minister and the Executive, at least to give a target to meet or beat and to put Northern Ireland in touch with other United Kingdom regions.

12.00 noon

Amendment No 2, as its proposer indicated, is effectively out of date, and I will leave it at that. Amendment No 1 would pass the initiative back to the Executive, as its proposer said. However, it would do so without putting down a marker. That would weaken the case for an increase in arts funding. My party, therefore, prefers to support the motion and to send the message that the House wishes to give the Minister on this important issue.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá na healaíona iontach tábhachtach ar fad, iontach tábhachtach do shláinte na sochaí ina bhfuilimid inár gcónaí. Téann said i bhfeidhm ar shláinte, ar shaol sóisialta, ar oideachas agus ar mheon an phobail, agus téann siad i bhfeidhm fosta ar eacnamaíocht na tíre seo.

I declare an interest as an amateur actor. I am aware, however, that there are many more professional actors and limelight-grabbers present in the House today. I do not put myself in the same category as them.

The arts are extremely important to the well-being of society. They impact directly on our social lives, education and health. Art also contributes to our economic well-being. It is an indictment of historic governance that the arts have fallen behind so badly in this part of the world. The arts are considered very important in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. Why were we unworthy of proper investment under direct rule? We now have the opportunity to correct that, and I hope that the Minister will take appropriate action.

The increase asked for by the Arts Council is modest: less than £10 million per annum. A relatively small increase can produce substantial leveraged income for the arts, and the economy generally, through other investment opportunities, box office receipts and so on.

In direct economic terms, in 2005 the arts and creative industries employed nearly 35,000 people in over 2,500 enterprises in Northern Ireland. In indirect terms, the economic impact is more difficult to quantify. There is no doubt,

however, that regions with a successful high-value-added tourist industry also have a thriving and dynamic arts industry. There is a positive, synergistic relationship between tourism and the arts. One relies on the other.

In a global economy, where this region competes with thousands of others for direct foreign investment, the arts are extremely important. When location decisions are being made, companies consider whether employees will locate and remain in the region in question. Often, senior managers and key personnel are required to move to the investment location. In high-value-added industries, key employees are extremely mobile. If they do not like a region, they will not stay; they will quickly move on. It is no accident that highly successful economic centres also have vibrant and properly-funded arts industries.

Economic advantage is gained through industrial and product innovation. It is often the case that market advantage is gained through aesthetic aspects of product design and marketing.

Often, technical functionality is expected as a given, and competitive advantage derives from the look and feel of a product. Such design is carried out by designers who live and work in centres where there are high levels of creativity. It is not by accident that Italian, French and Japanese products have distinctive and attractive aesthetic attributes that give them an advantage in the marketplace.

Most importantly, it is great for our children and grandchildren, our parents and ourselves to have the opportunity to enjoy the uplifting experience provided by music, art and drama. The arts are life-enhancing — often life-changing — and open up new ways of thinking. They take us from the mundane to the fantastic.

The arts are most limited when they reflect our world, and most inspirational when they influence and shape our relationships with each other and how we view the world around us. I support the motion, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Lord Browne: It is only right that the Assembly:

“recognises the critical role that the arts can play in promoting a positive international image of Northern Ireland, attracting visitors and growing the local economy and the contribution that community arts make to social cohesion”,

as the motion states. However, I support amendment No 1.

For over 200 years Northern Ireland has been a centre of cultural and academic excellence. From the mid-nineteenth century on, cultural activity,

coupled with a proud tradition of academic excellence, has earned Northern Ireland many accolades. There is no doubt that, in more recent times, there has been a resurgence in cultural and academic achievement in Ulster.

It can be difficult to define what Northern Irish culture is, but there is no doubt that Irish culture, as epitomised by the Irish language, music, dancing and art, is a strong influence. Similarly, in the last 15 years Ulster Scots has undergone what can only be described as a revival, with more than 200 groups in existence throughout the Province.

There are other cultures in Northern Ireland that have not been tapped into or explored to their full potential — I refer to the new immigrant communities that have come into Northern Ireland, from central and eastern Europe, for example, bringing with them their cultures and traditions. Those communities must be cherished and built upon as a potential way of drawing visitors to Northern Ireland.

There is high culture and there is popular or mass culture, and the British Isles successfully displays a shared heritage of both, which can be enjoyed by people of all affiliations. Border and regional identifications are no barrier to the enjoyment of this common British culture. Equally, we must also recognise modern culture, as epitomised by artists such as Van Morrison and Snow Patrol, who are enjoyed by millions of people throughout Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Culture is a big business, and it can be turned to economic advantage. That said, art and culture help many people, and it must be encouraged at a local level, where money could be well spent. In my constituency of East Belfast, there is the Beat Initiative, which is a carnival and a community arts organisation that promotes art across the city and the communities, and seeks opportunities for young people.

There is a problem with arts funding. I say, with a little regret, that prudence must be exercised. Members could cite many projects that would benefit from an increase in their budget allocations. Sport has been mentioned in the debate; it, too, could benefit from an increase in budget per capita. In Northern Ireland, the expenditure per capita on sport between 2005 and 2007 was £5·31. Compare that with the amount that is spent on the arts, which is £6·13. Therefore, a little prudence is needed.

All methods of increasing the arts budget must be considered. That is why I support amendment No 1, which calls on the Executive to, at least, explore the means by which the level of arts funding could be increased. Society benefits from culture and the arts, and would be less well off without them.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend Ms Lo and Dr Farry for bringing the motion to the Floor. I also want to commend the arts community, which has worked tirelessly for many years with a miserly budget. Without its vision, communities in some areas would be much worse off through deprivation and antisocial behaviour. That is why I proposed to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure several months ago that an inquiry be held into expenditure on the arts and on what the arts mean to communities. Fortunately, the proposal was supported. I hope that the Committee will work on that process soon.

I disagree with Mr McNarry, who said that amendment No 2 is out of date. Barry McElduff and I tabled the amendment in the hope that this matter will be taken seriously and that additional funding can be made available to the arts community, because we are all its beneficiaries.

The figures that I am about to quote have already been mentioned in the debate. However, they are vital to the winning argument. The current spend per capita on the arts in the North of Ireland is £6.13, which is around 50% of what is spent in the rest of Ireland and Scotland, and two thirds of what is spent in England and Wales. I want to see expenditure here being brought into line with what is spent in the rest of these islands. Sinn Féin wants the spend per capita to increase to at least £10 per person.

There would be many benefits to society from a little extra investment in the arts. In my constituency of West Belfast, organisations such as Féile an Phobail have contributed to regeneration. The féile attracts many visitors every year, including the Culture Minister in 2007, and has generated millions of pounds to an area of high deprivation. Despite that, its funding has been cut over the past several years. The Dubbeljoint Theatre Company has presented many award-winning plays, and many of its young acting stars who were given their first breaks on the stage on the Whiterock Road are now regular faces on television. Consider what could be achieved if such organisations were given proper funding.

The murals throughout Belfast attract many thousands of visitors every year. Mr Bradley said that people visit from Italy and from elsewhere around the world.

Visitors come to West Belfast from China and Japan to look at the murals. The murals must also be supported.

Many arts organisations assist with economic regeneration and social cohesion throughout the North of Ireland. It is essential that they are able to continue to do so in a properly funded environment. It is often left to the Arts Council to tell groups the bad news that the amount of money that is needed to deliver all of their projects is simply not available. The Arts Council has done an excellent job with the limited resources that it has. According to the Arts Council, projects have had to work during the past three years with a budget shortfall of £5.6 million.

Mr McElduff mentioned earlier that for every £1 that is spent on the arts, there is a return of £3.60. It is, therefore, hard to fathom why there is not more investment in the arts. With more investment, that return would be enhanced. More investment would mean more income for all areas, including those of high deprivation. It would mean more jobs and more tourists. It would mean that pride is instilled in communities and that more children are given the opportunity to take part in the arts.

It means more international recognition and possibly more acclaim for literature — for example, in the form of the Nobel prize. Work must be allowed to continue in the arts sector, but it is clear that more investment is needed. It is important that the arts budget for the North of Ireland is brought into line with budgets in the rest of these islands. That will allow the arts sector to grow and thrive, ensure that all of our communities can go from strength to strength and that we leave a legacy of which future generations can be proud. Go raibh maith agat.

12.15 pm

Mr K Robinson: While I have some reservations regarding the wording of the motion — due in no small part to the budgetary pressures that will shortly face all Members of the Assembly — I recognise, and fully support, the aspiration to reach funding parity with that of the other devolved regions of the UK. That is clearly stated in the Ulster Unionist Party's policy manifesto.

We all bathe in the reflected glory of international recognition when “one of our own” makes it to the big time. Liam Neeson, Seamus Heaney, Barry Douglas, Van Morrison and Sir James Galway have held up the banner of excellence and focused the attention of the world on the positive, constructive side of Northern Ireland. At that same time, others were intent on giving their own version of Attila

the Hun, by bombing and shooting over 30 sterile years, when the flame of artistic endeavour in the Province was in danger of being snuffed out.

The grotesque spectacle of the Grand Opera House, in the aftermath of bombing, was flashed around the world. Yet, the raw talent, enthusiasm and determination of this society to resist the Philistines, triumphed. I pay tribute to the work of those in the performing and creative arts who weathered that stormy period.

Many Members have quoted various financial figures that highlight the dire situation of the arts sector, in its broadest sense. I will not go into those now. However, I call on the Minister, Edwin Poots, to apply maximum pressure on his colleagues in the Executive, to find the necessary moneys to raise the level of arts funding towards the shibboleth of parity. If any of them should be tempted to play the role of Scrooge, let him highlight the fact that, for every £1 invested in the arts, £3.60 is generated for Northern Ireland's economy.

With an employment figure of over 2,000 active in the arts, the sector is too important to neglect. Its growth potential is enormous. For too long the arts have been viewed, by many, as the domain of a select few. In the ranks of the chosen few, the temptation was to look down on the rest of society, who did not share their rarefied view of artistic worth. Such an attitude did nothing to achieve widespread sympathy and understanding for further arts funding.

Thankfully, today, outreach projects — and the development and appreciation of community-based arts projects — have helped to demolish those walls that needlessly divided the world of art and the world of creativity. That approach has helped to build confidence in communities and enabled them to discuss and explore their experiences. That, in turn, has further enabled them to tackle other more thorny issues.

I echo Lord Browne's appeal that the ethnic cultures, which are now present in Northern Ireland, should be supported. I referred, in my speech yesterday, to the successful Mela festival that was held in Botanic Gardens, which was attended by Anna Lo and me. Again, I commend it as a template for community involvement.

The most recent blow to arts funding occurred in March 2007 when a reduction of £4.5 million was sought in order to divert money to the Olympic Games in London. That, on top of the historic lack of adequate resources for the arts, under the direct rule regime, has led to a crisis in that crucial sector.

Minister Poots noted on 19 September 2007:

“Public funding is needed to support and sustain our arts organisations which form the backbone of our creative economy.”

He went on to state:

“Investment in arts and culture strengthens the economy and fuels economic regeneration by supporting local jobs and stimulating consumer spending.”

Therefore, we must all play our role in relation to funding so that we can all enjoy those benefits.

I support the Minister’s sentiments, and so does the House. It is now up to the Minister, not to rob Peter, but to persuade him to invest in the growth potential of our existing talent.

I support the motion.

Mr O’Loan: I strongly support the motion. The figures very much speak for themselves. Spending per capita in the year 2006-07 was as follows: in the Republic of Ireland, £12·61; in Scotland, £11·93; in Wales, £8·80; in England, £8·19; and in Northern Ireland, £6·13. It is not good to be at the bottom of that league table.

Sometimes what we get back more than compensates for what we spend. That is the case with the arts, both in social and economic terms. Take, for example, the success of tourism in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland — their tourism sectors input greatly to the economy. By contrasts, we lag hugely behind. It can be no coincidence that those areas spend the most on the arts.

The Arts Council is requesting an increase in funding of £26 million over the CSR period, which would bring our per capita spending up to £11·55 per annum, similar to that in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. We should aim at getting that level of spend.

The arts have a huge role to play in society and in tackling social disadvantage. The motion rightly outlines that role, and other Members have mentioned it, too. I welcome the recent shift towards funding for the community arts, although the high-level arts must not be neglected as they have a significant role to play. In England, the simple creation of a choir in a disadvantaged run-down estate did a huge amount to turn around that community’s lack of confidence. Sometimes

non-typical approaches to problem-solving can be adopted, and, just like that approach, they can be very successful. Here, drama and film have been used to explore and spread an important message about domestic violence. Therefore, there is the potential for major payback. We know that a lack of social cohesion results in huge costs, and that can often be addressed by developing well-targeted arts programmes.

Recently the chairman of the Ulster Bank, Dr Alan Gillespie, made important comments on what attracts foreign direct investment to a country. He mentioned four or five factors on which investors reflect when making their investment decisions, and among them was the presence of a rich cultural environment. Thus, our flagship projects, such as the Lyric Theatre and the Ulster Orchestra, play a part in creating that environment, as does the local provision of music and drama education for children, and so on. We must build on that if we are serious about playing an important role in the international community.

I welcome Ken Robinson's remarks about Liam Neeson. I hope that the day will come when we properly recognise what Liam Neeson has done for Ballymena, and for Ireland as a whole. Work on a new museum, arts and civic centre in Ballymena is nearly completed, and some £20 million has been spent on it. I welcome the departmental contribution to that project, to which the Minister referred yesterday. I have no doubt that that will encourage a huge flood of community arts activity; in fact, such activity is already starting to happen.

For example, a Ballymena Chamber Orchestra has recently been formed. That classical orchestra comprises a small number of professionals and a large number of ordinary community members. They have enhanced their standards beyond all recognition. There is nothing airy-fairy or ivory tower about this orchestra — it works in the community and in disadvantaged areas and visits schools, getting youngsters excited about music that they might not have been excited about before. That is all marvellous.

There are other significant community arts projects in the areas. Ballymoney has a strong and continuing tradition of involvement in drama. There is also a strong interest in traditional music, which is promoted by groups such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and others. Interestingly, the music played in north Antrim is very influenced by Scottish traditional music, and there is a great deal of interaction between those two areas. Thus, the arts have a crucial role to play with regard to their contribution to quality of life and potential contribution to the economy. We must therefore invest more money in them.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): I thank those Members who tabled both the motion and the amendments for demonstrating their interest in such an important subject. I agree with the points that have been made about the positive role that the arts can play in society, which is not always highlighted when funding for the arts is debated in the media or elsewhere.

Since taking up office in May I have spent a great deal of time in meeting a wide range of arts providers, from community-based voluntary arts groups to the professional arts organisations. I have listened and learned, to get a feel for the issues that have an impact on the arts sector, and to see for myself the positive benefits that are derived from the arts. I fully appreciate that, for some considerable time, there has been a historical deficit in arts funding in Northern Ireland. Arts Council funding has been pegged at about £11 million since 2002 without much change. Other Members have already highlighted the disparity with other parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In some places, Northern Ireland funding for the arts amounts to only half of that provided elsewhere

We are already behind, and the 2012 Olympic Games will further reduce lottery funding available to the arts. We will lose £1.5 million per annum from 2008. The Arts Council's income from the national lottery will have dropped from a high of £10.3 million in 1997-98 to only to £4.5 million in 2011-12. That represents a significant loss to the local economy.

Following the last two rounds of national lottery applications, requests from arts organisations totalled over £10 million against available funds of just under £3 million. That gives an indication of the funding shortfall. Inevitably, many good projects and organisations will be disappointed as a consequence of not obtaining funding, because the Arts Council simply does not have the money to distribute.

The per capita figures that have been quoted relate to revenue funding, and do not include the recent investment in capital funding in the arts infrastructure. In the 2004 comprehensive spending review, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure secured £18 million in ISNI 1 (investment strategy for Northern Ireland), which was primarily intended to address the deficiency in Belfast's arts infrastructure that was identified following the unsuccessful bid to be European Capital of Culture. Including arts lottery funding, the Department has invested £6.3 million in the redevelopment of the Grand Opera House; £8.25 million has been allocated to a new Lyric theatre, and a further £8.25 million to the new Metropolitan Arts Centre which will replace the Old Museum Arts Centre

(OMAC). Almost £4 million was earmarked for the refurbishment of the Crescent Arts Centre, and £2.7 million for the Ulster Hall. Therefore, there is potential to improve the arts infrastructure in our capital city and it should be an exciting time.

As I said yesterday, however, we require support from other sources to ensure that those capital projects go ahead. I have to make it abundantly clear that if that support is not forthcoming, it is likely that some of those projects will fall. That is for others to consider. There has been some success in the regions. Capital infrastructure has been well supported; for example, Ballymena Borough Council paid for 66% of the cost of a new arts centre, and Omagh District Council invested £3 million in its new arts centre — 28% of the total cost. In my own constituency of Lagan Valley, Lisburn City Council contributed 94% of the cost of the Island Arts Centre. There is investment to be made in capital infrastructure for the arts, and benefits to be derived from that investment.

I want to comment on where the arts come into the scheme of benefits and other Departments. Some people see the arts as the cherry on top of the icing. I do not even see the arts as the icing on the cake, but as part of the mixture that makes up the fabric of Northern Ireland, and what it can deliver.

12.30 pm

With regard to economic development, for example, some 33,500 people are employed in the creative industries and in arts-related occupations. That represents about 4.6% of the population. If we were to emulate what has been achieved in the rest of the United Kingdom, we could create another 11,000 jobs in that industry. If we want to attract high-quality jobs to Northern Ireland — and we do — the arts have a key role to play. People who are employed and have a good disposable income will want to spend that income on attending quality events. The arts have a key role to play in that. In the not-too-distant past, I was aware that a company that was considering coming to Belfast chose in the end to locate in Edinburgh simply because the arts infrastructure was better there. The people that it employed had a very strong disposable income and wanted to go to a city where there were plenty of events in which they could participate.

The arts sector improves the attractiveness and image of Northern Ireland and provides a key product that contributes to tourism development. Major arts and cultural events supported by the Northern Ireland Events Company in 2005 generated 25,000 additional bed nights. It is my desire that venues such as the Grand Opera House — and the Lyric Theatre, when it reopens — should be open all year round. However, they cannot do that if they do not have the

funding. Ultimately, if we want to make Northern Ireland a tourist destination for 12 months of the year, we need the arts to make that contribution.

The arts support learning, education and training, and that contributes to economic development as well. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has used the arts to promote education among children and young people. In particular, the creative youth partnerships have involved over 13,000 children and young people and 130 artists in Northern Ireland. That initiative has helped to strengthen links to the curriculum and provide high-quality educational experiences. Projects such as the Nerve Centre, AmmA and Studio ON provide real benefits to education as they demonstrate to our young people the opportunities that are available in the creative industries.

The arts sector promotes improved health outcomes and can often act as a preventative measure. I talked about how sports can contribute to health; however, art can contribute to health as well, particularly for older people and those with disabilities or mental-health issues. People's mental health can be assisted and improved as a consequence of having the opportunity to engage in the arts. In a survey carried out by the Mater Hospital, 88% of patients described arts activities as beneficial.

As well as promoting general economic development, the arts can act as a driver for local regeneration in both urban and rural areas. Over the past 10 years, funding to the arts has helped to establish nine new cultural buildings in towns and cities across Northern Ireland, with plans for further developments. The Cathedral Quarter in Belfast city will largely be successful on the back of the arts.

The arts sector has high levels of participation across a range of social groups and ages in Northern Ireland and contributes towards addressing issues of social inclusion and participation. Statistics show that, between April 2005 and March 2006, 47% of residents aged 16 and over had participated in or attended an arts event. The arts sector has high levels of participation among people with disabilities, and, according to research carried out by the Arts Council, 82% of the population with disabilities have expressed interest in one or more art forms.

That is a demonstration of the benefits that the arts can provide to the wider community, and that is critical. Mr O'Loan referred to Alan Gillespie's comments, and that ties in quite neatly with what I said about the experience of the company that chose to go to Edinburgh, as opposed to Belfast. The arts are critical to the

desire of this Government to deliver a stronger economy for the people of Northern Ireland.

Cultural tourism is the fastest growing segment of our tourism industry and, last year, 224,000 people engaged in cultural tourism activities. Earlier this year, the Rediscover Northern Ireland programme provided us with an opportunity to attend the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC to demonstrate Northern Ireland's wares and show the United States of America the quality of our arts and culture. That showcase was hugely successful and, since then, the United States has shown a lot of interest in what we are doing in Northern Ireland. Many out-dated, Northern Ireland stereotypes were challenged, and we showed that we were a creative, confident and outward-looking people, capable of partnering with businesses, organisations and people from all sections of the community. We also showed that, for some individuals, Northern Ireland has a lot more to offer than what might initially meet the eye.

I want to develop Northern Ireland as a world-class creative and cultural region, generating wealth and sustainable employment opportunities in the creative industries. We have made it very clear that, the arts are critical to many aspects of Northern Ireland; therefore, arts funding is of critical importance. A significant shortfall has been identified, and a case has been made for that in the comprehensive spending review. I have listened to my colleagues, and for example, to what the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr McNarry, had to say about his party's support. That is not always reflected by his ministerial colleagues; some of the more negative comments about arts funding perhaps have come from that source.

We need to get together and identify how we, as a Government, can deliver more from the central pot, and how local government can deliver more. We must look to the corporate sector and to private sponsorship because, in many other cities and regions, the private sector makes a far greater contribution to the arts. It is not simply about giving money away — there is something in it for business.

There is significant benefit —

Dr Farry: In light of the Minister's discussions with his colleagues, has his Department, through the CSR, made a formal bid to bring spending on the arts in Northern Ireland in line with the other regions of the United Kingdom?

Mr Poots: The answer is yes, and the Member should not have expected any other answer. It would cost around £26 million over the three years of the CSR. I do not need to tell Members that this is a very tough negotiating round, and we

shall see what comes out of it. What happens today will have some impact on the announcement at Westminster on the CSR.

I support the spirit of the motion and of both amendments. For all the reasons that I, and other Members, have outlined, investment in the arts is a sound investment for Northern Ireland. It is important that local government and private funders step up to the mark along with central Government. Members can rest assured that I have made the case very strongly in the context of the CSR, and I very much value the many contributions made by the arts to Northern Ireland, its society, and its economy, as illustrated in the speeches this morning.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you Minister. Members will be aware that the Business Committee has arranged to meet as soon as the Assembly suspends for lunch.

I propose therefore by leave of the Assembly to suspend the sitting until 2.00pm, when we will have the winding-up speeches on the motion and on the amendments. The sitting is by leave suspended.

The sitting was suspended 12.39 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Brolly: I had prepared a pre-lunchtime address, so I will be brief. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I want to deal not so much with arts funding but with where the Arts Council directs its funding. I have been at various Arts Council meetings over the years, and at one such meeting, I made the point that its promotion of the arts should be more proactive and dynamic. It seemed to me that the council simply doles out any funding that it receives to people who promote the arts. It even passes the buck to the Events Company, which doles out money on its behalf.

I understand the reason that that is the case. It is probably linked closely to the fact that the funding is not available and that the council works on a shoestring while doing as much as it can. Therefore, I look forward to the Arts Council's receiving extra funding — and I hope that it will get the sum that it seeks — so that it can become more proactive. The Arts Council is different in nature from the body that was known as the Sports Council; at sporting events, the Sports Council has a certain presence. However, people do not get a sense of an Arts Council presence at arts events. If the Arts Council adopted the same kind of promotional attitude as the Sports Council, people might show more interest in, and be more enthusiastic about, the arts.

Last night, I listened to an interview with Anna Lo, one of the proposers of the motion. I predicted the question that the interviewer would ask her when she said that the arts needed an extra £6 per capita. I said to the person who was in the car with me that the interviewer was going to ask whether that money would not be better spent on schools or hospitals. We must get that attitude out of our minds. I have an image of hospitals and schools being soulless places. These days, compared with when I was a young man, schools and hospitals are soulless. Local schools and hospitals used to have souls, but now they just have bodies. That is a good reason for the Arts Council to receive extra funding — it can use it to add soul to schools and hospitals.

My second — and last — point is that it is important for us to sustain and encourage North/South co-operation in the arts. That would give everyone a wider geographical and cultural area of interest.

Many benefits have come from North/South co-operation. I mention a very good initiative called Turas/Journey, which is a North/South funding initiative to encourage individuals and group performers in all areas of the arts. Such initiatives are useful even from an economic point of view, because, when Dublin is involved, it usually contributes a wee bit more money than we do. Apart from that, widening people's perspectives and giving them a greater opportunity to enjoy artistic things is beneficial.

I am sorry, but I do not know whether we have yet heard the Ulster Scots for Turas/Journey from Nelson.

Mr McCausland: Three Ulster-Scots translations for "journey" are "stravaig", "gang" or "rake".

If we are to broaden the vision, we should be inclusive, not insular. To think about one island is to be insular. We must take a broad-minded and comprehensive view, which means embracing all the islands — the entire British Isles. Let us look east to Scotland as well.

Mr McElduff: Did Nelson previously offer "dander" as another alternative?

Mr McCausland: It was a possibility, but I thought that three alternatives were enough. I did not want to overpower people.

Mr Brolly: Will the Members give way? *[Laughter.]*

I shall conclude very soon, because most of the points have already been made. The Turas/Journey initiative is as inclusive as any initiative can be. I attended its launch, at which Ulster Scots and Irish were represented. Indeed, anything that could have been represented was there. I appreciate what Nelson has said about embracing all the islands. We can travel across the water to enjoy morris dancing, and perhaps even learn a bit of it. Everything cultural is good, from wherever it comes in the world.

Mr D Bradley: When the Member refers to crossing the water to enjoy culture, does he include the Scottish Gàidhealtachd in that? We heard yesterday about the worthy Colmcille initiative that was organised on Iona and Mull.

Agus ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an bhall an aontaíonn sé liom gur choir an gaol sin idir gaeltacht na hÉireann agus gaeltacht na hAlban a fhorbairt agus a threisiú.

Does the Member agree that we should do all that we can to encourage arts links between the Gaeltacht in Ireland and the Gàidhealtachd in Scotland?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member literally has 10 seconds.

Mr Brolly: Aontaím go mór leis an bhall eile agus gor raibhmíle maith agat, Dominic. I have little more to say. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Shannon: I support amendment No 1, which I urge Members to back.

The benefits of the arts in Northern Ireland as a means of expression are important. Indeed, those benefits are essential. Many famous poets and artists from Northern Ireland gained their inspiration from — dare I say it? — the beauties of Strangford, so I readily enjoy seeing pieces of art on display that give me a taste of home.

Undoubtedly, art has been the vital means of expression and release in the rehabilitation of many in the Province. The fact that 88% of people in the Mater Hospital felt that crafts helped them to recuperate should come as no surprise.

People are made aware that they can do something useful and therapeutic, whether that be to make Christmas cards, to dedicate a piece to the memory of a loved one, to erect a monument that represents a loss of life or to paint a mural that depicts history — but that does not glorify terrorism. There is a major difference there.

Arts and culture are vital to our children's development. It gives them an outlet for expression other than rage or bad behaviour. Ask any youth leader in the Province how he or she guarantees good behaviour from a group: the threat of their not getting to do craft. Children and adults alike enjoy working with their hands to achieve something beautiful, so that must be encouraged. For that reason, 75,000 children in the Province participate in art workshops. In my constituency alone, many workshops are held, not only in Newtownards Town Hall but right across the entire Ards Peninsula. Moreover, art classes are held in the techs, and classes are taught on the intricacies of knitting and crocheting — skills that I dare say elude many of us in the Chamber. I certainly would not possess them.

Historically, Strangford has produced superior poets, authors, artists and craftsmen. That must be fostered and maintained.

Everyone present will have heard me use the Ulster-Scots language in the Chamber and will know the importance that I, and many of my colleagues, place on our cultural identity. Recently, Newtownards celebrated the four-hundredth birthday of the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement, and many events were coordinated to celebrate that.

Mr Campbell: The Member has, on occasion, used Ulster Scots in the Chamber, but will he accept that the difference between his use of it and others' use of Irish is that he does not use it every single time he gets to his feet, in order to make a political point?

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his intervention; it is quite clear that I do not use Ulster Scots every time that I speak, and I do not use it for political means.

We in Ards Borough Council saw the four-hundredth anniversary of the Hamilton and Montgomery settlements as an opportunity to remember our history, as a way to enjoy our culture, and as a drawing point for tourists. Judging by the expressions on people's faces as they enjoyed the theatre, the crafts and the history of how Ards and Strangford have developed, a great time was had by all.

One needs only to take a drive around my beautiful constituency of Strangford to see that the lack of money is leading to serious accidents on the roads. That is why the DUP amendment is important. One needs only to sit and wait in the Ulster Hospital to realise that the Health Service is understaffed and underfunded. One need only sit in the library in Ards, which holds 40 people, or go to our schools to witness the problems that arise from lack of funds, and to see that there are areas in the Province that must be given priority in a wholehearted allocation of funding.

Although it is important for children to be able to express their talents and gifts, it is crucial that they can sit in a classroom that is equipped to meet their needs, and that they can go to a library that will enhance their basic literary skills. As important as good funding is in boosting tourism, it is essential that the infrastructure can bear the weight of the load. As amazing as the results of rehabilitative arts expression are, it is imperative that the correct drugs and treatment can be recognised for each patient, and afforded accordingly.

It would be great to be able to afford to do everything; to have the perfect country with enough funds to ensure state-of-the-art hospitals and schools

alongside artistic forums, workshops and dedicated facilities. However, Northern Ireland is not that country; at least, it is not yet. I have no doubt that a time will come when our nation's investment portfolio is greater, when our tourism potential is explored, and when we get all the benefits that that will bring. At that time, the funds will be available to invest greatly in young, individual artistic talents. However, that day is not yet here, and the essentials must take precedence.

As a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I would love enough money to be available to support all of the applications for funding that are made. However, that is not possible, so we must strive for the most and excel with what we have. We can do that. I support the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in his bid for the extra £26 million for arts funding over the next three years, because that gives an indication of what he is aiming to do, and it gives the Committee a chance to support him.

I support the amendment, which recognises the importance of arts funding in Northern Ireland, but also identifies the fact that there are pressing needs that must take priority if we are to develop as a nation. I support amendment No 1.

Dr Farry: I welcome the vast majority of the comments that have been made in the debate. It has been a constructive debate, although Members have, at times, wandered into the next debate.

All parties, and especially the Minister, accept that, per capita, the arts are underfunded in Northern Ireland, compared to every other region of the United Kingdom, and compared to the Republic of Ireland. There is no need to repeat the figures, but they are revenue-based, and additional capital investments should be taken into account when arts funding is considered. Parity with the rest of the United Kingdom to meet the UK average requires an investment of £26 million over the course of the forthcoming comprehensive spending review period. I am pleased that the Minister has today confirmed that DCAL will make a specific bid for those funds in the comprehensive spending review.

The Minister made a strong case for the Alliance Party's motion during his speech. I hope that the Assembly will approve the original motion. If it does so, the Minister's efforts to persuade his Executive colleagues to come up with that money will be reinforced.

2.15 pm

The Assembly is not asking for something unrealistic or off the wall but for something that the Department has put on the agenda. Unfortunately, the Alliance Party cannot support amendment No 1, because it ducks the core problem of underfunding in Northern Ireland relative to other regions. The issue of parity must be addressed in the short term and as quickly as possible.

The DUP Members who spoke reflected the essence of the motion. When the Minister spoke, he effectively made a bid for the money to which the motion refers. Rather than blurring the issue, there are advantages in DUP Members weighing in behind their Minister in order to reinforce his efforts around the Executive table. There is a real advantage to be gained by the Assembly's speaking in a clear, united voice.

I must slap myself on the wrist and apologise to Barry McElduff, who proposed amendment No 2, for not sufficiently reflecting the Irish dimension in the original motion. The motion tried to place Northern Ireland in the context of overall UK public expenditure. However, Anna Lo and other Members, including Mr McElduff, referred to the figure of £12·61 — or its euro equivalent — that each person in the Republic of Ireland receives in arts funding. It must be recognised that people in the Republic are even further ahead of people in Northern Ireland in arts funding per capita. The North/South and all-island dimension to the arts must also be acknowledged. Many facets of the Irish story of arts and culture can be marketed to the world. That point has been well made, and I accept the criticism of the original motion.

That said, the reference made in amendment No 2 to arts funding of £10 per person perhaps sells Northern Ireland somewhat short, given the loss of the National Lottery funding for the arts. To achieve parity in arts funding, the figure per capita in Northern Ireland would now be £11·55. Given my comments on the Irish dimension to arts funding, it would be advantageous were Sinn Féin to withdraw its amendment and back the original motion.

During the debate, Nelson McCausland referred to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in the United States. I agree that that was a tremendous demonstration of the creative arts in Northern Ireland. I also fully accept his points that the Orange culture must be incorporated into the arts and that alternative funding streams must be considered.

Much has been made of the fact that the Arts Council is the main recipient of funding. Although the Arts Council is in the driving seat and has made the strongest arguments for additional funding, it should be recognised that other

sectors in Northern Ireland contribute to the creative arts. The motion made no specific reference to the Arts Council; it dealt with arts funding in general rather than specific funding for a particular organisation.

Several councils throughout Northern Ireland make strong interventions in support of the arts. Mr McCausland criticised North Down Borough Council, but I reassure him that North Down is at the cutting edge of the arts. In my capacity as Mayor of North Down, I recently attended a concert by Camerata Ireland and Barry Douglas. Moreover, the annual Aspects Irish Literature Festival was held in my constituency at the end of September. The council is working to secure a new theatre and multi-purpose venue in the near future. On the back of that, the council will increase the amount of money that it diverts towards the arts.

Barry McElduff mentioned the sandy beaches of west Tyrone: I am not sure where they are, but I look forward to sunbathing there in the future. However, he made the important point that for every £1 invested in the arts, the benefit to the economy is £3.60. If anything, that may be an underestimate.

David McNarry said that the Assembly is setting a target and a challenge for the Minister on arts funding. That should not be perceived as an ultimatum to the Department. The motion does not try to back the Minister into a corner but to reflect concern about a critical issue and achieve some consensus in the Assembly that should aid him in his efforts.

I look forward to seeing Dominic Bradley's acting ability being put to good use in the future. He made useful points about tourism potential on the back of arts and the importance of arts investment in the context of the global economy. He referred specifically to the importance that countries such as Italy and France place on high-quality design to create high-value products. Northern Ireland can learn lessons from that.

Lord Browne referred to the history of creativity in this part of the world, and to the benefits of groups such as Snow Patrol and Van Morrison putting Northern Ireland on the international map. On 1 September, 30,000 were people in Bangor for the Snow Patrol concert.

Paul Maskey referred to Féile an Phobail, which is an excellent example of a community arts festival. It has been a tribute to the ongoing work in west Belfast, and, as we move out of conflict, has done much to create a positive image for that community.

Ken Robinson mentioned a host of names who have benefited from arts funding in Northern Ireland, and who, in turn, have played a crucial role in promoting its international image. He also referred to the Grand Opera House, and it is worth reflecting that it was a beacon of hope in Belfast during the Troubles. The Grand Opera House, at the start of the golden mile, is the centre of so much investment and spin-off in Belfast.

Declan O'Loan referred to how areas that invest in tourism also invest highly in the arts. Surely there is a link there. He also referred to the importance of providing a rich, cultural environment in which to attract foreign direct investment.

The underfunding of the arts is not the fault of the Assembly, but a legacy of the past. We now have an opportunity to put things right. That underfunding illustrates that there are structural problems in our economy, and it is one of the many areas where we will come across major distortions in public expenditure that are having a detrimental effect on our ability to grow as an economy. There are a range of reasons for investing in the arts — social benefits; health and education; helping people with disabilities, including the visually and aurally impaired; dealing with mental health; community engagement; and promoting a shared future. Two thirds of art activity is, in fact, cross community.

In conclusion, I shall focus on the financial and economic aspects. Investment in the arts can be viewed as a major investment in our economy and future prosperity for us all. As Anna Lo stressed at the beginning, the sums involved are small in the context of the overall budget. However, the investment that we make on the back of the motion could have a disproportionate positive effect. In the 1820s, an English political economist, David Ricardo, set out the theory of comparative advantage: Northern Ireland has a comparative advantage in the creative arts. It is something that we are good at, and we should develop that to its full potential. We have the excellent talent — we have mentioned the names already — and we have the culture and the heritage on which to capitalise. We should, arguably, try to build on those areas at a rate ahead of the UK average.

As the Minister has stated, the Arts Council supports about 2,500 jobs. It is larger than any other industry in Northern Ireland. The arts underpin a wider range of creative industries, including design, architecture, fashion, marketing and the media, which amount to around 33,000 jobs. As the Minister has said, that is only 4.7% of our economy, whereas the UK average for those industries is 6.8%. Again, there is huge potential to build on that. Artistic output goes further in branding Northern Ireland. Not all investment in the arts will work, but some investment will produce huge gains for Northern Ireland. That investment is a

form of research and development. Overall in Northern Ireland, research and development is a major problem, and we should invest in that for everyone's future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that if amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 will fall, and I will proceed to put the Question on the motion as amended.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the critical role that the arts can play in promoting a positive international image of Northern Ireland, attracting visitors and growing the local economy and the contribution that community arts make to social cohesion; expresses its alarm that the arts are relatively underfunded per capita in Northern Ireland compared to all other regions in the United Kingdom; and calls upon the Executive to raise the level of arts funding to at least the United Kingdom average within the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.