



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Performing Arts Provision:  
Belfast Metropolitan College

1 July 2015

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Employment and Learning

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)  
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sydney Anderson  
Ms Anna Lo  
Ms Claire Sugden

**Witnesses:**

Ms Gillian Magee	Belfast Metropolitan College
Ms Marie-Thérèse McGivern	Belfast Metropolitan College

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** I welcome Marie-Thérèse McGivern, the chief executive of Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC), and Gillian Magee, its head of corporate development. You are very welcome. I thank you for coming to us at short notice. We received an informal briefing from a number of unions and industry professionals on their concerns over the removal of some courses at Belfast Met. We heard their input and their side, so this is an opportunity for the Committee to get some feedback from you.

**Ms Marie-Thérèse McGivern (Belfast Metropolitan College):** Thank you, Chair. If you want, I am happy to update the Committee on where we are. Gillian will chip in with her information as well, as we have quite a lot of information. We are then happy to take questions.

As the Committee will be aware, the college has taken a decision to cease running dance and drama classes. I think that there has been some confusion about the performing arts. The college is most certainly not giving up on performing arts. We have a considerable number of other courses in the performing arts field, including music, music technology, backstage event management, costume design, and hair and beauty for theatre. We continue to run a very varied performing arts programme. However, for a number of reasons, we took the decision to let the courses in dance and drama run down. The first reason relates to the building in which dance and drama takes place, certainly since I have been there, which is the Tower Street campus. Once we moved to Titanic Quarter, Tower Street was always surplus to the college's requirements, and it was always envisaged that Tower Street would shut. In fact, our corporate improvement plan, which was agreed with our parent Department, included closing Tower Street, Parkmore and a number of other places that the college was working out of at that time. It has always been our intention to move from Tower Street. As a result, we have been gradually doing less and less in Tower Street. Principally, at the moment, we have the dance and drama courses and the pathfinder course, which will be moved to the Millfield campus in the city centre. We had to wait until we moved some classrooms and changed things around, so we are doing some building work to accommodate that. The pathfinder course will move out.

When we moved into Titanic Quarter, we knew that it was our aim and objective to close Tower Street. We took a number of actions to rehouse the dance and drama courses. In 2010-11, when the MAC was opening, we had a long and what appeared initially to be a strong negotiation process with the MAC to look at the possibility of becoming resident there. There was no malice, because the MAC had certain issues, the main one being that it could not accommodate the amount of time that we needed to book because it had other things going on. Principally, our biggest time in the year tends to be in the period up to Christmas when there are lots of productions on and lots of things are happening. Unfortunately, as a working cultural centre, that also tends to be the MAC's busy period. So we got nowhere with that in the end, and we had to drop it because the MAC could not accommodate us. In the following year we had overtures from the Grand Opera House, and we did a lot of work on that. We had the staff down and we looked at the possibilities, but the same problem occurred. It is a working theatre with a working schedule and it was very difficult for the Grand Opera House to accommodate us on a 30-week cycle, which is what it would have had to do.

We gave up on looking for a partner in an active theatre or cultural venue and began to have discussions with Belfast City Council about the possibility of some joint development work at our Castlereagh site. As a result of those conversations and conversations that we opened with DCAL at that time, there was a possibility that DCAL could assist us, if we could make the case with our parent Department, with an extension to the E3 site. At that point, we put our eggs in that basket and we did a considerable amount of work in visioning what it might look like if we moved dance and drama to E3. We went as far as producing drawings, and lots of work was done. There is a strategic outline case which we and DEL have held for a period of time. Last summer, however, as you are aware, once we encountered the problems and issues that we have with finance and the cuts process, all of that came to a stop because there was no longer any guarantee that any Department could give us money to do anything like that. At the beginning of this academic year, we were faced with a stalemate on dance and drama and where the future would lie with it, and, at that point, we felt that we had done a lot of work, as I said, to find them another home. The cuts then came. Initially, the cuts were 15%, and, eventually, our college's cut was 7.6%, so we had to take some very serious decisions on retracting and moving back and finding ways to save money. We had to cut a number of courses, and roughly 9,000 student places will be lost from where we were this time last year for September. We have to make some changes, and, on top of that, the costs of Tower Street continue to be problematic. We have a condition report, and I think that there has been a lot of talk about it being fit for purpose or not fit for purpose. At the moment, the building meets all health and safety standards, so there is no issue with health and safety standards. However, to maintain that over the next period, we did a condition survey, which tells us that, in the next three years, we will potentially have to put somewhere in the region of £1.5 million to £2 million into the building to keep it ticking over. That is a very large drain on our resources at a time when we are losing in our budget for next year at this minute £2.6 million, and we are aware that we may be liable to larger cuts in year. There is no guarantee that that will not happen.

Those were some of the reasons that started us thinking that we have a problem in Tower Street and a continuing issue that we have been trying to fix. We were also aware that our sister college, South East Regional College (SERC), was about to open a fantastic and fabulous facility. I have visited it, and we went down to look at it to make sure that what was happening in Bangor was of the quality that we thought was good enough for our students. We were satisfied that what SERC was doing with its facilities in Bangor was better than anything that we could offer at Tower Street. Our view was that dance and drama students at our college would be better served by a sister college that is, effectively, 10 miles down the road. Reluctantly, we decided on that basis that we could find an alternative. It was not an alternative in our own college, but it was an alternative in the FE family. With that, we were meeting the needs of our students. We agreed that we would run out second year for the students who are in first year, so we will run another year of courses in dance and drama in the college so that those students will not have to change midway and go to SERC. We decided that we would not recruit new students in this coming year and that we would move forward with that. That is, effectively, the reasoning and the rationale behind the decision that we have taken.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Gillian, do you want to come in?

**Ms Gillian Magee (Belfast Metropolitan College):** No, I think that Marie-Thérèse has covered everything. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Marie-Thérèse, basically, the rationale or the starting point for this decision is accommodation.

**Ms McGivern:** We have been trying for four years to find accommodation. The Tower Street site is no longer suitable. It costs too much, and, as I said, it was in our improvement plan that we agreed and signed off with the Department that we would divest a number of properties, and it is one of them.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** You went through a number of options for relocating dance and drama. We had representation from Dan Gordon, who said, "Just give me an empty classroom and a tutor for dance and drama". Is that not feasible anywhere in Belfast Met, including your Castlereagh campus?

**Ms McGivern:** We have met Dan Gordon on a number of occasions, and, while I love his dynamism and his brio in terms of, "Give me a garage, and we will do a production tonight", unfortunately, we are a further and higher education college and have standards that we have to meet, which are set by ETI and by our Department. Sticking everybody in a classroom to do a dance and drama course, you need a high — . Let me put it this way, Chair: to do a dance course, you need a very highly sprung floor, which costs a considerable amount of money. SERC has one of those. We had one, but the old building needed upgrading constantly. Therefore, there are equipment needs in order to do dance and drama correctly and at the standard to which they need to be delivered. There are equipment and facility needs to meet the standards that we have to meet as a professional college.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** When was a decision made and by whom?

**Ms McGivern:** The decision was made as a part of a process that began last September, when we reviewed every part of the curriculum in the college. The decisions on all the curriculum issues — we did not just take the decision on dance and drama courses in isolation — had finally been made around February or March, because we then had to produce our first budget. We have done several subsequently, but we are obliged, by a certain point each year, to produce our college development plan for the coming year, which indicates to the Department in what way we are going to use the funded learning units (FLUs) that it intends to give us. The decisions will have been taken in the round.

**Ms Magee:** If I may just add to that, we had our budget confirmed at the beginning of February, which was the 7.6% cut, or £2.6 million. As Marie-Thérèse said, from September until February, we went through a process to review our curriculum, root and branch. We had identified some areas. Depending on where our budget fell, that was when the decision would be made. Between February, once we had the budget confirmation, and April was when we absolutely confirmed the curriculum for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 years. At that point, once those decisions had been taken, we began having conversations with staff and students.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Budgets are driven, and the college wants to divest courses. The only course now running in Tower Street is dance and drama, and, therefore, dance and drama is axed. Is that the thought process?

**Ms McGivern:** Not axed. Through our conversation with SERC — we talked to SERC and visited its new facilities — our view was that we could offer an alternative, not in our college but in a sister college in the FE family.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Are the students who had already auditioned to come to Belfast Met to do dance and drama automatically going to SERC, as a result of the conversation that you had, or is there a reapplication process?

**Ms McGivern:** The students who auditioned at that time were passed over to SERC, and my understanding is that SERC is continuing to audition as we speak. It has not completed its auditions. My understanding is that any student whom we auditioned has either been auditioned by SERC already, if it makes that call, or will be auditioned.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Students now have to reapply to SERC, however.

**Ms McGivern:** Yes, they have to reapply, but we sat down with them and passed on their applications to SERC. Not all students have chosen to reapply. They have to reapply because SERC's application process is different from ours.

**Ms McGivern:** I understand that, but you said that you had the conversation about transferring dance and drama to SERC and transferring the students there, but, at the end of the day, it is up to those students to go to SERC. There is no additional facilitation given by Belfast Met for the students who had already gone through the audition process with you.

**Ms McGivern:** They went through the audition, but, again, many people go through auditions and many people come to *[Inaudible.]* but that does not guarantee them a place. None of those students was guaranteed a place the following September.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** They still have time. Does Belfast Met —

**Ms McGivern:** I spoke to the principal of SERC last Friday at a meeting. As far as I know, the application process in SERC is still open and live.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Right. It is just that we had a briefing from the Minister earlier, and we pushed him on that. SERC has a limited number of places within its maximum student number (MaSN) cap. It did not fill them last term, and the Minister has not lowered the number this time. There may not be the numbers that were applying to Belfast Met, and there may not be the capacity for them.

**Ms McGivern:** My understanding, from the principal and from a letter that came from DEL, is that the college is in receipt of £300,000 extra this year to accommodate additional students and student places.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** That is not what the Minister told us this morning.

**Ms McGivern:** I can only tell you what is in the letter, which all six colleges received. My understanding is that SERC received an additional £300,000. MaSN is slightly different —

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** The Minister was in front of us half an hour ago, and we pushed him on the £300,000.

**Ms McGivern:** All I can say to you, Chair, is that the letter that I have from DEL, telling me what my budget is this year, indicates an additional budget for SERC of £300,000 towards additional student places or whatever as a result of the opening of the SPACE.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** It is not for additional FLU anyway; it is more for the facilitation of opening the new facility. That is what he told us half an hour ago.

**Ms McGivern:** As I say, my understanding is that SERC is taking on more students and that it envisages growing its provision to 400 students over the next two years.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** It is only to fill the gap in numbers that it has currently; there are no additional places in SERC.

**Ms McGivern:** That is not my understanding. I was not here when the Minister spoke, but you might want to write to the principal of SERC to see what it envisages. My understanding is that it is going to grow its numbers.

**Ms Lo:** The Minister said that there is headroom in SERC —

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** There is headroom under MaSN.

**Ms Lo:** — to move around.

**Ms McGivern:** MaSN will only refer to students who are doing higher education courses. Further education is not affected by the MaSN cap.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** That is what he was —

**Ms McGivern:** All I know is that SERC envisaged growing. We all recognise that it is now a centre of excellence for dance and drama in Northern Ireland in the FE sector. SERC envisages growing its provision.

**Ms Sugden:** One of my biggest concerns about this decision is that we are taking dance and drama out of Belfast. I come from Coleraine, and if I was ever to think of taking those up, I would think that I needed to go to Belfast. Was an impact assessment done on the people who would be looking to study dance and drama and what their experiences and opportunities would be in the surrounding area? To be honest, that is the way that we seem to be going; we are trying to emphasise experience alongside the learning. Was there any impact assessment done to say that this was a good idea for the industry? I believe that the FE sector and the HE sector have a responsibility to look at the industry and the surrounding areas to see how we can best facilitate things so that everything knits together.

**Ms McGivern:** From our point of view, we looked at what the impact would be on students. Of the 112 students that we looked at, we know exactly where they all come from by looking at their postcodes. Forty of them come from Belfast —

**Ms Magee:** Forty-six.

**Ms McGivern:** I am sorry; it is 46, and the rest come from outside Belfast. If you were in Coleraine, you might be surprised to know that the Northern Regional College has performance arts courses running —

**Ms Sugden:** To be honest, it is not about a geographical perspective; it is more about the experiences and opportunities that students can get. I would imagine that most of the opportunities and experiences in dance and drama would be in Belfast or one of the other cities, such as Derry. I am a wee bit concerned that we are taking things out of the city where most opportunities are provided for in the existing places.

**Ms McGivern:** You might say that, but SERC might tell you that it has had a different experience. It has a track record in running dance and drama and performing arts courses, so it is not doing something that it has not done before. It has been able to make those links and carry them on. The links with the industry will continue. It is 10 miles down the road; we are not telling people that they have to go to —

**Ms Sugden:** But we are telling 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds to do that. To get certain people out of bed in the morning is difficult enough, but, if they are having to travel a certain distance, it adds another barrier.

**Ms McGivern:** I am saying that 60% of the students are already travelling a considerable distance. Bangor will be closer for some of them, not further away, from where they are at the moment.

**Ms Sugden:** I would be keen to see whether you have an impact assessment of the sort of issues that I —

**Ms McGivern:** We can send you a record of the postcodes —

**Ms Sugden:** I want not just the figures but a qualitative analysis: what surrounds students in SERC and what currently surrounds them in Belfast; what are the connections and opportunities; and how students will be impacted by the move.

**Ms McGivern:** Our expectation is that a centre of excellence, which is what the SPACE has been designated, will have those connections.

**Ms Sugden:** Given that we are trying to feed the industry, have you spoken to people from the industry in order to understand the potential impact on it?

**Ms McGivern:** People in the acting and dance industry know that they have to move and be very fluid. Belfast does not support a huge amount of work for actors and dancers.

**Ms Sugden:** Surely, if we are moving it, we are not encouraging Belfast to support it more in the future.

**Ms McGivern:** My view is that we have built those connections. We will continue with those connections in the music industry, but we are happy to work with our colleagues in SERC to help them to build. I think that they already have considerable relationships with the sector.

**Ms Sugden:** Have you spoken to the industry? Do you know what its opinion on this is?

**Ms McGivern:** Personally, I have not.

**Ms Sugden:** Have people in your organisation done so to enable you to make a rounded decision?

**Ms McGivern:** I think that they have.

**Ms Sugden:** I would be keen to see what their opinions are on that.

**Ms McGivern:** I am happy to provide you with detail of our conversations with the industry.

**Ms Lo:** Marie-Thérèse, in the early 1980s, I went to night classes in Tower Street to do my O levels and A levels. I was there a couple of months ago to open the new beauty salon, which is a partnership between you and Springvale. I am surprised that the building is still in use, to be honest. I know that it meets health and safety standards, but it is not the most attractive building. If they are saying that they need only a room, would you not be able to accommodate them in the beautiful and fantastic big building in the Titanic Quarter?

**Ms McGivern:** We have a different view. I think that Dan is happy to have his opinion. A room is not sufficient, Anna, to deliver the dance and drama courses that we currently deliver. It is simply not possible. Specific facilities are required, such as a sprung floor for dancing —

**Ms Magee:** Lighting rigs.

**Ms McGivern:** Lighting rigs and space for theatre. We do not have those facilities. They were never written into the original plan. We can say that hindsight is 20:20 vision, but I was not there, we were not there, and it was a different time. The plans for Titanic Quarter did not include dance or performance of any kind in that building. As I said, trying to retrofit other buildings would be very difficult. We hoped that the extension to E3 would give us, finally, somewhere to move to and do something a bit more purpose-built. That has come to nought. In the meantime, there is a brand spanking new facility with everything required to do performing arts — certainly dance and drama — at the quality that they need to be done at.

**Ms Lo:** Are you absolutely sure that SERC can take in all the students? There was a big question mark during our meeting with the sector over whether it has the capacity to take all your students.

**Ms McGivern:** I spoke to the principal last Friday afternoon. He told me that, as far as he was concerned, the courses are still open. That implies that its courses are still not full for September: it is still auditioning and receiving applications. We have to check that, but, as I said, my understanding is that it got additional money to increase the number of places and is still recruiting.

**Ms Lo:** People just do not like change. It is a matter of communicating with and encouraging people to move over to the brand new facility.

**Ms McGivern:** The building is very impressive. I do not know whether the Committee has had the opportunity to go down there, but I am sure that SERC would be happy to host you if you wanted to have a look at it. It is fabulous. I would absolutely adore to have it.

**Ms Lo:** You have the beautiful Titanic. You cannot be too greedy.

**Ms McGivern:** That is what SERC tells me. It is a three-minute walk from the train station. It is just where Bangor Castle is.

**Ms Lo:** I know where it is.

**Ms McGivern:** You come around the corner, and it is spectacular. I believe that it will provide a very fine environment to develop the skills in dance and drama that the college hopes to provide there.

**Mr Buchanan:** Edexcel rated the facilities at Tower Street as outstanding, so there seems to be no difficulty with the facilities there. I am concerned that a full impact study had not been done as to the detrimental impact that this will have on the students who are training and going through these courses in Belfast. I questioned the Minister today about whether the 112 students — I thought that it was 126 — would all be facilitated in SERC. The Minister said no, and they will all have to apply for whatever places or opportunities are available for them. We are closing a facility but not guaranteeing the students a place in SERC. We talk away about SERC and what will be there.

**Ms McGivern:** Yes.

**Mr Buchanan:** My understanding is that very few of these students will go in that direction.

**Ms McGivern:** As I said, that is not my understanding. I will let Gillian come in. I need to make the point that there was no guarantee that the 112 students whom you are talking about were going to get places at Belfast Met either. They were all subject to application and to audition, and there are no guarantees. No place is guaranteed until we get to the third week in August, when we will be able to tell you who has a place and who has not. All those courses are regularly oversubscribed across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Buchanan:** You mentioned on numerous occasions that they were not guaranteed places at Belfast Met. If you were to look back over the last number of years, you would know what percentage of students in all those years got a place at Belfast Met. If we took that percentage, we would have a good idea of what percentage of the 112 would still get a place at Belfast Met if the places were there.

**Ms McGivern:** That is true, but I would hope that —

**Mr Buchanan:** What would that percentage have been?

**Ms McGivern:** I would hope that the sector, given that it now has a new centre of excellence in Bangor, will be able to absorb that difference over time. That is my understanding.

**Mr Buchanan:** Would that percentage have been over 50%? Would it have been 60%, 70% or 75%?

**Ms McGivern:** You are asking me a question that I do know the answer to. I do not have intimate details of how many people apply. I can tell you that the course is deeply oversubscribed, as are many of our courses. This year, a lot of courses will be absolutely oversubscribed because we are cutting the number of places across the college. This is not the only course that is going, and it is not the only place that is going. This year, we expect many, many courses in the college to be oversubscribed.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Marie-Thérèse, you said that this is not the only course that is going. What other courses are going?

**Ms McGivern:** We have had to cut back across the college. We have nine schools, and each school had to make sacrifices. We have to make a cut of up to 9,000 places across the college.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** What full courses are going?

**Ms McGivern:** We have pruned back some courses in areas such as ICT. Our community classes are absolutely pulled back. We will cut a good bit of what is referred to as recreational and leisure in the evenings, so you will see a major cut across evening classes. This is not the only area of the college in which courses are being deleted and pulled back.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Is that public knowledge yet? Has a list of courses been given out? I am not talking about reducing numbers in some schools or on some courses; I am talking about courses that have been stopped.

**Ms McGivern:** When we get to the period when we would normally, for example, advertise our part-time courses, you will see that there are fewer courses. We are publishing advertising for fewer courses. The cost of the courses that we are advertising now has risen considerably.

**Mr Anderson:** I just want clarification, Marie-Thérèse. Tom was asking about the 112 places and you said that those auditions were not guaranteed in the Belfast Met. Surely you would have an idea of how many you could accommodate. We are trying to clarify how many could be accommodated in SERC. There are no guarantees there, and you are trying to say that there are no guarantees in Belfast either. How many could you have guaranteed out of the 112? Are you saying that it is less than that? How many less than that?

**Ms Magee:** Most of our courses run over a period of two years, and 112 places are available in total for those two-year courses.

**Ms McGivern:** They run for two years, so we really only would have been taking 60 on this year.

**Mr Anderson:** Yes, but could you have finally accommodated those 112 over the two years?

**Ms McGivern:** We are already accommodating half of them, because they are doing their second year with us.

**Mr Anderson:** So really, you could accommodate all those who auditioned.

**Ms Magee:** No.

**Ms McGivern:** No. We will audition a lot more people than we can accommodate.

**Mr Anderson:** But of the 112 that you have auditioned —

**Ms McGivern:** Of the 112 —

**Mr Anderson:** — you will eventually —

**Ms McGivern:** — half of them will go into their second year, which we are accommodating this year.

**Mr Anderson:** I am working this out and, all things being equal, if they did not move, those 112 would eventually be accommodated over a two-year period. Is that what you are saying?

**Ms McGivern:** Over a two-year period.

**Mr Anderson:** But there is no guarantee in SERC that that will happen, because we do not know whether it can facilitate that. I am just trying to establish that.

**Ms McGivern:** That is a good question for the Committee to ask SERC. Over a two-year period —

**Mr Anderson:** There is a possibility that those students will lose out because the places will not be there.

**Ms Magee:** When we took the decision, as Marie-Thérèse said, we had conversations with our colleagues in SERC. The very first thing that we did was to work with SERC's head of school, who organised an open day for all our students to go down, see the facilities and understand the application process. That was either early May or the end of April. They had the opportunity to apply through the same application process as everyone else who was applying to SERC for those places. As soon as the decision was taken, we worked with students to help them through that process. They will have equal access to the places along with any other students.

**Mr Anderson:** I am not sure that everything is equal and that students who go to SERC will have the same opportunity that they had in Belfast. I am getting the feeling that there is some concern about that.

**Ms McGivern:** You have to understand SERC's position that it is growing an area that previously ran at a certain level. The new facility allows SERC to grow and increase the number of students, but it will not want to do that in one step. We had a brief conversation with SERC about taking everybody, so that it would take our second-year students and we would transfer them straight away to Bangor. However, it was not in a position to take them automatically, so we agreed that we would run the first-years into the second year and run that out.

**Mr Anderson:** From what I can see here, Marie-Thérèse, there is an unknown. If there is a growing —

**Ms McGivern:** There is an unknown —

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Just let Sydney finish.

**Ms McGivern:** Sorry.

**Mr Anderson:** There is a growing opportunity in SERC. Claire made the point about the geographical spread of students and whether they would want to go to Bangor. There is a possibility that the same opportunities will not be there for them. That is something I believe here.

**Ms McGivern:** We will send the Committee the information about the geographical spread of students. This is not a Belfast-based course. The majority of students who come to the two courses are not from Belfast.

**Mr Anderson:** The facility was in Belfast.

**Ms McGivern:** The facility was in Belfast, but in Northern Ireland we sometimes need to accept that we cannot have everything where we want it. Sometimes people have to travel for certain services. In this case, the sector has built an all-singing, all-dancing new facility for this area in Bangor.

**Ms Lo:** That is a nice pun.

**Mr Anderson:** In hindsight — I will finish with this — would you prefer it to be in Belfast?

**Ms McGivern:** Would I prefer to have SPACE in Belfast? You betcha. But I was not there for those decisions. They predate the current structure, because the decision to build was taken in 2005-06, so we are going very far back for that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** OK. Just to tie up a couple of things on the centre of excellence designation for Bangor, who gives it that designation and what does it mean?

**Ms McGivern:** Before my time, there was a system in FE whereby certain places were designated centres of excellence. That seems to have fallen by the wayside, but I think that there are elements of the Department's aim in the new draft FE strategy, which you will see. There is a move back to colleges across Northern Ireland specialising in particular areas — not in all areas; it would still be a broad thing. Each college would say, "Really, we are very good at this and we want to really —".

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** As of yet there is no designation.

**Ms McGivern:** It is not there. At this point, I am using "centre of excellence" loosely, but I imagine that, as we move forward, there will be some kind of designation that will be recognised across. We are pushing that. Other colleges are working in other areas where they are particularly good and think that they will be able to have an accolade as a centre of excellence.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** You referred to letters in FE in regard to the numbers in regard to the additional moneys that they have got. Could you provide the Committee with —

**Ms McGivern:** I will go back and get it. It is just a standard letter that we get informing us what the budget looks like.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** It is specifically for the additional moneys that Bangor got.

**Ms McGivern:** It just mentions that there are other colleges getting extra money for other things so that we, as accounting officers, know, just in case you look at that budget and say, "Wait a minute; how did they get that and I'm only getting this?". It is a paragraph explaining where there are anomalies in the funding. I will send you that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** We need to see that, because I thought that there was an indication that it said somewhere in that letter that the additional money was for additional student places in dance and drama or performing arts. I thought that was —

**Ms McGivern:** I think that it says — you are asking me to quote it — something like "in recognition of the opening of SPACE, there is an allocation of an additional £300,000".

**Ms Lo:** I think that the Minister said £300,000 for spending.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** On facilities. OK, Marie-Thérèse and Gillian, thank you. If you can, send us the —

**Ms McGivern:** I will get that sorted tomorrow when I am back in the office.