

## **Nelson McCausland (DUP), Chair for the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure**

My Name's Nelson McCausland. I'm a DUP MLA in North Belfast, and I'm Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. The role of the committee is really to hold the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to account, to scrutinise the work of the department and the minister, to examine the budget, to look at legislation that comes forward from the department and to consider policies, documents that emerge from it, and to respond to approaches from the general public about particular issues, because from time to time arts organisations or sports clubs would raise issues with us.

### **Sports**

One of the big areas for the committee, because it's a big area for the department, is sport. And right across Northern Ireland, so many people have a passion. They're interested in one sport, or maybe more than one. Many people play games, they play sports, and that's important too because one of the key priorities has to be about participation, getting as many people as possible in Northern Ireland participating in sport. It enriches our lives, it's good for our health. Many people have problems around obesity, and one of the best ways to fight obesity is to be involved in activity, and sport is a very good form of activity. So, participation - hugely important.

And again, improving participation right across the board. There are some sports where there are not as many women taking part, and we want to encourage women's participation in sport. There's also the issue of people with disabilities and how we can ensure that they have access to sporting activity. So, participation. Then, the more people you have taking part, the better the chance you have of getting people right to the top level in their sport so that they can go on to represent Northern Ireland internationally.

And then, I suppose, the third P that comes in here is "places". We need places to play sport. We need to see an increase in the number of 3G pitches because with a grass pitch, you can only use that a number of times in the week. A 3G pitch you can use almost 24 hours a day, so you're getting better value from it. So all of those are the areas that we would be looking at.

### **The Arts**

When we come to the arts, there's a similarity to sport. The same three Ps emerge about participation, performance and places. The arts enrich our lives, they make our lives better. They provide enjoyment, stimulation, they help in regard to education. There are social skills that people gain through the arts. So many positive benefits.

And we want to encourage people to participate in the arts. It may be that one particular art form doesn't appeal to them, but there will be something, surely. And we have very many people in Northern Ireland who learn instruments, who paint, who perform in plays, so participation's one of the big issues.

Then also performance, we want to get high level performance in Northern Ireland. We have some really top class theatre companies. We have world champions when it comes to pipe bands. There are a whole range of areas where we have really high standards of performance. And then again, you come back to having the right sort of facilities to ensure that people have access to a theatre or an arts centre in their locality.

## **Funding**

The issue of funding is hugely important. And in times when money is tight, there's pressure on our libraries, our museums, to make sure that we do have enough money to keep them open, to keep them operating, so that people have access to them.

The fact that we can go into the Ulster Museum here free of charge, and if you go in you see so many families there with young children and parents and grandparents. It's absolutely wonderful that people have free access to that. We want to protect that and we want to make sure that our libraries are free again, that people can go in and borrow books without having to pay.

Access to information in those two arenas, whether it be the libraries or the museums, we value it enormously and there's a cost associated with that, so getting the right budget and enough money to support the sport, the arts, the museums, the libraries, that's something that the committee would feel very strongly about.