

Current state of Children and Young People's dance and what's next

Linda Jasper, Director of Youth Dance England, describes the current landscape of Children and Young People's dance in the UK, highlights new opportunities and asks the important question: what is next?



In the UK we refer to ourselves as world leaders in dance education and training; but is this a position that can still be upheld particularly in light of the major reductions to public funding over the past few years? Drawing on information about the current position in England with reference to other UK countries and countries overseas, the aim of this article is to identify current issues and outline ways forward for Children and Young People (CYP)'s dance.

In schools

In England there has been noticeable and fast-paced change since the change of government in 2010 and the world-wide economic crises in 2008. The school system is a very important system to work with if we want to

ensure access to dance and the arts for all. Fundamentally, this is where all children and young people should get an arts education – free at the point of delivery.

The government in England has created new school structures with the intent to raise academic standards. They have engineered a direct relationship with schools through directly funding them and so loosening ties between schools and the Local Authorities. The new schools, mainly called Academies and Free Schools, are run as individual businesses and have far more freedom to run their own affairs, including not having to deliver the National Curriculum. 18.1% of all state schools are Academies or Free Schools and the number is expected to rise.

There are now seven different types of publicly funded schools in England, and this has created fragmentation in the system. Where there were once Local Authority advisory structures to coordinate services for schools, there is now very little left. In this vacuum some of the new Academies are creating their own dance networks. For example, academy chains such as the Harris Chain in London. There are also consortia of non-academy schools coming together to create networks.

The curriculum

Nicky Morgan, Secretary for Education, speaking in early November 2014, warned young people that choosing to study arts subjects at school could “hold them back for



U.Dance performance. Photo: Brian Slater

the rest of their lives". This statement revealed clearly the Government's policy to focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects as they are seen to be linked with wealth generation that leads to economic security. This focus on STEM is driven by the need to become more competitive in the world, especially in economically challenged times. The introduction of the EBacc and then the Best of 8, where a school's performance is judged against GCSE scores in core 'academic' subjects, has contributed to a decline in the arts offered in schools.⁽¹⁾ 15% of schools surveyed by Ipsos MORI in 2012 for the Department for Education withdrew one or more arts subjects as a result of the EBacc. This was higher in schools in areas of deprivation: 21%

of schools with a high proportion of free school meals withdrew one or more arts subjects, compared to 8% of schools with a low proportion of free school meals.

Dance in the National Curriculum

In England and Wales dance remains an activity within Physical Education (PE). It was a struggle to retain dance in PE in the latest consultation in 2012 in England due to the Government's focus on competitive games. The PE curriculum in England describes dance as a performative physical activity, not as an artform. If it was not in PE, it would be nowhere in the curriculum, whereas in Scotland it is in the expressive arts and in Australia it is placed in the arts in their first national curriculum. However, we should

remember that in other European countries, such as Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands, dance is not on the curriculum but delivered as an extracurricular or project-based experience.

Workforce in schools

The majority of young people in the UK are taught by PE teachers and at the last survey, 10% of those teachers had a dance degree and QTS.⁽²⁾ In England there are now four PGCE courses (none north of London) and an increasing focus on school-based training. There are no PCGE Dance courses in Wales – students do access courses in England. Scotland has just begun to produce its first postgraduate qualification in Initial Teacher Training.

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Linda Jasper and choreographer, Young Creatives 2015 workshop, Royal Opera House. Photo: Brian Slater

Examinations in dance

GCSE, AS and A Level Dance

From 2008 to 2014 there was a decrease in the number of entries to arts GCSEs with the decline in dance (-10%) being the largest alongside decreases for other arts subjects and PE. However, in the last academic year there was a 3% increase in GCSE Dance candidates.

During this same period, there was an increase in the number of students completing Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Dance qualifications by 47%: the new qualifications for dance taking off at National and Higher levels alongside their new curriculum for excellence.

In and outside of school

The English government conducts a public survey every year and the figures show a decrease in the numbers of young people taking part in dance(3):

From 2008 to 2014 there was a 33% decrease in all 5-10 year olds taking part in dance – alongside a decline in arts participation in this age group. During the same period there was a 28% decrease in all 11-15 year olds taking part in dance – this is in comparison to sustained or increased participation in most of the other artforms. The breakdown of the figures for where young people

participated in dance in 2013/14 revealed that 19.2% took part in school only, 9.9% both in and out of school and 8.5% out of school only.

Participation in dance is lower overall than in other arts areas and the percentage decrease is higher than for other artforms. The decrease was perhaps affected by the economic downturn, changes to schools' priorities and cessation of funding for Youth Dance England (YDE)'s national network as well as Youth Sport Trust's School Sport Partnerships.

Arts council interventions in CYP's dance

It is very noticeable that arts councils in England, Wales, Scotland and Australia are intervening in education where at one time they would not have seen it as their role. This is perhaps in response to demand of the state of the sector and aims to widen participation. As public funding is reducing the size of government departments, more services are being handed over to be delivered by the quangos they fund.

Arts Council England (ACE) has invested significantly in Bridge Organisations to bridge the gap between schools and the cultural sector and administrate the Music Education Hubs. In Wales there will be joint investment between Department for Education and Arts Council of

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Wales to fund the implementation of the National Plan for Creative Learning that has come from a report for the Welsh government into arts in education. Creative Scotland has commissioned YDance and Glasgow University to write a new postgraduate course in effective teaching and learning for 3-14 year olds in dance. In addition they have also commissioned the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to develop a PGDE course, which will be open to dancers who already have a degree qualification.

Out of school

Arts council funded dance sector

Due to reductions in funding, the leading regional dance organisations (eight outside of London, in London there is no one lead organisation) from April 2011 have been expected to embed CYP work that was previously funded through YDE into their programmes. Due to variances between programmes, funding and focus, this has been differently interpreted by the regional leads. The lack of a national network of young people's dance is leading to less cohesion and fewer opportunities for young people to participate in dance.

Youth dance sector

The youth dance sector is surviving, even though there are many cases of organisations losing their funding and independent artists increasingly have to raise funds to subsidise their groups. YDE estimates that there are 850-1,000 youth dance groups across the country. They are run and funded in different ways and remain a very important access point and progression route for young people.

New working models

What has been of great interest is the Hip Hop sector, which has created new working models. They have had enormous success in increasing the numbers of young people who take part in their programmes. They offer progression routes to training, which is important as there is little vocational and higher education provision in this area of dance practice.

Focus on progression routes

It is interesting that in this climate of cuts in public funding, the area that has been retained, even though not kept up with inflation, is the publicly funded pre-vocational training sector in England (Centres for Advanced Training and vocational residential schools). This government has also supported the creation of a National Youth Dance Company, which joined the other companies in Scotland and Wales. These developments are very useful for dance as supporting young people to develop their skills from an early age can enhance the possibility of them going on to have professional performance careers, regardless of their backgrounds. Perhaps we have made the argument concerning the importance of creating a world-class workforce for the cultural industries? But these involve relatively small numbers of young people, which means that the financial commitment is containable whilst government intervention is highly visible.

We have created a range of opportunities for talent development – but access to them is being eroded through reductions to opportunities for young people to dance in schools as well as falling participation rates in outside school activity.

Higher Education

Recruitment for dance degree courses remains high. The introduction and subsequent increase of student fees has not had the detrimental impact that many thought it would. Between 2007-2013 there was an increase of 32% of students taking up places (which peaked in 2011). In 2013/14 1,395 students enrolled on dance degree programmes in England.

Private dance sector

The private dance sector remains a large provider of dance for CYP, especially for girls and young women. On examination of their annual reports over the past few years, they have weathered the economic downturn. Other countries have not developed such systems as the UK did from early last century and many have imported ours.

Private dance teachers in some

areas now provide services usually connected with the publicly funded sector as they work in schools and offer GCSE and A Level Dance courses.

New opportunities

PE and Sport Premium

This new funding scheme set up by Department for Education and Department of Health is for all primary schools. £450 million will be spent over three academic years (2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16). On average every primary school receives £9,000 each year to spend on enriching their PE and Sport offer. Dance features in Key Stage 1 and 2 and so schools could be spending this funding on dance. This funding is now available until 2020, depending on the outcome of the next election. On YDE's website there is a document that explains how this funding can be used to support dance.⁽⁴⁾ This is the only new funding that is available for dance in schools on a national level and this opportunity should be communicated to all.

Public health

One of the most useful opportunities for dance is in the area of public health. With the trend towards increases in obesity and other health problems associated with physical inactivity, the health departments in all UK countries are focusing more of their investment on public health. There is no other artform that has such an important part to play in this area. Dance is included in the PE and Sport Strategy in Wales and YDance in Scotland has been funded for many years to run dance projects to encourage more young people to be active.

To return to the question raised at the beginning:

The UK can still be seen as a world leader – dance is included in statutory national curricula, we have a well-developed youth dance sector, we have publicly funded pre-vocational training, we have a private dance sector that is expanding the dance genres and services it offers and we

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U.Dance Grimsby. Photo: Brian Slater

have means of producing a dance workforce within universities and training providers, even though not well-distributed across the UK.

However, dance remains a marginalised artform and, even though we are starting from a higher base than other countries, we have seen significant reductions in participation in dance in and outside of schools by young people since 2010 in England.

So, what do we do about it?

As public funding is reduced, it is driving more collaboration between organisations. We will have to work even harder and in partnership with more organisations, across the arts, health and other sectors to bring about our visions for dance. There are new opportunities bubbling up if we

are ready and able to address them.

Schools may have to join together to offer an arts curriculum; make relationships with professional artists, share resources and staff. More dance artists and practitioners need to be delivering dance in schools using the PE and Sport Premium funding.

We have unique services and experiences to offer; our problem is a matter of scale. For example, can we come together to make consortia to secure commissioning funds for health with a diminished infrastructure? Supporting infrastructure is rarely prioritised by funders but is absolutely essential. What other countries envy about our system is that we have created development and umbrella bodies that can profile dance and connect people and practice together.

We will all have to continue to make the case for dance – but now with more graduates joining the workforce there are many more of us to make it!

When considering what's next, I was struck by a report on a seminar run by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and ACE in 2013.⁽⁵⁾ The discussion not only focused on making the case but considered an even more important issue: how are we to deliver arts education in these very changed circumstances? What emerged clearly from the seminar is that the most urgent issue is less about the nature of the value of arts to education (although that case needs to be strengthened and deepened), but more about how we move forward in a period where there will be less national prescription to schools and reduced funding to the arts.

What steps can we take and whose responsibility is it to make all this happen?

Info

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