



National Youth Dance Festival 2008, Southbank Centre. Image courtesy of Youth Dance England. Photo: Brian Slater

Young people's dance

A collection of leading dance, education and school sport organisations and individual experts have produced a ten year vision discussing how young people's dance in and beyond school be developed, as **Linda Jasper**, Director of Youth Dance England (YDE) explains

The need for a ten year vision

There are pockets of excellent practice in England, where young people have the chance to access high quality dance and progress their interest to whatever level they wish and are able; but this is not the picture in most areas of the country and it is this key issue that the Vision addresses.

As a world leader in dance education and youth dance we cannot rest on the laurels of the achievements and progression over the past year, but rather, build on what we have achieved and push further to make sure we reach all young people in England. As a result of this aim the first ever Ten Year Vision has been produced.

The investment (£5.5m 2008 - 2011)



in young people's dance has shown the potential for what can be achieved in a short time. Even in the current challenging and economic climate we need to invest in our young people, as future citizens, entrepreneurs, leaders, work force and artists.

In order to make a cohesive offer for young people across the country, key stakeholders who have responsibilities and interest in young peoples' dance need to work together to ensure that we are making the most of the expertise, resources and provision available to create a coherent dance offer for young people.

Focus of the Ten Year Vision

The Vision, which was launched at Youth Dance England's national

conference in September 2010, outlines the ambition to create a cohesive dance offer for all children and young people up to 19 years (24 years for disabled young people) across England. It includes schools (including alternative educational establishments such as short stay schools, young offender institutions and hospital schools) as well as arts, dance, sports and youth organisations.

The Vision was produced by members of the Programme Board for young people's dance in England, including YDE and national network, Association for Physical Education (afPE), National Dance Teachers Association (NDTA), Specialist Schools & Academies Trust (SSAT) and Youth Sport Trust (YST) in consultation with many individuals and organisations involved in dance for children and young people, from policy makers, Arts Council England, practitioners and artists, dance company education departments and of course young people themselves.

The Ten Year Vision describes how we want to create a rich dance experience that allows young people to not only participate in a range of dance genres but also to give them the experience of dancing, creating dance, performing, viewing and taking on leadership roles.

The main objective is to provide a seamless dance experience that takes an individual from first steps in dance, deepening engagement through participating in dance in and beyond schools, to progression onto training for a dance career. The lasting legacy will be for young people to become life-long dance enthusiasts and participants - and for a few, our dancers, choreographers, teachers and managers of the future.

The Vision outlines the following goals:

- To provide every young person with access to a range of high quality dance experiences in schools and in the localities where they live
- To provide more opportunities for young people to deepen and broaden their dance knowledge and skills as participant, creator, viewer/critic and leader
- To identify and nurture our most

talented young dancers regardless of their backgrounds

- To Improve progression routes for young people into a range of dance careers
- To create a world class work force for young people's dance
- To ensure that young people know how to and have the confidence and motivation to continue their involvement in dance post 19 years.

Priorities for development

These top national five priorities were identified consistently throughout the consultation period for the Vision. Key actions (agreed by the key partner organisations) to address these priorities are outlined in the Vision and will be described in more detail in the five-year Strategy which will be produced in 2011.

- Workforce development: the number of skilled teachers, practitioners and artists working in and beyond schools needs to be increased and reflect the gender balance and cultural diversity within the population
- Restricted access to dance in and beyond schools: all young people must have access to dance programmes so they can progress their interest to whatever level they wish and are able. In particular, boys should have equal access to dance in school and be encouraged to take part in dance beyond school. The cultural diversity of practice and practitioners needs to increase
- Focusing on the least engaged: making sure that those young people who face the most barriers to participation are reached
- Lack of dance spaces: young people need to dance in spaces that meet health and safety requirements and inspire artistic and physical exploration
- Strengthening the national young people's dance network: to provide a cohesive, well connected and quality assured dance offer for all children and young people in England.

Challenges facing the Ten Year Vision

Don't stop now - we've just got

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Being Frank Youth, performing at U.Dance, England, 2010, Birmingham Hippodrome. Image courtesy of YDE. Photo: Brian Slater

started! might seem an appropriate strap line to any vision or strategy, but in the fast changing political landscape in which YDE, national network and the partner organisations are working is the main challenge this Vision faces. We move in uncertain times and all the organisations involved are affected by this situation which has made it difficult to plan ahead with confidence.

Young people's dance, as a relatively new investment area, has to secure its place within the new, broad cultural agenda as reflected in government policy. This development could provide opportunities for the burgeoning young people's dance sector to provide advice, practitioners and best practice for inclusion in cross arts/cultural programmes.

In spite of being second only to football as the most popular physical activity of the nation's youth, dance attracts startlingly low levels of funding. In response to under-investment in young people's dance, the Tony Hall review was commissioned by government. This represents a per capita spend on dance through the £5.5m investment is 58p. To put this in

perspective: £38 was spent on music and £79 on School Sport in the same period.

Through this investment there has been significant development in the young peoples' dance sector that we do not want to lose in the light of the stringent financial climate. Sustaining the improvements to the sector is therefore paramount.

The most visible impact has been the creation of a first national network for young people's dance with 40 sub regional hubs that create sign-posting, coordination and joint resourcing for young people's dance delivered through partnership delivery. The network has been created through commissioning existing arts/dance organisations to extend their role in regional/local development and delivery of young people's dance. It is seen by funders and other sectors as a very economical, efficient and effective way of increasing capacity and building on the continuum that exists in dance, that connects professional dance with educational and youth dance practice.

Following the vision's launch, further consultation will take place with young people, practitioners, teachers and

organisations as well as the key national partner organisations to produce the five-year Strategy. We will set up a facebook page as well as a space on YDE and the other organisations' websites to encourage dialogue and exchange.

In these uncertain times it is essential to plan for the future so that we communicate what we want to achieve through presenting clear messages and identifying where we can work together, in and beyond the dance sectors, to sustain developments in young people's dance.

YDE remains optimistic about the future of young people's dance: the case has been made and the effect of modest investment over the past three years clearly demonstrated in the numbers of young people accessing high quality dance.

Dance remains highly popular amongst young people and is a very important tool for improving educational attainment, health and well-being and improving life choices – it remains the time for dance!

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