

What are the future employment opportunities for dance?

Pauline Tambling CBE, Chief Executive, Creative & Cultural Skills, considers the challenges facing the future of employment in the dance sector



Pauline Tambling, People Dancing event 2014. Far right: Wings 3 - Time Flies, People Dancing event. Photos: Rachel Cherry

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The creative sector is thriving.

According to recent Department for Culture, Media and Sport statistics, the creative industries contribute over £70 billion per year to the UK economy.(1) Employment in the creative industries increased by 8.8% between 2011 and 2013, compared to a 2.4% rate for the UK economy as a whole.(2) This makes the creative industries the fastest growing sector in the UK, and there's no sign of it slowing down.

When we look at individual subsectors like visual arts or dance however, it's clear that this positive outlook doesn't tell the full story.

The official figure – taken from those who report through Government censuses that they earn a living as a dancer or choreographer – is 14,500.(3) However, work by Arts Council England suggests that the 'ecology' of dance is larger, with some 40,000 people involved in the workforce in some capacity.(4) This will include dance teachers, ad hoc project work, participatory practice, social dancing, part-time and voluntary work, and people whose main income is not from dance. As arts funders continue to manage funding cuts, this latter practice is where the growth is likely to be.

We know that the majority of these people are struggling to make a living through their dance practice alone. Like other artforms, dance is a sector that is split between a handful of 'superstar' artists, and a long tail of low paid practitioners. Arts Council England estimates that 40% of those who work in dance earn £5,000-£20,000 per year, and almost 25% earn less than £5,000 per year.(5)

A lot of dance practitioners work in participatory settings with schools, hospitals, pupil referral units and health or care settings, and much of this work is funded by the National Lottery, including through the UK Arts Councils or grant-making trusts.

But practitioners on the ground are finding it harder and harder to get work. Why is this when the statistics prove that the wider sector is thriving?

There are a host of reasons for this trend:

- Arts sector cuts tend to hit freelancers and individuals disproportionately
- Across the public sector, 'intermediary bodies' are out of fashion and artists have relied on agencies to broker projects with non-arts bodies
- For all the evidence of its value and impact, one could hardly say that participatory practice is securely embedded in the minds of arts funders, let alone potential non-arts commissioners. Most activity has been project-funded and individually negotiated with sympathetic partners in other sectors – and is easily cut in hard times.

In sum, the work opportunities for participatory practice are ad hoc and unreliable.

Against this backdrop, I'd like to suggest two major challenges that we have to address in order to improve things for dance.

Firstly – and this is a very old story – we need to do more to inspire young people to take up dance when they're young. The figures for take-up for dance in schools are not good. We need to remember that we are not in the business of lobbying to protect dance in schools – we must be in the business of making the case when dance has always been marginal both in schools and in the community.

We are seeing arts subjects in decline in schools at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in part due to the ongoing education reforms, and this is particularly true of schools that have a higher proportion of young people from low income backgrounds.(6)

Examination numbers aren't everything but they give a sense of the challenge:

Around 12,000 students take GCSE dance annually,(7) and around 2,000 take A Level.(8) That's in the context of around 160,000 taking Art and Design at GCSE, 21,000 taking Fine Art and Art and Design at A Level and >>



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far more taking English, Maths and the Humanities.(9) In 2012/13 there were 4,650 full-time dance students in higher education.(10)

For the dance sector to thrive we need the population at large to engage with it. High profile projects like Big Dance and media profile through shows like Strictly Come Dancing are critical in this, but they need to be backed up by ongoing opportunities delivered by schools and dance practitioners week in, week out. Unless we have a solid universal offer for all young people in every neighbourhood, dance will remain marginal.

Although there's a lot of negative comment about the demise of Local Authorities' role in managing schools, I think we could see the new scenario of schools operating as independent businesses, or within multi-academy trusts, as an opportunity. Governors and headteachers are working in a very competitive world where they want their school to be recognised as the best in their area and their wider curriculum offer is part of this. The challenge is that we'll need to engage with schools individually, not through Local Authorities.

The other big challenge is to find new financial models to replace reliance on ad hoc grant funding. Dance has never been one of the big beneficiaries of arts funding and things are not getting better. Artists must seek new ways to make their practice sustainable, and this means finding 'customers' who want the activity and are able to pay for it.

We've recently been working with Skills for Care, the workforce development body for adult social care, a sector with frightening staffing gaps because of demographic changes. There are opportunities for artists with participatory expertise to work on a major scale in care contexts. There are plenty of excellent

case studies of this work but the commissioners in the care sector can't see them. We are missing the embedded routes into these sorts of workplaces from entry level upwards. We need strategic partnerships with those who will see the addition of dance into, for example, residential homes as part of an improved 'quality of life' offer to their clients. In summary, we need to stop doing these projects as 'nice to have' one-offs and start working in a joined-up way as a sector to embed this sort of practice into non-dance settings. We focus our discussions a lot on the content and quality of the practice – which is good – but we're missing the equally important debate about finding sustainable business models for the future of this work.

Embedding vocational routes into work is the key to this shift. At Creative & Cultural Skills (CCSkills) we have created over 3,500 apprenticeship places in the creative sector, from a standing start of zero in 2008. We are the National Provider for Arts Council England's Creative Employment Programme and we are about to launch a similar scheme with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

We support employers to create apprenticeship and paid internship roles and I'd like to see some applications from the dance sector and particularly some using Creative Apprenticeships to move dance into community settings.

CCSkills can help this process – please contact us about putting in place employment opportunities for young dance practitioners and we can discuss these issues and opportunities. And instead of lamenting what is bound to be a decreasing pot of arts funding for the work we all do, let's find a new model for funding dance activity, which we know is of critical importance.

Info

About Creative & Cultural Skills

CCSkills is an independent charity championing youth employment and fair access to work. CCSkills is licensed by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills as one of 18 Sector Skills Councils, and has a remit to raise training standards in craft, design, cultural heritage, visual arts, music, literature and the performing arts.

For more information please visit www.ccskills.org.uk / @NSApaulinet

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