

Making a Move

Towards a professional framework for community dance



A news update for policy makers and funding bodies

This newsletter is an opportunity for us to update you on the progress of Making a Move: the Foundation for Community Dance's project to develop a professional framework for community dance, by sharing some of the findings of our recent research activity.

During 2007, we have done some serious groundwork to prepare for the framework: we have undertaken extensive research with dance artists, organisations and employers, to ensure that we are working from an accurate and up-to-date picture of the community dance profession. The research included:

- A UK-wide survey of dance professionals that asked more than 100 questions about their training and employment, their community dance practice and what their professional roles entail. We received over 200 responses – from dance practitioners through to project managers and company directors.
- Face to face consultation with over 50 employers and specialists from across the dance, arts, education, health, sport, social care and voluntary sectors who have experience of employing dance artists to work in community and participatory settings.

Here are some of the findings that we think will be of interest to you...

The main headlines

Initial training: Whilst the profession as a whole is highly educated and the majority of practitioners in community dance have a formal dance qualification, their routes into working in the sector are more informal. Much of their expertise and confidence in specialised areas of practice is gained after initial training through informal or 'on the job' learning and CPD.

Practice and provision: A large proportion of individuals and organisations regularly undertake work in partnership with others – across all sectors. The profession is making a strong contribution to widening access to participation in dance and physical activity, accessing people across the age, gender, ethnicity and ability spectrum to a wide variety of opportunities. At the roots of this diversity lie common values: people, learning and the art form are central to the activities that artists and organisations offer and the outcomes they strive for in their work. Many artists work with creative, person-centred processes that lead to a range of dance and non-dance outcomes; this is reflected in what non-sector employers say they are looking for from participatory dance provision.

Employment: There is some discrepancy between what employers are looking for, and what dance artists offer. As well as specialist dance skills, employers seek artists that can meet the particular needs of each individual and group, with a high level of awareness of context, culture and community, and a thorough knowledge of safety and support issues. They feel that qualifications are seldom a guarantee of actual ability to do the job, and interpreting equivalence across a range of qualifications/training/experience can be problematic. Despite the match of values and shared agendas, the lack of common cross-sector networks and benchmarks presents challenges to the clear communication of expectations between employer and artist. Artists are not always able to evidence their competence in ways that provide potential employers with the reassurance they need, and in the absence of specialist advice, or clear guidelines around the recruitment and selection of dance artists, non-dance employers in particular lack confidence in this area.

Behind the headlines

Initial training

95% of community dance professionals have a recognised qualification at undergraduate level (e.g. a university degree) and 47% have post-graduate qualifications (e.g. a PGCE)

Initial dance training provision appears not to offer all the skills, knowledge and 'readiness' that emergent professionals require to feel confident across all areas of practice. For example, on completion of initial training, fewer than 50% of respondents felt confident in dance management/business and in specialised areas of community dance practice e.g. working in early years or with disabled people.

A great deal of informal, non-accredited learning is taking place outside of mainstream qualifications and training and there is no one route into the profession:

- 12% of respondents to our survey have undertaken formal apprenticeships
- 50% have undertaken informal apprenticeships, mentoring, volunteering or shadowing
- 35% have worked as dance performers and moved into community dance by choice
- 17% have come through non-dance routes such as youth/social/health work, education and sport/physical activity

Practice and provision

Over 60% of artists and organisations identified the following values, aims and outcomes as central to their work:

Values: Learning; society/community; art

Aims: The development of dance as an art form; creating access to dance; providing opportunities for learning *through* dance and *about* dance; and providing activities that support personal, social and community development

Outcomes: Personal development e.g. self-confidence, awareness and well-being
Art form skills e.g. creative, performance, choreographic and improvisation skills
Other skills e.g. team work, communication and social skills
Opportunities to create, perform and participate

People	65% of practitioners work with young people aged up to 18 years, including young people at risk. 60% work with young-middle aged adults; over 45% work with older adults, including those in care settings, and 48% work with intergenerational groups. Over 40% work with disabled people and 36% with integrated groups of disabled and non-disabled people
Practices	The profession offers a wide range of dance styles, including less well-known forms such as Arabic or Latin dance. The most common are contemporary dance and street/urban forms, reflecting the dual influences of mainstream training and cultural trends. The majority of practitioners work through creative dance and improvisation – both person-centred approaches – reflecting the equal value placed on the individual and the art form
Delivery	Half our practitioners work with between 60 to over 100 different participants per week, through both 'open access' and specific/closed groups. In an average year, 84% of practitioners deliver one-off/occasional sessions; 64% deliver regular sessions/mid-term projects and 45% deliver short-term projects. Dance artists and organisations are the main initiators of community dance activity, followed by outside employers/purchasers and communities/participants themselves
Places	Half our respondents operate in their home county/region; a quarter work across several regions and over one fifth work nationally, indicating a significant degree of mobility. The communities they work with are mainly local, but a substantial amount of provision draws participants from across counties, regions, even nationally. They work in settings from arts centres, to education institutions, community/public spaces and closed environments

Partners	Partnerships occur most frequently across the dance sector or with other artists/arts organisations, including local authority arts providers. Significant non-arts partners include education and community/voluntary organisations and, to a lesser extent, partners in youth, care, early years, health, sport and criminal justice settings. Many practitioners work alongside other professionals: teaching partners are most likely to be other dancers/artists but many work with non-arts professionals, especially teachers and health/social care professionals, in the planning and evaluation stages of their work
Purchasers	In descending order, the most common sources of earned income for community dance artists are: education (a huge percentage earn income from working in schools); the publicly subsidised dance/arts sector; local authorities; the private/commercial dance sector; sport/physical activity; the health/social care sector and the voluntary sector
Funders	Community dance is funded across the spectrum from local to national/European sources and from public funding to private sponsorship. Local authorities emerge as the most significant funders, followed by Arts Councils, lottery funding and charitable trusts and foundations

Employment

Only one third of respondents are employed on full time, permanent contracts – mainly in local and regional dance organisations or local authorities. The majority work for multiple employers on a part time or project basis or are entirely self-employed. In terms of project based and ‘occasional’ employment, there is much greater diversity of employers: ranging across arts, health, sport, social care, education and the voluntary sector.

Of those who earn all their income from community dance, average earnings are £15,000-£20,000 per year. The average rates that dance artists charge are £25-30 per hour and £150-£200 per day.

We asked practitioners and their employers what they consider to be the essential competencies for someone working in community and participatory dance. We also asked practitioners which areas they felt most/least confident in and asked employers to identify what they felt to be the ‘gaps’ in skills and knowledge amongst potential employees. Here’s what they told us:

Practitioners emphasised knowledge of their own dance style, choreographic and creative abilities, dance teaching skills, safe practice and awareness of relevant legislation, ‘people’ skills, knowledge of regional/national dance infrastructures and networks and the ability to self manage, work independently and apply self reflection and evaluation to inform their professional progression.

Dance sector employers echoed these, but emphasised greater depth, application and contextualisation of knowledge and skills. They feel that dance artists need an understanding of the social, cultural and artistic context of their own practice, awareness of the values of community dance, skills in applying feedback/reflection to improve quality and the ability to articulate/evidence their legal compliance, as well as project management skills and the ability to ‘sell’ an idea and build and sustain effective partnerships.

Non-dance sector employers emphasise art form skills, and the ability to apply these to well planned, developmental activities. They look for person-centred practice that pays attention to the individual, and demonstrates appreciation of context/local needs. Artists should be able to respond creatively to a brief and facilitate other peoples’ ideas and creative expression, alongside thorough understanding of liability and legal responsibilities and a commitment to keeping up to date with relevant specialist training and agendas. They want artists who take a professional approach to their practice and operate effectively as a ‘business’.

Practitioners are most confident in knowledge of their chosen dance style/form, their dance leadership skills, the practical aspects of safe dance, their people skills and their ability to self-manage and work independently. **They are least confident** in their theoretical knowledge of safe dance practice, their ability to articulate/evidence legal compliance, their business skills and how to undertake effective self-evaluation.

For employers, the biggest gaps lie in artists’ reflective and evaluative skills, their commitment to maintaining their artistic practice and managing their professional development, the application of their dance skills in a given context, their awareness and application of safe practice and legislation, their knowledge of the regional/national dance scene and their planning/management/business skills.

Future challenges and opportunities

We think these findings present the profession with several key challenges and opportunities in supporting dance artists, organisations and employers to achieve greater satisfaction and effectiveness in working together to provide and support community and participatory dance:

- The underlying match between the values of community dance and those of employers in other sectors offers great potential for cross-sector partnerships to support and deliver community and participatory dance activity for the benefit of a wide range of communities
- Improving cross-sector communication would support existing and potential employers to benefit from the specialist knowledge and expertise that dance organisations can offer around recruitment and selection of dance artists, best-practice guidelines and so on
- Employers are demanding that the profession provides fit for purpose artists, supported by fit for purpose CPD, training and qualifications: building the skills and confidence of artists in more specialised areas of practice and supporting them to evidence their competence and learning more effectively would help reassure employers that they are equipped to do the job
- The lack of widely-recognised professional qualifications in dance and associated quality assurance issues, highlights the need to clarify/de-mystify dance qualifications, training and accreditation for the benefit of non-sector employers

How we can rise to the challenges and make the most of the opportunities

Through the professional framework, the Foundation for Community Dance will:

- Communicate the profession's values and practice (what it does, why it does it, how it does it and for whom) in clear, accessible language, for a range of dance, arts and non-arts participants, audiences and employers
- Work with training and CPD providers to achieve a greater range and availability of targeted, specialised training opportunities that meet the needs of dance artists and better equip them to meet the expectations of employers and participants
- Provide a comprehensive system of signposting and guidance around qualifications, training and CPD opportunities
- Provide guidelines for artists, organisations and employers around competencies for general and specialised areas of community dance practice (National Occupational Standards)
- Work with specialist employers and experienced practitioners to create information for dance artists about working in particular settings (e.g. schools, health, criminal justice)
- Create and signpost artists and employers towards resources, toolkits and 'how to...' guides on effective self-reflection, appraisal, evaluation and professional development planning

We begin work on these initiatives in 2008 and will continue to inform you of our progress. The Foundation looks forward to working with its members, artists, organisations, employers, providers and policy makers in realising our collective ambitions in bringing the professional framework to fruition.

To find out more about Making a Move, visit our website www.communitydance.org.uk

