

Why study dance at school or college?



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1. Breadth of jobs in the arts and dance sector

Jobs in dance stretch far beyond the familiar roles of dancer, teacher and choreographer to include health care practitioners, researchers, dance scientists, writers, producers, programme managers, costume designers and many more. [See more dance careers here.](#)

Those working in the dance industry often have 'portfolio careers'. This means that their career spans across many parts of the dance sector, including administration, performing, project managing, teaching, choreographing and more. Dance training and education can open doors to a whole world of fascinating and rewarding careers!



2. Creative industry is growing at a rapid rate

According to the Creative Industries Federation, jobs in the UK's Creative Industries were growing at four times the UK average prior to the pandemic and one million people were employed in these sectors, with a further one million jobs projected to be created by 2030. This data suggests that, as a significant contributor to the Creative Industries, there is a need for the next generation of dance workers to be sufficiently trained and supported. The UK economy will grow with creative thinkers who can start new businesses.

The Creative Industries Council (CIC) also reports that the UK accounts for more than £45bn per annum in creative exports. Dance is unique in the way it combines athleticism and technical accuracy with creativity and artistry. Dance qualifications provide many of the creative skills needed to thrive in this fast-growing sector.

3. Transferrable skills

Dance and performing arts qualifications provide the opportunity to develop skills that are essential to thrive in a variety of careers, not just those within the dance or creative sectors, and for life in general!

Teamwork, leadership and collaborative skills are needed when working together on choreography and performance. Rehearsing and refining technical exercises and choreography enables students to build tenacity, perseverance and resilience. The exercise of repetition and rehearsal when dancing improves mental dexterity (Bennetts, 2014). and dancing helps the brain find new ways of thinking and creates new neural circuits (Lovatt, 2020). Learning through movement helps students absorb ideas better and improves their ability to retain information (Swift, 2017).

Observing and appreciating dance, whether professional work or that of their peers, requires students to use interpretative and analytical skills. In addition to this, when creating movement students continually reflect on and refine their work, developing self-assessment skills.

It is worth noting that 95% all universities, including the Russell Group universities, accept BTEC qualifications from applicants (Twin Employment and Training, 2018).



4. Dancing to happiness

Sport and exercise have been shown to improve students' self-esteem and body image (Fox, 2000 & Gruber, 1986). Studies with young people showed significant improvements in physical self-worth scores in girls who took part in dance activity in the intervention compared to controls in other P.E. activity (Burkhardt and Brennan, 2012). Dance is a joyous and expressive art form. It releases 'feel-good' hormones associated with increased feelings of happiness and confidence.

The very act of making art (visual or performance) develops young people's sense of identity and self-efficacy and increases resilience, which is a key component of good mental health (Catterall et al., 2007). The act of participating in the arts lowers cortisol levels in the blood stream (lowers stress) (Kreutz et al., 2004). It is not just the act of *making* art but also *viewing* art that can have benefits. Research by the Scottish Government has shown that those who participated in a creative or cultural activity were 38% more likely to report good health compared to those who did not. For participants who engage with dance, the figure increased to 62% (Leadbetter & O'Connor, 2013).

What Works Well (Mansfield et al., 2018) have recently highlighted different research projects where dance has been proven to increase wellbeing. A study looked at students' depressive feelings before and after a dance intervention. Their depression score reduced significantly after the dance intervention (Akandere and Demir, 2011). Another used five different interventions with young people: dance aerobics, hip-hop dance, ice skating, body conditioning and jogging. The best interventions to increase wellbeing were dance aerobics & hip-hop dance (Kim, S. and Kim, J., (2007).

A further study conducted was *Dance Quest*, a project that encouraged young people to engage with and watch dance. Results showed that dance had made a positive impact on health and wellbeing and on future aspirations (Potter et al, 2015 in Mansfield et al., 2018). There is no doubt that dance is a powerful tool for positive wellbeing!



5. Better physical health

Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke, certain cancers and depression (World Health Organization, 2009). Physical activity also plays a key role, as the principal determinant in energy expenditure, in preventing obesity (World Health Organization, 2009). Studies in dance have shown to reduce BMI, increase cardiovascular fitness and improve bone health (Burkhardt and Brennan, 2012). Guidance from the Chief Medical Officer states that children and young people should be aiming for at least 60 minutes of activity per day, and this is reinforced in the School Sport and Activity Action Plan. Having dance as part of their curriculum is one way of ensuring students have regular opportunities for physical activity.



6. Dance gives ownership over learning

According to the self-determination theory, students are more likely to succeed, be motivated and be happier if they have autonomy over their work and learning. Dance lends itself to this through students having control over their choreography and through their own interpretations of dance works, with no 'right or wrong' responses. Creative work also develops awareness of the capabilities and strengths of their own bodies, allowing them to design movement to suit their own style.

7. Dance to embrace, express and escape

Dance is a safe way to peacefully advocate, protest and stand up for issues and changes within our society. Every culture has used dance as an integral part of life, whether it be to creatively tell a story, share a message or celebrate. Studying dance will open students' eyes to the vast influence that dance has had throughout history as well as enabling them to tell current stories and share messages of their own. Dance is a way to self-reflect and process change, providing an outlet for emotion. It can also help others who are going through the same challenges in life or broaden their mind to another perspective.

8. Dance as a form of communication and connection

Dancing automatically connects you with people. Dance is a wordless form of communication that conveys emotion without needing to have a huge understanding of the artform to appreciate. Dance requires no special equipment or apparatus – if you can move your body in any capacity you can dance. Being able to dance in a shared space, with others, enables children and young people to connect with their peers. Dance enables us to communicate through movement things that we cannot easily express verbally.

9. Dance as a form of entertainment and escapism

In tough times people turn to the arts for entertainment and escapism. In the 2008 recession London theatre's contribution to the UK economy increased (Smith, 2013). The arts are resilient and adaptable when it comes to change, meaning they can sustain for many generations to come. Think how many times you may switch on TV to watch a film or TV programme that features dancing!



10. Take it from the experts

"I am really interested in creative intelligence and what that means, and how can we harness the incredible creative abilities that young people have? ... This sense of creative freedom is a gift that should be nurtured and encouraged."

Kate Prince, Artistic Director of ZooNation

"It [taking part in dance] shows the transformative power of dance and how it is a positive force for everyone involved – physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. It's engaging viewing as you get to see the shift and transition that the young people make. As their ability to engage with their feelings and express them through dance increases, so does their confidence and self-belief, and this is so inspiring to see."

Kevin Turner, Company Chameleon co-director (2018)



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