

# Expanding Horizons: Opening Up Career Pathways in Dance

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## How the dance sector can better support students to understand the full spectrum of opportunities available to them

The traditional narrative around dance careers has long been narrow; train intensively, audition for companies, perform and perhaps, teach. Whilst this pathway remains valid and aspirational for many, it represents just one route through a rich and diverse landscape of dance-related careers. For One Dance UK and the wider dance education sector, there's an urgent need to expand students' knowledge of the opportunities available and help them navigate multiple progression routes from training to sustainable careers.

### The Perception Problem

Many dance students—whether taking a dance qualification in school, studying in conservatoires, universities, or vocational schools—enter training with limited awareness of the breadth of career possibilities. The visibility of performers, particularly those in prestigious companies, can overshadow the hundreds of other roles that exist both within and beyond the dance sector. This narrow perception creates several challenges: students may feel their only option is a performance career they might not want or be suited for; those who don't "make it" as performers may leave the sector entirely, taking their skills and passion with them; and young people may be discouraged from studying dance because they think it only leads to one outcome.

The reality is far more exciting. Dance graduates work across an extraordinary range of fields, and A Level Dance is accepted by universities as a rigorous academic qualification that can open doors to virtually any degree programme. The myth that Russell Group universities somehow view A Level Dance as "less than" other subjects is precisely that—a myth, with the list of 'facilitating subjects' for this group of universities being scrapped in 2019. UCAS points from Dance count exactly the same as those from any other A Level, and admissions tutors value the breadth and distinctiveness that Dance brings to an application.

### Dance as a Gateway: A Spotlight on A Level Dance

A Level Dance is frequently misunderstood as solely a practical, vocational qualification. In fact, it's a strong academic subject combining practical performance and choreography with critical analysis, dance history, and theoretical study. Students develop skills in:

- Critical thinking and analytical writing
- Research and evaluation
- Creative problem-solving
- Independent project management
- Understanding cultural and historical contexts
- Practical application of theoretical concepts

These skills make A Level Dance holders attractive candidates for a wide range of university courses. Students have successfully used this to gain entry to degrees in:

**Arts and Humanities:** Drama, Theatre Studies, English Literature, History of Art, Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Philosophy, Music

**Social Sciences:** Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Education, Youth and Community Work, Social Policy

**Health and Science:** Physiotherapy, Sports Science, Occupational Therapy, Health Promotion, Nutrition, Dance Science

**Business and Media:** Arts Management, Events Management, Marketing, Public Relations, Media Production, Digital Media, Journalism

**Law and other Professional Degrees:** Some students have even progressed to Law, Architecture, and other professional qualifications

Universities value the rigour, creativity, and discipline that A Level Dance demonstrates. The key is helping students—and their parents, teachers, and careers advisers—understand that Dance is not a limiting choice but an enriching one that keeps multiple doors open.

## Careers from Dance Study: Far Beyond the Stage

For those who do pursue dance-specific degree programmes or vocational training, the career possibilities extend far beyond performance:

### Performance and Creative Roles

Whilst performing remains a viable career, it encompasses much more than company dancers. Opportunities include:

- Commercial dance (music videos, television, film, touring productions)
- Site-specific and immersive performance
- Cruise ship entertainment and themed attractions
- Freelance performance across multiple projects
- Choreography for dance, theatre, opera, film, and television
- Movement direction for actors
- Creative producing and artistic direction
- Dramaturgy and creative development

### Education and Community Practice

This sector has grown enormously and offers diverse, rewarding careers:

- Teaching in schools, dance schools, and higher education
- Widening participation and outreach work
- Community dance practice across all ages and abilities
- Dance for health and wellbeing programmes (working with people with Parkinson's, dementia, mental health conditions)
- Dance in healthcare settings (hospitals, care homes)
- Youth work using dance
- Dance in criminal justice settings
- International development work using dance

## Arts Management and Production

The infrastructure that supports dance requires skilled professionals:

- Company management and administration
- Venue programming and management
- Festival direction and programming
- Arts marketing and communications
- Fundraising and development
- Tour management and logistics
- Stage management and production
- Technical direction (lighting, sound, set)
- Costume and set design

## Research, Writing, and Curation

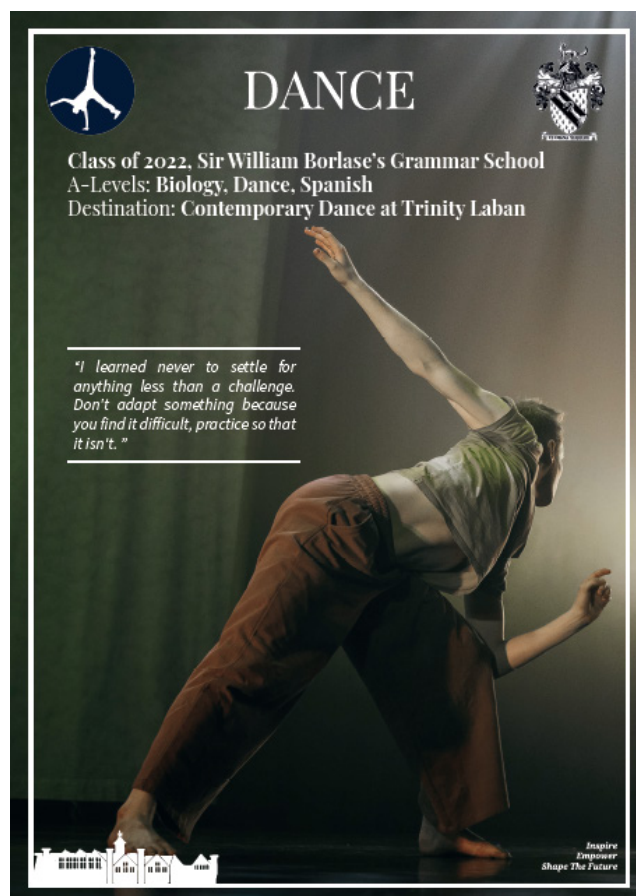
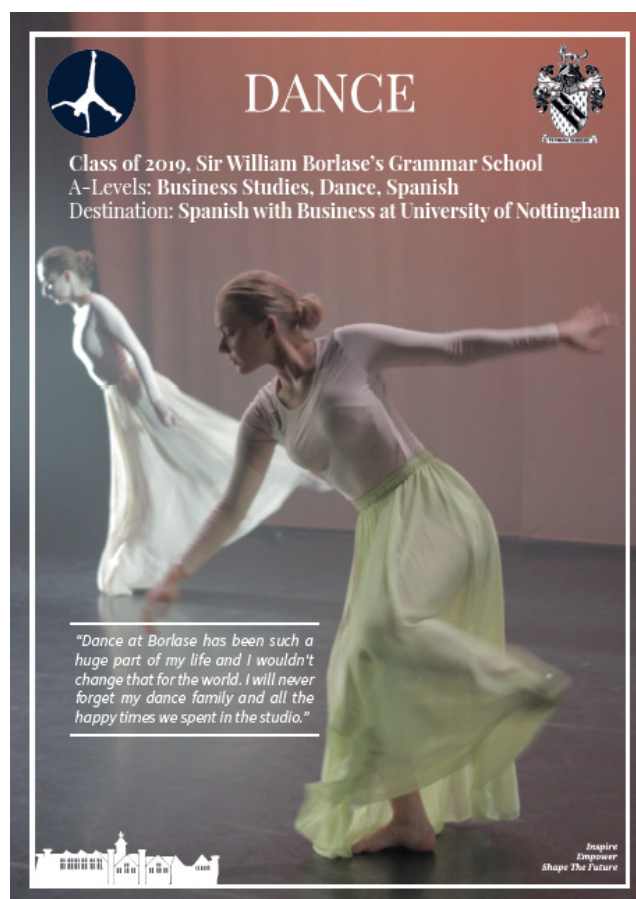
The critical and analytical skills developed through dance study lead naturally to:

- Dance criticism and journalism
- Academic research and lecturing
- Archive and heritage work
- Curatorial practice
- Arts policy and advocacy
- Publishing (commissioning and editing dance content)

## Digital and Media

The intersection of dance and technology offers growing opportunities:

- Dance film production and direction
- Digital content creation
- Social media strategy and management
- Video documentation and editing
- Virtual and augmented reality experiences
- Motion capture work
- Digital marketing for arts organisations



## Health and Wellbeing

Dance training provides excellent foundations for:

- Dance movement psychotherapy
- Physiotherapy specialising in performing arts
- Sports science and conditioning
- Pilates and somatic practice instruction
- Health promotion and public health
- Occupational therapy

## Entrepreneurship and Portfolio Careers

Many dance graduates create their own opportunities by:

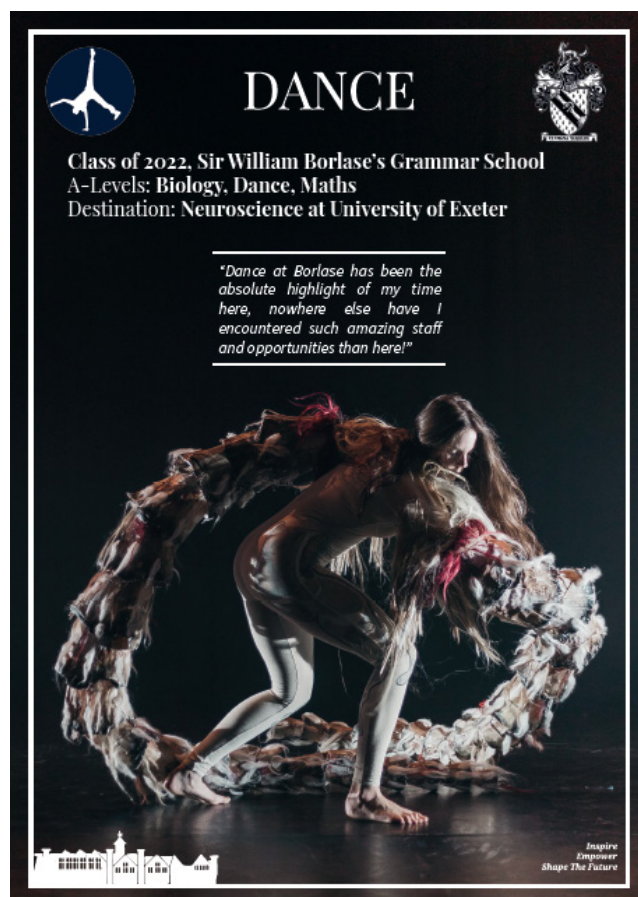
- Establishing their own companies or collectives
- Developing participatory projects
- Creating dance schools or studios
- Building freelance portfolios combining performance, teaching, and other work
- Developing innovative social enterprises using dance

## Beyond Dance: Transferable Skills in Action

Dance graduates also thrive in careers seemingly unrelated to dance because their training develops highly valued transferable skills. Dance graduates have successfully moved into:

- Project management across various sectors
- Human resources and recruitment
- Event management
- Retail and hospitality management
- Digital marketing and social media
- Publishing and media production
- Charity sector management
- Business development and consultancy

The creativity, discipline, resilience, time management, collaboration, attention to detail, and problem-solving skills honed through dance are assets in any field.



## Expanding Knowledge: Practical Strategies for Educators

### 1. Start Early with Career Conversations

From studying dance in a secondary setting onwards, help students understand the breadth of possibilities. Challenge the assumption that studying dance means becoming a performer. Invite guest speakers from diverse dance-related careers and entirely different fields who studied dance.

### 2. Make University Pathways Explicit

Clearly communicate that A Level Dance is respected by universities across all subject areas. Share examples of students who've used Dance to access diverse degree programmes. Work with careers advisers to ensure they're giving accurate information about dance as an academic subject.

### 3. Embed Career Education Throughout

Rather than relegating career discussions to final-year modules, integrate them from the start. Professional development workshops, reflective practice, and opportunities to explore different roles within projects (not just performing) help students discover their strengths and interests.

### 4. Create Meaningful Industry Connections

Partnerships with organisations across the sector can provide internships, work placements, shadowing opportunities, and mentorship schemes. These shouldn't be limited to performance companies. Students benefit from exposure to dance agencies, festivals, health organisations using dance, digital platforms, funding bodies, and arts venues.

### 5. Showcase Portfolio Careers and Non-Linear Journeys

The reality for most dance professionals is combining multiple roles and income streams. Rather than presenting this as a fallback, frame it as creative and sustainable. Invite professionals who successfully balance different aspects of dance work—and those who've moved between dance and other sectors—to share their experiences.

### 6. Develop Entrepreneurial and Business Skills

Many dancers will create their own opportunities. Include project management, budgeting, fundraising, marketing, and business planning in training. Understanding how to apply for funding, set up a company, or develop a participatory project opens up new possibilities.

### 7. Help Students Articulate Their Skills

Dance students often struggle to translate their abilities into language that resonates with non-dance employers or university admissions tutors. Practise articulating how choreographing a piece demonstrates project management, creative problem-solving, and meeting deadlines. How does ensemble work show leadership and collaboration? How does performance demonstrate resilience and communication skills?

## The Role of One Dance UK

As the national support organisation and Subject Association for Dance in schools, One Dance UK is uniquely positioned to facilitate these conversations and create resources focused on:

- Developing comprehensive careers resources mapping roles across and beyond the sector
- Creating case studies showcasing diverse career journeys from dance study
- Providing evidence and advocacy materials to demonstrate the value of dance qualifications such as A Level and BTEC Level 3 Dance to university admissions
- Facilitating connections between training providers and diverse employers
- Supporting research into career pathways and outcomes for dance graduates
- Advocating for careers education to be embedded and funded within dance education
- Working with careers services to improve understanding of dance qualifications

## Broadening Success

Ultimately, expanding students' career knowledge isn't about lowering expectations or suggesting they abandon performance dreams. It's about giving them permission to explore their full potential and find the role—or roles—where they'll thrive. It means recognising that someone who becomes an exceptional dance producer, or physiotherapist, or uses Dance A Level to study Law, is just as successful as someone who joins a professional dance company.

The dance sector needs people in all these roles to flourish. By helping students understand the opportunities available and supporting them to develop diverse skills and connections, we create a stronger, more sustainable, and more inclusive dance ecology. We also ensure that talented young people aren't discouraged from studying a subject they love because of misconceptions about where it might lead.

Dance study doesn't close doors—it opens them. It's time we made that message clear to every student, parent, and adviser considering dance as an educational choice.