

Taking it Higher: Dance in HE

Educators shine a light on the rapidly shifting landscape of dance in higher education.



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1. FOREWORD



As the national support organisation for dance, and the Subject Association for dance in schools, One Dance UK believes that access to high-quality dance education is the birth right of every child and young person. As well as contributing to an engaging broad and balanced curriculum, dance offers a plethora of health and wellbeing benefits, contributing positively to both physical and mental wellbeing. As both an artistic and a physical pursuit, dance education supports the development of vital life and employability skills including creativity, resilience, problem solving, collaboration and critical thinking. It seems clear then that dance education and training should be an entitlement for all children and young people, given its indisputable benefits for the general population. Furthermore, for those young people with the potential and desire to proceed into a career in the dance sector, or associated creative industries, access to quality dance education and training is imperative as an entry point to the dance talent pipeline. It is impossible to ignore the enormous growth of the creative industries in the UK in the 21st century, pointing to a need to ensure the next generation of performers and creatives are nurtured. As a country that prides itself on producing and showcasing world leading performing arts, it would seem completely logical for access to dance and arts education to be a strategic national priority.

Sadly, we know this has been far from the case in recent years. One Dance UK's 2021 report *Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken* highlighted the catastrophic decline of dance education in the UK at primary, secondary and further education (FE) levels. The report identified a reduction in the provision of dance curriculum hours, extra-curricular provision and the number of specialist dance teachers in mainstream settings. It also highlighted the dramatic decline in the numbers of young people accessing dance qualifications through their mainstream education, predominantly through a lack of availability rather than a lack of desire, with educators identifying shifting educational trends and priorities as a major cause of the decline in dance provision.

It is sadly perhaps no surprise then that a knock-on impact of the marginalisation of dance education is now being felt at higher education (HE) level. Recent years have seen a number of high-profile dance HE course closures, along with temporary suspensions and 'mothballing' of others. Despite the public outcry, petitions and letters of support that have often followed each new setback, little has changed, with declining numbers of applications and a lack of financial viability often being cited as the rationale behind such tough decisions. As the nation gradually began to recover from the pandemic – which had impacted practical and creative educational subjects more than most – we transitioned into a new challenge – a financial crisis – adding additional pressures to an already marginalised and misrepresented educational subject.

This research into the current landscape of dance at higher education level draws together information about the challenges and changes witnessed by those educators working 'on the ground'. There is no doubt that the findings are at times bleak and extremely alarming. Yet despite the challenges faced by those working in this sector, there are some green shoots of hope. Dance educators speak passionately about the young people they work with and their capabilities and skills. There are examples of innovative practice, of new programmes opening and a broader range of options for some young people.

It is vital, however, that these options are available to all. As a resilient and creative sector, it is clear that dance educators work tirelessly to ensure that young people can access and benefit from quality dance education and training. The hugely rewarding and enriching experience of being immersed in dance training and study is something that educators are clearly passionate about. There is still a long way to go to ensure that the value and importance of dance and the arts are recognised more widely and viewed holistically. There is still work to do to ensure that dance programmes are not considered a 'nice to have' luxury or an unnecessary expense and it is understood that they are, in fact, critical.

There are certainly challenges ahead and there is no quick fix, but One Dance UK remains resolute in its ambition. The UK needs a strong and secure dance talent pipeline that is accessible to all, along with a cultural shift in thinking about the power and positive impact of dance for society as a whole.



2. BACKGROUND

One Dance UK is the national support organisation for dance and the Subject Association for dance in schools. We champion the importance and value of high-quality dance education and training and believe passionately that access to dance education, both within and beyond formal education settings, should be available to all. Our ambition is for a clear progression pathway through to studying dance in HE that is accessible for all children and young people, offering a cohesive 'talent pipeline' to fulfil the needs of the growing creative sector.

One Dance UK has undertaken research into the picture of dance at HE level due to concerns arising from the sector, and recent dance HE course closures or suspension of recruitment at several institutions, including University of Wolverhampton⁽³⁾, University of South Wales⁽¹⁾, Coventry University, and University of Plymouth⁽⁵²⁾. At the time of writing this report, dance staff at University of Central Lancashire have informed us that the BA (Hons) Dance programme is being withdrawn and is no longer recruiting students. Roehampton University is in consultation around ceasing new enrolments on courses with small numbers in its School of Arts. Prior to this, Roehampton had experienced a significant decline in demand for their arts courses⁽⁵¹⁾.

Dance education plays a vital role in providing a broad, balanced and enriching curriculum experience for the wider population. As a subject area combining physical activity and creativity, dance holds a unique place in the curriculum. Taking part in dance activity supports the development of vital employability and life skills including creative and critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving and resilience. Dance is an engaging and popular physical activity, which can ensure children and young people

are being active, supporting the Chief Medical Advisor's recommendation for participating in daily physical activity for all 5–18-year-olds⁽¹⁶⁾. Research has shown that dance can support positive mental health and wellbeing and help to build social connections, and that engagement within the arts can be fulfilling and enriching⁽²⁸⁾. At a time that sees the UK's young people facing both an obesity crisis and a mental health epidemic, the need for access to dance seems perhaps more vital than ever^(16, 48, 28, 49).

It is clear that provision for dance in HE in the UK is a rapidly changing landscape, with courses offered across a variety of settings and contexts including universities and conservatoires, colleges, and within vocational settings. There is also growing online and remote provision.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

There are 251 undergraduate dance courses currently available in the UK, offered by 75 different providers. The majority of provision is based in England, while Scotland and Wales have two providers of dance HE in each. Currently there are no providers of Dance HE in Northern Ireland⁽⁸⁾.

In the UK there are 96 post graduate dance courses offered by 26 different providers, which includes three providers in Scotland and one in Wales. There are no providers in Northern Ireland⁽⁸⁾. Despite the rich and varied landscape of dance within the UK at both undergraduate and post-graduate level, there are concerning disparities around provision across the four nations.

Included in this figure are discrete dance courses as well as those where dance is offered as a strand within a course, for example within Musical Theatre or combined Drama and Dance programmes.

DANCE IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

As examined in One Dance UK's 2021 report *Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken: The Place of Dance in UK Education*, dance provision within schools and colleges as part of primary, secondary and further education (FE) has been in significant decline over the last decade and beyond due to a 'perfect storm' of factors. The introduction of the



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EBacc accountability measure in England, prioritisation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects, funding challenges and of course the pandemic have all played their role. Teachers believe that these factors have been exacerbated by the use of derogatory language from Government and media, describing dance and other creative subjects as 'low value', 'non-priority' and 'dead-end'.

Further to this, the Department for Education in England has begun implementation of their plan to streamline qualifications at post 16 FE level, with the introduction of T-Levels. Under this proposal students will be directed to choose one of two routes; either the A-Level route, presented as the 'academic' choice: or the T-Level route, designed as a 'vocational' pathway, in which students would focus solely on specific vocational career skills and undertake an industry placement. There are currently no plans to introduce a Dance or Performing Arts T-Level.

There are, however, some more promising developments across the UK, including the plan for a new 'made-for-Wales' Level 2 dance qualification as part of the new Curriculum for Wales, which will be introduced next academic year⁽⁵⁰⁾. Meanwhile, Scotland continues to offer the Expressive Arts Baccalaureate which features dance, and dance as a discrete subject with the Diploma and Higher Diploma in Dance.



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Given the overall significant challenges facing dance at primary, secondary and further education level, leading to a dramatic decline in the number of young people taking dance at examination level in mainstream education, it is perhaps of little surprise that we are now seeing the impact of this on the dance HE sector.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

Changes to the funding system for HE have impacted on dance as a subject area. Following a consultation on funding decisions in 2021-22, as directed by the Department for Education, the Office for Students (OfS) - an independent regulator - has announced funding cuts to creative and performing arts subjects within the next year. The creative subjects, deemed as “high-cost” subjects which are not a “strategic priority” are to experience a 50% cut in funding, which contrasts with other “high-cost” subjects related to STEM, medicine or healthcare who will not experience any funding cuts^(9,10,11,12).

Additionally, there are 17 dance HE providers offering 30 undergraduate dance courses (41 including Musical Theatre)

and 29 postgraduate dance courses (37 including Musical Theatre) based in London and Greater London, who will be further impacted by the removal of the London Weighting funding. This funding was designed to support universities with the higher cost of operating in the capital^(31, 32).

More positive announcements for funding have included the OfS world leading specialist provider funding, which provides financial support for small scale education institutions classed as world leading⁽⁵³⁾ and, more recently, the £9.6 million of funding to be awarded to a selected group of fifteen specialist higher arts education providers across England (four of which are dance specific), with the aim of developing degree apprentices within the performing arts⁽⁴⁷⁾. We welcome this additional funding as a sign of recognition of the value of dance training and education. It is promising that the OfS recognised the positive contribution of the creative arts industry, with their statement that “the performing arts make a significant economic and cultural contribution to society. They enrich lives and create tens of thousands of jobs across the UK”⁽⁵⁴⁾.

We recognise the positive impact that this funding and announcement will make in supporting selected HE providers to continue to grow and build their dance training provision but acknowledge that it is a relatively small number of providers that will benefit. We would welcome plans to see this funding model replicated in a sustainable way that could be beneficial for all HE institutions, broadening the choice of courses and widening opportunities for all potential students.

THE GROWTH OF THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Following the pandemic, the creative industries have recovered well and are growing, with the potential to create 300,000 new employment opportunities by 2025, generating an extra £28 billion to support the UK economy (Creative UK, 2022)⁽¹³⁾. With this in mind, and with dance making a vital contribution to the creative industries, it seems a critical time to be developing the future generation of talent that will feed into the creative industries growth. As well as developing the next generation of performers, choreographers, dance teachers and researchers, studying dance in HE also supports the development of wider skills such as communication, creative thinking and problem-solving, which were highlighted in a recent report by Kingston University as being among the “top 10 core skills” vital for a “prosperous economy”⁽¹³⁾.

THE SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

One Dance UK surveyed experienced dance HE educators, with the aim of gathering a clear picture of the current landscape in dance at higher education level, highlighting the growing areas of concern and the contributing factors, as identified directly by those working in the sector.

While this report focuses predominantly on undergraduate courses it is important to note that a number of concerns were raised about the closure of several post-

graduate courses including Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) courses, adding to the marginalisation of dance as an educational subject. When discussing the fact that a specialist dance provider would not be accredited as an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provider from 2024, one respondent said “We are currently in discussion with our validating university to map out our next steps. This is worrying as there are not many ITT providers that specialise in dance education. What impact will this have on dance provision in schools at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5?”.

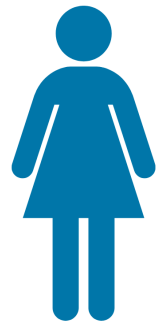
The number of PGCE dance teacher training courses is at an all-time low, with just four remaining in England and the closing of more to come due to reforms in the delivery of Initial Teacher Training^(29, 30). There are currently no dance specific post graduate teacher training courses within Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



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3. HEADLINE FINDINGS

To gain an accurate picture of the current dance in HE landscape and to inform our advocacy work, One Dance UK surveyed experienced dance educators working in HE settings across the UK in November and December 2022. One Dance UK received 64 responses from educators working across 47 different institutions.



Most respondents identified as **female (84%)**, **White British (72%)** and had worked in Higher Education for **11 years or more (60%)**.



There was a limited geographical spread of educators, with the vast majority of respondents working in **England (92%)**. Other respondents work in **Scotland (5%)**, **Wales (2%)**, and **outside of the UK (2%)**. There were no respondents working in **Northern Ireland**.



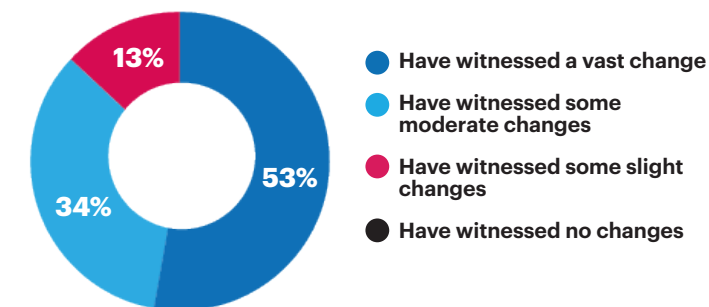
The majority (**75%**), of respondents work in **university settings**. **21%** work in **conservatoires** and **19%** in **college settings** offering Higher Education programmes. **3%** work **Online** and **3%** in **other settings**. Some respondents work across more than one type of setting.



56% of respondents are **employed full time**, **14%** are **employed part time** and **11%** work in a **freelance capacity across multiple settings**. The majority (**87%**) teach as part of **undergraduate courses** and **53%** teach as part of **postgraduate courses**.

HEADLINE 1: THE DANCE HE LANDSCAPE HAS FACED UNPRECEDENTED CHANGE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS

Strikingly, 100% of those completing the survey have witnessed a change in provision in the setting(s) they work in over the last five years.



COURSE CLOSURES

Dance educators have witnessed dance course closures across several HE settings.

“Unfortunately the university I was in decided to suspend recruitment to ALL undergraduate and postgraduate courses without giving any future plan. They managed the closure of the school of performing arts.”

A staggering 64% of dance HE educators stated that they have experienced a course closure at their work institution within the last five years, with examples given across undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Some dance courses have closed completely while others have suspended recruiting dance students for at least a temporary period.

“Our MA course has been suspended for two years. We are generally feeling the pressure of other courses closing as this puts us at risk.”



Dance student from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

Respondents also highlighted the fact that teacher training programmes, in the form of Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses, have had to reapply for accreditation as an Initial Teacher Training provider from 2024, with some being unsuccessful.

FURTHER CHANGES TO PROVISION

Other changes to dance provision highlighted include the merging of courses, a need for increased cohort sizes and new providers offering degree courses.

Some respondents have seen new courses such as performing arts being introduced, where dance features as a strand within the course, rather than as a discrete subject. It was also highlighted that some dance HE departments have felt pressured to introduce broader based performing arts courses rather than discrete dance courses to encourage an increased number of applications and provide greater financial viability.



Dance students from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

“There have been a number of closures of dance departments and others have added musical theatre to their offer to encourage applicants and viability.”

“Often the assumption is that closing dance and adding a musical theatre course will be more financially viable due to the pool of applications.”

Several educators expressed concern, however, that the introduction of new ‘mixed’ courses, was not the solution to the recruitment crisis and that it has, in fact, contributed to a reduced number of applications for dance as a discrete subject and to the ‘dilution’ of dance-specific content.

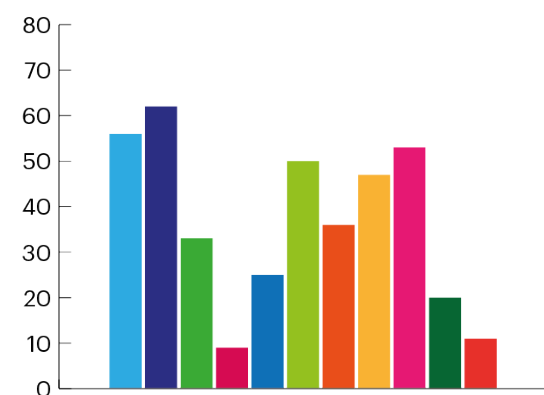
“The course is being co-taught across performing arts provision, and I feel is at risk of losing its identity as a dance course as a result.”

“The variety of dance artists graduating with individual specialisms is in danger of being lost.”

Survey responses highlight that the landscape for dance provision at higher education is rapidly changing, and applications from those young people keen to study dance were now dispersed across a much broader range of settings, including

an increasing number of vocational contexts. Some educators commented that with this, students’ expectations were changing with a desire for practice-based and industry-led courses. One educator working in a university setting commented that, “the types of ‘competitors’ have changed, with more vocational schools opening or running degree courses, and this has changed student expectations. The need for programmes to be more practice-based and linked to industry and employment is imperative.”

If you have witnessed a course closure or reduction in provision, what do you feel are the reasons for this? (Respondents were able to choose all reasons that applied)



- Knock on effect from decline in schools and FE (56%)
- Financial cuts/lack of investment (62%)
- Competition from other providers (33%)
- Geographical reasons (9%)
- Pressure from parents (25%)
- Lack of exposure to dance as an option (50%)
- Lack of promotion/marketing of dance courses (36%)
- University leadership change of priorities (47%)
- Negative perception of value of the arts and career paths from media and government (53%)
- Reduction/increase in no. of overseas students (20%)
- Other (11%)

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

When asked to consider the factors leading to the reduction in provision of dance at HE level, respondents spoke extensively of financial cuts and a lack of investment. Three quarters of respondents stated that they have *directly* witnessed budget cuts to dance provision in their work setting(s) within the last five years.

Over half (55%) of respondents stated that the lack of funding available for dance courses has forced the need for greater cohort sizes in their workplace setting(s), while 30% of respondents said that dance courses have been merged with other subjects, purely for the purpose of making them financially viable.

Survey responses highlighted that the lack of funding and investment also influences the design and delivery of course content. One educator highlighted that in their work setting, there is “support for the principle of diversifying the curriculum, but no funding to bring in extra teaching hours or support, [with] staff having to fundraise for this separately”.

Other respondents expressed that financial pressures mean that limited time is given to the introduction of new developments, with the expectation of demonstrating an immediately successful response in order to be considered financially viable.

“New initiatives have to be successful and make waves in one year otherwise they are shut down.”



Dance student from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower



Linden Dance by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

Responses also highlighted that the practical requirements of delivering a dance programme are viewed as ‘too costly’ for HE institutions facing multiple financial challenges.

“Dance spaces in HE environments are often considered expensive when compared to other similar size spaces in business faculties. A space that fits twenty dance students could be turned into a lecture space hosting 160 business students.”

“We lost our MA course which was full with a waiting list, but considered too expensive in staffing to run. The institution want MA courses that require minimal staffing and maximum independent study so it is considered financially viable.”



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The lack of access to prior quality dance education was cited by 56% of dance educators as a significant contributor to the reduction of applications to study dance at HE, and therefore the overall decline in dance provision at HE.

“Sadly, it would seem that the decline in students studying dance, especially at GCSE and A Level, is greatly affecting the number of students applying to study dance in HE.”

Half of survey respondents also identified that young people’s lack of awareness of dance as a viable degree and career option had further impacted application numbers.

“There has been a pressure to recruit to a subject such as dance that is not being positively encouraged in schools/colleges, with STEM subjects taking the limelight.”

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF THE VALUE OF THE ARTS

Many educators (53% of respondents) felt that the negative perception of the value of the arts and creative career paths presented in the media and by Government, and embedded in educational policy, has directly contributed to the ongoing decline in dance HE provision. Respondents highlighted their belief that



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STUDENT APPLICATION NUMBERS AND THE DECLINE IN DANCE EDUCATION PATHWAYS

65% of respondents highlighted a decline in the number of applications to dance courses over the last five years.

One Dance UK’s 2021 dance education report *Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken*⁽⁶⁾, identifies the catastrophic decline in access to high-quality dance education at primary, secondary and further education (FE) levels over the last decade and beyond. The report highlights that the EBacc performance measure, a focus on STEM subjects, shifting educational priorities, funding reductions and of course the pandemic have created the perfect storm, leading to a dramatic reduction in dance education provision.

The report identifies that “In secondary education, 66% of educators reported a decline in the uptake of dance qualifications for students aged 14 and over”. It is perhaps not surprising that this decline in access to dance qualifications in school and college is now being felt at HE level.



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the negative rhetoric used to discuss dance and other creative subjects publicly has led to a reduction in student applications and an increased pressure from parents for young people to follow a more ‘valuable’ or ‘academic’ career path.

“Despite some HE dance courses becoming more vocational in their nature and providing superb training and opportunities, the Government, media and educational leaders fail to recognise what dance contributes to health, culture, society and suchlike.”

“Although there are more options and avenues available within performing arts, there is no support from the Government and media. It has not received its due credit, thus is not the first option for most.”

Some respondents communicated that a perception of the arts being ‘low value’ has led to shifting university priorities and a

change in the culture of leadership at their institution.

A recent report *At Risk: Our Creative Future* also highlighted a need for improving the messaging around arts education. “The Department for Education’s sweeping rhetoric about ‘low value courses’ is unhelpful. We agree that universities should provide good value for money, but the Department must also acknowledge that many of those going into the creative industries will work flexibly, in freelance roles, and take time to generate higher salaries. That does not mean their studies and subsequent jobs are less worthwhile.”⁽⁴⁾

Survey responses highlighted the need for support and value for dance to be demonstrated throughout HE organisations at all levels of leadership. One respondent stated that when this is in place and underpinning provision, a positive culture with successful outcomes is achieved. “The University is very supportive of dance. We have had investment and support from SMT. It has been helpful that we have had strong NSS and REF results in dance.”

HEADLINE 2: THE SHIFTING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED THE ROLE OF DANCE EDUCATORS AND STAFF CAPACITY.

STAFF MORALE

Responses to the dance in higher education survey demonstrate that dance educators are characteristically determined and robust, skilfully evolving professionally, navigating seismic shifts and carving out successful careers in a competitive and demanding ecology. It is perhaps no surprise, however, that with so many competing pressures and changes taking place over recent years, respondents' morale levels are being put to the test.

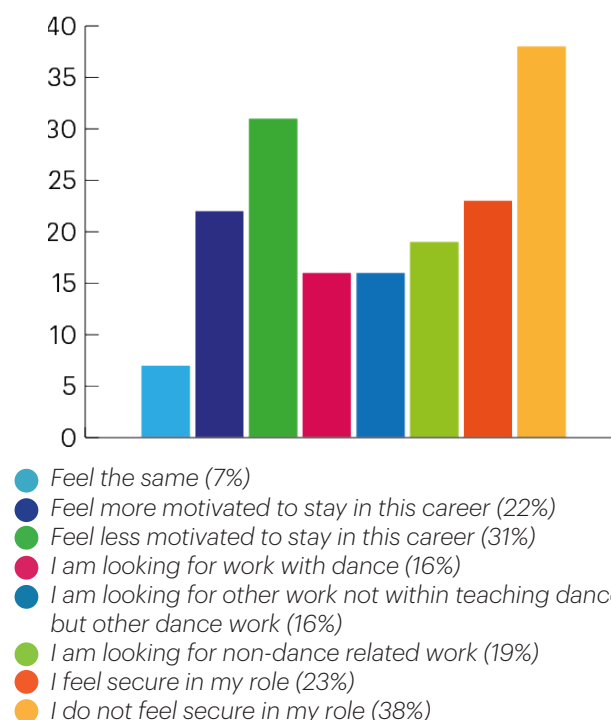
“Courses are fighting to survive one year at a time. Staff are weary and made to feel like they are failing in their roles when the reality is that it is part of a wider demise of dance at HE level.”

When asked how stable and optimistic they feel in their current roles and in their future career in HE, only 23% said they feel secure in their role compared to 38% who said they do not. Almost a third of respondents (31%) said they feel less motivated to stay in this career than they did five years ago.



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How stable/optimistic do you feel in your current role/your future career in Dance HE?



STAFF TURNOVER AND REDUCTIONS

More than half (55%) of respondents said they have seen a reduction in dance specialist staff in their work setting(s) over the last five years.

Respondents identified a significant reduction in the number of staff teaching dance in HE as well as a reduction in the number of teaching/lecturing opportunities available, attributed directly to cuts in funding^(25, 26) and associated course closures.



Dance students from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

“Pre covid I was a visiting lecturer in three HE institutions, now I have no work at all in HE. All my contracts have finished due to reduced numbers of students applying and reduced budgets.”

“My predecessor was employed full time as a dance education lecturer whereas I’m employed part time on a 0.6 contract. Another colleague was let go.”

Several educators commented that although staff have not directly been made redundant in their setting(s), staff leaving their roles or retiring had not been replaced as a cost cutting measure.

“There are not enough students, so when a staff member leaves the university they are not replaced.”

REDUCTION IN STUDENT CONTACT HOURS

Half of respondents stated that in order to make staff and other resources ‘stretch further’ they have been forced to reduce face-to-face contact hours with students, negatively impacting on the quality of the course. Educators described a pressure to reduce lecture delivery time, make changes to the delivery structure of programmes, such as by merging modules, and to replace contact time with online/digital learning as a way of reducing cost. Despite these reductions, respondents highlighted that the same amount of course content is still required.

“All modular teaching has been reduced over the past five years. We now have students working independently for 1.5 hours every afternoon on tasks set by staff [in order to] get through the module content.”

“[There has been a] move to more blended delivery to cut costs rather than as a mode to be more inclusive or aligned with sound pedagogical design.”

Several respondents highlighted that the limited number of contact hours impact most significantly on opportunities for students to take part in technique classes and choreographic exploration. The structure of the academic year has also been reduced in some HE establishments with terms being shortened.

“In the last three years we have had our contracted period cut from nine to eight weeks. The ninth week was for assessments. We now have to include these in the eighth week.”

INCREASED DEMANDS AND PRESSURE

Survey responses identified that many educators working in HE feel there are increased expectations of them in their general working practice, creating a sense of pressure and the need to cover more areas of work. With a reported reduction in the number of dance specialist staff employed in HE institutions, it is perhaps no surprise that 20% of respondents stated that – despite remaining in the same role - their own teaching and lecturing hours have increased over the last five years.

“Whilst resource capacity has grown, it hasn’t grown in line with cohort size increases and was already unmatched to begin with.”

“Workload modelling does not match reality of working pattern and demands.”



Dance student from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

Others highlighted that, despite no change in contract or pay increase, greater expectations are being placed on staff, with educators being given additional administrative tasks and responsibility for areas such as extra research projects, fundraising and marketing. Several educators reported increased pressures around retention and recruitment of students.

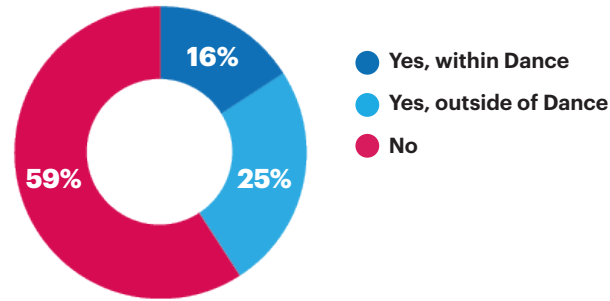
“Dance educators and support staff in HE settings are overworked and at their limit of sustainability.”



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STAFF SKILLSET

Have you or other dance specialist colleagues been asked to teach other subject areas outside of your specialism?



The deployment of subject-specialist staff was highlighted as a concern by respondents, with several examples given of dance content being delivered by non-specialists. One respondent gave the example of ballet technique classes being taught by a tutor with little prior experience in this style.

“A new BA in Musical Theatre has been opened. No specialist dance staff [have been] retained to teach on it!”

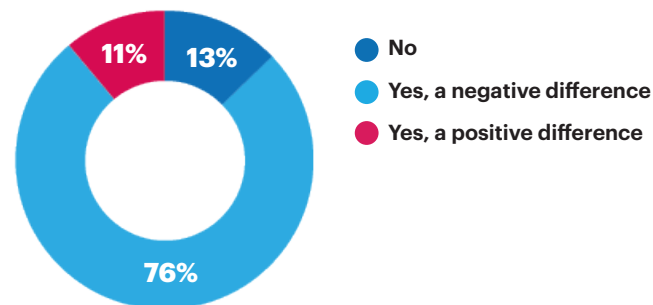
One dance educator felt that, due to a reluctance to recruit specialist staff, dance programmes in their work setting were being delivered by “...inexperienced lecturers who have not actually worked in [the dance] industry, resulting in them leaving the job and profession due to the stress.”

Conversely, respondents highlighted the fact that expert dance staff are being redeployed elsewhere to deliver on courses outside of their specialism. Some stated that there was a need for them to be flexible about what areas they taught both within dance and across other subjects, and that this could change each year. This included teaching across other performance-based courses and other programmes related to the creative industries. Other areas which dance teaching staff had been asked to cover included health and fitness, alternative sports provision, yoga-based practices and engagement of disaffected young people and communities.

One respondent claimed that, in their workplace setting, dance staff are “.... always asked if [they] can teach any other subject other than dance when appointed.”

HEADLINE 3: WHILST STUDENT NUMBERS ARE IN DECLINE, THOSE STUDYING DANCE IN HE ARE EXPERIENCING INCREASED PRESSURES

Over the last 5 years have you noticed a difference in the skill level, experience, and resilience of young people starting on Dance HE programmes?



For those students who do study dance at HE level, educators report additional challenges for them to navigate. A staggering 76% of educators commented on witnessing a reduction in the skill level, experience and resilience of young people starting on dance HE programmes.

DISRUPTION TO THE DANCE EDUCATION PIPELINE

In the last decade and beyond schools and colleges have experienced significant challenges and cuts to their dance provision. The number of young people studying GCSE and A-Level Dance has almost halved with a 48% decline in entries for GCSE Dance and a 47% decline in entries for A Level Dance since 2010⁽⁶⁾. Dance education has been marginalised and access to provision in mainstream schools has effectively become a postcode lottery.

It is perhaps not surprising then that this impact is now being felt further down the line. Many educators cited a difference in the practical skills of young people coming

into dance HE courses, commenting on lower levels of specific dance techniques and a decline in overall fitness levels. It was felt by some that students have had less exposure to practical dance training and lessons, and lack awareness of the level of commitment and practice required to undertake dance training at HE.

One respondent identified that, compared to previous cohorts, students in recent years have had a “lack of core strength and stability, lower fitness levels [and] lower levels of understanding how to work in a collegiate manner”.

Many respondents had also noticed a reduced depth of theoretical knowledge and a lower quality in academic writing, with one educator linking this directly to the lack of provision in schools. Some felt that students require a greater level of scaffolding of basic skills.

“[We now see] less depth of academic knowledge of the subject area due to the reduction of Key Stage 3 and 4 curriculum delivery in schools.”



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With the closure of some one-year foundation dance courses, several educators felt that students who previously would have completed such programmes in preparation for a BA Degree course, were now being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ and were struggling with their studies, with some even dropping out of higher education.

“[Students] have less academic knowledge and understanding of the art form – for example less knowledge of dance history and choreology.”

The 2021 dance education report *Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken* highlighted a focus on knowledge-based learning and ‘teaching to the test’ being prevalent in mainstream education. An overwhelming number of survey respondents commented on the frustrating and concerning decline in the wider skills of critical thinking, independent thought and even literacy skills being developed in pre-18 education, resulting in students, through no fault of their own, struggling with making the shift to HE level. The survey also demonstrated a decline in



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

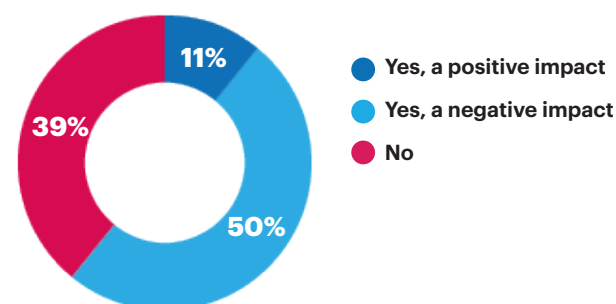
the skill areas of problem solving and independent working by learners, resulting in less positive outcomes at HE. Many survey respondents linked this decline in knowledge and skills to the reduction of a clear dance education pathway in many schools and colleges, causing significant disadvantage to some students in preparation for the study of dance at HE level.

It is important to note that not all responses were negative, with several educators saying they have witnessed an improvement in practical technical skills over the last five years. One respondent noted that the students they teach now possess a greater range of practical skills covering more diverse dance styles and techniques.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

In addition to the ongoing decline in dance provision in schools and colleges, the impact of the pandemic appears to be a contributing factor to students' entry level skills and experience. Half of survey respondents stated that the pandemic has resulted in a lasting impact on the provision of dance HE in their setting.

Do you feel that the pandemic has had a lasting impact on the provision of Dance HE in your setting?



Some felt that students have less breadth of experience in different dance styles. One respondent felt that there is little knowledge of contemporary dance, with another stating that students' only experience of dance is through social media platforms.

“The skill level [of students] is lower due to lack of dancing during the covid years and many have limited knowledge or experience of dance other than TikTok.”

It was noted that students had, in many cases, been forced to cease choreographic practice during the lockdown period with limited space and opportunities for group exploration and rehearsal. This, combined with the reduced number of students studying dance at further education level, was cited by some respondents as negatively impacting students' choreographic and creative skill when entering dance at HE level.

MENTAL WELLBEING, PASTORAL ISSUES AND RESILIENCE

A recurring theme, throughout responses around the impact of the pandemic, was the visible impact on the wellbeing and resilience of young people entering dance HE. An overwhelming number of educators commented on a steep increase in mental health issues experienced by students with an inconsistent ability to cope with the demands of study and life challenges. Survey respondents described an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety and low confidence, with a lack of coping strategies to be able to support themselves. Educators felt that greater resources are needed to deal with the volume of growing support needs and that pastoral, mental health and wellbeing teams were overwhelmed.

“The pandemic has led to increased lack of confidence and anxiety.”



Linden Dance by One Dance UK, Dani Bower



Dance student from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

One educator noted an increase in students withdrawing from programmes of studying, not completing assignments, or taking periods of absence from their studies due to issues around mental wellbeing. Several educators commented on the fact that students appear to have greater support needs – both academically and pastorally – and there were multiple responses around a decline in students' resilience and engagement. Some felt that students are less likely to participate in wider opportunities available to them such as enrichment programmes.

“Students are less resilient in terms of adaptability and innovation. We are faced with increasing numbers of students with poor health and wellbeing who require additional support and resource.”

Another educator commented on a general lack of motivation amongst students entering courses, attributed directly to a knock-on effect of the reduced provision during the pandemic.

“[We see] less students entering with [experience of] face-to-face contact at school, or visits to live theatre, both of which stimulate enthusiasm for the subject. There are less dance activities available outside school settings which would widen student experiences.”

Others cited social media as being a contributing factor to a decline in mental wellbeing in students, commenting on exposure to unrealistic goals and a skewed vision of success, relating to *“the number of followers as opposed to fulfilment and feeling challenged.”*

Students were described as *“much more vulnerable and fragile”* and lacking in confidence in the idea that they can succeed and gain employment within the dance ecology. One respondent felt this may not have been helped by a *“lack of connections for placement opportunities”* due to the pandemic and others stated that there is a lack of careers advice around the wide variety of opportunities and job roles in dance.

Respondents communicated a sense of pride in their dance HE students and empathy for the challenges they have faced in recent years. Educators were clear that their comments are in no way a criticism of students and young people themselves but reflect the breakdown in pathways for dance education prior to higher education, and the challenges and obstacles faced by young people.

“I noticed a greater resilience of those on the post-graduate programmes in dance, especially as we entered the global pandemic. They seemed determined to succeed despite all that they were faced with.”



2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research into dance HE highlights that the challenges faced by the sector are not isolated, but in fact form part of the wider decline of dance education at all stages across the UK. It is no surprise that the diminishing dance education provision within school and further education settings seen over the last decade and beyond has contributed to a reduction in the study of dance at HE level. With this in mind, we would like to highlight and amplify the recommendations outlined in our report *Everything We Loved about Dance Was Taken*. The report recommendations are a firm foundation for rebuilding dance education and training from the ground upwards, creating and strengthening an effective talent pipeline. To view the report and recommendations see [here](#).

Based on our research into the current and recent experiences of dance HE educators, One Dance UK has collated a series of recommendations to ensure that the future of dance training within higher education is secure and continues to be of world-class standard.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

ONE DANCE UK CALLS ON THE UK GOVERNMENT AND DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS TO:

- **Demonstrate support for dance within HE settings, publicly recognising its value and importance.**

Dance and other creative arts subjects should no longer be referred to as “dead-end courses” or “high-cost, non-priority”, nor should they be referred to as courses that produce “poorer outcomes” for students⁽¹¹⁾. They should instead be considered as a strategic priority for the continued growth of the Creative Industries.

Derogatory language used to describe dance and other creative subjects – particularly by Government representatives and other decision makers – is extremely harmful, creating a negative and misguided public perception of the importance of these subjects. This in turn impacts on students, parents and carers, and other professionals who may influence young people such as careers advisers, teachers and peers. We firmly reject the idea of dance and other related arts subjects being of “low value” in the current societal and economic context.

- **Reconsider HE student outcome measures, which are currently very narrow.**

The success of arts education cannot be judged on students' professional employment status within 15 months of leaving HE, which is the current OfS indicator for student outcome measures⁽⁴⁰⁾. A career in the arts can take longer to establish involving income streams from different sources and different types of employment contracts^(40, 41, 42).



U.Dance National Festival 2022 by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

- **Recognise the positive impacts that dance makes to the UK economy, society and the health and wellbeing of the general population.**

The significant impact of the creative sectors should be recognised, and publicly acknowledged by leaders. Dance is integral to cultural life in the UK, from local arts activities which enhance quality of life, to events that showcase the UK on the world stage such as the Commonwealth Games, Platinum Jubilee celebrations and the King's coronation. Dance has the potential to improve lives. As outlined in the PEC report, 93% of 16–18-year-olds stated that “studying a creative subject impacts positively on their mental health and wellbeing”⁽²⁰⁾. Furthermore, dance has the potential to support in tackling the obesity crisis that the UK is facing, providing both preventative and actionable supportive measures⁽¹⁶⁾.

The arts and creative industries have faced huge challenges over the last few years with the pandemic restrictions and the slow return to operation. With great

resilience and perseverance, however, the sectors are recovering well and are a vital and growing part of the UK economy. Outlined by Creative UK, the sector has the potential to generate £28bn by 2025 and create 300.00 new jobs⁽¹³⁾. It is therefore now more important than ever that all political parties recognise this potential and reflect this within their education and curriculum policy and funding for both schools and HE. As things stand, we run the risk of not being able to provide the highly skilled creative workforce required for a prosperous and rapidly growing industry.

- **Ensure that dance and other creative arts subjects have equal status and value to subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), which the Government proactively encourage uptake for and refer to as “high-value subjects”.**

The decision approved by Gavin Williamson in 2021, saw funding for dance and arts subjects halved⁽²⁵⁾. One Dance UK calls for this decision to be reversed and for dance and arts subjects to be given funding that is in line with other HE subjects.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

- **Ensure that all children and young people receive a broad and balanced curriculum and cultural offer, including access to quality dance training, throughout their education.**

One Dance UK very much welcomes the Cultural Education Plan for England due for publication this year, which aims to improve access for all children and young people to a diverse range of cultural educational experiences and activities. A plan like this is a promising start in reinstating the importance of a high-quality arts education and we hope it will go some way to readdress the imbalance in value and status of subjects within the National Curriculum.

We call for a reinstatement of the abandoned 2019 Conservative Party pledge, to offer an Arts Premium fund to all secondary schools in England, with the purpose of supporting high quality arts provision^(38, 43).

We ask for a review of the impact of school accountability measures (the EBacc and Progress 8) on dance and other arts subjects. We also ask for a reform of the Progress 8 accountability measure, giving young people in England greater freedom of choice at Key Stage 4.

In order to ensure there is a clear and unbroken dance education and training pathway available to all students, dance and the wider performing arts must be included in the post-16 curriculum reform and the introduction of T Levels.

- **Work collaboratively and holistically to ensure that there is a clear dance talent development pipeline available to all young people.**

We need to ensure that, as a nation, we are nurturing the dance sector workers of the future, building on and extending our world-class provision and meeting the skills needs of the rapidly growing creative sector. We ask that the Department for Education continues to work closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to champion the value and strength of the arts sector within the UK economy and to establish a secure roadmap for dance education through to HE level, ensuring that young people can learn from qualified and specialist dance educators and through developing partnerships with industry professionals and organisations.

- **Recognise and address regional and geographical inequalities in dance HE.**

One Dance UK calls on the Learning Directorate in Scotland, the Department for Education and Skills in Wales and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to review the limited provision of dance HE courses and address this through a clear plan to ensure that children and young people have access to dance as part of their education and can study dance at HE within their home nation, ensuring that there is a sustainable pipeline for homegrown talent. Provision for dance HE is currently a postcode lottery, and some young people are forced to move region or country to be able to pursue the study of dance at HE.

In order to broaden the provision of dance HE across the devolved nations and in more remote areas within England, we ask Office for Students, Universities

Wales, Scottish Funding Council and the Department for Economy in Northern Ireland to support with allocating further resources and funding to avoid access barriers.

- **Support the development of improved careers guidance around the rich and varied careers pathways available in dance and the creative industries.**

As highlighted in the recent House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee Report, *At risk: Our Creative Future*, the creative sector careers guidance provision within schools requires much improvement. One Dance UK supports the recommendation that “the Government should work with education leaders and industry bodies to promote the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company”⁽⁴⁾ in providing clear information about routes into careers within the creative sector.

One Dance UK is delighted to be a partner on *Discover! Creative Careers*, an industry-led programme that is working to ensure there is a large and more diverse intake of talent via a broader range of routes into the creative industries. The *Discover!* programme is funded by DCMS with additional support from Arts Council England, until 2025. We call upon DCMS to work to ensure this programme is sustainable in the longer term.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

ONE DANCE UK CALLS ON HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO:

- **Commit to providing high quality dance training and education for young people** through the inclusion of discrete dance courses, along with the appropriate financial support for such courses, understanding the subject specific nuances and demands on resources and staffing.
- **Develop effective recruitment strategies for dance programmes** by developing a long-term plan for targeted marketing and publicity. HE institutions should work with Heads of Faculties to understand the benefits of studying dance as part of their promotion strategy.
- **Be outward facing and recognise their role in the wider dance education and training landscape.**

It is vital that HE settings build partnerships with their local schools, colleges, and communities to support widening access for young people and develop strong networks and partnerships within dance education to bolster the pipeline of applications. A model of good practice in this area can be seen at Arts University Bournemouth who already work extensively to build strong relationships with schools and communities to promote the pathways for dance, including the provision of high quality CPD for their staff as well as for teachers working in schools and colleges⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Sharing best practice between universities and conservatoires will strengthen the voice of dance in HE, working together to secure the next generation of dance makers, educators, and managers.

We ask that HE settings build a two-way relationship with industry professionals to establish suitable work placements and industry links for young people, and to ensure that industry skill needs are being met within undergraduate courses.

ONE DANCE UK CALLS ON SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LEADERS TO:

- Recognise their role in laying the foundation in preparation for further study in dance, much the same as with any of the core subjects. Read previous recommendations for school and college leaders [here](#).
- Provide informed, up to date and relevant dance careers advice with the support of One Dance UK and *Discover! Creative Careers*. All students should be provided with opportunities to undertake work placements within arts organisations, watch live dance performances, and participate in dance activity from invited dance artists and companies who can also advise young people about career options in dance.
- Build and strengthen relationships with dance HE providers and dance organisations to expose students to quality dance activity and demonstrate the pathways into studying dance as part of a career.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

ONE DANCE UK CALLS ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS/CARERS TO:

- Proactively champion the value of dance education to school and college leaders and respectfully challenge their curriculum offer if dance is not included at all stages of education. One Dance UK encourages parents, carers and students to champion the positive effects of participating in dance through conversations with school and college staff as well as through social media.
- Write to their local MP to raise awareness of the declining provision for dance in HE in the UK and specifically within their region or devolved nation, highlighting that young people may be forced to move to a different part of the UK to be able to access provision.
- Seek out opportunities to be involved in dance activities through youth dance companies, community groups, community projects and through One Dance UK's programmes such as Young Creatives, Dance Ambassadors and the U.Dance framework.
- Share this report along with One Dance UK's previous dance education report *Everything We Loved About Dance Was Taken* with school, college and HE staff and amongst local and social media communities.



Dance student from Kingston University
by One Dance UK, Dani Bower



Dance students from Kingston University by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

AS THE NATIONAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION AND THE SUBJECT ASSOCIATION FOR DANCE IN SCHOOLS, ONE DANCE UK PROMISES TO:

- Continue to provide the support needed for a growing dance ecology and to amplify the voices of freelancers, dance companies, teachers and dance managers.
- Provide relevant and current information on pathways and careers in dance, including as a partner on the *Discover! Creative Careers* programme.
- Continue to provide evidence and resources for use by teachers, educators, and policy makers.
- Promote the benefits of dance for mental, physical and social wellbeing.
- Keep abreast of current funding and policy affecting children, young people and education.
- Gather accurate data from organisation surveys, exam boards entries and results.
- Share excellent practice in dance education and highlight the many success stories of our teacher members.
- Continue to proactively champion the importance of dance education within our schools, colleges, and higher education institutions across the UK.
- Relay information to the government directly, through our direct engagement with various government departments, by providing the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dance and the Children and Young People's Dance Programme Board, and through being a member of the Council for Subject Associations.
- Provide high quality and current continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities to specialist and non-specialist dance educators, including training with an advocacy focus.
- Continue to work closely with colleagues at Dance HE, to keep abreast of the picture in dance in higher education and ensure issues are represented and understood at the highest level.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Dance forms a staple part of popular culture in the UK. It is almost impossible to tune into mainstream prime time television without coming across dance content. Dance crazes sweep through social media and into day-to-day life. Dance content is featured in films and in adverts. It seems, in many ways, like dance has never been so popular. It is hard to believe then that it simultaneously finds itself – as an educational subject at least – in such a precarious position.

Dance is of course an engaging, enjoyable and uplifting form of entertainment – and rightly so! But beyond contributing to popular West End shows and weekly TV dance contests, dance serves an even more integral role in our society.

Regular involvement in dance can help to ensure that our children and young people are physically active, strong, and healthy, thus working to reduce the UK obesity figures and the burden on the NHS caused by obesity-related illnesses and the impact of inactivity. Taking part in dance can encourage connection with others, building a sense of community and teamwork, whilst developing important communication skills, which are so vital in all aspects of life. Positive mental health and wellbeing of participants of all ages is supported by involvement in dance and physical activity⁽²⁸⁾.

At times of challenge and uncertainty, the arts provide security and comfort, a creative outlet and a form of escapism. During the pandemic we saw only too well the need for creativity and

entertainment. As we move as a nation from a health crisis to a financial one, this need for connection and purpose grows stronger.

In a world where technology develops at an almost unimaginable rate and the Artificial Intelligence ‘of the future’ quickly becomes a present-day reality, creative jobs are perhaps the only ones that cannot be replaced by robots.

Dance has the power to support the development of wider skills such as creative responses critical thinking and problem-solving, which were highlighted in a recent report by Kingston University as being among the top ten core skills vital for a prosperous economy⁽¹³⁾.

Furthermore, the phenomenal growth of the creative industries, and their impact upon the UK economy is impossible to ignore. We are at a crucial moment in time when we need to be developing the future generation of dance talent which will feed into the continued growth of the creative industries. With this in mind, the reduction in provision of dance at HE level feels incredibly short sighted. How is the UK to develop the next generation of performers, choreographers, teachers, dance scientists and creatives if the education and training pipeline is broken, disjointed or non-existent for some young people? We are a country that prides itself on its vibrant and diverse creative sector, but without immediate support and increased provision, the creative sector is under threat of losing the talent pipeline vital to its continued growth.

It is utterly baffling and nonsensical that dance education continues to face such challenge and marginalisation. We need an expanded cohort of motivated and engaged teachers and educators to inspire the next generation of dance talent and to pass on their skills, knowledge and experience. The reality is, however, that teaching dance in HE continues to be challenging. An alarming 51% of survey respondents said that they were actively looking for other work outside of dance HE. If the situation does not improve, we run the risk of losing the skilful expert teachers needed to support and develop knowledgeable well-rounded dance graduates, ready for employment within the creative arts. This is further exacerbated by the loss of Post Graduate Certificate of Education in Dance courses, which are crucial in ensuring dance teachers qualify with exceptional specialist subject knowledge alongside excellent standards in teaching and learning. The overhaul of delivery of Initial Teacher Training will no doubt have a major impact on dance specialism, and in turn on standards. The cycle of decline in dance education could very easily continue or even worsen.

One Dance UK urges that funding for dance and performing arts in HE be increased and consistently and evenly distributed across all HE settings. The choice to study dance throughout primary, secondary and further education and onto HE, should not be a postcode lottery, with pockets of England and most areas within the devolved nations experiencing limited or even no provision.

This research highlights the grave concerns of educators working in the dance HE sector, which sit in a wider context of incremental damage caused to the dance education landscape by current educational policy, priorities and funding practices. One Dance UK urges that our key recommendation to safeguard the future talent pipeline for dance in dance education are considered with urgency. The time to act is now. It is more important than ever for the dance ecology to stand together in championing its importance. We have a generation of young people with the potential to be the dance workforce of the future who simply can’t afford for us to wait.

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