

# Considering Difference

## Making Dance Accessible: An Introduction

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### WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This resource is aimed at those who work in, manage, or facilitate practice within dance spaces and venues.

### WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE ABOUT?

This resource brings awareness to access barriers in dance spaces, and suggests actions that promote independence and inclusion.

We understand that one resource cannot address every access requirement, dance genre, or context in which people dance, but hope that these considerations are broad enough to apply to a wide variety of circumstances.



**“Creating a space for people to consider differences in dance is vital to enabling artists to thrive who have hidden talents. There are rich offerings that people can provide to enhance creativity within the arts and provide interesting solutions for our industry.”**

Charlotte Edmonds - Co-founder, Move Beyond Words

**“It’s so important that people aren’t left behind... It’s important that we consider differences because we are all different, and we should all have the opportunity to be celebrated through art.”**

Elizabeth Arifien - Co-founder, Move Beyond Words

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO BE CONSIDERING DIFFERENCE?

Go to <https://bit.ly/consideringdifferencesvideos> or scan the QR code to hear why those in dance think it is important for us to be considering difference.



Dance can provide an equitable means of creative expression and empowerment. We believe that spaces where dancing takes place have a responsibility to ensure that anybody who wants to access dance, can.

One Dance UK reviewed resources about access available to the UK dance sector. A gap was identified in policy and practical guidance for creating accessible dance spaces, and limited consideration of the social model of disability (which we describe below).

This highlighted the need to create a resource that offers considerations to managers and users of dance spaces, to begin developing best practice guidelines and industry standards.

28 dance professionals with a lived experience of accessible and inclusive dance practice have informed this resource. Below are some of the reasons why they think it is important that we consider difference in dance.

**“To me, inclusion is about being able to show up fully as yourself and being able to relate to the experience that you are a part of. Dance is such a great way to celebrate our uniqueness, tell our stories, and connect. The power of dance and its impact is huge, and I really believe that inclusive dance practice is a fundamental part of dance becoming more representative and accessible to everyone.”**

Helen McLaughlin - Dance artist and One Dance UK Dance Ambassador

**“I believe that everyone in dance should be equal.”**

Mark Smith - Founder and Artistic Director, Deaf Men Dancing

### A BRIEF BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Often, the suitability of community, recreational, amateur, and professional dance environments are overlooked for many who engage.

Fortunately, there are organisations – many of whom have contributed to this project – who actively advocate for dance to be inclusive and who promote positive change in our sector.

In this resource, the term ‘difference’ refers (but is not limited) to many individual subjective experiences of our:

- physicality
- mental health
- learning preferences
- age
- gender
- caring responsibilities
- religion
- economic status
- or any combination of these

A single definition of ‘difference’ has potential to cause exclusion and division, creating a duality between that which is or isn’t ‘normal’. Everybody will experience and understand difference...differently – and that’s ok!

### WHY THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY?

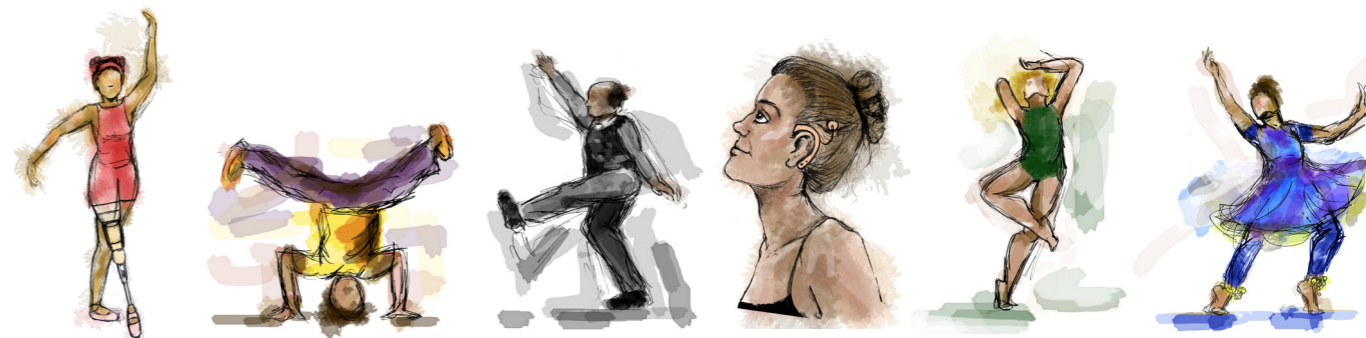
The social model of disability proposes that a person is not disabled by any impairment, but rather by physical and attitudinal barriers in society. Often, the lack of access adjustments is a key disabling feature.

This positive model identifies the causes of exclusion and inequality and proposes solutions.

This resource uses the social model to help frame our understanding of difference and inform how we approach access in dance spaces.

**“Ask yourself, who is not being invited into your dance space? – And invite them.”**

**Mark Brew – Mark Brew Dance Company**



### SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS - PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO YOUR DANCE VENUE OR SPACE

Our conversations and research revealed what our contributors considered to be some of the biggest barriers to accessing dance.

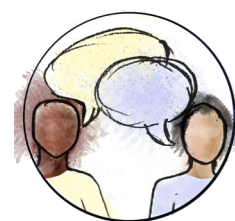
We have transformed these findings into a reference checklist below, to help you evaluate your level of access to and through your dance space.

#### IMAGINE THE PEOPLE JOINING YOUR DANCE SPACE – WHAT MIGHT THEY NEED?

Is there a cost implication for them to take part or travel? What space is available to those with a guardian or carer? Will the person have what they need to support their physical and mental health needs? Will the person have access to a space where they can comfortably use the toilet, get changed, and rest? Does the timing work for your participants - does your class coincide with a religious holiday or allow for caring responsibilities?

**Use this table to help you consider their experience.**

### WHERE CAN WE START?



#### Talk more openly about the complex interactions that impact our dance spaces

Access needs are intersectional and layered. Enabling access to dance doesn’t begin in the studio or Zoom room, at the entrance to the building, or on somebody’s journey to the dance space. It begins by re-evaluating how we approach access to dance in the first place. We should encourage openminded conversation at ground, leadership, and board level, through various lenses.



#### Listen to our communities

Learning about the access experiences and needs of those we serve will allow us to overcome disabling barriers within dance spaces, where creative, artistic, and conceptual work comes to life.



#### Challenge ourselves

People make spaces. Think - how are we, the dance people in the dance place, working together to foster a welcoming environment? Inclusion can innovate!



#### Invest greater time, resources, and research

Committing to growing our knowledge and confidence will help us to better understand and embrace the differences in our dance communities. Venues and other stakeholders working together to action ideas would promote positive change in accommodating difference.

ACCESS BARRIER	WHAT THE SECTOR SAID	CONSIDERATIONS
Arrival at the dance space	<p>“Disabled artists who arrive in an inaccessible dance space have just had to get on an inaccessible bus or tube... they’ve probably been stared at or commented on. You’re making your way in a highly normative world, and then you arrive at an inaccessible dance space...”</p> <p>We know that the world isn’t accessible, so are we doing everything that we can to make this space accessible?”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By what means and manner are people getting to your dance space?</li> <li>• Are they likely to have safe and assistive transport?</li> <li>• Are there any obstacles that may hinder their arrival to and access of your space?</li> <li>• Might a user need assistance to enter the building?</li> <li>• How are staff addressing the needs of the dancer before they arrive? Do you offer a pre-class conversation or questionnaire?</li> </ul>
Use of facilities	<p>“What fascinates me is creating spaces of ownership, so that the way a space is set up immediately says, you belong here... this space is for you”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are lighting and sound controls accessible? Can they be adjusted to suit the needs of the user?</li> <li>• Do your changing/rest spaces accommodate all users relative to functionality and privacy?</li> <li>• Do you have a dedicated safe space or calm area?</li> <li>• Does your space have rules regarding flooring? If so, who might this impact?</li> <li>• Will users know who to contact if they need building assistance?</li> </ul>

## One Dance UK Information Sheet

Digital engagement	"Digital, virtual teaching means that people don't necessarily need to have access to the space in order to be able to access the work. So, it can potentially be a much more accessible way of enabling dance to happen".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before visiting your physical space, can users go online to learn more about it, and the staff?</li> <li>• How user friendly is the online experience? Do you use any web accessibility tools? Are photographs, virtual tours, or audio descriptions of your space available?</li> <li>• Does your online offering work asynchronously with your in-person delivery?</li> <li>• Are you reviewing your web and online access regularly? There are plenty of platforms that will give audits.</li> <li>• If the user does not have digital access, how are they being reached?</li> </ul>
Communication and interaction	"When we think about access, we automatically think of buildings and ramps and what's needed to physically be there. Yet actually, if your language is limited then that person can't access it anyway".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you using inclusive language? How open is your vocabulary?</li> <li>• Can staff communicate, translate, or demonstrate beyond the use of spoken English? E.g., other languages, or non-verbal/ non-written ways such as British Sign Language (BSL), Sign Supported English (SSE), Makaton, or by using assistive technologies?</li> <li>• Are you asking questions? Worrying about saying the wrong thing can become restrictive and inhibit communication. Your intention matters more than your words.</li> <li>• Don't worry if you're not a specialist - the specialist is the person themselves.</li> <li>• Where can you build in moments and opportunities for feedback?</li> </ul>
CPD and Training	"For a space to be accessible, people need to know how to invite people into their space... we need to create resources and platforms that [the dance sector] can engage with, to learn more about their diverse audiences".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you considered the level of training that people facilitating the space have had to accommodate a range of individual needs?</li> <li>• What training would be most beneficial for you and your space?</li> </ul>



This resource can also be found on the One Dance UK website, where it is available in an easy-read format and a web version that is screen-reader compatible and supported by an accessibility plug-in.

Go to <https://bit.ly/consideringdifferences> or scan the QR code.

Please also see our website for a full list of references and resources.



### One Dance UK thanks the following contributors who gave valuable time and insight to support the Considering Difference project:

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