

Advancing Safer Dance: Progress, Gaps, and the Path Forward

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Safeguarding has moved from the periphery to the centre of the UK dance sector. Over the past decade, sector-wide conversations have highlighted the urgent need to protect dancers and support their wellbeing. Earlier this year, in collaboration with One Dance UK and NIDMS, we conducted the second national survey of safeguarding and abuse prevention. The results show we are making real strides, but they also reveal where we must focus our energy next.

The Good News: Policies and Training are Taking Root

Most of the 71 dance organisations who participated in the survey now have formal safeguarding policies and behaviour codes in place. Our survey found strong implementation in:

- **Risk Management:** Organisations are now routinely assessing risks for travel, touring, and overnight stays.
- **Widespread Training:** Almost all respondents (95.8%) have received safeguarding training, reflecting a high level of professional commitment across the sector.

The Reality: Complex Challenges in the Studio

Despite these systems, dance teachers are managing complex issues that fall into three broad categories:

1. **Internal Dynamics:** Managing power imbalances, peer bullying, and discrimination.
2. **Mental Health:** Addressing eating disorders, anxiety, and self-harm, which are often exacerbated by high-performance pressures.
3. **External Risks:** Dealing with concerns that follow the student into the studio, such as parental pressure or online risks.

The "So What" for Teachers: Closing the Reporting Gap

The most striking finding was a significant gap: across 50 organisations, 136 issues were raised, but only 38 were formally reported. Many teachers felt concerns did not meet the "threshold" for a formal report.

What does this mean for your practice?

- **Capture the Ripples, Prevent the Wave:** A "lower-level" concern may be part of a larger pattern that might otherwise get missed. Even if an incident doesn't feel "serious enough" for a formal external report, it should be documented internally.
- **Recognise Mental Health as Safeguarding:** Anxiety or low self-esteem in high-performance environments are not just "performance issues"; they are wellbeing concerns that require a robust support system.
- **Build Confidence in Safeguarding Procedures:** Policies only work if staff feel safe and supported when they raise a concern. We must ensure that reporting is seen as a proactive act of care, not an administrative burden or an admission of failure.

Safeguarding in dance is more than a policy on a website; it is a culture of safety that happens every time a teacher notices a change in a student's behaviour and chooses to act.