

Boys Dance Too! – A new initiative for male-identifying dancers



Outside, the February skies are grey, but in a studio at The Mayflower Theatre in Southampton, there is an energy that feels like a bright summer day. As a soundtrack of hip hop vibes fills the room, 25 boys and young men are getting to grips with a new routine, stretching their skills and enjoying the opportunity to learn something new.

"In dance variety does matter. You can definitely be stronger in one style, but you need to have range."

This day of workshops (along with other days at Central School of Ballet in London and Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds) is part of a new initiative led by five leading dance higher education institutions. **Boys Dance Too!** aims at supporting young male-identifying and non-binary dancers to discover higher education training in dance, and is organised by Central School of Ballet, London Contemporary Dance School, London Studio Centre, Northern School of Contemporary Dance and Trinity Laban.

For some of the young dancers attending, this is their first time trying different styles, and for others, a chance to really connect with like-minded peers. As one parent says at a session at NCDS in Leeds:

“It helps show them that there are other people just like them, that enjoy the same things as they do. My son constantly worries about how other boys see him at school, and it’s nice for him to be himself on days like today.”

This pilot project created space for young dancers to explore dance further, and to understand the career opportunities that dance at higher education can offer. It focused on pathways into dance training, building aspiration, awareness and confidence in its participants. The project was delivered across three days during the February half-term, with the five HE institutions facilitating a series of practical sessions in ballet, contemporary, street dance styles, improvisation and choreography. Participants and their parents and carers met expert male identifying facilitators and learnt more about routes into dance in Higher Education including the National CAT Schemes and other training options.

One participant said:

“Obviously dance is not a ‘mainstream’ career and it’s very nice to see how dance can actually be something to progress into.”

The **Boys Dance Too!** project also tackled some of the issues around barriers to participation for young male-identifying dancers. The organisers provided a toolkit of resources for young people and their parents to guide them through the process of applying to higher education; to thinking about career pathways, and to sources of funding and support to attend open days, and longer term, to study for a dance degree.

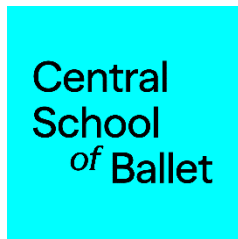


“It is impossible to put into the words the importance of the availability and opportunity for the boys to see each other and meet each other dancing, without any fear of isolation or ridicule even if those fears are unfounded.”

The challenges faced with male-identifying recruitment in HE institutions form part of a wider decline in school arts engagement among 11–15-year-olds.

As Higher Education institutions delivering courses in dance, the project leaders for **Boys Dance Too!** recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that pathways into dance are created for all young people. It is therefore crucial that dance providers seek to nurture the training progression necessary for young male-identifying dancers to continue dancing and aspire to a career in dance if they so wish.

Following the evaluation of the pilot, the partner institutions are seeking to further develop this project in the future.



TRINITY LABAN



Project Partners:

Central School of Ballet <https://www.centralschoolofballet.co.uk/>

London Contemporary Dance School <https://theplace.org.uk/>

London Studio Centre <https://www.londonstudiocentre.org/>

Northern School of Contemporary Dance <https://www.nscd.ac.uk/>

Trinity Laban <https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/>