

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND (SOUTH WEST) DANCE

Arts Council England's response, June 2019:

We're grateful to Nick Sweeting for this piece of work. It is intended to help Arts Council England, South West in our internal discussions about what an appropriate future level of ambition for dance in the south west should look like.

Nick's key recommendation – the development of a new south west strategic network for dance – is welcome, and we will now give some thought to how this might best be achieved.

To this end, we have invited Julien Boast, CEO and creative director of Hall for Cornwall, to chair a consultative group which will take this work forward.

Final report – submitted 27 July 2018

CONSIDERING NEW FUTURES FOR DANCE IN THE SOUTH WEST

CONSULTANCY BRIEF

Through this consultancy I have been tasked with presenting recommendations that would support a legitimate and achievable future level of ambition for the dance sector in the South West.

Particular areas I was asked to look at to inform those recommendations included – the dance offer in other places; the development of artist led companies elsewhere in England; touring and barriers to touring faced by South West organisations; and identifying potential partners in local government and higher education.

To respond to the brief, assess the current climate and shape the recommendations I have met and corresponded with a wide range of organisations and individuals throughout the South West and further afield. I have attached a list of those in Appendix 1.

INTRODUCTION

The dance sector in the South West is at a tipping point. It is at a point where a rigorous look at where it is and where it could go would allow the sector to increase its profile, make new strategic connections, forge new partnerships and build on its core strengths. A failure to do so will see a massive missed opportunity and the potential disintegration of the region's support networks and key development opportunities.

A disparity in perception of where dance sits at this moment in time and a fracture between the sector and funding/strategic organisations have put the sector in a weak position. However, my view is that there exist a number of key strengths that offer the foundation and opportunity for catalysing significant change. The sector is not in need of a significant overhaul, but it should be empowered and it needs to take on that challenge. It is time to reflect on and celebrate successes and not to be dissuaded from the challenges ahead by barriers and things that aren't happening.

BACKGROUND

The breadth of the dance offer in the South West is wide and unique: from world class artists based in and visiting the region to a strong social dance offer addressing inclusion, ageing and isolation; ambitious land based performance to significant initiatives aimed at young males; ground breaking rural touring projects to an array of emerging artists and companies spanning the whole range of what dance is.

The sector is also faced with particular challenges, many rooted in historical decisions within the sector and compounded by the geography of the region, which presents a particular challenge to communication and collaboration, with major impacts on both time and money.

It is a unique region, culturally, geographically and historically, and while vital lessons can be learnt from the experiences of other regions it is of paramount importance that we don't try to simply impose those learnings on the South West.

Trying to set a level of ambition would depend, to some extent, on future levels of funding, both public and other. In the current funding climate it would be remiss to expect, or even push for, a significant uplift in Arts Council funding. However, it would also be a missed opportunity not to identify areas in which additional strategic and core funding, would have a significant impact. With this in mind I have made recommendations in areas that would benefit from new funding and others where that requirement is not so significant.

I have divided the body of the report into a number of key strands that emerged during the consultancy period. They are, by no means, a definitive, all encompassing study of the sector. They are, however, strands that are evident as significant for the sector at this moment in time. They reflect a wide range of issues from Perception and Leadership to Artist Development and Touring. There are several areas where the strands overlap and intersect. However, these are, in the main, clear and I felt that, by highlighting particular strands, it gives us a structure to work from. Within each strand I have detailed a number of recommendations and pathways forward. I have condensed and focussed these in the final section – A WAY FORWARD, which details some overarching recommendations and opportunities.

KEY STRANDS

PERCEPTION/VISIBILITY

The following statement sat within the Brief Document for this piece of work - “At the heart of the issue is the sector’s perceived marginality in the south west. It hasn’t yet found a substantive role at the heart of place-making agendas; it would benefit from more effective leadership; it needs to raise its profile with potential stakeholders and demonstrate greater relevance to their agendas, and it needs to diversify its business modelling in order to drive greater resilience.”

There is currently a big disconnect between the national and the regional perception of the dance sector in the South West, as well as a differential between the regional perception of what is happening and what is actually going on on the ground. The National perception of the South West Dance sector is positive. People talk widely of: the diverse dance offer, with some real highlights including Mark Bruce Company, James Wilton and Zoie Logic Dance; generous and democratic working; and agencies excelling at their specialisms. The perception within the region is varied but is less positive and energetic. As so often happens, people both within and outside the sector are more prone to analysing barriers and problems than celebrating successes.

A large part of this disparity in perception is due to a lack of visibility for dance in the region, both within the arts sector and with a wider community of stakeholders and the public. There is little doubt that the vibrancy and energy within the dance sector itself has not found a way of effectively communicating a broader positive message. This in turn has a negative impact on engaging stakeholders, new partners and the public.

Certain factors contribute to this lack of visibility. The sector is lacking high level advocates and campaigners. Apart from Mark Bruce there are no “stars of the sector” based in the region and high profile visiting companies do not have a sustained impact over time, often visiting with their own agendas and rarely connecting with local artists and communities. What the sector does have is a network of well connected, hard working and inventive individuals and organisations. The focus for many of these, in times of financial stretch, is on raising funds and delivering projects. They have little time and resource for networking and profile raising. To support them and fill a current void there is a need for a group of prominent advocates – from within the sector (eg Mike Ockwell or Sir Christopher Bruce) or further afield (politics, business and the wider cultural sector) to help champion dance consistently at a high level.

Another contributing factor is the way that dance presents itself within multi artform sector projects. Across both projects and within venues they have failed to elevate their profile.

A third factor in this lack of visibility is a disconnect between the sector and Arts Council South West. There is a sense that the two rarely operate in tandem and do not share the same ambitions (see below). For example, there is a strong feeling that the sector is not “invited to the table” at key significant events, several of which have been co-ordinated by ACE. For example, during my conversations reference was made to stakeholder events/visits to both Southampton and Plymouth where key dance leaders/practitioners were not invited.

The sector also needs to embrace the Arts Council within its mission to raise its profile and alter perceptions. For example, Pavilion Dance South West's current social media campaign – South West Dancing – aimed specifically at raising the profile of dance with the general public, has been developed independently by them. On one level this is a positive step to raise the profile of dance but it also feels like a missed opportunity to partner with ACE to further the campaign's reach throughout the region and across artform connections.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Work with the sector to identify high profile advocates and campaigners and support/mentor them to make an impact in strategically important areas.
- Create a space for constructive dialogue between the Arts Council, at all levels, and the sector (see below)
- Sector to embrace ACE as a partner within its mission to raise profile.

ROLE OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

Arts Council England funds four South West based National Portfolio Organisations under its dance portfolio – Pavilion Dance South West; Swindon Dance; Black Bird/Red Rose Productions (Mark Bruce Company) and Zoie Logic Dance. Additionally, there are also thirteen organisations that have a dance remit within their activities – these range from Activate and Take Art to The Barbican in Plymouth and MAYK in Bristol.

ACE also funds a range of dance activity through Grants for the Arts. Success rates for sub £15,000 applications and National Activities are good, but less successful in the over £15,000 bracket. One of the main reasons for this is the view that often too much activity is put into those applications – making work, touring and organisational development.

Against the backdrop of this funding commitment there is a feeling of disconnect between the sector and the Arts Council. There doesn't seem to be a clear dialogue across the whole. On certain levels ACE and the wider sector seem quite separate. This seems to be a two-way process: with Arts Council perceiving a lack of clear leadership and engagement from the sector in its place making agenda and other key priorities; and the sector feeling that they are not included in key strategic ACE agendas. For example, the sector's commitment to the "eradication of the post code lottery" and reaching across the rurally dominated region contrasting with the Arts Council's Place Making agenda.

Artists and companies talk positively about the role of the Arts Council in supporting their development – "insightful, helpful, nurturing". However, reflecting on observations from artists and producers both within and outside the region, the feeling is that there is an opportunity for the Arts Council to be more joined up with artists across all levels. In other regions there seem to be more pathways to engaging with, a variety of people within ACE – eg Area Directors and Strategic Touring personnel. There is a clear call from artists within the South West for ACE to engage more with the independent sector.

There is a sense that ACE South West is focussed on regional priorities and not engaged with the national conversation. The disconnect emerges in certain areas of ACE overarching strategy on a regional and national level – eg support for regional hubs – there seems to be a disconnect between the ACE Corporate Plan for Dance (which supports an evenly distributed infrastructure) and the current policy within the South West (which has seen intermittent funding of some of the regional hubs).

What does success look like for the respective parties – national office, ACE South West and the regional dance community? Is the amount of NPOs the right benchmark or is the quality of the quiet, steady life affirming community and social dance work. There needs to be a clarity around this so that ACE and the sector can work in partnership towards shared goals. What are the honest opinions around the balance of professional development and support for socially engaged dance? Given that dance is not clearly represented at Area Council and is not part of current regional priorities, where does dance sit within ACE South West's strategic planning? What do both "sides" feel the barriers are to a more open dialogue? There is a unique opportunity now for ACE and the sector to work together to move the dance agenda forward. Dance is held in many places and the conversation needs to reflect that.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Create a clear space for constructive dialogue between the Arts Council, at all levels, and the sector.
- Include Arts Council personnel as an integral part of the Regional Dance Network (see below)

OTHER STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS

One of the criticisms aimed at the dance sector in the South West is its relative inability to engage with key stakeholders, to be at the table when key strategic partnerships are being forged. This in turn has a negative effect on both profile and finance, and is, to some extent, self perpetuating.

Looking more closely at the examples across the region it is obvious that this is a varied picture. This variation is often seen within the same locality and organisation. For example: Pavilion Dance South West, who have forged strong relationships with Bournemouth City Council and both the local universities – Bournemouth University and the Arts University of Bournemouth. They are currently a key part of a bid to government led by King's College, with Bournemouth Borough Council, Arts University Bournemouth and Activate, looking at how to use 5G capability to use XR to research the impact on audience interaction. On the other hand, they (PDSW) have been unable to join the regional LEP, in a way that DanceXchange (for example) has done in Birmingham. This diminishes their wider influence and, with it, the wider profile of dance.

Another example of this varied picture is in Plymouth. On one level Plymouth Dance and the dance sector have a good relationship with Plymouth City Council and other stakeholders like Plymouth University. The Council are very positive about the significant

contribution of dance across multiple agendas – health and well-being; youth engagement; skills training and new audiences. However, this has not led to a consistent or joined up partnership at local/regional level. Plymouth Dance is viewed as playing a key strategic role without which a real void would exist, but yet it is only supported by the Council on a project commissioning basis. The Theatre Royal and The Barbican, both of whom carry a dance remit, have a firmer historic annual funding relationship with the Council.

Across the region there are examples of ongoing positive connections with wider stakeholders – eg Dance Republic and Cornwall County Council; James Wilton and Plymouth Culture; relationships with some of the key regional universities – eg Falmouth University, University of West England and the Arts University of Bournemouth; Mark Bruce’s resourcing for his new studio space. However, there is little doubt that there is scope for much more engagement between the dance sector, encompassing everything from high level performance to a broad social dance programme, and key stakeholders on a regional and national level.

Recommendations

- Sector wide engagement with this as an important issue.
- ACE/sector joint thinking and strategic planning to maximise impact in this area

LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE SECTOR and SUPPORT/DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The leadership of, and support infrastructure for, the dance sector in the South West is a distributed model that reflects the geographical spread of the region. As referenced earlier in the report there are few, if any, high profile individuals and organisations who dominate the field and are prominent within the overarching cultural sector.

Dance leadership in the South West is predominantly female led and non patriarchal. It models a collaborative, pastoral, nurturing way of working. It has produced a sector that reflects that and is praised on a national level for supporting artists in a non competitive collaborative way which has allowed them to draw on a breadth of expertise from a range of organisations who have developed individual specialisms. It nurtures initiatives across the region – sharing information, expertise and resources,

The support and development network for dance in the South West is centred on Pavilion Dance South West – the National Dance Development Organisation for the South West. This central role is supported by a distributed network model of dance and dance engaged organisations. These partner organisations/hubs include – Activate, Bath Dance, Dance in Devon, Plymouth Dance, Swindon Dance, Take Art, Theatre Bristol and Hall for Cornwall.

PDSW plays the lead role in this network and the regional and national view of PDSW is very positive – nurturing, collaborative, supportive. In many ways they set the tone and influence priorities throughout the region but they can’t deliver this agenda without regional partners.

PDSW plays a very different role to other National Dance Development Organisations – they have a broad remit and, since moving into their own building in Bournemouth, have to balance their commitment to developing work there with the regional dance development brief. Dance East, for example, has been able to concentrate on their building not the broader remit of dance in the East of England, taking a decision to curtail the wider Dance East offer and concentrate on the Jerwood Dance House. Anthony Baker at Dance City in the North East also has a purpose built building, which is very much the focus of their work. Yorkshire Dance have adopted a model which, in addition to the development work from their hub in Leeds, focuses on one of their four regional hubs at a time.

The geographical diversity and predominantly rural disparity of the region present major challenges when seeking solutions as to how best to sustain the support network and therefore dance development across the region. These challenges are compounded by the location of Pavilion Dance South West in the south east of the region. There are opportunities that being in Bournemouth opens up, including partnerships with the two universities and the tech expertise there. However, the distances across the region and the transport infrastructure stretch connectivity to breaking point and with their commitment to supporting dance across the largest region in England PDSW need to rely on the dissipated model of hubs above.

Over the last few years the region has seen a diminished role for County Dance Agencies – eg The Works being subsumed into Hall for Cornwall, yet with no designated dance KPIs within its ACE agreement. The pattern that has emerged from that is fractured, with a differential support and coverage across the region. As well as supporting the lead work of PDSW the partner hubs, in turn, have their own priorities and hold expertise within their own specialisms – eg Inclusion – Sue Smith at Dance in Devon and Adam Benjamin; Rural Engagement – Take Art; Youth Dance – Plymouth Dance, Rise in Bristol and Hants Youth Dance Company. These are widely acknowledged as a strength – with opportunities for each to learn from others and to draw on/share that expertise.

Swindon Dance, the other non performance NPO in the South West Dance portfolio, has a more focused role around talent and professional development, positioning itself as a development hothouse and providing a clear pathway from initial engagement through its CAT scheme and then on to conservatoires. It does this very well, yet needs to broaden its remit from this fairly narrow professional development and training focus. The creation of PDSW, some would say at the expense of Swindon Dance, was seen by many as a short sighted manoeuvre – lack of foresight and envisioning of consequences.

One of its priorities should be linking with the group of key strategic organisations across the north of the region – Theatre Bristol, Bath Dance and Strike a Light - to address certain immediate strategic issues and introduce more consistent shared thinking and action: how they all engage more widely with the wider cultural sector; presenting a fuller public performance programme; and opportunities for artists to return to the region.

A cluster of three organisations are key to nurturing and supporting dance within the south west of the region – the Peninsular. They are Hall for Cornwall (who assumed a dance brief when HforC and The Works merged); Plymouth Dance and Dance in Devon. Each of these

organisations has a distinct identity and has developed different expertise, but there is a strong history of collaboration between the three. Intermittent recent funding for Plymouth Dance and Dance in Devon has seen a re-evaluation of their business models and the decision to work more closely and join resources in an initiative called Peninsula Dance Partnership. It is much too early to see how this collaboration will evolve. Its initial aim is to deliver social impact dance projects across Cornwall, Plymouth and Devon. Individual activities will continue and it will be interesting and important to monitor both the work under the joint initiative and other impacts on areas such as dance profile, professional development and performance.

Of the other areas in the region, multi art form organisations Activate and Take Art take the lead in Dorset and Somerset respectively. They both provide strong leadership with particular interests and strengths in site/land based work and rural engagement. However there is currently no similar provision in Wiltshire, Hampshire or the Isle of Wight. Given the relative geographical proximity it falls to PDSW to lead in these areas

To support dialogue and learning across the region PDSW want to continue a series of Action Groups – eg Health and Wellbeing; Professional Development; Children and Young People – connecting, networking and reporting back to local areas and communities, sharing information and knowledge – eg The Health and Wellbeing group learning about Dance in Devon’s funding from an alcohol related charity.

Against this background, of multiple partner organisations and a complex set of areas of interest, combined with a call from artists to meet and connect with people, how does PDSW maintain a strong network across the region while maintaining a building and its associated programme? It is clear that PDSW cannot abandon its lead regional role, especially in light of a partner network that, in parts, is really struggling due to a lack of consistent support and, in some cases, an inability to make a wider impact.

At the same time its building base and the opportunities it offers to artists and the wider public in Bournemouth is a key focus. Many people still question its geographical positioning but to seek to move it would not, I believe, be realistic. PDSW have embraced their location and the foundations are there for – engaging with local initiatives such as Dancing Along the South Coast and Arts by the Sea Festival; forging new partnerships in Bournemouth and Poole placing it at the centre of dance and technology; and reaching out to support development in adjacent areas such as Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight.

Maintaining the balance needed to enable it to thrive on a local and regional level will require PDSW to empower and devolve its partner network, taking the opportunity to work with existing partners while evolving a new diverse leadership in the region. I recommend the establishment of a Strategic Network that embraces the current partner hubs as well as representatives of the Arts Council and other key organisations (eg Dance NPOs, HE/FE establishments, venues and independent artists). This network would then be tasked with maintaining strategic dialogue with ACE as well as developing new partnerships and supporting regional initiatives. Given the communication barriers presented by the geography of the region I would recommend that the Network engages with the use of

digital technology to enable easy engagement and conversation right from the beginning – regular yet swift meetings to maintain connections!

Recommendations/Opportunities

- Strengthen and formalise the regional network of dance development organisations
 - establishing a Strategic Network. This network would, in dialogue with ACE, establish a series of key regional wide priorities while at the same time supporting and growing the expertise developed by individual partners.
- One of the priorities of this Network should be to engage with the wider arts sector - venues, strategic partners and key stakeholders.
- Sector and ACE to explore a wider role for Swindon Dance
- ACE to engage with Dance in Devon, Plymouth Dance and Hall for Cornwall to discuss their relative positions in light of recent funding decisions and their current joint initiative – Peninsular Dance Partnership.

BRISTOL

Geographically and historically Bristol plays a key role within the wider cultural sector in the South West. Over the last ten to fifteen years a series of historical issues, strategic decisions and certain anomalies have led to a denuded dance infrastructure within the city, without a clear strategy for dance. As the Director of one National Dance Development Organisation said “Bristol has been an unbelievable fail over the last decade”, linking the failure to the demise of the Arnolfini and the lack of alternative spaces to nurture, support and present high level dance.

Much of the debate around support for dance within the city has centred on the call for a dedicated dance space, although the greater issue seems to be the feeling from within the dance community that no one is flying their flag. This has led to a self perpetuating downward spiral that has deeply affected the moral of the dance community within the city, with the knock on effect of a lack of vibrancy and opportunity.

The recent role of Dance Futures Advocate, hosted by Theatre Bristol and funded through a partnership between TB, Pavilion Dance South West, Tobacco Factory Theatres, Circomedia and Bristol Council has begun to address this. It is a development role with a broader remit than simply supporting individual artists. Backed by a steering group of venues and artists the role is tasked with connecting individuals and organisations – mining the cross-art connections with organisations such as MAYK, In Between Times and Trinity, and increasing buy in from a wider constituency of organisations throughout the city from Bristol Old Vic to Watershed to Knowle West Media Centre and University of West England.

Recent programming of Ballet Black, Ballet Boyz and Hofesh Schechter by Bristol Old Vic as well as the development of high profile projects by artists such as Dan Canham and Lea Anderson are indicators of what is possible within the city. However, the challenges that still face artists such as Seeta Patel, the lack of venue and Festival commissioning and development opportunities, and the non emergence of high level advocates/champions are just some of the problems that still face the sector in Bristol.

There is little doubt that a vibrant dance community within Bristol would impact positively throughout the region. The profile and resourcing that a more connected, engaged and focussed dance offer brings would add a high profile focus for regional, national and international work. Bristol's dance offer is really broad – from Lea Anderson's "Trying It On" for "Museums at Night" in Bristol Museum to the development of Lisa Mae's Thomas' VR, dance and science research project. These and a host of other projects are broadening people's understanding of dance and offering opportunities for making new connections within the city, regionally and nationally.

To support the galvanising of the dance community in Bristol they may well look further afield for examples of sector engagement focusing and energising the sector. One prime example of this regionally is the Birmingham Dance Network – a support network for independent dance artists, choreographers and teachers set up in 2013 by three dance artists. Working in partnership with Theatre Bristol and the Dance Futures Advocate the sector could look at trialling a similar model, potentially expanding the constituency of the network to embrace producers and organisations. In the spirit of self organisation and responsibility this may best be led by artists and producers themselves, supported through the provision of space and other resources by venues and organisations, and potentially hosted by Theatre Bristol.

When looking at ways forward it is unrealistic to look at funnelling large amounts of funds into a dedicated dance space but it should certainly be a priority to support conversations with venues in Bristol. In the work that Ruth Hecht has started as the Dance Futures Advocate she has garnered positive noises from Arnolfini about the aim to reclaim the theatre space for performance and there are encouraging signs from a range of venues and festivals around dance programming. The challenge is to evolve a coherent and consistent level of programming across the city.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

(with the personal caveat of a potential clash of interest as I am also Chair of Theatre Bristol):

- Support the continued role of the Dance Futures Advocate in partnership with Theatre Bristol, PDSW and Bristol Council. Widen the remit to more fully embrace diversity as a priority.
- Pilot a network for artists/producers/venues and stakeholders along the lines of the Birmingham Dance Network.
- Engage in dialogue with the Dance Advocate, Arnolfini and other core Bristol venues about dance programming.

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCER SUPPORT

On a regional and national level people talk positively about the ability of artists within the South West to access any support network in the region at any stage – leading to different artists emerging than maybe would have emerged elsewhere. There were frequent references to the sector being more collaborative and generous with artists than elsewhere

In the country, and this is reflected in strategic working. Other regions tend to be more exclusive around artists, more competitive.

Pavilion Dance South West and their partner dance organisations have supported a wide range of companies and individual artists over the last decade. For example: Richard Chapel (nurtured by Plymouth Dance; Dance in Devon; Swindon Dance and PDSW); Daniel Martin (Bath Dance and Swindon Dance). Zoie Logic and others talk enthusiastically about support from The Point in Eastleigh and the growing networks within Southampton and along the South Coast; and James Wilton also enthuses about cross region support, from Barbican Theatre, Plymouth Culture and Swindon Dance. At the same time artists such as Dan Canham have successfully straddled artforms and engaged with partners from both dance and theatre including Bristol Ferment and PDSW.

However, this is not a universal experience within the region and is an area to address, particularly for more experienced artists that are not quite at NPO level. Seeta Patel, for example, having had excellent support in the earlier stages of her career, is finding it difficult to secure performances within the region. Seeta's position highlights certain challenges within the realm of artist support/development:

- Including venues and festivals within the support network of organisations, encouraging them to work together and collaborate with artists, whether on a development or presentation basis. People have observed that PDSW is a good broker of relationships. However, I feel they can probably play a fuller/more active role in this area – see Touring & Presentation below.
- The lack of producer support within the region. Seeta's producer is based in Leeds and, with this in mind, it is not a surprise that many of her producing and presenting partners are national and in the North and few, if any, are in the South West. There are a number of independent producers in the region
- Practical challenges around access to finding high quality rehearsal space. There are exceptions to this, eg The Point in Eastleigh – but, often, the only quality space available to artists is at University spaces – eg Plymouth and Falmouth – or other spaces that require the creators to work scheduling around external factors. Mark Bruce has developed his own space, whereas others go out of region to create work.

Two other challenges arose during my conversations in the region:

- How appropriate and ready are the artists in the region for opportunities in the region – eg Outdoor work, and also opportunities around digital.
- A lack of connection between the grass roots/early career artists and larger organisations

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Explore opportunities for greater support of early and mid career artist development, including advice and guidance for GfA applications.
- Engage with the perennial questions around the lack of appropriate space to develop work and producer support for that work.

TOURING & PRESENTATION

Within the region there are a wide range of small, middle and large scale venues that provide a potential network from the presentation of regionally and nationally significant dance performance. Through certain initiatives the opportunities these venues offer have been capitalised on very successfully. However, particularly at middle scale level, there is a lack of leadership and coherent regional thinking, which has led to a fractured picture and little strategic development.

One particular success story in this field in the South West has been the development of dance in the rural touring sector. With a strong foundation of rural touring networks and led by Ralph Lister at Take Art the region has been at the forefront of pioneering dance development in this field. As an exemplar of this work the Rural Touring Dance Initiative, a major national touring project looking development, producing and presentation of dance work for rural and small scale touring, was set up in 2015. Ralph and Take Art in Somerset have been central to the development of the project along with the National Rural Touring Forum, The Place and China Plate. Four of the South West's Rural Touring Schemes have been prominent in the initiative – Carn to Cove, Take Art, Activate and Beaford Arts.

The initiative is key to both developing the artform and bringing diversity into rural communities. Work developed for this predominantly rural scheme is also being presented in new spaces elsewhere – eg Strike a Light presenting Lost Dog in Gloucester Cathedral. One of the key components of the scheme is their ability to translate marketing speak into “audience speak”, talking to and attracting new audiences. This learning is something that can usefully inform wider sector learning. As mentioned by more than one key national dance producer this is an example of success coming from concentrating and focusing key resources.

On the small scale there is a wide range of more “formal” venues across the region including Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre (Monkton Heathfield); MacMillan Theatre (Bridgwater); Phoenix (Exeter); The Barbican (Plymouth); Amata (Falmouth); The House (Plymouth University); PDSW; Swindon Dance. On the middle scale there is a similar spread and range of venues: Winchester Theatre Royal; The Point (Eastleigh); Nuffield Theatre (Southampton); Salisbury Playhouse; The Lighthouse (Poole); The Octagon (Yeovil); Taunton; The Northcott Theatre (Exeter); Bristol Old Vic; The Brewhouse (Taunton); Hall for Cornwall.

Many of the venues mentioned above present a programme of dance work. More often than not this sporadic with venues presenting one offs rather than coherent programmes. One recent example of this was Mark Bruce's tour of Macbeth. Although this was presented by four venues across the region (Frome, Winchester, Salisbury and Exeter) it seems like a missed opportunity that this production wasn't presented in Bristol and other cities/major towns. Exeter continues its dance programme this year with performances by Wayne McGregor and Jasmin Vardimon and Winchester will present James Wilton and Ballet Black. However, Salisbury will not present any further dance this year.

Barriers to more extensive dance programming vary – variable audiences; cost (exacerbated in some instances that further distances, especially into the Peninsular, increase those);

difficulties in attracting audiences - but there is certainly capacity for an improved dance offer from key venues.

One initiative that might support that is pooling of expertise and resources along the lines of an initiative in Lincolnshire – Lincolnshire One Venues (LOV). Set up in 2005 LOV brought together nine venues from across the county to offer a more coherent arts offering, making venues stronger and more adaptable in the current economic climate. The venues continue to programme individually but the network allows them to create jointly commissioned work which can then tour throughout the county and beyond. There are obvious differences in terms of geographical scope and artform remit but similar networks on the small and middle scale may well offer new dialogue, connections and increased presentation possibilities.

This idea could link with the opportunities for the region to capitalise on Surf the Wave, a major national project co-led by PDSW – rethinking showcasing and touring dance in England. broader than and a shift change from British Dance Edition. The project involves three phases: supporting the sector to look at and build promoter and artist/producer relationships; the showcase itself (May 2019 in Bournemouth and Poole) and, subsequent to the showcase, support continuing conversations and collaborations. Although this is a national project it is being driven and hosted to a large extent by PDSW and the whole process seems to be an excellent opportunity to engage promoters afresh. There are plans to revive a South West promoters network along the Shift and Share model that previously existed to support the legacy from the work that is happening now and the main Showcase next year. Much of the work at the Showcase will be small scale but a Network that reflects the strengths of both LOV and the previous Shift and Share model, and links with current initiatives like Dancing Along the South Coast, would benefit work at all scales.

LOV does a lot of work around audiences and when looking at the development of the touring sector marketing is an area that needs to be looked at. There is little doubt that, with rising costs, venues are less likely to take risks when programming performance, especially dance. To lessen that risk dance artists and promoters need to become better at talking to their potential audiences. Part of Surf the Wave is an Audience Voice Symposium – which will see interested companies and artists working with the public to look at what appeals to audiences and how that could inform the work.

Alongside that I would also recommend that the wider touring network engages with the marketing strategies developed through the Rural Touring Dance Initiative. So often venues continue to have difficulties in marketing and talking about dance whereas, through the RTDI, the rural touring schemes are helping individual promoters turn “marketing speak” into “audience speak” with great results. There is little reason why this learning can’t be passed on, through workshops and on-line materials etc, delivered by, for example, Take Art and presented with PDSW and other partners.

Surf the Wave is offering a high profile platform for regionally based artists to connect with both regional and national presenters and producers. At this moment, more South West artists have registered involvement in the project than artists from any other region, and this is a clear opportunity for a step change in artist support and touring capabilities. Within

that, one of the clear and particular barriers faced by artists in the region is their distance from presenting partners. Obviously a growth in regional opportunities would help address this but increased costs for national or international activity (additional travel – not just direct costs but the additional time taken to travel to, say, London or the Midlands from the Peninsular) make it much more difficult for performances to be self sustaining for someone like James Wilton as supposed to a London or Birmingham based artist.

When looking at presentation there are exciting emerging opportunities for the dance sector within its engagement with new technology. The work of organisations such as Kaleider in Exeter and the Pervasive Media Studio in Bristol is at the forefront of this interface. Combining this with world leading expertise at regional universities, Bournemouth University, Arts University of Bournemouth, University of Western England and Plymouth University, and the emergence of pioneering work from people such as Laura Kriefman, Lisa May Thomas and Emma McFarland signal exciting times in this field. National and regional initiatives involving PDSW, Kaleider and PMS are already supporting major new initiatives and it is an area, as one of ACE's priorities, should be further explored by the sector.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Lay the foundations for the legacy of the Rural Dance Touring Initiative. The current strategic funding period comes to an end in 2021. Take Art are well positioned to drive the project on a regional and national level after that and I would recommend discussions around how that can be best resourced and supported by ACE in partnership with other strategic partners.
- Sector to establish a Dance Promoters Network
- Sector to embrace marketing initiatives that aim to broaden the way dance talks about itself.
- Explore future, post Surf the Wave, funding possibilities to support joint touring initiatives - both incoming to the region (potentially marketing initiative support) and increased national activities by South West artists.
- Engage the sector in dialogue around the Arts and Technology priority within the Area Plan.

DIVERSITY

When looking at both the programming of professional work and the engagement of the social dance programme across the region the sector has engaged with and addressed issues around all characteristics of diversity. This is not to say that there is not much more that can be done (see recommendations in strands above) and that the work in this area is uniform but there is positive work throughout the sector engaging with issues around diversity. Examples include: PDSW's supported artist programme includes several BAME artists – eg 2Faced Dance's project The Bench, Seeta Patel and Freddie Opoku-Addaie; Dance in Devon's ongoing work with people with disabilities; work around the burgeoning street dance scene, across the region and particularly in Swindon and Plymouth.

There is plenty to build on but also lots of work to do. Talking to artists through the region there is still frustration at a perceived lack of avenues and opportunities for work from diverse artists and for diverse audiences. Where opportunities do exist the sector needs to build on those – eg Toby Gorniak’s Street Factory project in Plymouth - an exciting high energy project centred on hip hop culture – which offers an opportunity to engage with other street dance groups in the City and further afield as well as the wider dance and creative community, offering new opportunities to a diverse youth sector; in Bristol, if the emergence of a new energy is going to be supported widely, then the sector needs to engage fully with the black and South Asian communities, partnering with organisations like Asian Arts Agency and Trinity Arts.

The sector is in a much weaker position when we look at diversity within the sector itself. The creative and administrative workforce is not reflective of a diverse society and this is an issue to be addressed immediately. There is an opportunity to work with the sector to establish more a proactive practice around engaging with diversity in the work place and the wider impact that will have. One avenue may be through the ACE Change Makers scheme – learning from successful applicants from within the sector (The Place and Metal Culture (South East)) and within the region (Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Cornwall Museums Partnership) and exploring a bid for a South West based dance practitioner.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Sector to formalise a collective approach to diversity and ensure that it is central to artistic and audience development.
- Develop initiatives around marketing explored in the Touring and Presentation strand and apply directly to audience diversity.

SOCIAL DANCE

There is a strong and varied socially engaged dance offer throughout the South West that is acknowledged nationally as a real strength. The sector has embraced the impact dance can have on individuals and communities, engaging with a wide cross section of the South West’s population: with the fastest ageing population in the country the region has a deep rooted and high impact programme of work addressing a range of issues faced by the elderly - from isolation to dementia and Parkinson’s; at the other end of the age spectrum there are many youth dance initiatives – from more general engagements to particular schemes aimed at engaging boys in dance.

As indicated earlier in the report much of the specialist expertise in the particular parts of this spectrum is held by individual organisations. At the same time there is a generous sharing of this expertise and mutual support between individuals and organisations. One of the key collaborations in this field is the triangular partnership of Hall for Cornwall, Plymouth Dance and Dance in Devon. Their recently announced the Peninsular Dance Partnership – aiming to strengthen the place of dance in the social programme and creating a healthier, happier and better-connected communities through the delivery of social impact dance projects across Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall. The initial projects, drawing on shared expertise, are: Tea Dances with a Twist in Plymouth (an intergenerational

inclusive dance event that is primarily for people over 50; All Boys and All Girls Dance in Cornwall (dance workshops for young people); and All Aboard! In Devon (an inclusive dance project for disabled children and families).

Similar projects proliferate around the region: the Boys Dancing initiative led by Sarah Shorten (Somerset) and the work Zoie Golding is doing with boys and young men from her new base in Southampton; the Hampshire Youth Dance Company As part of their regional brief PDSW continue to champion the social dance sector. One of the ways they support this is through a series of Action Groups – eg Health and Wellbeing – connecting and networking and reporting back to local areas and communities, sharing information and knowledge..

The wider support for socially impactful dance ties in with the overarching ethos held by many in the sector of reaching as widely as possible – engaging with as many people as possible. This sets up two potential conflicts in strategy and delivery – should the sector be more concentrated on particular places rather than broad region wide delivery and should they focus more on the “art of dance” rather than the social purpose/impact of dance. Part of the balance to be struck should acknowledge the creative professional cross over between artists developing their own performance work while earning a living through delivering social dance workshops.

My own opinion is that the overall ecology depends on a geographical and artistic balance – developing and presenting high quality work throughout the region (whether that be on beaches in Cornwall or at the Mayflower in Southampton) to inspire and be enriched by a powerful social dance presence from Swindon to Minehead.

Recommendations/Opportunities:

- Continue to champion this sector while establishing clearly what balance the funded professional sector should be striking between professional dance development and social dance.

A WAY FORWARD

Returning to the core of the original brief this final section looks to distil the findings of the consultancy into some recommendations that would support a legitimate and achievable future level of ambition for the dance sector in the South West.

The key recommendation is not centred on a call for additional funds, rather a focus on the clear need for more joined up dialogue and thinking, whether that be between the Arts Council and the sector or within the sector itself. At the centre of this is the recommendation to establish a Strategic Network that will provide a key strategic overview from which collaborative thinking and action can be nurtured and supported.

There is an opportunity to press the reset button for joined up thinking across the region, building on the strengths of the sector and embracing a region wide new diverse leadership.

There is no doubt that additional funding, whether that be strategic funds to underpin touring risk, core funding to provide stability to regional dance development hubs or further NPO funding for companies, would help the sector achieve a greater level of ambition. However, before any uplift in funding is properly debated it is essential that the Arts Council and the sector become better aligned and agree on the regional programme for dance that everyone can work towards.

Key Recommendation: Establish a Strategic Network

- Work with and support the sector to create a Strategic Network, led by a Steering Committee, made up of members of the dance sector and Arts Council South West. The Network would identify and support the delivery of key regional strategic priorities as well as engaging with the wider arts sector - venues, strategic partners and key stakeholders.
- One of the key aims of the Network would be to create a clear space for constructive dialogue between the Arts Council, at all levels, and the sector, establishing and monitoring the regional strategic priorities.
- Work with the sector to identify high profile advocates and campaigners. Additionally, work with these advocates and the wider sector to engage with key stakeholders.
- In the spirit of collaboration and dialogue I am also recommending two other, more bespoke, networks to support particular areas of development (see below). It is key that, if adopted, they work with the Regional Network to develop those areas rather than duplicating work.

Other recommendations: Support key regional initiatives

1. Explore additional funding for touring and distribution as a legacy to Surf the Wave, and also funding for a future iteration of the Rural Touring Dance Initiative –

supporting Take Art to take a national lead on continued strategic development of this important project.

2. Sector to establish a Dance Promoters Network as a legacy from Surf the Wave to pool and co-ordinate resources across the region.
3. Monitor and explore further support for key pilot schemes in the region – eg the role of Bristol Dance Futures Advocate (and a potential pilot of a Bristol Dance Network); the Peninsular Dance Partnership.
4. Explore opportunities for greater support for the development of early/mid career independent artists and the producer support that they require.

APPENDIX 1

People I spoke to as part of the Consultancy Process included:

Viv Slayford (Artistic Director, Swindon Dance)
Ed Collier (Co-Director, China Plate)
Alison Lord and Ralph Lister (Take Art, Somerset)
Zoie Logic and Vicky Thornton (ZoieLogic Dance Theatre)
Kate Wood (Executive and Artistic Director, activate performing arts)
Zannah Doan (CEO, Pavilion Dance South West)
Sacha Lee (Artistic Direct, The Point and The Berry Theatres)
Deryck Newland (Chief Executive, Live Theatre Winchester)
Nicola Moyle (Head of Heritage and Arts, Plymouth City Council)
June Gamble (Co-ordinating Producer, Plymouth Dance)
Helen Tiplady (Head of Arts Development, Hall for Cornwall)
Anthony Waller (DR2 Director)
Toby Gorniak (Street Factory, Plymouth)
Katy Noakes (one Dance UK; Bath Dance)
Ruth Hecht (Dance Futures Advocate, Bristol)
Laura Drane (CEO Maternity Cover, Theatre Bristol)
Emma Gladstone (Artistic Director, Dance Umbrella)
Wieke Erinka (Director, Yorkshire Dance)
Brendan Keaney (Director, Dance East)
Laila Diallo (Choreographer)
James Wilton (Artistic Director, James Wilton Dance)
Seeta Patel (Independent Dance Artist)
Dan Canham (Contemporary Performance Maker and Choreographer)
Katie Keeler (Executive Producer, Kaleider)
Emma-Jane Benning (Co-Artistic Director, Strike A Light)
Arts Council England personnel – Phil Gibby, Phil Hindson, Melanie Zalouf,
Simon Jutton, Anneliese Slader and Cate Canniffe