

# Summary

From *21<sup>st</sup> century dance*, pages v–ix

## Dance portfolio

Dance in England has found new languages, forms, meanings and applications over the last four decades. In 1969/70, the Arts Council supported seven dance organisations; in 1998/99 this number grew to 74 and encompassed a far wider range of artistic visions, purposes and ways of working. Today the funded dance portfolio is diverse and eclectic, including performing companies, dance agencies providing promotion and space for creation, production and participation, and strategic development organisations. Access, education and new ways of engaging with audiences have been integral to this growth.

The Arts Council established its Dance department in 1979. In 1989, Graham Devlin's *Stepping Forward* provided a blueprint for the following decade with a focus on developing a healthy dance ecology. Achievements during the 1990s included the establishment of National Dance Agencies, the growth of a number of new companies and significant growth in audiences. Dance has been nurtured to the point of maturity, but its critical mass is still developing. While it provides work and audiences for a range of other art forms, with relatively few sustainable commercial outlets the dance economy remains particularly reliant on the arts funding system. Maturing at what was a time of shrinkage in real terms in public funding for the arts, it is perhaps inevitable that creative energy has outstripped public investment.

Analysis of the 54 dance organisations receiving regular funding from the regional arts boards and the Arts Council in 1998/99 shows that the majority (24) were agencies, followed closely by companies (22). Almost 80% of all organisations received grants of less than £250k,

while almost 50% of the funds went to only 4% of the longest established organisations. London is the main production centre and is home to most of the largest organisations, although there is a more equitable geographical distribution of dance agencies. While ballet received about three-quarters of the funds, it also provides almost half of all performances, two-thirds of jobs for dancers, almost three-quarters of all audiences, and good value for money when compared to its peer group of arts organisations.

Almost all dance companies tour. There are no dance companies with their own theatres. The Royal Ballet performs mainly at the Royal Opera House, which it shares with the Royal Opera, and the Birmingham Royal Ballet is based in the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre, which it shares with a range of art forms. Dance still needs to develop a countrywide network of appropriate venues. Demand for large-scale dance remains strong, but on the smaller scales dates tend to be spasmodic and runs restricted to one or two performances. There is a wide range of choice for promoters, and a regular diet of international work is touring more widely. But under-resourced theatres demand significant marketing and audience development support from even more stretched dance companies. This is particularly onerous on the smaller scales where management resources are leanest and budgets tightest. A number of these dance companies have been facing crises. Beyond the traditional theatre context, dance is having a powerful impact in site-specific work, and digital dance. There is potential for further diversification in the means of disseminating dance to new and wider audiences.

### **Structural investment**

Individual artists are driving the art form forwards. The introduction of Dance Fellowships in 2000/01 recognises this and has been widely welcomed by the sector. Dancers also need creative opportunities, and the creative energies of dance managers, teachers, commentators and facilitators need to be fostered for the benefit of

dance's future. Essentially collaborative, dance is looking to its own resources and building partnerships across and beyond the sector in order to tackle issues collectively.

Dancers' performing careers are short and precarious. Most dancers work on short contracts, and stop performing in their 30s. Many embark on their careers with debt accumulated over three or four years of full-time training, and they need to sustain a maintenance programme of regular class and complementary techniques. Injury is a constant risk, and while improvements have been made in understanding its prevention and management such measures have a cost implication. There is a need to recognise these factors. Improved salaries while dancing, and opportunities for professional development that equip dancers for post-performing careers in dance, would help stem the flow of experience and expertise out of the sector.

Salaries, salary progression, working conditions and continuous professional development are major issues across dance. For an industry that is entirely dependent on people, the lack of regular, structural investment in its people is remarkable, and encouraged by reliance on public funding.

### **Future-ready**

Life is changing, and unless we look to the future, we are in danger of proposing solutions for yesterday's problems. There are opportunities for dance in providing real and virtual interactive art experiences, high-impact special events, and in its transient, experimental, collaborative and essentially human qualities. At the same time, digitalisation offers the potential for the commodification of dance, with the associated possibility of reducing its reliance on public funding. Yet the possibility of piracy and need for commercial acumen could inhibit benefit. Increasingly the future will require those working in dance to take risks, yet the traditional model of public

funding for the arts provides neither the potential for gain nor a baseline of security. Dance celebrates and is enriched by cultural diversity, yet a decade of decline in funding for vocational training has resulted in a student population that is predominantly white, middle-class and female. Much of the traditional culture of training and working practice encourages conformity rather than difference. Individuals will drive the major changes in dance, and the arts funding system's recent focus on individuals offers an opportunity to support individual vision, talent and drive. It is time to build in the capacity for dance to be future-ready, if not future-proof.

The vision for *21st century dance* weaves together strengthened core support with shifts in approach – focused on individuals and companies, looking to the future and creating the climate in which dance can thrive. Backing for individuals could build on the Arts Council Dance Fellowships Programme to include dancers, others working in dance and promoters and producers. Companies at all scales need to be strengthened, with backing directed at anticipating growth and releasing capacity. Seismic shifts could be initiated by creative coalitions between organisations, while the potential to back the unexpected needs to be built in. A climate conducive to dance would provide special attention for cultural diversity, build the capacity of strategic organisations, release the capacity of dance agencies and nurture regional dance ecologies. Running through this vision are the core values of quality, diversity, inclusivity, access and education.