South Asian Dance & Music

Mapping Study

Commissioned by:
Arts Council England

December 2020
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1. Introduction

1.1. Foreword by Simon Mellor, Deputy Chief Executive, Arts and Culture

In 2019, when Arts Council England commissioned the South Asian Dance and Music Mapping Study, the world was a very different place. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the Arts Council and the cultural sector have both had to adapt dramatically over the past nine months. However, the findings of this report – and the need to support and develop South Asian dance and music in England – remain pertinent. We are pleased to publish this important study, along with our thoughts outlining how we might work with the sector to respond to it over the immediate and longer term.

We welcome the frank views expressed and are pleased that the open and honest approach that Courtney Consulting and the participants took has allowed a wide range of perspectives and observations to come through. We see this report as part of an ongoing dialogue with the sector, which will allow us to further understand challenges faced in terms of leadership, training and transition routes into professional arts careers. The data in the study also provides us with benchmarks we can build on, and much of what we have heard aligns with our plans for a relaunch of our National Lottery Project Grants programme in 2021.

We look forward to working together with all interested parties to try to address the main barriers to progression, leadership and training identified in the report. We note the significant alignment between the issues raised in this study and the aspirations of our new ten year strategy and this report will help us shape the Delivery Plans that we will put in place to implement Let’s Create.

A significant amount of time, energy and resource was invested in creating this report and our sincere thanks goes to Courtney Consulting and all those who contributed to building such a detailed picture of the South Asian dance and music sectors.

1.2. Purpose of the study

Courtney Consulting was commissioned in September 2019 by Arts Council England (ACE) to conduct a combined mapping study of the South Asian dance and music (SAD&M) sector in the UK. The brief for the work was driven by a number of strategic factors:

- Applications and awards for Arts Council funding from South Asian applicants are currently very low.
Other research into the South Asian sector has revealed challenges around leadership development and progression opportunities for South Asian dance and music artists, as well as a need to further investigate possible training courses for South Asian dance and music.

The need to champion and advocate for the Creative Case for Diversity, which is undermined by the above factors.

The research and areas to map within the South Asian dance and music sector are vast and could easily contain multiple separate projects. However, Arts Council England set a specific focus for this work to provide a clear and detailed picture across three key areas:

- Training
- Progression
- Leadership

The key objectives of the research were:

- To map existing South Asian dance and music activity not currently regularly funded by the Arts Council, including classical, folk and popular forms.
- To better understand provision, distribution and new opportunities within the professional and community context.
- To better understand the strengths and vulnerabilities within the sector, including where activity is taking place, who is undertaking it and the intended audience.
- To better understand gaps that exist within the sector and how the Arts Council can support the sections of the South Asian sector it is not currently reaching.

1.3. Methodology

In delivering the conclusions and insights required we conducted a number of discrete tasks:

- Stakeholder consultation involved speaking to a range of different officers within Arts Council England and the wider National dance ecology. In total 18 stakeholders were consulted.
➢ The desk research and literature review examined a number of key reports and previous research investigating these specific areas. Many of these reports contained literature reviews in themselves and spanned a wide range of evidence and research going back many years. In addition to the literature review, our desk research involved reviewing websites and annual reports of South Asian providers of training, progression and leadership, and sector social media and digital publications, such as Pulse, providing articles and insights into the three key areas.

➢ A mapping study of South Asian dance and music was undertaken and informed by all the other tasks. The mapping document has been provided in excel format at Appendix 3 and has 617 entries. All of the information was gathered through publicly available information and it is searchable by geography, organisation type and art forms offered. Where available, contact details and websites are provided. A map of the activity we were able to document within the time and budget constraints of this project can be accessed via: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zypcD4TjSTNQZ6aRY8tIPBmqEa3Njy7n&usp=sharing

➢ Individual in-depth interviews with South Asian dancers and musicians spanning every stage of the career spectrum were undertaken. The interviews specifically explored their artistic journey so far, with a focus on training, progression and leadership. In total 56 artists were individually consulted with, and an additional 28 consultees (alongside those who had already been interviewed) took part in the group round table discussions, representing a total individual artist consultation pool of 84.

➢ A sector survey was emailed to South Asian musicians and dancers who had been identified through desk research as part of the mapping activity and a snowball sampling technique employed, whereby recipients were asked to forward a link to the online survey to their networks. Following data cleaning and removal of incomplete responses where no usable data was provided, a total of 219 respondents participated in the survey.

➢ Artist round table discussions were held in the three English cities, to make attendance as accessible as possible. The purpose of the roundtables was to feedback, test and debate some of the emerging findings through the authentic lived experience of those that these findings will impact. Each round table was attended by dancers and musicians representing different stages of their careers and at least
one National Portfolio Organisation representative (the Arts Council’s regularly funded organisations). In total 42 artists participated in the round table sessions, comprising 14 artists at the London roundtable, 15 at the Birmingham roundtable and 13 at the Manchester roundtable.

A consultation list can be found at Appendix 1 of this report and the Literature review and summary insights can be found at Appendix 3. The full survey findings can be found at Appendix 5.

**1.3.1. Impact of Covid 19 on this work**

The desk research and consultation for this project was undertaken from October 2019 and completed by the end of March 2020. There was a six week delay in the one to one consultations, from 6 November 2019 until 12 December, due to the general election and Arts Council’s position as a Government arms-length body. The Christmas holiday period also impacted on the ability to speak to consultees and convene round table discussions before the middle of January 2020. The draft report was issued to the Arts Council in April 2020.

By this point the Covid 19 crisis had taken hold across the UK and was having a catastrophic impact on the cultural sector. The Arts Council was deep in its first phase of response, having released emergency funding and all members of staff involved in this report were redirected to cope with the crisis. Given the significant amount of data and insights to review from the report and in the context of Covid 19 it was agreed to delay the publication of the report until the end of 2020.

Despite being undertaken just before the outset of the pandemic, the consultation and research findings remain relevant and even more pressing to consider and address.

**1.4. Alignment with Let’s Create**

During the course of this research Arts Council England launched its new 10 year strategy ‘Let’s Create’.¹ This research on the training, progression and leadership for South Asian dancers and musicians can undoubtedly support and inform the implementation of Let’s Create across a number of areas and priorities. The bullet points below are all sourced from the detail of Let’s Create and align strongly with the findings from this research.

Arts Council England
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- Inclusivity & Relevance – England’s diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture they produce.

- We will create clearer, more accessible pathways for children and young people who are interested in pursuing careers in the creative industries.

- We will aim for a better balance of investment across the country and will work with the right partners on a range of projects, including capita investment in physical and digital infrastructure and the use of technology to distribute cultural content into homes, cultural venues and community spaces.

- We will continue to support the development of touring at all scales, especially into places with the least access to publicly funded culture.

- We will support towns, cities and villages to use culture to connect, nationally and internationally, and to reflect the diverse influences, experiences and knowledge of their diaspora communities in building and understanding collections and creating and presenting work.

- We will support the development of new international partnerships that enable knowledge sharing, co-investment and trading opportunities, and will deliver financial and cultural benefits for the country as a whole.

- Many artists from this country have developed global reputations for the quality of their work and are in demand around the world. However, it is also the case that many creative practitioners and cultural workers, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, D/deaf or disabled people, and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, continue to struggle to develop and sustain financially viable careers.

- We want to help children and young people from every part of the country to understand what a career in the cultural sector or the wider creative industries could look like, and to support everyone who embarks on such a career to remain in the sector and fulfil their potential, regardless of their background. The future success of the cultural sector depends on being able to draw on a talent pool that reflects society as a whole and is much wider and deeper than it is now.
▪ We believe in the value of training and skills, and we will use our investment to support organisations to develop talent and improve quality across all their creative work and processes, and in the way in which they run their organisations.

▪ Judgements about quality are inevitably complex and open to debate. We will therefore continue to work with the cultural sector to establish a shared language around it, which we will draw on as we consider and explain our investment decisions. But in the end, it will be the Arts Council’s responsibility to use our experience and expertise to make the judgments that determine those decisions.

▪ The Creative Case for Diversity has deepened the quality of cultural provision in this country, giving voice to talented creative practitioners who have too often been overlooked. It is now time to build on this work and address the persistent and widespread lack of diversity and inclusivity in cultural organisations’ leadership, governance, workforce and audience.

▪ In our investment processes, we will: Regularly review our application processes and our monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure that they are as accessible, easy to understand and inclusive as possible.

1.5. Research approach

1.5.1 What we mean by South Asian

For the purpose of this report we have followed and applied the current Arts Council definition of South Asian dance and music, which they state “includes artistic forms which originated from the Indian subcontinent – including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – and varies between classical and non-classical forms.” We recognise however, and the research bears out, that the catch all term of ‘South Asian’ is problematic.

1.5.2 Why two art forms?

A number of artists have questioned how we can address two sectors with such vast scope within one report, which we felt needed clarification. The original impetus for this research came from the Arts Council dance team, who were keen to explore a number of challenges and opportunities within the South Asian dance sector. Before they put out the brief, the team spoke to other artform teams at Arts Council to see if their artists and organisations were facing similar challenges. From those conversations, it was clear that there was synergy between dance and music particularly,
which have strong interwoven ties. With a desire to maximise the impact this work could have it was therefore decided to progress the research for these two artforms together.

From a research perspective, we can testify that South Asian dance and South Asian music are indeed vast areas of study in and of themselves. However, having spoken to so many different artists and read so much around the subject, we can also testify to the symbiotic nature of dance and music. In terms of training, progression and leadership there are significant commonalities that South Asian artists working in either or both fields experience. To this end we believe this research is mutually beneficial to both sectors.

1.5.3 *Time to walk the walk*

One of the first things that struck us when we began this research process was the significant amount of talking that has already taken place. Many of our consultees complained that a lot of lip service has been paid to and within the sector over the years and yet nothing has changed. We can see first-hand that many of the problems and challenges facing artists today have already been discussed and debated by the sector many times over. So, our challenge to both the Arts Council, as a key sector funder, and the sector, with responsibility for its own development and advocacy, is to stop talking and start making change happen.

The Creative Case for Diversity, Let’s Create, the possibilities offered by an explosive technology and innovation driven era, the rapidly evolving diversity of the UK population, the changing of the ‘old guard’ in some important South Asian arts organisations and a new generation of British Asian artists emerging offers a macro environment that has not existed before. The time is now to capitalise on this perfect storm of context and circumstance for South Asian dance and music. Our vision and hope are that this report becomes a proactive catalyst to action that eradicates past inertia and realises tangible and transformative change.

1.5.4 *Sector research voiced, owned and led by the sector*

We spent five months listening to the people who matter most. The artists and stakeholders who are immersed in this world every single day. The creators, facilitators, gurus and producers who are the beating heart of the South Asian dance and music sector. Those starting out, those at mid-career level and those who are sector leaders.

Every single conclusion within this report is a direct result of that listening, together with a detailed analysis of what has gone before and the current
strategic context. Through the research we have identified the collective and common areas of concern, challenges, strengths and opportunities in relation to the three areas of training, progression and leadership. Each conclusion across the three areas has been brought to life through sector voices via direct quotes of those who made this research happen. The work may have been commissioned by Arts Council England and undertaken by Courtney Consulting, but the findings are underpinned and owned by the South Asian dance and music sector.

1.6. Thanks from Courtney Consulting

We would like to thank the project team at Arts Council England for commissioning this work, appointing our team and being brilliant to work with. We made it clear from the get-go that we weren’t the sort of consultancy that would sugar coat any hard truths. You supported that sentiment and were ready to hear and respond to whatever the research delivered back, regardless of how difficult some of it might be to hear. This work and its outcomes are the richer for your trust, willingness to listen and learn, and belief and investment in South Asian dancers and musicians.

To the wider Arts Council Relationship Managers we consulted with, and the strategic sector stakeholders who participated in the research, we are thankful for your passion and professionalism in support of these art forms and artists. The diversity of your expertise and experience around the strategic context the sector is operating within was incredibly helpful and useful.

To the many South Asian dancers and musicians who shared their time, artistic journeys, expertise, creativity, passion, pain and joy. And those who took part in the survey, but we didn’t get to speak to in person. Wow. Every single one of you inspired us. Whilst we have designed and undertaken a great deal of complex research programmes across diverse art forms and artists in the UK and internationally, neither of our research team comes from a South Asian background or had worked specifically in South Asian dance or music before now. It would have been easy for you to be guarded or dismissive. Instead you respected our expertise and impartiality and met us with open minds and enthusiasm to be part of something that could really help and make a difference for the wider sector. This is exactly what you have done. Because of all of you this report took on a life of its own and became a labour of love that went far beyond the original parameters set. Thank you all.
2. Market Analysis

2.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to present an overview of the potential talent pool, in relation to the South Asian dance and music sector in the UK (and specifically England), by summarising a number of data sets. These include:

- UK population data, such as mid-year population estimates, UK Census 2011 and online bulletins published by the Office for National Statistics. This data has been utilised to provide a better understanding of the distribution of South Asian communities across the UK. It is recognised, however, that practitioners of South Asian music or dance do not always self-identify as being from a South Asian ethnic group, however, as the majority do, these groups are the focus within this chapter.

- Data and online bulletins linked to the Taking Part Survey, published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

- Other online sources that provide additional data and insight into South Asian communities in the UK.

- A database of South Asian musicians, dancers, music schools and academies, dance schools and academies, dance companies and other South Asian arts organisations and practitioners linked to the sector created specifically for this study (Appendix 4).

- Arts Council England (ACE) grant application data for 2018/19, for projects classified as South Asian music or dance projects.

Key findings from the data analysis are identified which, together with the wider research findings, inform the final conclusions. The detailed market analysis which this chapter is based on can be sourced at Appendix 2.

2.2. Population Data

The 2011 UK Census\(^2\) states:

- People from Asian ethnic groups made up the second largest percentage of the population (7.5%)

- When looking at residents of South Asian background:
  - 1,412,958 (2.5%) identified as residents of Indian ethnicity;
  - 1,124,511 (2.0%) identified as residents of Pakistani ethnicity; and

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\(^2\) Source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census
447,201 (0.8%) identified as residents of Bangladeshi ethnicity. This equates to a total South Asian population in England and Wales, in 2011, of 2,984,670 (5.3%), if other Asian groups and people of mixed ethnicity are not included.

In the South East, North West, Yorkshire & The Humber and the East Midlands the population who identified as South Asian were:

- South East: 452,042 people; 5.2% of the region’s population
- North West: 437,435 people; 6.3% of the region’s population
- Yorkshire & The Humber: 385,964 people; 7.3% of the region’s population
- East Midlands: 293,423 people; 6.4% of the region’s population.

- The Bangladeshi ethnic group had the highest percentage of people under 18 years (38.3%), followed by Pakistani (36.2%); the Indian ethnic group had one of the lowest (15.6%)\(^3\).
- The Indian ethnic group had the highest percentage of people aged 65 years and over (8.2%), and the Bangladeshi group the lowest (3.7%)\(^4\).
- The website Minority Rights (https://minorityrights.org) provides additional insight into South Asian communities in the UK, stating that:

  - The main religions are Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. The Indian community is Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are each predominantly Muslim. There are also Jains and Buddhists\(^5\).

### 1.6.1. Ethnicity by local authority

When looking at the 2011 Census data by local authority it is possible to see the overall number of people by ethnic group, percentage by ethnic group and rank based on percentages. Based on the absolute number of people in a local authority population who identify as South Asian:

- Of those which fell in the top ten local authorities for number of individuals identifying as Indian, seven were in London, two in the West Midlands and one in East Midlands:

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\(^3\) https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/age-groups/latest#asian-ethnic-groups-age-profile

\(^4\) https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/age-groups/latest#asian-ethnic-groups-age-profile

\(^5\) https://minorityrights.org/minorities/south-asians/
- London: Harrow, Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Redbridge, Newham and Hillingdon
- West Midlands: Birmingham and Wolverhampton
- East Midlands: Leicester

Of those which fell in the top ten local authorities for number of individuals identifying as Pakistani, four were in Yorkshire & The Humber, three were in London, two in the North West and one in the West Midlands:

- Yorkshire & The Humber: Bradford, Kirklees, Leeds and Rochdale
- London: Redbridge, Newham and Waltham Forest
- North West: Manchester and Rochdale
- West Midlands: Birmingham

Of those which fell in the top ten local authorities for the number of individuals identifying as Bangladeshi, seven were in London, one in the North West, one in the East and one in the West Midlands:

- London: Tower Hamlets, Newham, Redbridge, Camden, Barking & Dagenham, City of London and Westminster
- North West: Oldham
- East: Luton EA
- West Midlands: Birmingham

1.6.2. Participation in the Arts by ethnicity

In December 2019, the website GOV.UK published facts and figures about arts participation by ethnicity, using data from the Taking Part Survey. Key findings from this show that:

- 59.7% of people with Asian ethnicity took part in the arts, the lowest percentage out of all ethnic groups.

- Between 2012/13 and 2018/19, the percentage of people with Asian ethnicity has fluctuated between a low of 59.3% in 2015/16 to 66.8% in 2016/17.

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2.3. Mapping of South Asian dance and music

As part of the desk research for this mapping study a database of South Asian dance and music has been created (see Appendix 4) from publicly available data sources, informed by:

- Report consultees
- Other consultees added to the consult list over the research period
- Individuals and organisations listed within desk research documents
- Online research of websites relevant to the sector
- Online research using the Google search engine
- Survey respondents not captured through the above

The mapping database should not be taken as a complete picture of the South Asian dance and music sector in the UK. It is based purely on the information provided by these data sources, so is reliant on: individuals and organisations being known to ACE and others consulted; having engaged with previous research or conference activity; having an online presence; and being reached by the survey. It is likely that many more individuals/organisations exist, who do not have an online presence and/or did not appear through the search terms utilised in Google.

However, despite limitations the mapping database provides a fairly detailed overview of the sector and a useful starting point from which to build upon: 617 entries have been made into the database.

The following sections present an analysis of the database. A visual map has also been created utilising post code and town/city data from this database (where available). This can be accessed clicking this link.

The database was primarily developed to capture South Asian dance and music practitioners based in England. A natural extension was the inclusion of South Asian dance companies, dance schools and academies, and music schools and academies. These categories therefore formed the main focus of research in terms of time and resource.

However, as data was gathered through desk research and online, and the consultation list and survey respondent pool grew, a number of other individual/organisation types were identified. These fall into two categories – those within the South Asian dance and music sector and those who do/have offered opportunities to South Asian musicians and dancers.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the individuals and organisations in the database by organisation type. NB: some entries have more than one category aligned to them, e.g. individuals could be dancers and musicians,
or dance schools and academies that are also music schools and academies.

Table 1: Mapping by Organisation Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual / Organisation Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Asian Music or Dance Sector Specific</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Musician</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Dancer</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Dance School or Academy</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Dance Company</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Arts Development Organisation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Arts Festival</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Arts Producer or Production Company</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Band</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Music School or Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Music Promoter or Agent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA Arts Collective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-South Asian Music or Dance Sector Specific</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Centre or Society</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue – Arts Venue</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Development Agency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Festival (non-SA specific)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue – Community Venue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Producer or Production Company (non-SA specific)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Examination Board</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>616</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA = South Asian

1.6.3. **Key observations from the mapping document**

The bullet points below summarise the key observations arising from an analysis of the mapping document.

- There is a greater number of South Asian musicians than South Asian dancers with an online presence – this could indicate there are a greater number of South Asian musicians than dancers in the UK and/or
that musicians are more pro-active, generally, in promoting themselves online.

- Conversely there is a greater number of South Asian dance schools or academies than Music schools or academies with an online presence – this could suggest there are a greater number of South Asian dance schools or academies in England than music schools or academies, or just that they are more pro-active, generally, in promoting themselves online.

- Overall, the number of South Asian producers or production companies and promoters or agents is low (though a search was not specifically done to identify these individuals and organisations).

- The highest concentration of individuals/organisations within the South Asian dance and music sector appears to be in Greater London – not all provided information on the specific borough in which they are based, but Harrow appears to stand out as being a particular area of activity.

- After London, there is a fairly even spread of individuals/organisations within the South Asian dance and music sector across the West Midlands and South East of England, most closely followed by the Yorkshire & The Humber and East Midlands regions.

- There are very few individuals/organisations within the South Asian dance and music sector in the North East.

- In the Midlands, Birmingham and Leicester are the cities that appear to have the highest level of activity, most closely followed by Coventry.

- In the North of England, Manchester and Leeds are the cities that appear to have the highest level of activity.

- Where specified, the boroughs within Greater London with the highest level of activity are Harrow, Ilford and Uxbridge.

- Bharatanatyam appears to be by far the most practiced of the South Asian dance forms by individual practitioners and is also the dance form that appears to most frequently be offered by South Asian dance schools and academies.

- Kathak appears to be second to Bharatanatyam in terms of individual practice and seems to enjoy a relatively high level of representation amongst South Asian dance companies.

- Bollywood appears to be a popular dance form also, and within the database outnumbers Odissi.

- Other South Asian dance forms are practiced, performed and taught, but currently seem to lag behind the more well-known dance forms of Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Bollywood and Odissi.
Greater London, in general, has the highest representation of all South Asian dance forms with the exception of Mohiniyattam and Indian Creative Dance amongst practitioners; Yakshagana amongst South Asian dance companies; and Kuchipudi amongst dance schools and academies.

Bharatanatyam has higher representation amongst South Asian dance practitioners in the South East and South West of England than in other regions (not including London); and in Yorkshire & The Humber and the East Midlands for dance companies.

Kathak has higher representation amongst South Asian dance practitioners in the East Midlands than in other regions (not including London); and in the East Midlands, South East and West Midlands for dance companies.

Bollywood appears to be equally popular amongst South Asian dance practitioners in most other regions outside London; and has higher representation amongst South Asian dance companies in the South East of England, Yorkshire & The Humber, the East Midlands and North West.

Odissi has high representation amongst South Asian dance practitioners in the South East (not including London); the West Midlands, South East and East of England for dance companies; and the East Midlands and East of England for dance schools and academies.

Bhangra has high representation amongst South Asian dance practitioners in the West Midlands (not including London); and in the West Midlands and Yorkshire & The Humber for dance companies.

Kuchipudi has high representation amongst South Asian dance practitioners in the North West (not including London); and the East Midlands and North West for dance schools and academies.

In most other regions (not including London) the representation of Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Bollywood is fairly evenly spread.

The South West of England and the North East appear to lack dance schools or academies for all forms of South Asian dance.

Musicians were frequently multi-instrumentalists, as well as instrumentalists and vocalists.

Tabla appears to be second to vocal in terms of individual practice.
Sitar and Harmonium appear to also be popular instruments amongst South Asian musicians.

The sheer number of musical instruments, vocal styles and genres of music indicate how complex the South Asian music sector is.

The number of South Asian music schools/academies seems extremely low but may be indicative of how many musicians learn through one-to-one private tuition (with a guru), or via classes run in faith temples.

Greater London, in general, has the highest representation of all South Asian music forms amongst practitioners and South Asian music schools and academies.

Vocalists have higher representation amongst South Asian musicians in the West Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber, East Midlands and South East regions (not including London).

Tabla has higher representation amongst South Asian musicians in the West Midlands (not including London).

Sitar, Harmonium, Bhajan, Guitar, Violin, Dhol and Dilruba have low but fairly even representation amongst South Asian musicians across the regions (not including London), though in some cases there are regions that appear to have no representation in each of these forms.

Veena has higher representation amongst South Asian musicians in the West Midlands and South East of England (not including London).

The East of England is the only other region in England (not including London) with a South Asian musician who states they practice the Piano.

As was the case with dance, representation of South Asian music in the North East is very low.

1.7. Arts Council England: grant application data

2.4.1 Dance Applications

Arts Council England provided three years of data (2016-2019) for dance applications to Grants for the Arts (GFTA), National Lottery Project Grants (NLPG) and Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) from South Asian applicants.

Applications by Individuals

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8 South Asian applicants are defined as individuals who identify as being Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, or organisations who have > 50% representation.
Data on the applications made by individual South Asian applicants shows that over the three-year period:

- The number of applications made in each category has remained relatively consistent, though there appears to have been a small jump in 2018/19 for NLPG under £15,000 and National Activity categories:
  - The highest number of applications in the under £15,000 category was 16 (2018/19) and the lowest 11 (2016/17), with an average of 13 applications a year over the three years.
  - The highest number of applications in the over £15,000 category was 2 (2017/18) and the lowest 0 (2018/19), with an average of 1 application a year over the three years.
  - The highest number of applications in the National Activity category was 3 (2018/19) and the lowest 1 (2016/17), with an average of 2 applications a year over the three years.
  - When all applications made in the year are added together, the highest number of applications was 24 (2018/19) and the lowest 13 (2016/17), with an average of 18 applications a year over the three years.

- The number of offers made in each category has remained relatively consistent over the years, with the exception of the under £15,000 category:
  - The highest number of awards made in the under £15,000 category was 11 (2018/19) and the lowest 7 (2016/17), with an average of 9 awards a year over the three years.
  - The highest number of awards made in the over £15,000 category was 1 (2016/17 and 2017/18) and the lowest 0 (2018/19), with an average of 1 award a year over the three years.
  - The highest number of awards made in the National Activity category was 3 (2018/19) and the lowest 1 (all other years), with an average of 2 awards a year over the three years.
  - When all awards made in the year are added together, the highest number of awards was 16 (2018/19) and the lowest 9 (2016/17), with an average of 12 awards per year over the three years.

- The success rate of applications made in each category (once ineligible applications are removed from the calculation) has seen fluctuations across the three-year period, though this is predominantly due to the very small number of applications in the higher categories:
  - The highest success rate for applicants in the under £15,000 category was 83% (2017/18), followed by 79% (2018/19) and 78% (2016/17), with an average of 80% across the three years.
The success rate for the over £15,000 in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 was 100% (discounting one ineligible application), with no applications made in 2018/19.

The highest success rate for applicants in the National Activity category was 100% (2016/17 and 2018/19).

### Applications by Organisations

Data on the applications made by South Asian organisation applicants shows that over the three-year period:

- The number of applications made in each category has remained relatively consistent:
  - The number of applications in the under £15,000 category made across all three years was 14.
  - The highest number of applications in the over £15,000 category was 2 (2016/17 and 2018/19) and the lowest 1 (2017/18).
  - The highest number of applications in the National Activity category was 2 (2016/17) and the lowest 0 (2018/19).
  - When all applications made in the year are added together, the highest number of applications was 18 (2018/19) and the lowest 16 (2016/17 and 2017/18).

The number of offers made in each category has remained relatively consistent over the years, with the exception of the under £15,000 category:

- The highest number of awards made in the under £15,000 category was 10 (2018/19) and the lowest 4 (2017/18).
- The highest number of awards made in the over £15,000 category was 2 (2016/17 and 2018/19) and the lowest 1 (2017/18).
- The highest number of awards made in the National Activity category was 1 (2016/17 and 2017/18).
- When all awards made in the year are added together, the highest number of awards was 12 (2018/19) and the lowest 6 (2017/18), with an average of 9 awards per year over the three years.

### Sub-classifiers in Applications by South Asian Applicants

Data on the popularity of sub-classifiers amongst South Asian applicants shows that:
64% of eligible applications from South Asian applicants were sub-classified as World, compared to 10% of eligible applications from all applicants.

Contemporary was the next most popular sub-classifiers amongst South Asian applicants, accounting for 29% of all eligible applications from these applicants, compared to 75% for all applicants.

55% of awards made to South Asian applicants included the sub-classifier World, compared to 9% amongst all applicants.

38% of awards made to South Asian applicants included the sub-classifier Contemporary, compared to 76% amongst all applicants.

The number of eligible applications from South Asian applicants that included the sub-classifier World has grown over the last three years, from 15 to 23.

The number of eligible applications from South Asian applicants that included the sub-classifier Contemporary has remained relatively consistent over the last three years with a high of 10 (2016/17) and low of 8 the other years.

2.4.2 Music Applications

Arts Council England has provided data for financial years 2015 through to 2019 showing music applications to Grants for the Arts (GFTA), National Lottery Project Grants (NLPG) and Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) from South Asian applicants.

Applications by Individuals

Data on the applications made by individual South Asian applicants shows that over the five-year period:

The number of applications made in each category has remained relatively consistent:

- The highest number of applications in the under £15,000 category was 15 (2017/18) and the lowest 10 (2015/16), with an average of 12 applications a year over the five years.
- The highest number of applications in the over £15,000 category was 2 (2017/18) and the lowest 0 (2014/15 to 2016/17), with an average of 1 application a year over the five years.

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9 South Asian applicants are defined as individuals who identify as being Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, or organisations who have > 50% representation.
The highest number of applications in the National Activity category was 2 (2014/15 and 2017/18) and the lowest 0 (all other years).

When all applications made in the year are added together, the highest number of applications was 19 (2017/18) and the lowest 10 (2015/16), with an average of 14 applications a year over the five years.

Offers have only been made to applicants in the under £15,000 category with a high of 7 and a low of 5, averaging 6 per year; and the National activity category with a high of 1 and a low of 0, averaging 0 per year – this represents an average success rate of 63% and 10% respectively.

Applications by Organisations

Data on the applications made by South Asian organisation applicants shows that over the five-year period:

- The number of applications made in each category has remained relatively consistent:
- The highest number of applications in the under £15,000 category was 23 (2018/19) and the lowest 12 (2016/17), with an average of 17 applications a year over the five years.
- The highest number of applications in the over £15,000 category was 3 (three of the five years) and the lowest 2 (two of the five years), with an average of 3 applications a year over the five years.
- The highest number of applications in the National Activity category was 2 (2015/16) and the lowest 0 (2016/17 to 2018/19), with an average of 1 application a year over the five years.
- When all applications made in the year are added together, the highest number of applications was 25 (2018/19) and the lowest 15 (2016/17), with an average of 20 applications a year over the five years.

- The number of offers made in each category has remained relatively consistent:
- The highest number of awards made in the under £15,000 category was 9 (2017/18) and the lowest 5 (2016/17), with an average of 7 awards a year over the five years.
- The highest number of awards made in the over £15,000 category was 3 (2017/18) and the lowest 2 (all other years), with an average of 2 awards a year over the five years.
- The highest number of awards made in the National Activity category was 2 (2015/16) and the lowest 0 (all other years).
When all awards made in the year are added together, the highest number of awards was 12 (2015/16) and the lowest 7 (2016/17), with an average of 10 awards per year over the five years.

The success rate of applications made in each category has seen fluctuations across the five-year period:

- The highest success rate for the under £15,000 category was 75% (2017/18) and the lowest 41% (2015/16), with an average of 55% over the five years.
- The highest success rate for the over £15,000 category was 100% (three of the five years) and the lowest 67% (two of the five years), with an average of 87% over the five years.
- The highest success rate for the under National Activity category was 100% (2015/16) and the lowest 0%, (all other years).
- When all awards made in the year are added together, the highest success rate was 53% (2017/18) and the lowest 40% (2014/15).

**Sub-classifiers in Applications by South Asian Applicants**

Data on the popularity of sub-classifiers amongst South Asian applicants shows that:

- 61% of eligible applications from South Asian applicants were sub-classified as World, compared to 10% of eligible applications from all applicants.
- Classical and Popular were the next most popular sub-classifiers amongst South Asian applicants, both accounting for 8% of all eligible applications from these applicants, compared to 20% and 18% for all applicants, respectively.
- 57% of awards made to South Asian applicants included sub-classifiers World, 12% Popular and 8% Classical; compared to 11% World, 16% Popular and 21% Classical amongst all applicants.
- The number of eligible applications from South Asian applicants that included the sub-classifier World has remained relatively consistent over the last five years with an average of 22 applications per year – the only outliers are 9 applications in 2016/17 and 31 applications in 2018/19.
- The number of eligible applications from South Asian applicants that included the sub-classifier Classical has remained relatively consistent over the last five years with an average of 2 applications per year – with the exception of 9 eligible applications in 2014/15.
- The value of awards to South Asian applicants as a % of overall that included the sub-classifier World has varied over the last five years,
from a low of 8% in 2016/17 to a high of 23% in 2017/18. The average over the five years is 16%.

- The value of awards to South Asian applicants as a % of overall that included the sub-classifier Classical has ranged from a low of 0% in 2016/17 and 2017/18 to a high of 3% in 2014/15. The average over the five years is 1%.

- When sub-classifiers and success rate of applicants across all five financial years is ranked from 1 to 13, with 1 being the highest success rate (100%) and 13 the lowest (0%), South Asian projects including the sub-classifier World were the 7th most successful (60 out of 108, 55.6%).

- Over all five financial years, South Asian applicants accounted for 15% of all applications, 17% of all awards, and 16% of the value of awards made to projects containing the sub-classifier World.

2.4.3 Ineligibility & Rejection Reasons

In addition to data on the eligible applications and awards made by ACE to South Asian dance and music projects, data is also available on the reasons why some applications received were deemed ineligible and why those that were eligible were rejected.

South Asian Dance

A review of the data shows two principal reason categories for South Asian Dance applications being deemed ineligible (see Figure 1 for full breakdown):

- Underdeveloped (41%, n=7)
- Underdeveloped against one or more of the four criteria (29%, n=5).

When looking at the reason text, one principal reason was given to 71% (n=12) of applicants - *Your application does not contain enough information or is not sufficiently developed in some areas for us to be able to process it.*

Figure 1: Reason Categories for Ineligible SA Dance Applications
When looking at reasons for why applications were rejected, again there are two principal reason categories (see Figure 1 for full breakdown):

- Comparatively weaker (41%, n=14)
- Other applications preferred (24%, n=8).

This is reflected in the reason text sent to applicants, which also shows two principal reasons were given (see Table 4 for full breakdown):

- We decided that the artistic and/or public engagement outcomes of your activity were less strong than other applications we received (25%, n=11).
- We decided that your application was less strong in relation to quality and/or public engagement than other applications we received (19%, n=8).
South Asian Music

A review of the data shows two principal reason categories for South Asian Music applications being deemed ineligible (see Figure 2 for full breakdown):

- Underdeveloped against one or more of the four criteria (25%, n=9)
- Underdeveloped (22%, n=8).

When looking at the reason text, one principal reason was given to 49% (n=17) of applicants - Your application does not contain enough information or is not sufficiently developed in some areas for us to be able to process it (see Table 23 for full breakdown).
When looking at reasons for why music applications were rejected, again there are two principal reason categories (see Figure 4 for full breakdown):

- Other applications preferred (45%, n=27)
- Comparatively weaker (38%, n=23).

This is reflected in the reason text sent to applicants, which also shows two principal reasons were given:

- On balance we preferred other applications on this occasion. Careful thought about lots of different factors goes into making our decisions. We consider the strength of your application alongside other
applications we receive, and we think about the range and balance of different projects we’re supporting. We want the projects we fund to cover a broad range of artforms and disciplines, geographical areas and activity types (36%, n=24).

- We decided that your application was less strong in relation to quality and/or public engagement than other applications we received (24%, n=16).

Figure 4: Reason Categories for Rejected SA Music Applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparatively weaker – finance</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview area 1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparatively weaker – management</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparatively weaker – public engagement</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet criteria</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparatively weaker</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other applications preferred</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.5 Data implications for South Asian dance and music

The data in this report illustrates that the community who self-identify as South Asian within the UK, and predominantly in England, is significant. It makes up at least 5.3% of the population, when just considering those who self-identify as Indian (2.5%), Pakistani (2%) and Bangladeshi (0.8%). This does not include those who self-identify as Asian Sri Lankan, Afghani, Nepalese, Bhutanese or Maldivian. Equally, it does not account for anyone with mixed or multiple ethnic groups, which include those linked to South Asia. The proportion of the population who self-identify with one of these ethnic groups in both England and the UK as whole is also growing over time.

Relative to the general population, those of Asian ethnicity tend to be younger, with a significant proportion being aged under 18 years. There is therefore a need for any activity and development of the South Asian dance and music sector to be mindful of the great diversity that exists within England’s South Asian communities, with particular focus on those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Afghani ethnicity (who represent the most significant populations). It will be important to ensure that those from all ethnic groups/countries of births are targeted with opportunities.

The research undertaken during this study has highlighted a strong perception that, in its current state, the sector is strongly biased towards artforms and practitioners linked to India and, as such, the term “South Asian” is disingenuous. Certainly, the profile of respondents to the online survey delivered as part of this study suggests a great deal needs to be done to better engage with those who self-identify as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Afghani, or Nepalese, with little to no representation from these communities.

This population data also suggests there is a great opportunity for developing and sustaining the South Asian dance and music sector in England. With a growing population that is young, the potential talent pool from which practitioners and arts professionals can be drawn for training, progression and leadership is strong and exciting.

The distribution of South Asian communities across England also shows the opportunity for developing the sector extends across the country as a whole, with the majority of the nine English regions having more than 5% of their resident population self-identify as South Asian. This highlights the need for the South Asian dance and music sector to reach beyond the capital, ensuring that its activity takes place in and impacts on the West
Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber, East Midlands, North West and South East regions in particular.

The population data shows that in terms of reaching those with Pakistani ethnicity, the West Midlands, Yorkshire & The Humber and the North West should be where most energies are focused; whilst London, the West Midlands and the North West are key regions for those with Bangladeshi ethnicity. In addition to these regions, the South East and East Midlands are also key regions for those of Indian ethnicity.

When looking at the more granular level of cities, towns and London boroughs, again the reach needs to be broad within each region. When reviewing the analysis of the database of the South Asian dance and music sector created as part of this study, it appears that the current spread of activity is particularly dominant in the region of Greater London, most closely followed by the West Midlands, South East and East Midlands.

This is seen in the higher number of entries assigned to London, Harrow, Birmingham, Leicester and Leeds, at a city, town and London borough level. If this database is reflective of the current reach of the South Asian dance and music sector, it suggests that much more needs to be done in targeting other cities, towns and London boroughs with any developments in the sector’s infrastructure or other opportunities offered, especially:

- **London boroughs:** Ealing, Hounslow, Redbridge, Newham and Hillingdon for Indian communities; Redbridge, Newham and Waltham Forest for Pakistani communities; and Tower Hamlets, Newham, Redbridge, Camden, Barking & Dagenham, City of London and Westminster for Bangladeshi Communities.

- **Cities & Towns beyond London:** Wolverhampton for Indian communities; Bradford, Kirklees, Rochdale and Manchester for Pakistani communities; and Oldham and Luton for Bangladeshi communities.

It should be noted that the above conclusions are not implying that only individuals from South Asian ethnic groups will potentially engage with and wish to develop a career in the South Asian dance and music sector. However, they are certainly the dominant target audience for any training, progression and leadership opportunities offered, as per the focus of this report.

The relatively low levels of participation in the arts, as demonstrated by the Taking Part data presented in this chapter, highlight a potential challenge to engaging Asian communities with arts activity. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know if this differs when looking at South Asian communities as a sub-population of this group. However, it may signal that those who self-identify as Asian or Asian British face a greater number of
barriers to engagement than the UK population in general and that as such these need to be mitigated against in any development of the South Asian dance and music sector.

2.5.1 Implications for South Asian Dance

As the analysis of the database created for this mapping study shows, Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi appear to be the most practiced classical dance forms in England, whilst Bollywood is the most practiced of the popular forms; and Bhangra the most practiced of the folk dances (though relative to classical dance forms and Bollywood, numbers for Bhangra are low).

This supports the perception that Indian classical dance forms dominate the publicly funded sector, with popular and folk dances overlooked and undervalued. Equally, only a small number of the classical dance forms are represented. At a regional level the lack of diversity of dance forms becomes even more marked, particularly outside of London and the West Midlands:

- Across all regions, with the possible exception of the East Midlands, Bharatnatyam dominates.
- Five of the nine regions have a Kathak and Bollywood presence.
- Odissi only seems to have a presence in London and the South East.
- Kuchipudi only seems to have a presence in London, the East Midlands and North West.
- Bhangra only seems to have a presence in London and the West Midlands.

It is important to remember that these observations have been based on the information that was available to map from desk research, a nationwide callout could help to identify UK-based dancers who practice wider forms of Indian classical dance, classical dance from other South Asian countries and folk dances from across the whole of South Asia. It may also signal a need to bring practitioners of these dance forms to England from overseas to train and develop local dancers. The BBC Asian Network and other media platforms are significant promoters and Bhangra/Bollywood/Urban music is a booming industry with a long history in the UK. However, Bhangra and Bollywood need greater support and investment from the public sector, particularly considering their increased relevance to a younger second and third generation South Asian population.
2.5.2 Implications for South Asian Music

In terms of South Asian music, Vocal, Tabla, Sitar and Harmonium appear to be the most practiced musical instruments in England. The sheer number of musical instruments listed in the database highlights the diversity of practice that could exist. Equally, musicians and organisations spoke of themselves in relation to the systems of music they practiced, e.g. Canatic and Hindustani; and the musical forms they practiced, e.g. Bhajan, Qawwali and Ghazal, which adds another layer of complexity. Vocals, Tabla, Sitar and Harmonium are not solely linked to India, being popular in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and in some cases other South Asian countries. As such, it is less clear if the bias towards India that appears to exist in relation to South Asian dance forms is as prevalent within the music sector.

At a regional level, the lack of diversity of music forms becomes more marked, particularly outside of London:

- Across all regions, with the possible exception of the West Midlands, Vocal practice dominates.
- Five of the nine regions have a Tabla presence.
- Sitar seems to have the most presence in London, the South East and Yorkshire and The Humber.
- Harmonium seems to have the most presence in London, the West Midlands and North West.
- Veena and Violin seem to have the most presence in London and the South East.

It would be helpful to understand why these musical instruments so heavily dominate the South Asian music sector. Certainly, there appears to be a lack of South Asian music schools or academies in England and arts development organisations offering classes, especially at a regional level, which may limit the options available to budding musicians in their locality. Equally, if one-to-one tuition, temples or other community-based offers are limited in the instruments practiced by teachers this may also have a knock-on effect.
In relation to music, it is less clear than the dance sector if there is a need for greater promotion of non-classical music systems, genres and forms, though anecdotally the classical forms do seem to enjoy greater support.

### 2.5.3 Implications from South Asian Applicant ACE Grant Applications

The grant application data provided by the Arts Council shows applications from South Asian applicants for both dance and music projects has remained mostly consistent over the years. However, given that the number of individuals and organisations within the current database who practice in the South Asian dance and music sector totals 617, and in comparison with the wider applications overall for grants, the number of applications from South Asian applicants still appears low for both dance and music.

This suggests that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the Arts Council’s funding programmes amongst the South Asian dance and music sector, as well as a better understanding and response to the barriers that exist to those who are aware of the grants but are not making an application. As the results of the artist consultation for this study show, these include:

- A lack of awareness it existed or understanding of the process involved
- A perception that it is a daunting process
- Confusion over what is eligible for funding
- Belief that they are not eligible for funding (due to immigration status)
- A belief that the Arts Council does not support the type of work they do

It appears that targeted outreach and engagement activity to encourage applications to the Arts Council’s funding schemes is needed. Equally, with the majority of applications to National Lottery Project Grants (or previously, Grants for the Arts) being for under £15,000, this may signal an issue with the scale and ambition of projects being developed by South Asian practitioners and organisations. This may be indicative of issues linked to training, progression and leadership within the sector, which are discussed in the coming chapters. Arts Council England should therefore be working more proactively with the sector to increase both the number and scope of ambition for South Asian applications.

Encouragingly, applications made by South Asian dance and music practitioners and organisations achieve a relatively high level of award success from the Arts Council, compared to all applicants. This may signal that, in general, the applications submitted are of a high quality and interest and/or that there is a strong appetite within the Arts Council to support more projects and activity in the sector.
Data from the Arts Council shows that in 2018/19 the number of applications from South Asian dance practitioners and organisations with the sub-classifier ‘World’ increased, as did the number of awards for these projects. This may signal a shift and growth in confidence to both put forward and support projects with a more classical or traditional focus.

For both dance and music applications from South Asian individuals and organisations, the main reasons for ineligible applications were the same – underdeveloped generally or underdeveloped against one or more of the Arts Council’s four specific criteria. Rejection was mainly because of competition, with applications being seen as comparatively weaker to other applications or other applications being preferred. A lack of information and the proposed project not having been thought through enough were the principal reasons for applications being underdeveloped; whilst lesser quality, less clear artistic and public outcomes, and less public outcomes overall were principal reasons that other applications performed better.

This suggests that individuals and organisations in the South Asian dance and music sector would benefit from training in how to write successful funding applications, and greater support throughout the journey of developing and submitting an application. This could include face-to-face and virtual training and support programmes, surgeries with specialists and resources (including examples of successful applications made). Such an offer could be provided by the Arts Council and/or organisations within the sector whose role it is to support South Asian artists.

Equally, peer-to-peer support networks of South Asian dancers and musicians who have successfully applied to the Arts Council and/or are confident in writing funding applications could be created to support those who are struggling in this area.
3. Training

3.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out what’s working, what’s not working and what the priorities, concerns and needs for South Asian dancers and musicians are; specifically in relation to training.

The research for the report evidenced that South Asian dancers and musicians both share a similar training trajectory:

- Introduced early to art form by family and/or through community and religious settings such as temples.

- Take classical South Asian dance and/or music classes/lessons through local independent teachers/South Asian arts focused organisations – rarely offered through formal education routes/taught in schools.

- For those who are aware of the pathways and options, have the support of family, resources and talent some intensive/advanced/elite training options such as Yuva Gati for dancers and SAMYO for musicians are available catering mainly to the 14-19 years old age groups.

- For those who don’t pursue a formally advanced training route they will continue with their individual and group training, classes and coaching. Some UK institutions offer their own examinations structure affiliated to Indian and other examining boards.

- The arangetram performance marks a key milestone in the training of the South Asian artist. However, following this debut most artists pursue an academic/professional career outside of dance or music. Many keep in touch/stay with their gurus and some spend time in India but very few can see a viable career and progression path.
3.1.1 HE&FE provision

There is currently no dedicated degree or equivalent fulltime course to transition early stage practitioners of classical South Asian dance and music from pre-vocational to professional level. However, courses where students study classical Indian dance or music as one part of broader courses do exist. This is in stark contrast to the plethora of HE&FE courses available to study contemporary western dance and music.

A significant piece of research\(^\text{10}\) was undertaken in 2018 to explore the feasibility of launching a UK-based degree-undergraduate or postgraduate course, in South Asian Dance. This research concluded that the numbers likely to undertake a full-time 3-year BA degree in South Asian Dance remain too low for it to be a viable option at this point. An Indian music degree was also explored through a partnership between the Bhavan and Trinity Laban in 2006, however this was eventually discontinued. The wider factors outlined in this report around the specific needs of South Asian dancers and musicians provides some further insights into why the market for a standard degree course is limited at this time. Our research does however support the recommendations from previous research that a shorter modular and/or more intensive HE course would be better suited to the needs and drivers of the artists it would seek to benefit.

3.2. Survey insights re training

The full survey write up is available at Appendix 5. This section summarises the key findings that are most relevant towards providing insights into training for South Asian dancers and musicians.

❖ More than half of respondents had begun learning their primary artform as a young child – with 11% giving an age of 0-4 years and 48% an age of 5-9 years. Only 8% of respondents began after the age of 25 years.

❖ The most important factors that have enabled individuals to be a practicing South Asian musician and/or dancer in descending order were:
  1. *Individual time spent training and honing my practice*: 97% rated this very important (81%) or important (16%);
  2. *Training under a guru*: 91% rated this very important (80%) or important (11%);

3. **Support of parents/family**: 81% rated this very important (64%) or important (16%);
4. **Weekly dance/music lessons at a local dance/music school**: 80% rated this very important (62%) or important (18%).

Around two-thirds of respondents also rated the following factors as important:
5. **Time spent in India/Bangladesh/Pakistan/Sri Lanka immersed in the artform**: 69% rated this very important (41%) or important (28%).
6. **Training in different styles outside of my core dance tradition/instrument**: 66% rated this very important (28%) or important (38%).
7. **Training with multiple teachers**: 65% rated this very important (25%) or important (40%).

Respondents were also provided with an opportunity to state if there is anything else that has been important or very important to helping them develop a career as a professional dancer or musician. Answers that came up repeatedly included:

- Performing
- Dedication and hard work
- Peer support and networks
- Funding
- Networking
- Accessing/experiencing the work of other artists
- Collaborating with other artists
- Mentors
- Love/passion of their chosen artform
- Expansion of their knowledge and understanding of the artforms.
- Other things of note were access to affordable space (studio, rehearsal, performance) and having the necessary business skills required.

❖ Early career artists, on average, felt that intensive summer school style masterclasses and short courses with gurus tied to formal accreditation/grades and increasing opportunities for British South Asian artists to travel and spend time in the places their art originates from, such as India, were more valuable than mid-career and established artists.

❖ 74% of respondents agreed with the following statement, with 39% stating strongly agree and 35% agree: **The current training and progression routes for most South Asian dancers and musicians in the UK does not adequately prepare them for the professional rigour and standards required to work, develop and achieve at a world class level.**
3.3. **Artist insights**

The comments set out below paint a picture of the key issues and opportunities facing dancers and musicians in relation to training.

### 3.3.1 Socio-economic and class factors influence the talent pool

An important observation that was repeatedly evidenced through the consultation was the fact that South Asian dancers and musicians, and leaders of South Asian arts organisations, have historically been largely common with western art forms - comprised of people from higher socio-economic backgrounds. However, we spoke to some incredibly inspirational artists and leaders who did not come from privileged backgrounds and/or from families with existing connections to the arts.

The market analysis of the future talent pool evidences that socio-economic barriers must be eradicated for a truly representative South Asian arts ecology to emerge. Reaching young South Asian dancers and musicians from lower socio-economic backgrounds will involve a concerted and resource intensive effort.

*Having an outreach programme is essential to reach these young artists. This is what CAT did. Bhavan needs to do that or they’ll keep getting the same old, same old.*

*When you start chipping away at it, posh actors will always talk about their parents taking them to things, that’s no different to South Asian posh families – it’s a bit of an echo chamber in my opinion for the NPOs focusing on the classical bubble. You’re performing to the same people with the same thing. That stunts training and progression.*

*Classical Indian dance and music are amongst some of the most privileged artists and audiences there are. The caste system is alive and well. There’s racism within the sector as well as beyond it. That’s a difficult conversation to have but the way some artists from lower casts were treated here was incredible.*

*SAMYO has about 35 children in it doing some brilliant work but they seem to all be from fairly privileged backgrounds.*

*Many of our kids find it too difficult to do the IDST work, there’s lots of file work and it’s difficult if you’re not literate that way.*
If you’re not married to a rich husband or have a great job, then I wouldn’t advise anyone to be a dancer unless you’re super passionate.

This is an art form based on patrons and now the patrons are parents.

3.3.2 Dance/Music not generally considered a credible career option culturally

All consultees acknowledged the influence of family on their decisions to pursue other careers through formal education pathways. Asides from situations where consultees were sons or daughters of artists and/or people leading South Asian arts organisations, the majority observed that South Asian parents did not feel a career in the arts was credible or viable. For this reason, swathes of potential artists pursue ‘professional’ higher education pathway whilst their art form takes a back seat or disappears completely. Training and development models such as the Centre for Advanced Training programme for dance or SAMYO/Tarang for music, which can be run alongside academic studies, are one way to address this cultural reality.

Awareness needs to be created with parents that artist careers can be possible. We need to challenge the mindset in the culture.

I always wanted to be a dancer or a lawyer. My mum is a Tamil historian writer, so she was fine with it, but I was scared to tell my dad who’s an IT consultant. He was supportive but told me you need to realise that you can’t doss around. The outer family circle were of course critical, who would marry me, how would I survive? But I don’t care what they think.

At a lot of the Tamil schools there are cultural differences where no one takes dance seriously as a ‘real’ job. You have to go against that. The Tamil schools would have no idea about the Arts Council. The Bhavan Centre where I trained, my guru’s reaction from there was that he didn’t know what ACE is.

The parents of the Yuva Gati students appreciate the high level their sons and daughters are getting, that it’s the best in the country and it complements the work with their home tutors. That’s what drives people like that.

The cultural barriers are huge, most South Asian families don’t feel dance is a viable option as a career.

More than 50 or 60 of my students have gone on to be a doctor.
Most of our parents feel their children should do everything, sports, dance and music and that dilutes the quality.

I hear from the parents that they don’t want their daughters to become dancers because it’s hard to maintain a living. The contemporary dance kids also face this. So, our gifted children need to be able to compete in the wider dance sector.

You need to be strong willed to take as arts career on, my parents never said yes but they never said no. Some of my friends who are very very talented had to become doctors or lawyers. They were academically so smart too – one of the top doctors in England is a really really good flute player. There’s a perception that you can’t do music full time. There’s a drop off point around 18/19 where people refocus on academia. I studied music academically, so I had a plan B. I took a gap year and studied in India with some senior musicians there.

I got into it because my dad wanted me to get into Bollywood. My dad’s measure of success coming from a working-class background was to be on the silver screen and so that led me to dance and discovering Kathak in Birmingham. My teacher there, her commitment, dedication and passion for the artform really influenced me. I was very introverted and bullied at school and dance was one of the ways I could understand myself, it was a tool to communicate with. It was a way to find my identity.

You have to educate the mothers. Tamil boys don’t dance, they learn instruments at the temple but not dance. Some people won’t bring children to me because I’m not Tamil.

3.3.3 Relevance to their lives is critical to artform engagement and connection for young artists

Dance or music as a career option to young South Asians will not resonate if they cannot see themselves and their own stories reflected in the art. The consultation unveiled a strong need to create work and themes that are relevant to younger audiences, in order to connect and engage their interest with the traditional art forms. So whilst many felt that genres such as Bhangra and Bollywood were more accessible to younger South Asian artists, it was also acknowledged that traditional forms and genres can successfully inspire and engage them when telling stories that resonate.

Young people need to find relevance in work they are doing or performing, or they won’t be interested. I have to dance in traditional language because that’s what I know but my themes are contemporary. Even going back to the traditional pieces, you can draw parallels with those stories.
and today and through this they can co-exist. Young people need to do it cos they want to, not because they are brought by their parents.

Bhangra and Bollywood is accessible. It comes down to a commercial world. Bhangra does well at University circuit, but the quality of what they do, and the production is great, but as soon as they come out of university they stop. There are major competitions amongst University Bhangra teams at international level. Commercially they do very well. Classical performance costs would come down if they were programmed more frequently.

The education establishments that offer training, most people I know are put off by that because those institutions don’t look like them. If there was something that normalised and integrated South Asian dance and music it would really help.

There’s not much thinking about where the art forms fall within contemporary England and the young people and artists living here.

I feel worried about Kathak that it might become some faint history of India that we used to have in Britain. I was in a school today, nearly all Asian kids, but they had never come across Kathak. If I told them it was a vegetable, they’d have believed me. The school felt it was a massive gap in their learning that they couldn’t have a language to express themselves through movement. I’ve had those kids do Kathak as a football match for a boy’s class. Use what they love to inspire them through dance. A 7 yr old today told me he felt ‘humiliated’ by being made to dance and I asked him to talk about it and because we had the conversation with him about whether it’s ok to dance as a boy and with other boys, those are really important conversations.

There is a market but we’re going about it the wrong way. It’s not second-generation Indians anymore. Some of that generation are sticking to it but there’s a younger generation that needs to be attracted. It needs to happen from the ground up.

You can’t teach children here the way you teach them in India, so I wrote a book. 50% of learning music is listening and exposure but the children here aren’t exposed to it the way we are in India.

My art form (Bharatanatyam) and the use of movement and facial expression meant that it was close to performing arts and theatre, so it was easier to interpret for non-dancers. We provided an opportunity for young people to forget themselves through moving themselves and taking ownership so the Indianess was embedded without being forced.
We did an open mike session once a month which really helped our young audience. A lot of the influence comes from hip hop and Bollywood.

In the last 4 or 5 years we dance schools feel like many young people are just giving it up more easily. Not all of them of course but many more of them are giving up than did before that’s for sure. And I think that’s because it’s not relevant to everything else going on in their lives.

We do a lot of Bollywood for elderly people as well as young people. Folk dances and the Bollywood is very popular with young people because it speaks to their generation and gives variety. There’s demand for it.

3.3.4 If you can’t see it you can’t be it – young artists need visibility of other people like them who’ve `made it’

This was a common theme and concern throughout all the conversations. Artists felt strongly that the lack of visible role models beyond one or two ‘stars’ such as Akram Khan or Ravi Shankar, who felt like exceptions to the rule, was a major barrier to early stage artists. Being able to see and reference a wider range of South Asian artists and South Asian people in arts sector careers, who were making a successful living, was felt to be a pivotal factor for helping young and/or emerging artists to decide to be a professional artists or practitioner. We heard the sentiment and words many times, “If they can’t see it, they can’t be it.” There was also commentary around the need for young and/or emerging artists to experience excellence in their art forms in order to be inspired to develop and grow.

Musicians have no idea where to go for further training to address weaknesses and grow as an artist. This info not readily available.

We must invest in young people and show a clear path for a trade they can fly with. We invest in our students for 10 solid years. We’ve hired some of your past students back as tutors.

There’s only a handful of role models, we need to be able to show pathways.

Without a plethora of role models that can show success there’s no incentive to train.

We need to find the confidence in dancers and musicians that their form is valid. Only western forms are seen on TV and via media, so this can impact on confidence. Collaboration and funding is really important. Marketing and touring is where things fall down.
That's where dance and music advocacy comes from and the need to do this from the school level. If children see what to aspire to at school and train from then they can achieve their dreams of being a musician or dancer in this field.

As a youngster, it would have changed all the events in my life if I’d seen or been exposed to people in the career and seen the possible career or pathway I could have followed. I fell into a naïve ignorance that it’s not viable or possible. So, I went for a degree in Physiotherapy. BBC Young Dancer changed my life in so many different ways. Of course, there is that national platform and visibility. But also, to be alongside mainstream dance forms that do have more exposure was so useful. Just to have that platform was one thing and then the opportunities that came from that another.

There was no clear way of me making money from my artform. The only role models I saw were only teaching or just playing at graduation ceremonies so that didn’t seem very fun to me. There were no role models. I would look at the western way of things and explored that, but no one ever encouraged that. I wasn’t given the opportunity to be creative that way either. My community don’t feel like it’s a sustainable way of living.

There were a few international stars from India who are the real deal. This is why I organise festivals because I want young people to see excellence. Seeing the Indian masters really inspired me.

Children are only watching other children dancing so there is never any aspiration.

Often with South Asians in music they have to carve their own path. They have no one to look to and be inspired by when it comes to diversifying their sound, and that’s the difficulty.

Music also has to be normalised as a viable career option. Our communities need to accept it instead of pushing people into other careers – but for that, you need to have more examples so that the path to be taken can be understood.

How can we expect artists from diverse backgrounds to want to be performers when they don’t see themselves represented on stage?

When you perform in the ballroom at Buckingham Palace at 18 that’s a turning point when you know you want to do this forever.
Collaboration is very important between different genres and musicians but that only happens at professional level. I recently composed for London Phil and with Nordic folk music and have written film music for Bollywood and this needs to happen more with young people because they need to be able to do this to have a career.

The things that are missing for young people coming up is work. If you’re a violinist and do three years at the Royal College there’s so much work, you can do as a violinist but coming out as an Indian dancer has such few positions. The ones coming out of the Royal Music put through 1,000s each year who all earn a living from it. There needs to be a discussion about careers, and they need to be much more visible. Our artists need to be prepared to do hybrid forms. It’s the only way to get some work.

People value instrumentalists but my first skill is writing music – being a composer wasn’t an option as a core specialism – you had to choose an instrumental route.

I lived in Bristol and started dancing at the age of 10. There as a local Saturday school run by someone in the temple that I went to with my parents. The teacher was charming and had scrap books and things and it was an easy way to rather than a rite of passage. There’s no one in my family with a dance background so it was all very casual early on. About two years in the teacher changed to a woman who was a professional dancer who had her own company and did performance and when I saw that I was wowed and knew that’s what I wanted to do. At the age of 16 she invited me to tour with her company around Wales where we mostly performed. I then went to university at Nottingham to do medicine. I was the first person who got the grade 4 Bharatanatyam exam when it was introduced to IDS T – I was a guinea pig. I was recommended to Cirque du Soleil for an audition. There were few dancers with bi-lingual bodies. They offered me the job, but I was in the middle of my dissertation, so I said no but two weeks later I thought it was crazy. A professional company was starting up that year and they asked me to join which was good timing, so I got my bachelor’s degree but wasn’t a doctor, so I took a sabbatical. After my second sabbatical I knew I didn’t want to go back to be a doctor. For solo touring classical work, I can only think of me. It’s a shame we don’t have more role models. I don’t remember seeing anything like this.

Since 2015 I’ve a South Asian showcase at Curve theatre every year, mainly local young people but also professionals who perform and educate the audience and the participants. We’ve shown them different dance styles they wouldn’t have seen before too. When they see high calibre artists it inspires them. If you don’t create work and opportunities for young people, then they won’t want to pursue it as a career or a hobby.
They also should see that there are wider opportunities, they don’t have to become performers. They could be in stage management, administration lots of different areas they don’t otherwise know about if they didn’t. One of our students won the BBC young dancer. That inspired her to take it further.

3.3.5 Current training routes aren’t producing ‘rounded’ artists ready for all aspects of professional practice

Young and/or emerging artists at the start of their careers commented, and older, more established artists reflected, that there are gaps in the current training and development framework. Many felt that whilst artists can access specific dance or music training, there is limited provision of the wider skills required to support a full-time professional career as a dancer or musician. These missing areas from the majority of artist’s training journeys include technical skills, choreography and composing skills, performance opportunities and the wider business skills required to have a successful career. The exceptions and more rounded approaches to training artists are more likely to occur in wider dance and music sector organisations such as the South Asian CAT training programme run by DanceXchange in partnership with Sampad South Asian Arts and Heritage.

Injury prevention and body management are key things that South Asian dancers need to understand and is never talked about. Institutions in the sector currently lack this but all the other places that train you in dance embed this.

Our students need to be able to not stay within one dance form, our students need to be interested and adaptable to different dance styles. So, a classical ballet dancer who would only do their style wouldn’t work here either. Dancers have to be willing to speak different languages. Our hip hop dancers may only ever have done brake dancing but they’re willing to try something different.

Indian classical teaches pieces that already exist, you’re not pushed to compose and write and that’s a skill you don’t learn in classical music so it would have been useful to have had some training in.

BBC young dancer showed that choreography for our kind of dancer is following behind. The hip hop dancers in that absolutely smashed it, because of their understanding of their body and how it works and moves and what they want to say.

The contemporary dancers have a very set dancing journey and route. South Asian dancers don’t have that – they concentrate on different
things. Their age range nearly needs to start something like the National Youth Dance Company but in their 20’s after they’ve done uni. They don’t see it as a sole career path.

Once you know your technique well you then you need to learn to perform. That is another type of training. I’ve struggled to find performers; I find those who are well trained are not always good at performing.

I did arts management when I was starting out and so I have some knowledge of how things work but that’s lacking in the sector in a big way.

At the very beginning we didn’t understand the contemporary dance market. I learnt it as a second or third language – it’s not my native language.

Young people aren’t one dimensional, they don’t do one thing that they’re good at – they’re hyper competent with portfolio careers but sometimes that inhibits having a skill woven into their DNA. They diversify too quickly.

What support is there for mixing engineers and people like that? Create opportunities for everyone to grow together.

There’s many studies that dance and music are a wonderful thing for health and wellbeing. They can address obesity, cancer, mental health. Our dance and music lends itself so well to this agenda. Also, working in other contexts like museums or with visual artists. There’s so much we could do but this is never part of your training or prep.

The opportunities are there – we just don’t know how to access them. The grassroots teachers don’t know or have those aspirations. They’re doing it for the community.

The sooner they get their work out there being seen the better. In India even a young upcoming performer would find it easy to get an hr and half slot in a local music event whereas in the UK you’d be very lucky to find 20 minutes anywhere. One of the hardest things I’ve had to do is to edit a four minute piece for the BBC or a 3 minute edit for Dance UK, culturally you have to be able to work within the culture you’re in. People are a bit more willing to listen to longer classical music. With dance you only watch long pieces if you go to somewhere like Sadlers Wells.

I trained in a community group class. The classes my teachers gave were for good quality dance, gifting traditional rather than training for a career.

I tell them they need a part time job that will pay some bills and dance alongside that. They see me and the company and think it’s wonderful and
I was the same with my teacher, but they don’t realise how hard and challenging it is. The reality is there isn’t enough opportunities for progression so making false promises doesn’t help anyone.

3.3.6 Lack of standardised accreditation/quality indicators undermines credibility and limits opportunity

The issue of quality was repeatedly discussed throughout all the conversations we had. Whilst only one measure, accreditation, is widely recognized in the wider cultural ecology as a shorthand indication of quality. The lack of formal, independently recognized qualifications and/or recognition of progression in the art forms makes it more difficult for wider stakeholders, such as funders or programmers who don’t have an in-depth knowledge of the forms, to assess quality. It also reinforces to parents who may be doubtful of the vocational value of a career in dance or music that it is not on a par with their preferred academic pathways, which have clear levels and routes in place. This issue is not confined to the South Asian Sector. The UK Carnival sector for example, where the majority of artists are from BAME backgrounds, also suffers from a lack of qualification/accreditation for carnival arts.

Musicians could learn from dance and the ISTD system. Bhavan have a diploma of five years and they’ve gone to Trinity and exam boards etc. to try and standardise what happens next, but most exam boards say it’s not a big enough market.

Where are the mid-career artists and those coming out of ISTD training? I see no evidence of the benefit of ISTD training. They enter into formalised training up to 16 – 18 years, then go to University and become doctors and never dance again. We aren’t creating artists. We’re training them in a discipline. We are not creating artists this way.

There needs to be some kind of standardisation, not necessarily of classical and contemporary, but that shows its quality work. The training is where that should start.

So when we talk about how you measure quality you end up falling into the same measures, in ballet for example there’s a whole range of levels that says, ‘that’s good’ and some organisations you just know that will be good because of their reputation. For non-westernised art forms, we haven’t cracked how we confidently talk about what good looks like.

I worried that private tuition was unregulated and so in 1989 we set up an exam board without any assistance from the Arts Council because they were not interested at all that successfully provides accredited
qualifications in all subjects of Indian dance and music. Our work has led to an improvement in standards for the teachers and student who go through our system of exams. The fact that the Arts Council does not know about us is symptomatic of what is wrong in this sector.

If I didn’t do a module in Indian classical music at university with some very good teachers, I don’t think I would have got into it the way I did. But to develop I had to go to India.

We partnered with Brayag sangeet samati https://www.prayagsangeetsamiti.co.in/ to develop a syllabus.

There needs to be a standardisation of how South Asian dance is taught. A license should be required to teach. Any Tom, Dick or Harry can teach at the moment. They should have to buy a license and in doing that need to have their teaching assessed.

We need more types of places like Bhavan, but the standards have to be regulated.

### 3.3.7 Young artists feel undervalued and sometimes exploited

Sadly, there was a theme throughout some of the conversations that South Asian artists were often expected to perform for free or at very low rates of pay. This was particularly true of the experiences of younger and emerging artists who felt under valued at best and exploited at worst.

I wanted to do law and got into a few universities to do that but my music theory teacher who’s a scholar and ex lecturer at SOAS said Trinity school of music is doing a programme on world music so you could do veena which I played. I also loved Bharatanatyam but there was nowhere doing classical Indian dance at that time. At Trinity I got to study all different fusions like Jazz and Caribbean. Altogether there’s only 10 people with my degree though because it only ran for a couple of years. When I got to the professional stages I saw a lot of negativity about being a South Asian dancer or musician in the UK. An institution would hire you if you’re prepared to do it for free or peanuts. I helped my teacher to teach which was great but the leaders know the problems musicians have and they still prey on you to do it for free or they’ll go to someone else who’ll do it for free.

I paid the musicians from my own pocket. I’m about £7k out of my own pocket. The project made no money because the people who could of helped didn’t but I’m not going to be the person who doesn’t pay musicians.
4. **Progression**

4.1. **Introduction**

This chapter sets out what’s working, what’s not working and what the priorities, concerns and needs for South Asian dancers and musicians are; specifically in relation to progression.

4.2. **Survey insights re progression**

The full survey write up is available at Appendix 5. This section summarises the key findings that are most relevant towards providing insights into progression for South Asian dancers and musicians.

- 40% were practicing as a South Asian dancer or musician alongside another job/career – the proportion for dance was higher at 24% than for music at 16%. Where respondents had a career outside of the arts and culture sector, the top five statuses/sectors cited were Student, Medicine, Education, Marketing & PR and Finance & Accounting.

- When respondents were asked, ‘What do you think would help you to move forward on that sliding scale over time towards being an established professional and/or leader in South Asian dance or music?’ many different answers were provided. Those which came up multiple times were:
  - Marketing, publicity and promotion
  - A better understanding of South Asian arts amongst the wider sector and more specifically with funders, including an openness to fund more diverse South Asian dance and music styles and roles in the sector
  - Better support from local authorities
  - Ensuring opportunities are open to all, including a need to combat perceived nepotism
  - Increased opportunities for networking
  - Mainstream performance opportunities, including venues and festivals
  - Opportunities for collaboration, apprenticeships and mentoring
  - Having the skills and/or resources to establish a dance or music school
  - Affordable venues for performance
  - Affordable spaces for practice, rehearsal and teaching
  - Audience development for the South Asian arts
• Ability to focus full-time on their artistic practice, as opposed to having another career alongside it to support them
• Better integration of South Asian artforms into the education system
• The support and opportunities to do intensive study in South Asia.

❖ Respondents were asked ‘What has been the biggest barrier or challenge to progressing your career as a practicing dancer or musician so far?’ many different answers were provided, with the most common being:

• Funding
• Lack of/level of pay and consistency of pay
• Lack of high-quality gurus and teachers
• Lack of support
• Lack of opportunities
• Lack of time to dedicate to practice and/or activity to support practice
• Family, other work and/or study commitments
• Perception of favouritism existing in some South Asian arts organisations
• Lack of affordable space (studio space, rehearsal space, etc.)
• Lack of interest in or awareness of South Asian artforms by others
• Cultural barriers, including language or ethnicity
• Lack of other skills required by artists to make a successful career.

❖ Respondents were asked ‘What has been the most influential factor/biggest opportunity in progressing your career as a practicing dancer or musician so far?’ many different answers were provided, with the most common being:

• Belief and support from gurus, mentors and teachers
• Support from family and friends
• Performance and touring opportunities
• Private practice, training, hard work and dedication
• Engaging with and working in other genres or styles of dance and music
• Training in and connections with India
• Role models, including working with specific artists
• Peer support, networking and collaboration
• Passion for the artform
• Networking and having good contacts
• Support from ACE and South Asian arts organisations
• Working in collaboration.

It is of note that within answers to the above two questions, there seemed to be different experiences amongst respondents in terms of their
interactions with South Asian arts organisations – some having positive experiences with these organisations and others not.

❖ Only 22% of respondents were satisfied with the current balance of time they spent on their artistic practice, compared with time they needed to spend on other activities supporting their practice. 43% were dissatisfied. Those who answered ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ were asked to explain why and what would help them to achieve a more satisfactory balance. Time, money and space were the three main causes of dissatisfaction:

- **Time**: this included people having to work another job to support their artistic career, with this job being either a primary or secondary career; commitments to family or studies; and the need to spend significant amounts of time teaching.
- **Money**: many did not have the necessary funding to be able to focus on their artistic practice, which links back to the time issue and having to work other jobs and dedicate more hours than desired to teaching.
- **Space**: many spoke of how there was a lack of space for them to undertake their artistic practice, be this for private or collaborative practice, rehearsals or teaching.

Several also spoke of how they would like help with the administration, marketing and fundraising activity they needed to undertake as an artist.

❖ When asked to rate their current level for a range of skills and attributes that might be considered important for artists, the skills that, overall, artists felt they were most lacking in were:

- **Fundraising** (60%): rated poor by 44%, satisfactory by 16%
- **Brand and marketing** (58%): rated poor by 34%, satisfactory by 24%
- **Digital skills** (49%): rated poor by 28%, satisfactory by 21%
- **Networking** (42%): rated poor by 18% and satisfactory by 24%
- **Partnership/collaboration** (37%): rated poor by 22%, satisfactory by 15%
- **Producing/entrepreneurial skills** (36%): rated poor by 14%, satisfactory by 22%.

❖ A range of ideas were tested with respondents, informed by desk research and initial stakeholder consultation, to determine how valuable they would be to the progression of South Asian musicians and dancers. All were considered valuable, with a minimum of 70% of respondents stating each was incredibly valuable or valuable. The top
10 most valuable in descending order, i.e. those ideas with the highest proportion of 'Incredibly valuable' ratings, were:

1. Dedicated performance platforms and opportunities to showcase work to venues and promoters (71% rated this incredibly valuable);

2. Dedicated low cost space and facilities to rehearse in and meet peers to collaborate and explore creative practice (66% rated this incredibly valuable);

3. Developing more producers for South Asian dance and music (61% rated this incredibly valuable);

4. Mentoring from an established and credible artist in their discipline (59% rated this incredibly valuable);

5. Investment in understanding and growing the audiences for South Asian dance and music and ensuring its relevance to today’s audiences from within and beyond the South Asian community (58% rated this incredibly valuable);

6. Increased awareness and advocacy of South Asian dance and music as sustainable career options within South Asian families and social networks such as temples, schools and grassroots dance and music classes (56% rated this incredibly valuable);

7. Increasing opportunities to see and engage with successful role models/leaders in the chosen artform (56% rated this incredibly valuable);

8. A centralised digital space where all professional opportunities for South Asian dancers and musicians are listed and regularly emailed out to subscribers (55% rated this incredibly valuable);

9. A paid apprentice style programme within a South Asian dance and/or music organisation/company (54% rated this incredibly valuable);

10. Greater partnership working and collaboration within and outside of the South Asian dance and music sector (54% rated this incredibly valuable).

When looking at the combined totals for those who rated ideas incredibly valuable or valuable, the following ideas also came in the top 10:

Increasing opportunities for British South Asian artists to travel and spend time in the countries where their art originates from, such as India.
offering training in business skills, such as fundraising and marketing to South Asian musicians and dancers; and intensive summer school style masterclasses and short courses with gurus tied to formal accreditation/grades.

Respondents were also provided with an opportunity to state if there was anything not listed that they felt would be valuable or incredibly valuable towards developing and progressing South Asian musicians and dancers. Several answers were provided, though very few by multiple respondents. Suggestions included:

▪ Provision for older/more mature artists
▪ Syllabus development of South Asian dance styles not covered by ISTD
▪ Support for a greater variety of dance and music styles, and approaches
▪ More links into mainstream (i.e. non-South Asian specific opportunities)
▪ More local opportunities outside of the major cities
▪ Increasing the quality of teaching and performance within the sector
▪ Ensuring greater investment in UK-based artists, over those based in India.

❖ Overall, established artists were more likely to have made more applications to the Arts Council than mid-career artists, with only 4% having made more than 3 applications, compared with 32% of established artists. Those who had never applied for Arts Council funding were asked why this was the case. The most frequently given reasons were:

▪ A lack of awareness it existed or understanding of the process involved
▪ A perception that it is a daunting process
▪ Lack of certainty about who and what is eligible for funding
▪ Belief that they are not eligible for funding (due to immigration status)
▪ A belief that the Arts Council do not support the type of work they do
▪ Have never needed funding from the Arts Council

Those who had been through the Arts Council funding application process were asked about the experience. Again, multiple responses were given, with the most common feedback being:
▪ There was the perception that assessors had a lack of understanding about South Asian dance and music, which inhibits their ability to fairly assess applications (applications are assessed through a ‘white lens’).

▪ For many it was a positive experience, with a good level of support provided by advisors at the Arts Council and a need to push one’s thinking in making the application.

▪ For others the process of applying was seen as long, tedious and involving too much paperwork, although several respondents stated it was a straightforward process.

▪ Some had difficulty putting into words projects that were at heart visual and/or auditory in nature, and doing this within the specified word counts, with some having the added challenge that English is their second language.

▪ Several people struggled with putting together a budget and the value-in-kind element was singled out as a particular challenge.

▪ There was a perceived imbalance between the quality of the art versus the quality of the application (i.e. projects were successful because someone was a good bid writer as opposed to having a high-quality idea).

▪ There was a perception that classical/traditional work is overlooked and accorded less value than work which has a more contemporary focus, whilst certain South Asian dance styles were felt to be more ‘fundable’ than others.

▪ Some did not find the online portal user-friendly.

❖ Ways that respondents felt the Arts Council might improve the funding application process in order to support the South Asian dance and music sector more:

▪ Allowing applications to include video and audio submissions in order that the work can speak for itself.

▪ Better explanation as to why an application has been unsuccessful.

▪ Providing examples of successful applications (case studies) for South Asian dance and music projects to help understanding of what is expected.

▪ Offering opportunities to meet with advisors via surgeries or other means.

❖ The ability for artists to network, connect with and collaborate with peers, and develop additional skills to support their practice is also of great importance as they progress through their careers. Equally important is having the facilities, infrastructure and financial support available to support them in their practice.
4.3. **Artist insights**

The comments set out below paint a picture of the key issues and opportunities facing South Asian dancers and musicians in relation to progression.

4.3.1 **Lack of access to spaces and equipment is stunting progression**

Our discussions with the sector indicate a serious shortage of access to high quality rehearsal, recording and performance space and equipment. This is undoubtedly impacting upon the progress of South Asian dancers and musicians, particularly those who are seeking to develop choreography or composition skills. It also limits the interaction, collaboration and peer to peer learning that arises anecdotally from high-quality shared spaces.

_I’m shocked to see how many musicians who have never stepped into a recording studio for the first time – even seasoned performers._

_We need longer periods where performances can happen. We need spaces where musicians and dancers can work together, longer time for collaboration, to allow growth of artists._

_These kids in the summer schools are learning in classes in their socks because it’s so cold and on inappropriate floors, they’re not being taught in an environment that’s conducive to being healthy dancers._

_Movement facilitating is a good income for me. I want to do some studio sharing where audiences can just come in and watch a dancer in a studio setting and break that fourth wall of the professional theatre barrier. Having conversations with the dancer and why they’re doing what they do. That intimacy, I’d love to do more of that. Curate a series of British born South Asian dancers to come and share their dance with other British and British Asian people. So, they can see and be inspired. But there are no spaces for this. This is what’s missing._

_Collective spaces being available at low prices is a huge problem too._

_My company has a space in London now so we provide low rate space for South Asian dancers in the hope it will become a cultural hub for them to work and meet. I don’t charge my dancers, if they want to practice, I tell_
them just use the space and practice because it’s so badly needed, and I know they can’t afford it.

4.3.2 Limited performance opportunities means less performance ready artists

A constant conversation during the research was the lack of performing opportunities available to emerging and mid-career artists. The chicken and egg impact of this issue slows down artist development significantly as performance is such an important part of the art forms. The lack of performance opportunities also means less chances for audiences to experience the art.

There is a lack of performance opportunities and that is what progresses people towards being better quality. Performance is fundamental to all South Asian arts.

For our National Youth Dance Company group, they’d never worked with a Bharatanatyam choreographer before. When recruiting for dancers we were thinking we’d be targeting similar ages as NYDC but the dancers who came forward from the South Asian community were like late 20’s and 30’s. There just aren’t opportunities for performance for them.

There’s a concern about focusing on training artists but then what? The reality is that opportunities on stage are limited for them. Can they then become a full-time dancer in a company? Is it a viable career route? That’s all questionable at the moment.

When you’re working in schools and teaching you hardly have time to perform and train – it’s a difficult life as a dancer here.

There is almost a hierarchy on stage, a solo artist and accompanist, it’s not presented as a group but that’s what the audience sees so keeping a collaborative mind is important. There’s a solo state of mind within Indian classical music. It’s a tough industry and there aren’t that many opportunities for the classical tradition. You must find a joy in doing it. In India there are a lot more opportunities to perform but here the venues and festivals are limited about where you can perform. If you are a purist within the folk traditional classical tradition it is a limited career option.

The National ensemble is for 18+ till you’re about 22-24. After that there is nothing for artist development. That’s where we’re spat out and not given opportunities to progress and perform. That’s where you hit a brick wall as a musician. There aren’t enough concert opportunities.
If you want to do music as a career you can’t only rely on performing. Teaching is a big thing, there’s a big market for teaching because in my opinion there aren’t enough teachers for our music.

Performance opportunities for younger musicians are scarce and that’s needs to change. We need more concert opportunities for young people so they can improve their performance standards.

When you perform to audiences who don’t know about the music it’s different than when you’re performing for those who know what’s what – you need to be more technical for the ones who know.

4.3.3 Visible success stories and mentoring would inspire faster progression

In common with the training stage of artist’s development, those who are mid-career level or have established careers also commented on the lack of visibility of where they might go next in their careers. Mentoring was discussed a lot and artists saw great value in mentoring support from individuals and organisations working outside of the South Asian sector.. Interestingly, the proven successful South Asian artists all referenced mentoring relationships and influences outside of the sector as an important factor in their success.

There are only a handful of musician success stories. Most of our work comes through dancers.

We’re disempowering artists when they can’t see pathways to progress.

There’s only a handful of role models – one successful artist, one successful teacher, one successful Arts Council person and everyone is very different. We try to hold them up as accessible role models because they have pathways that could be replicated. We need to show a pathway.

The problem is that there aren’t enough idols. People don’t see role models because they’re not there.

From what I hear from young people they want a stable career and then dance alongside it. Few see it as a sole career pathway. Where is their inspiration? In my generation you have Akram and Shobana but that’s it - there’s not enough South Asian dance providing inspiration. They need to be inspired.
I mentor some dancers now but there is no one to mentor me. I’m in the same position as I was 30 years ago. As a company we have no money, so how do we develop dancers, pay for the halls, how do I train young people and give them something to believe in?

I’m mentoring people at various stages of their career and have made an application to PRS to start a mentoring scheme for female South Asian musicians. I help people put successful ACE applications. The funding structure is something they’re very afraid to navigate, putting an application in is a minefield for them. But I’ve done this all on my own steam.

I got on the Siobhan Davies team. I know much more about the dance ecology now. My mentor relationship with my producer has been mega important in my dancing career.

There isn’t an infrastructure to pay people the way they deserve for the hours they’re putting in. Akram Khan was a big inspiration for me growing up. A lot of my work is inspired by the example he set. He was interested in taking his tradition but getting it to shake hands with all kinds of other art and combine them all to make a show that spoke to a lot of people from different traditions on an emotional level, transcending South Asian or ballet – it became something that anyone could witness and connect to which is so powerful. The other thing that really made him is that he had a producer. They took the risk together and trailblazed the way for a South Asian dance company to exist. I don’t know that many examples of other people who’ve done that which is strange that no one else has followed their model. A lot of it was to do with having a producer who saw the company as a start-up. They were entrepreneurs. They saw it a business that could be developed. They went out there and convinced other people and venues that they were worth investing in. I don’t see other partnerships like this. Models like that are so rare and we need to be able to see more of them so more of them can happen.

4.3.4 The lack of investment and opportunity at mid-career level is stopping artists from flourishing

The majority of artists we spoke to feel left behind by funders and stakeholders such as the Arts Council and Local Authorities and the wider dance, music and cultural sectors. The general consensus is that the current investment and infrastructure targets young and/or emerging artists and then stagnates. This then directly impacts on the development of leaders in the sector, and has a profound effect on confidence and morale. Many artists questioned, ‘what are we training for’?
In the wider dance sector, there is a diverse range of professional companies and the orchestra network is strong in the UK. However, if you’re a mid-career classical South Asian dancer or musician, these companies and the opportunities to have a salary and professional development pathway – with performance built in – simply doesn’t exist in the same way. As a result, many South Asian dancers and musicians have to start their own companies before they may be ready to do so and without the resources, skills and infrastructure required to sustain a thriving dance company or musical ensemble.

Emerging artists get opportunities – it’s the middle career artists who are relying on project funding that get overlooked.

We’ve had people who’ve gone through both these ensembles and supported them to launch their own careers, but they are mostly balancing their music with other careers because there’s not enough work to get an income. After they leave us there’s no one else to take them on.

As students there are so many opportunities – once you want to be professional in those early stages, when you need leaders and support they’re not there.

It’s so expensive to take classical music on tour – paying for hotels and travel and fees. My annual programming budget is £18,000 so if someone comes with something that costs £2k and is niche then I can’t spend that money.

I would love to see a middle scale rep company, but the question is, who is it for? It should be both classical and more contemporary. It would be helpful for international stars from India to come and choreograph for the company and people like Akram then it tours. That would be really exciting.

When I go to a concert like at the Wigmore Hall of a mid-career artist the list of funders who made it possible is long. Something has to be done to encourage both Asian and non-Asian owned businesses, successful businessmen and those with money to support South Asian performing arts.

There is a lot of Indian dance that cannot afford live music which is sad.

Fortunately, I’m now only doing music, but I used to do other things outside of music and you always feel like things can go wrong from one month to another. In France they have support for artists where if you prove you are a gigging artist you receive government support – art
intermedes – they get like 1,000 euro per month as a subsidy. So, you can focus on your music. That would be really helpful.

We have been involved with Derby music hub and wanted to take South Asian music to schools, but they weren’t happy to pay a higher rate than what was being paid to western musicians. But they forget that the demand and scarcity is an issue.

The investment is pitiful into this sector compared to what’s invested in western music. The structure for western music is so well supported with millions being invested in classical music, orchestras, infrastructure, music schools – Asian people pay as much tax money but don’t have that investment. If more western musicians learned Indian music that would change perceptions and audience development and musical awareness.

The Arts Council have been really good for me, I think it’s because I live in the North there’s nothing much else like me up here. There’s a sense that the Arts Council should be more proactive in helping to connect us to major bridge organisations like Opera North. They’re very intimidating otherwise for individual artists. Like Opera North have a resonance fund for a few musicians to get £3k a year but they get £17m from ace alone, that doesn’t feel right. They wanted me to develop an opera, but it would take three years, I don’t have the infrastructure for that. I’ve tried to set collectives up before, but they fall down, it’s a solo art form and there’s so much ego involved.

You need to pilot things and see if it has legs. If it doesn’t change it. I don’t promise what I can’t deliver. Upcoming artists need to be able to do that. If there was something like a post graduate company, bringing the professional rigour required to be a professional artist, how to review a contract etc. My generation who went into companies early on in our careers which were supportive - we’re the only ones who are still around. We had that infrastructure which taught us how to be freelancers. If I had to be a freelancer now, I probably wouldn’t have left university. Creating a company that has a touring circuit and do three pieces say a year and for that they get paid you’re not only developing choreographers who can work on the company but training those dancers to work in that environment. We shouldn’t have to expect classical dancers to have to do anything else if they’re not interested – you don’t ask a ballet dancer to learn hip hop.

If you give small crumbs to artists, they end up demoralised. They need bursts of meaningful investment.

I’m very keen to start a rep company for Kathak. The funders and promoters don’t understand this. I’m in this country 15 years and I’ve
already developed a repertoire. What I’ve found is that company dancers are freelancers so I can’t keep them cause I don’t have the funds and no funds to develop them. The rep company dance model doesn’t exist at the moment. This is the trajectory of my company.

4.3.5 Lack of networks and networking is holding artists back

Another factor that came up lots in the research was the tribal nature of the sector and the lack of outward facing connections and collaboration locally, nationally and internationally.

Those that we spoke to who were sustaining, and indeed excelling, in South Asian dance and music all evidenced strong networks and a proactive willingness to network both within and outside of the sector. For some artists the willingness to network and collaborate was undoubtedly there, but finding those networks and having access to the wider cultural sector was a key barrier. Establishing networks at this point is considered essential for developing leadership skills and progressing in their art form overall.

We notice patterns of regionality and if you only work in a closed area change, development and growth will not happen.

What’s missing is the wider platforms and networks for the music to be found and discovered.

We need to create an eco-system within the sector. The dance sector has been better at this. We need musicians to put their heads together and do the same. Indian Raga struggles to get musicians from UK. There is a way forward. We need to move and borrow from the best models. Musicians need to create a forum to come together.

There is no database of what there is in the sector and opportunities. We don’t know who is out there. You don’t want to go with ACE for everything as it comes with strings.

It’s apparent this sector have no annual conferences, no support agencies, no framework so they’re isolated. Outdoor arts UK should be helping this sector, but the sector is intimated by them. There’s no way to know what conversations are going on.

My teacher talks about how the music done now is not spiritual as it should be. He is one of the best, but no one knows him because he won’t play the game and go to dinner and get out there. The reality is you need to do that stuff.
A dance artist doesn’t just perform and work in the studio, there’s a lot of networking, admin and selling your soul and for someone like me who isn’t interested in all of that I found that really daunting.

You need to get to know the sector and who the movers and shakers are. I was lucky coming from a corporate mindset I was looking at it very commercially. I was thinking what can I make that people will want and pay for? The main skill I’ve used is networking, getting to know people and taken my time. But I know this is really unusual for the sector.

More than anything it’s not knowing who to network with, what kind of events to go to. Networking is not easy, going into a room full of people. I advise my students to do all kinds of networking but it’s alien to them.

Peer networking is underestimated, things like that. Giving people the confidence to do this and allocate time each week or month to meet people and get their work out there. There is a false idea that social media is enough, it is if you’re Beyoncé, but if no one knows your work you have to get out there and eyeball them.

4.3.6 Sector support organisations have historically not been as effective as they could be

A significant amount of commentary and observations were discussed with artists in relation to their experiences of sector organisations, including Arts Council funded National Portfolio Organisations. Many artists felt that historical leadership in particular valued power above partnership and collaboration, to the detriment of artist progression. Encouragingly many felt that this traditional barrier to progression was starting to change.

It’s always the same people who get funded. Akademi, the Bhavan, it’s always the same people who get the grants again and again. The senior people when they were my age struggled, I get that but because they’ve gone through that they should give opportunities to younger people coming up but they’re only looking after themselves. We should be a network but it’s not. It’s political and there’s a lot of egos.

I came across many sources of dissatisfaction from artists that the gatekeepers created fiefdoms and enclaves of power. Whilst those organisations would say the right things there was a reluctance to work in partnership as they felt they’d lose control and it was the same people in power for many years.
People protect their own organisation and areas they work in. In hip hop I’ve seen a very big growth over the last few years. There are no formal training routes there, but people do progress and become professional because there is peer support; they come to each other’s shows.

The South Asian leaders are very protective and not much partnership working goes on – SAADA worked when it was funded but now it’s not funded not much is happening. That speaks volumes.

They [South Asian dance and music support organisations] see the sector as internal competition so there’s limited partnership working and they’re quite snobby about other organisations.

I was the generation before CAT and BBC young dancer so in terms of career progression there was no such thing. I wanted to dance because I loved it and was inspired by it. My parents financed me to go to India to train. I tried to apply to Arts Council but failed because of my writing skills at the time. I did my debut performance and met some organisations like Akademi and SAMPAD but wasn’t programmed by them for a long time. At 21, 22 and 23 I was doing great work and developing that other people acknowledged but my own sector didn’t support me.

If you leave the development to the NPOs they’ve already proved they’ll fail at that.

I applied for ACE funding to do the concert. But no one helped me to write that application and that was a real low point. All the people who I think are paid to help with things like this said they were too busy. They didn’t give me the time of day. I wanted to cry. In the end I did it myself. I was successful with it, but I was walking in the dark and ended up having to organise it all. And then I was charged lots of extras to things they should have provided like marketing, lights, tech – this was all money that I didn’t have. It was a lot of stress, but they off loaded all their work onto me, but they’ve ticked a box that they helped a young artist. The amount of times I’ve been used as a tick box for South Asian NPOs to tick their funding box. I feel like they diminished the work I put in and then they had the audacity to complain that I didn’t acknowledge them in the promotional materials when it all went really well. If it wasn’t so tragic it would be funny.

4.3.7 Sector organisations / leaders can accelerate progression

Whilst there are undoubtedly some issues around the role of sector organisations and some leadership approaches, they are also clearly doing some important work for artists. A number of mid-career artists felt that
they had developed their careers directly from the support of these organisations.

*Because of the Bhavan I got to perform in some really prestigious venues like Buckingham Palace and Wembley stadium. I was there 6 days a week even with school.*

What’s been really instrumental to me is that there’s few South Asian led organisations who can provide a platform. It’s like the big 4 accountancy firms in South Asian dance and music. They’re the ones that get funded by Arts Council, Darbar, Milapfest, Sampad and I’ve worked with them all and they’ve done an amazing job. They have access to big prestigious venues like Southbank and that’s vital. They programmed me at the Queen Elizabeth hall and other places like that and it was instrumental in my career and creating opportunities.

I don’t come from a musical family whatsoever. Within the South Asian classical community there’s usually a family member that pushes them into music but that wasn’t my experience. In my primary school they offered singing and tabla. I learnt from a really imminent sitar player. A big educationalist and innovator – he had a big hand in the movement in the UK. I’d seen tabla at my local temple growing up. The story is I never used to leave after my class. My teacher saw that passion and told me about classes that were on at the local temple. From there I started learning religious hymns, I’m born into a Sikh family. I joined the school orchestra and that was included with the normal instruments, the teachers were very supportive. That kept going through high school. There was a company called SAAD – they used to run an Indian summer musical school that I went to. From there I got more and more involved and went to Saturday music school in Leeds – lots of grass roots. Yorkshire Young Musicians was another thing I did. There was a South Asian strand in that. As part of that I was doing vocal as my first study then I did Sitar as my second study. I joined SAMYO, and I met lots of high-class musicians there. It was instilled into me there to do lots in the sector and we were guided in the right way knowing about Arts Council. You need a 360 outlook about surviving as a classical musician in this sector.

*We helped Seeta Patel with her first GFA. She went to 7-9 venues and we helped her produce that work.*

### 4.3.8 Partnership working progresses artists

Where artists worked in partnership, they reported positive experiences, whether that was from leveraging resources, learning and development; community and audience benefits and outcomes; organisational or
personal career progression. A number of artists and organisations felt that it was important for bigger organisations outside of the South Asian sector to partner with smaller South Asian organisations and individual artists.

Those who had already done this reported that it was mutually beneficial.

_We had bits of money thrown at us from grants in the past but there is a visible change in Southampton, and I think that’s because we’re working much more closely together. We’re stretching our collective resources. We’ve chosen key partners who will enable us to move forward. We’re trying to ensure that we’re engaging with the wider world to both influence and learn from them._

_Determined clear partnerships with the big institutions is what’s needed. Everyone’s going to the same stakeholders for the same pots of money. Ensuring the smaller organisations are partnering up with the better resourced organisations will benefit both._

_It’s not about big organisations working with small organisations, it’s shared interests learning from each other._

_They work with lots of partners, the Nuffield theatre, Hansard gallery, the university and that’s a key part of their success._

_They’ve developed a really good board and advisory board and their chair is really impressive. People like them, they believe in what they’re doing and have integrity and passion. Because of this good people step forward and want to partner and help them._

_I compose for a lot of dance. I was contracted to be a composer for a year for Kathak dancing. The contemporary dance sector isn’t as interested in the tradition. It’s all down to word of mouth so you get connected with choreographers through recommendations._

_Working with Opera North is really interesting - they have consultants who are musicians but also have business minds, there’s artistic rigour but also marketability and that’s what gets bums on seats. I don’t want Indian organisations involved in my project. My conversations with them (Opera North) are so much more refined and they understand and want the musicians to be respected and happy._

_We’ve commissioned a lot of dance over the years, but our relationships and partnerships are stronger with music. We’ve a strong partnership with heads of departments at the universities with expertise in Hindu music._
We’re not a venue-based organisation so we rely on excellent partnerships and equitable relationships. We need them to put as much effort into marketing as they would with anything else. That’s really important.

### 4.3.9 Time spent in India is time well spent

The role of spending time in India in the progression of a South Asian artist’s career was felt by the majority of consultees to be highly desirable, if not essential. The dance and music forms they practice in England are minority art forms in stark contrast to India, where they are mainstream and embedded in everyday life – with dedicated professional and prestigious institutions. Spending time immersed in the birthplace of many artists chosen art forms was highly valued by those who had been. Many artists also talked about the lack of funds and resources to travel as a key barrier to progression.

Grants to travel to India to work with people at the top is important. I feel stagnant now to be honest.

My friends who are western musicians, they have like personal development grants but the person I need to learn from is not in the UK. My further training guru lives in India, but I do not have the funds to go there and pay her and the accommodation and that’s a big thing that I really need in life.

It’s intriguing as a young dancer to go to India and see how it works there. I wish I had spent more time in India over the process. I wish I’d been able to go there earlier. I asked myself lots of cultural appropriation questions, there is so much depth and culture around the music. Bypassing that and taking what you want felt wrong. Over there it’s not a transaction where you pay for information, it’s about building a relationship and trust. You spend so much time with your teacher. I think immersing yourself into that world is the only way you can be honest about what you’re doing.

If I didn’t do a module in Indian classical music at university with some very good teachers, I don’t think I would have got into it the way I did. But to develop I had to go to India.

I went back to India to study at a conservatoire and then got a scholarship from Sky Arts.

Darbar have been amazing and are really supportive of UK musicians. I could go to Mumbai and get paid really well. You’ve got to go to India, for
the atmosphere of the music and as a professional that’s the standard and you have to prove yourself at those festivals.

Access to world class talent and internationally recognised talent is there in India and not as much here, that’s why you go there for training. Mostly you have to buy your instruments there too.

Spending 6 months in India will make you a much better performer than taking a weekly class in between your engineering degree.

4.3.10 A bias for Indian artists is impacting performance opportunities for British South Asian artists

Whilst spending time in India was highly valued for progression, there was a definite perception that Indian artists were often booked for performances that could have been delivered to the same quality by British South Asian artists. There was a clear tension with other high-profile artists endorsing a viewpoint that dancers and musicians from India were indeed of higher quality than those living in England. The fact that Indian artists appear to be more likely to be booked than British South Asian artists for limited performance opportunities is a problem for progression. Many British South Asian artists feel undervalued and/or lack confidence in their ability when comparing themselves to Indian artists.

I always say to students you don’t need to go to India to learn. There is so much politics there that the dancers will be subjected to.

Programmers are more willing to spend money on people from India than British born people for the UK concerts so there are no platforms to play but I get it because the well-known names in India will sell tickets. But that means it’s the same old faces over and over again.

Musicians in UK, they’ll (SA programmers/NPOs) haggle with us from here but those coming from abroad get their business class plane tickets paid!

A lot of their budget is spent flying in prestigious Indian artists. That’s public money for British people so doesn’t feel right.

Role models are vital, but they cannot only come from India. There seems to be some sort of ingrained belief that artists from here are lesser artists.

A lot of foreign artists come from India; people don’t realise the talent here is just as good. Musicians from here get the scraps, we end up playing in foyers for free.
Whether it’s true or not there’s still a feeling that performers from India are of a higher quality. It could literally be that they’re working more. Unless you’re from here and one of the very few with international careers then you’re not working enough to be seen and get better. If you’re doing two shows a month you won’t have that edge, or it won’t seem like you do.

When big Bollywood artists come from Bombay, you’ll sell out Wembley arena, but we have artists here who can sell out the Albert Hall. I’ve played at the proms and been able to sell out the Elizabeth hall and Kings Place – there is an audience. We play a fusion of Indian classical and fusion. The audience is there but they haven’t been given the examples of British Asian talent in the bigger mainstream picture.

4.3.11 Professional rigour is mission critical and holding some artists back

Throughout the research we heard repeatedly from both artists and stakeholders that to progress and succeed as an artist required sacrifice, dedication and the highest professional standards. These standards were often referenced in the context of the wider dance and/or music sector ecology where artists must also make their mark. When compared to non-South Asian artists, who had gone through mainstream training routes, and South Asian artists, who had progressed to leadership and successful careers, there was a concern from many consultees that professional rigour is not always embedded in the sector. This reflects the lack of a clear formal pathway and the resources available for training and progression that is available to the wider dance and music sectors.

I started training as a one-person conservatoire at the back of my garage. I bunked school to train 8-10 hours a day.

I was amazed by the amateurism in the sector, there’s something about professionalism that needs to be addressed in the sector. There is no guru in this country of the calibre to make the generation of dancers that’s going to be strong enough to sustain the artform. They don’t have the knowledge. I have some rich aunts and uncles who took some dance classes in India but never made it their life and they make young people feel like their future lies in how they behave with these people, they hold the power. But they are mediocre, so they breed mediocre artists. I’ve heard rumours about starting a south Indian conservatoire, if that’s another aunty and uncle you’re just creating more average dancers.
Programmers often say things like, you know some of these performers are difficult to work with, they turn up late and they have small audiences so why would they programme it?

You pray, you eat, you sleep, you dance, you sing – it’s of your life, a lifestyle rather than a career. It’s part of who you are. It’s not an add on. I worry that private tuition is very unregulated, and I’ve seen some performances and less said the better! That’s quite common now. There’s a whole issue around quality.

Going back to quality, it would be interesting to know the people who are programming it whether they know the difference between good and bad. We’ve had so many acts booked, whether UK or International that just aren’t professional. Not keeping time, last minute issues around logistics which then impacts on marketing. There have been times that I have needed to go on stage and apologise to the audience about performances that will be starting late.

We send opportunities to artists to go and invest in their own development with things like body conditioning etc, there are expectations in the British context on injury and safeguarding, but this has been really tough even to get artists interested in, even when we offer to pay this. There is a level of polishing up that is needed.

There is no rigour anymore. I have to go to Asia or Africa to look for dancers who have that rigour or Rambert. A good conservatoire would be about the environment, surrounded by people who see the world differently, mentally and psychological.

We tell dancers all the time you have to be unique and yourself but also versatile and brave and nice to be around! Our dancers work with lots of different companies and artists. They have to adapt to succeed in this profession. It’s the same for musicians.

Indians are amazing at memorizing – all the national spellings comps are always South Asian kids! But if you have to create something new and interesting you can mark people out, so part of our process is identifying something relevant today and asking an artist to respond to that. We can tell when they do that based on their interpretation how good they really are in their core art form.

I had a really good teacher and I worked hard. Those things are harder to find these days. There is a lack in music training in the UK which is a huge part of dance. Most students are training without understanding the music and that’s a fundamental flaw.
There is a lot of interest in raga at the moment, but the interest can sometimes fall into cliché. There are certain things that they know work and are atmospheric, so they use them superficially without asking deep musical questions and understanding what the narrative is.

The attitude of so many South Asian artists isn’t professional – how people do things on time, not signing contracts, they don’t understand technical runs and lighting plans, backstage is a commotion. Walking in the audience before the show in costume, not respecting the producer, not keeping to what’s been agreed, music not edited correctly – all these little things make the sector look immature and amateurish. I’ve always been professional because I have a contemporary background – that discipline and project management is all built in.

There’s a step missing which is professionalisation. You turn up on time, you have to bring your best every time – working with professional companies gives this knowledge and many don’t experience that, and it shows.

### 4.3.12 Gurus are intrinsic and instrumental to South Asian artist development and progression

The role and importance of the Guru in South Asian artist progression cannot be overestimated. In contrast to the traditional UK institutional teaching models with different experts for different areas of the artform and artist development, this culturally significant one to one learning, which can last a lifetime and permeates all aspects of artist development, is distinctive to South Asian dance and music.

All of the consultees we spoke to had experienced a Guru-Shishya relationship as part of their training and development. Whilst some consultees fed back that they felt the model was outdated and/or detrimental to progression as a professional dancer or musician in the UK, the vast majority of consultees highly valued the tradition. Gurus are fundamental to these artists and art forms. Ensuring that the Guru-Shishya relationship is nurtured and accommodated within any training and progression framework is therefore essential.

*What is good with the guru structure is that it helps you to determine what you should take on from other teachers and what you shouldn’t. My guru brought lots of people in to work with us, so we experienced other dance styles. But you do need someone to give you the scaffolding, but you then need to go one from there. You need the stronghold and the branches.*
Curiosity is important but you need to develop strength and their voice. Resist the speed of the modern world and build a circle of trust. Know what you’re asking for and what it means to you. If we feel it then someone cares about it. Gurus can help with that spiritual connection.

Eventually I went to India. Through that I met an amazing teacher and asked could I learn from him. He would only teach me at 6am in the morning every day. It tested my commitment! But I started to learn more about the tradition of learning and the oral way of learning. Until then it had been very conceptual on how I’d learnt. With him it was a different way of learning – he played, and I listened and had to copy him and ask questions later. Sadly, he passed away around three years ago, and I started to learn from one of his senior students.

I want the old school stuff that’s been going for centuries. I want to learn from the beginning, the building blocks of it. My teacher – she’s very old school and she’s still my teacher today. She’s a mother figure too and gives me life advice.

When you read about guru training and you’re spending so much time nearly living at your teacher’s home, I was involved in all of the things it takes to run a company and by the time I was 14 I was touring internationally with her. By 12 I knew I couldn’t do anything else but be a dancer. By 17 I was teaching my teachers classes. The contact with my teacher was much greater, my mum felt that she didn’t have a daughter anymore. We were rehearsing 12 hours a day. My guru was my second mother.

4.3.13 Gurus can also be detrimental to development and progression

Whilst recognized and valued as an intrinsic part of South Asian dance and music training and progression, the role of gurus was not without criticism from the research. The recurring issues of gurus were two-fold. The first issue centred on the danger of relying on one person’s view and interpretation of the art form and approach. The second issue was a question of relevance to future generations, who may have no or very little connection to their South Asian heritage. This raised concerns around the long-term sustainability of a guru within an artist development framework.

I’m not aware of any other art form where artists are indoctrinated into such a narrow point of view as the guru system – that’s 100% part of the problem. We need the gurus to be more progressive and stop stunting growth. It perpetuates the same thinking.
I saw work with three Kathak dancers recently, all from different gurus, but they hadn’t adopted the choreography as well as they should because they stuck with their guru trained approach rather than adapting to the choreographer. To be able to make a living from it you need to be open to the idea your body is a vessel and tool and it isn’t owned by your guru.

What is a guru? The age-old tradition of a guru is gone. Someone told me that YouTube is their guru.

There is a difference between training in a studio to someone’s living room.

From a programming point of view, I’ve yet to see the correlation that comes through the guru you’ve trained with and the quality of the performance that the student will make.

The one to one relationship is professionally isolating.

Those artists in the past who migrated to the UK, they came from an India where the arts was mainly patronised by kings. You didn’t have to care about the audience as long as the King liked it. So, they came with that mindset and got stuck there. They lament that young artists want to ‘exploit’ themselves on you tube. It needs to be liberated from this clique who have a very limited understanding of excellence in the arts. There has to be a democratic element to this.

South Asian artists continually seek permission, the guru relationship cements that, they need to own what they do more. There is also a sense of entitlement from some about who they are and what they do because of their guru which doesn’t reflect on their practice.

There is insecurity between teachers, and they don’t want students to see other great people in case they leave them to go with that person. That is a really big political problem, students are not encouraged to see others. Listening is a part of learning but it’s not happening to the extent it needs to be because of this.

I was only trained in Bharatanatyam so it limited my opportunities. If I went to another company my teacher would have been upset so there’s this emotional blackmail that goes on behind the scenes.

My guru relationship wasn’t hugely supportive of the professional sector. The Laban was really important in helping me to talk across both worlds.

In terms of moving from training to performing properly there’s no opportunities outside of your guru to work with other choreographers so
that’s missing, and a rep / professional ensemble would really help with that. So, it would need to be a Kathak rep company, an Odissi rep company, a Bharatanatyam company – you can’t lump them all together.

4.3.14 Producers (or producing skills) for South Asian dance and music are pivotal but doesn’t substitute talent

Every consultee we spoke to commented on both the importance and lack of producers for South Asian dance and music. Finding producers who came from a South Asian background was considered important but extremely rare to find. The Farooq Chaudhry / Akram Khan model is the most commonly cited example of how and why this relationship works. However, even the producers themselves that we spoke to acknowledged that no matter how great the producer, if the art itself isn’t high enough quality and the artist isn’t ‘sellable’ progression will stall.

Given how few producers there are in the sector, a dual approach to developing producing skills as part of career progression alongside investing in the development of South Asian producers should reap dividends for the sector in the medium to long term. In addition to the benefits consultees felt more producers would bring to the artists such as increased performing opportunities and higher profiles, many felt more producers would directly influence audience development of the sector overall.

You can’t bypass the hard work it takes and training to have the talent through just having a producer. Producers are vital but you must stand up in the market.

I’d found my voice, but Farooq gave me a microphone.

The people who get exposure are those who have followers on Instagram, but they may not have the talent.

I’ve worked with lots of musicians from Birmingham Conservatoire. Lots of them were not given the tools to know what to do after they left. I teach them how to organise, how to get concerts, the professional elements you need to be able to make it as a musician. The role of a producer is fundamental in the change that the ACE is seeking. Musicians and dancers need one. It’s the bridging point between the venue and the artist.

As a producer I’ve had to be counsellor and deal with the baggage and insecurity the artists come with. I then have to navigate the journey with them to help see it from the audience point of view, in essence enabling
them to be a producer themselves. They need to reach a point where they self-produce and understand who they are making work for. As an artist you need to know who you’re pitching your work for. The big challenge is then to influence venues to take that work on. To build audiences it needs regular programming not tick boxing.

The sector’s filtering system is not owned by the sector. Lots of artists put applications in but don’t have tour dates. ACE need to look at how work is being made and produced. BFI has indicated that applications need to have a producer to pass to the next stage. Dance and music sectors undervalue the role of the Producer but there is also a lack of producers. They need to put money into developing South Asian Producers.

Producers will tell you if you are up to the standard or not. Along with the guru, the other concept people need to take on board is the role of the Producer. There needs to be some kind of platform for this.

A producer’s role is to package your work to put it on a professional platform. Take what you do brilliantly and help you see it from an audience’s perspective.

When you try to book somewhere, they just say they don’t have audiences. My producer has done a lot of work in terms of getting us in venues and engaging audiences through outreach work.

We got an agent who represented us worldwide and we got a lot of distribution through her. We had a champion with an address book.

Producers bridge the gap between artists and venues, they’re crucial.

I did a producer course with South East Dance eight years ago and that really helped me. Dancers have no clue what that entails.

I work with young producers; they need to find someone who believes in them. Every dancer is looking for a producer.

They are the ones that enable a South Asian artist to develop a career that can support them financially.

4.3.15 A turbulent touring circuit is a key barrier to progression

Individual artists and the South Asian dance and music sector can’t fix the macro strategic issues facing the touring model, but they can maximize visibility and appeal to venues on the touring networks. Stakeholders in the research referenced different networks such as the Dance Touring...
Partnership\textsuperscript{11}, National Rural Touring Forum\textsuperscript{12}, the Small Venues Network\textsuperscript{13} and the Touring Network Partnership\textsuperscript{14} - but artists themselves rarely mentioned or were plugged into/aware of these networks. This area links back into the need to at least have a basic understanding of the producing role and grasp of those skills. It also speaks to the need to be outward facing and see the world you want to perform in through the eyes of those in charge of the places you want to perform.

Touring for small scale dance shows that touring is a broken model. It’s not working for the artists or the venues.

There is a challenge of seeing the art form through a white lens. Most producers will be white middle class. To get into the mainstream you need to appeal to those producers too.

Touring is a broken model in the UK at the moment. Venues have been hit hard with cuts so are even more risk averse than they ever were. South Asian dance tends to get pigeonholed in places where for example there’s a mela.

Finding your feet on the lower to mid-scale touring sector is hard for anyone in this sector.

Maybe ACE and artists need to rethink tour venues, why not the temples or museums or community halls – not just traditional venues – this would mean artists would be seen much more. The community groups aren’t engaging because ACE go to big organisations and they don’t connect with those groups.

The rural touring network – we could do a South Asian dance touring network because the current system is failing us.

I had to teach to subsidise the loss of touring. We found that offering workshops linked to performances helped attendance at performances.

There’s a small and saturated touring sector – the venues know they have to programme South Asian faces but look after their own.

I didn’t try and broker the venue relationships myself, I invested in a tour booker myself and that has really paid off in getting the work out there wider.
There are producers out there who are vampires who know someone has to programme a South Asian artist and they have no interest in the art form, they just take the money and throw you at a venue – this has happened to me and it’s a big problem.

4.3.16 Artists as Entrepreneurs progress farther faster

All of the artists we spoke to who were making a successful living through South Asian music or dance evidenced a strong entrepreneurial drive and skillset. It appears from the research that to succeed as an artist you must also think like a business. This is problematic for many artists who, by the very nature of what they do, are not business minded or driven. Ensuring hugely talented artists can progress regardless of their ability to write fundraising applications and develop business plans is something that must be built into any future frameworks for artist progression and investment. Equally, the opportunity to develop the wider business skills to support a career as an artist should be available and accessible to all artists.

As a musician you are on your own and you have to have self-motivation and the ability to promote yourself.

There is something about a different world coming down and a need to persuade ACE to support people being more entrepreneurial with how they make and present work. They struggle with this because of their ways of assessing things.

Indian Raga plays the role an MBA plays for young artists. None of the traditional teachers train you to be a professional. You’re expected to do it for your soul and the culture and not to make money. So, people don’t know how to conduct themselves, how to market themselves, understand what the audience wants. And social media, how do you get noticed, get feedback, craft something for social media and talk to your audiences. We do artist residencies and help them to navigate all of these challenges. We help them to build their brand. When their work is the most widely viewed in their genre opportunities come from that and our fellows have played for some very important people.

We have a studio space and class programme with 900 unique people a week through our education programme. We do projects with dementia and have a programme of touring and we were turning over half a million pounds as a non NPO.

We decided early on not to use the south Asian classification because that would cage us. We wanted to stay clear of political correctness. We didn’t want to be a charity, we wanted to make money through touring and
never compromise quality of the art. We didn’t hire dancers on a full-time basis but on two-year contracts and helped fund some of their careers. We were determined to work with the best people in the world. Every project had to be a learning opportunity that extended our boundaries. 72% of our money was earned income.

You have to be a shrewd businessman and entrepreneurial to succeed. As soon as anything positive happened in my career they (NPOs) jumped off the back of it although the more visible I am the better it is for the wider sector so I’m grateful for that.

If you want to earn a living you have to be entrepreneurial. You can play bassoon in Cats and earn £45k a year but how can someone learning Kathak have those options?

I don’t think it’s a reality that just because you’re an artist you don’t have to know how to do the business side of things.

I wanted to be a dancer but there was no pathway, I had to be entrepreneurial. We set up a company because there were no other performance opportunities. The opportunities were in the contemporary world, so we had to perform in places like The Place.
5. Leadership

5.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out what’s working, what’s not working and what the priorities, concerns and needs for South Asian dancers and musicians are; specifically in relation to leadership.

5.2. Survey findings re leadership

The full survey write up is available at Appendix 5. This section summarises the key findings that are most relevant towards providing insights into leadership for South Asian dancers and musicians.

❖ A range of factors were tested with respondents, informed by desk research and some initial stakeholder consultation, to determine how valuable they would be in developing leaders within the South Asian dance and music sector. All were considered to be valuable, with a minimum of 67% of respondents stating each was incredibly valuable or valuable. The top 5 most valuable in descending order, i.e. those ideas with the highest proportion of incredibly valuable ratings were:

1. National exposure and engagement and International exposure and engagement (59% rated these incredibly valuable);
2. Greater partnership working and collaboration within and outside of the South Asian dance and music sector (49% rated this incredibly valuable);
3. Funding conditions/programmes to enable, empower and inspire true risk taking/innovation in creative practice (47% rated this incredibly valuable);
4. A greater understanding of and engagement with the wider UK cultural sector beyond the South Asian sector (46% rated this incredibly valuable);
5. Higher visibility of successful role models/credible leaders in the sector and wider society (44% rated this incredibly valuable).

When looking at the combined totals for those who rated ideas incredibly valuable or valuable, these ideas also came in the top 5: formal mentoring from an established and credible leader from the wider cultural sector; formal mentoring from an established leader within the South Asian arts sector; and a bespoke leadership development programme targeting South Asian artists in leadership and entrepreneurial skills.
86% of respondents agreed with this statement, with 51% stating strongly agree and 35% agree: *The current leaders running South Asian dance and music organisations in the UK have a responsibility to collaborate within and outside of the sector to create a greater number of training and performance opportunities for a more diverse range of South Asian musicians and dancers.*

82% of respondents agreed with this statement, with 45% stating strongly agree and 37% agree: *Communicating the relevance and meaning of South Asian dance and music is mission critical to making it accessible, developing and sustaining audiences.*

Respondents were asked in the survey if they considered themselves a ‘leader’ in the South Asian dance and music sector:

- 33% replied ‘Yes’, with a further 33% replying ‘I don't consider myself to be a leader now, but I feel I will be in the future.’
- The rest said ‘No’ (21%) or ‘I’m not sure if I’m a leader or not’ (12%).

When asked to provide an explanation for their answer, a number of common answers came up for why respondents believe they are a leader in the sector:

- Long-term career in the sector (as programmer, performer, producer, etc.).
- Pass their knowledge on to younger generations through teaching practice.
- Pioneers of their artform within their area/region.
- Job role that they hold (e.g. Artistic Director or CEO).
- Completed significant levels of training and have qualifications.
- Collaboration is a core part of their work.
- Set up their own school, company or organisation.
- Recognised nationally and internationally in their field.
- Creative and innovative in the approaches they take.
- Proactively promote the sector.
- Deep understanding of their own artform.
- Have made a successful career on their own (self-sufficient).

### 5.3. Artist insights

The comments set out below paint a picture of the key issues and opportunities facing dancers and musicians in relation to leadership.
5.3.1 Generational divides in leadership approaches within the sector are evident and emerging

There was a definite generational divide evident throughout the consultation. This stemmed between those who had been in the sector for a long time, who were world weary and/or had very set ideas about the way the art forms should be presented and sector should operate, and younger artists who felt strongly that a change in approach and shake up of ‘the old guard’ was long overdue. All generations acknowledged and valued the deeply ingrained South Asian cultural heritage of respecting elders, but for some this presented significant barriers to developing young leaders.

Younger artists reported that they were more willing to collaborate, work in partnership and take influences from outside of the sector and less likely to let egos and politics interfere with personal and sector development than current sector leaders. Many of the younger artists we spoke to evidenced strong foundations as future leaders, whether they realized it or not. Finding a way to bridge the generational divide so that emerging leaders can benefit from the wisdom and experience of older sector leaders and older leaders can stay relevant and take the sector forward for artists tomorrow is essential.

We become so accustomed to organisations, leaders and the sector acting in a certain way and we don’t challenge it. This is a time to both challenge and support that.

The younger generation are much more about ‘let’s work together’. There’s no egos. We learn from each other.

The current leaders can be very intimidating. They’re strong characters. It’s a question of survival of the fittest and leadership is integral to that and knowing which way the winds are blowing politically.

I’m seeing younger leaders coming up through who are questioning the existing way of how things work. Seeta Patel for example speaks up about challenging the status quo. She’s willing to interrogate and hold people to account and whether it’s liked or not that’s a leadership skill.

Working with young people compared to other adult dancers, they have a different attitude, they’re less concerned with cultural appropriation, they’re much more open.
1st generation immigrants will tend to be more conservative in their relationship to culture whereas the 2nd generation have a different relationship.

Go to the musicians and ask them what they want to do and what their dreams are and then do that – get your artistic direction from the artists. That’s what my generation will respond to but it’s not how it works now.

In certain places audiences are bigger, in London and Bristol, but in places like Wolverhampton you’ll get 12 people. There’s something in that west midlands are that is quite – I think venues are wary if there isn’t a South Asian audience locally, they’re businesses too. Where there are south Asian audiences it’s very territorial, if I do a live classical performance that’s been sold out in London, a lot of the companies in Birmingham and their audiences wouldn’t come and encourage others. It’s never about the work, it’s about the relationships and that’s a big problem in the sector. It’s usually from the older people in the sector. There’s a divide between how me and my peers operate and how they do.

5.3.2 South Asian creative leadership should be inspired by and practiced beyond the South Asian sector

When discussing qualities required of current and future leaders, the research indicated time and time again that an outward looking approach and willingness to engage with the wider cultural ecology locally, nationally and internationally was mission critical. Furthermore, and equally as important, was the need for South Asian creatives (not necessarily dancers or musicians) to be employed and visible in wider cultural sector roles. Having more South Asian representation in leadership roles within mainstream cultural organisations was discussed as something that would inspire and progress the whole sector.

We’re never going to break people into leadership roles unless they can work outside of the South Asian sector. It’s too small a sector – there’s just not enough leadership roles. So, the wider sector like Northern Ballet having a South Asian director, getting that right across the whole sector is mission critical.

They work very regionally, so if they’re based in the midlands, they don’t worry about what’s happening in the North. But a good touring piece should be touring UK wide.

I’ve been doing this for about 15 years and we’ve done so much and really understand the commercial end of things to but we’ve got to the stage, I
want to learn from international global leaders, pioneering entrepreneurs – not just the arts sector leaders. I want to know about how to scale things and build a business.

There needs to be more brokering with artists who work across the sector, someone like me should be able to be mentored by Mathew Bourne, that sort of connectivity and leadership is missing now.

5.3.3 Organisational leadership doesn’t always translate to sector leadership

There was a commonly held view across the consultees that some of the organisational leaders in the South Asian sector were leaders by proxy, rather than having earned that role and credibility. The majority of consultees struggled to identify true leaders in the sector but felt like the heads of the ‘funded’ organisations had assumed roles as leaders. For many, those leaders and organisations were working more for self-interest than wider sector interest and advocacy.

This was an area of the consultation that was particularly sensitive, with some very high feelings from many respondents. Moving forward it will be important for National Portfolio Organisations and other funded support agencies to be more open and accountable in decision making, in order to restore trust and repair some of the historical hurt and ill feeling within the sector. Cross sector collaboration and partnership working needs to become a priority and the ‘norm’ in order to transition organisational leadership to meaningful sector leadership. Recognising and supporting leaders and/or potential leaders who do not lead organisations but exhibit excellence in the art form, and are ambassadors for the sector, is another area for improvement that was identified through this line of consultation.

There’s no set leadership in this sector. When you’re a student the organisations are good but when you’re trying to make your own path they don’t want to support you unless you tow their line until you start getting recognised and they come back to you then.

There just doesn’t seem to be an overall strategy among the NPOs about what we want for our sector and how to achieve it. There’s no bigger picture coherence.

Some people find themselves as designated experts just because they’re the only Asian in the village, but they might not be the best person to be cast in that role.
Clore leadership, I’ve applied 4 times but they cannot see me running a South Asian organisation so I don’t get accepted but that is our strength. If leadership is only viewed through an organisational lens, then you’re devaluing individual leadership in the sector which is so important – these leaders are the people connected to the communities.

Some of the organisations are organised in the UK are family run which can be a problem, you see the head and then their deputy is their son or daughter and that’s a problem. Something that’s publicly funded should not be like that. There is also a strange religious dynamic. Some of my friends who are Muslims do not get gigs that they should get.

The gatekeepers are causing the sector to malfunction.

A lot of these organisations aren’t artistically led. You couldn’t get an AD (artistic director) that wasn’t a proper AD at the Royal Ballet but people who aren’t qualified can become AD’s in the South Asian sector. There’s no criteria.

The gatekeepers and organisations keep people in the invisible shadows and only shine the light on the people they like. I don’t know why that is and how to be included. It makes me feel what am I doing wrong? ACE have given these organisations artist development money, but none have gone through the rigour of what artist development entails. Subsequently I’ve had to go elsewhere.

Money means power so the NPOs are the guardians of the sector and power. This is not India it is Britain and young emerging artists don’t feel supported at all. I can say that hand on my heart because I speak to my contemporaries all the time about this. We feel grossly misrepresented and unsupported by these organisations.

To be a professional dancer – the amount of hours of training that takes, when organisations then treat like this who have the agency to help you and don’t, they’re diminishing the sector.

You can’t be a leader in dance if you don’t maintain creative practice of some kind in any medium. You have to keep understanding artist’s problems.

Empty vessels make a lot of noise. Sometimes they talk the walk but just don’t walk the walk. A lot of the things happening around me are putting me off. I can’t change who I am.

One Dance UK is not delivering specific support to this sector.
I don’t think there’s a visible leadership structure as such. There’s strong organisations who’ve been around for a long time. Leaders seem to have been created by longevity only. They’ve led organisations but I’m not sure that they’ve led the sector and I think the sector is lagging far behind.

5.3.4 Sector leadership succession planning is challenging and urgent

When we spoke to artists and heads of South Asian organisations there were serious concerns about who would take over and lead the next phase of their organisation’s practice and wider sector development. According to the research undertaken for this report, the time to invest in future South Asian cultural leaders is pressing and now. Governance and the role of the board was also discussed as piece of this difficult puzzle.

Sometimes you’re so busy chasing money you forget what you’re about. We’ve really struggled to recruit a new chief executive, we tried three times to recruit. There are not enough BAME leaders out there. We have a lot of artists but not many leaders, they don’t want to be bound by paperwork and being accountable to the arts council and funders. You need someone with very strong administrative, marketing and networking skills.

They’re not thinking about how they can support the next generation. They need to think about the role of boards too and business development and sustainability.

They can’t hook everything on Aakash because when he stops dancing it will stop.

I struggled a little when I wasn’t doing everything myself and I judged everyone with my standards which was wrong.

We’re now facing a legacy issue – how do we give back?

I was mentored by Paul Russ, now head of Dance4 and that was wonderful and I’m now on the board of Dance4. Being with a leader at that level enabled me to see strategy in a different way and see the position of performing arts in the UK and the parameters that need pushed and the strategic ways to push them.

I’ve been in the game 22 years now. Every time I advertise a post for the arts, I never see applications from BAME backgrounds. That’s terrifying, who will take the baton when I leave?
When you create good students, your work lasts longer than you do, that’s more important than awards. That’s the legacy.
6. **Collective Insights**

6.1. **Introduction**

Chapters 3-5 have presented the insights that specifically focus on training, progression and leadership. This chapter sets out a number of key strategic ‘bigger picture’ areas which impact collectively across all three strands of the research focus and overarching objectives.

6.2. **Classical versus contemporary is a conundrum**

In nearly every conversation we had with artists, the tension and balance of how classical South Asian dance and music is valued and presented in contrast to ‘contemporary’ interpretations of classical was discussed.

The research evidenced that the terms themselves are unhelpful. A majority of artists felt that using classical South Asian dance and music to transcribe the traditional stories and heritage of the forms for today’s audiences and expectations; and/or using the forms to tell completely new stories that address issues impacting today’s world, was delivering contemporary work that was at the same time classical. Ascribing loaded labels to split these two common approaches to practice in the sector was a source of contention.

There was also an acknowledgment through the research that a South Asian musician or dancer should not be confined to or defined by classical forms simply because of their ethnicity. If South Asian artists wish to pursue western classical and/or contemporary forms, whether that is ballet or hip hop or jazz or reggae, it should be equally as valued within and beyond the sector as classical South Asian forms. There was also discussion about internal sector snobbery around folk dance and music such as Bhangra and fusion styles such as Bollywood.

A common conclusion, particularly when this area was debated in the round table discussions, was that the artist and their voice and talent should be the primary focus. Style, whether classical, contemporary or fusion, should not interfere with or undermine what a musician or dancer has to say through their practice.

*There are only two types of dance – a good dance and a bad dance.*

*The artform itself is strict and rigid and they like to keep it pure and sacred. They don’t like you to make it your own.*
A lot of friends are doing great work but they’re not doing pure classical – you don’t get a grant for doing pure classical so they’re doing contemporary, it’s not pure. If you go to France or other countries, they want it pure in its traditional context but here it has to be different and forces artists to come up with random ways that compromise their practice.

That word contemporary threw a generation of dancers out. It was saying that we have no interest in Indian dance culture unless you see it through a white lens. So those skills became irrelevant overnight. That was heartbreaking.

At the very beginning we didn’t understand the contemporary dance market. I learnt it as a second or third language, it’s not my native language.

The word contemporary is confusing in itself. There’s a strict contemporary form and then there’s a way of contemporising work that many classical artists go through. It depends on the artist and choreographers creative urge. It has a lot of interpretation.

I’m a dancer first, rather than a particular type of dancer.

It is important to see good quality work. Where that is from it should not matter. I can get inspired by good quality Kathak, but also any other art. The word contemporary, in this context it’s more about the ‘now’. We need to allow artists to explore in new ways because it only strengthens the classical place they come from.

Don’t call it traditional, it’s classical. Our dance is equal to ballet and the music is equal to opera. We need the same respect as other classical art forms in the UK. ACE is trying to push people into new work but ask yourself, is this something they would do to ballet and opera?

There was a time when artists were left to feel that you had to do more contemporary work. ACE would only give funding to this work. Over the last 10 years though, a whole generation is coming out to make those two words no longer relevant. The new generation are changing the form from within. They are taking things from their own form and thinking about how to stretch that. It’s more about addressing themes now.

In the 90s ACE used the term ‘innovation’, which seemed to mean contemporary. It created a lot of trauma with classical dancers.
Kathak is a contemporary form. It’s a vocabulary and we use this to tell modern stories. It’s the same with music. It’s about what you’re trying to say with it. Our artists are encouraged to wear what they wear every day on stage, not classical clothing. We don’t feel that contemporary and classical is relevant anymore. We should be moving more towards authored pieces of work.

It’s more about the artist and the story they’re trying to tell, rather than their discipline and whether they are traditional or contemporary. ACE is moving more towards funding the artist, rather than the form which makes much more sense. Artists are starting to shift towards that now and it needs to continue. When touring they use the story as the message to attract audiences, not the form.

I am a very traditional musician, but you can have a traditional thought and make it sound contemporary through presentation. There are improvisations that allow a contemporary context. When open to the world and not confining ourselves to a pit, we can share traditional practice with contemporary thought. Classical has a particular grammar that you don’t deviate from. I’m exposed to different genres of music and western forms, so use classical knowledge to assimilate ideas from around the globe and interpret other artforms. That allows me to be liberal with thought processes. Rigorous training has facilitated that process.

Because we start with the classical forms it makes it difficult to move to the more creative style. You learn a style that becomes a language, but how you write a poetry with that language becomes your own. Once your body is trained in the right aesthetic it has the quality it needs. It’s really possible for the two to co-exist. Young people want to experiment but are sometimes scared to because of response this might get.

Maintaining heritage isn’t arts development.

I so often feel that classical Indian dancers are judged from the perspective of people who don’t understand it. The narrative of classical Indian dance is not the narrative of contemporary dance and how many narratives can you belong to anyway?

People who play Beethoven or Bach aren’t asked to play contemporary music. Why should we be? It shouldn’t be funding led but artists have to survive so arts council won’t fund anything but contemporary.

The ideas in India take greater risk but aren’t as good in delivery – here classical doesn’t take enough risk but delivers well.
Contemporary dance is so release based and reads rhythm in a totally different way. Indian dance is about detail rather than being dynamic, it’s grounded and held. But exposure to dance making and being employed by different choreographers who push your boundaries within your form is important learning.

Ballet, contemporary – they’re at the top of the game and South Asian dance and music actually is right at the bottom and we constantly have to prove our pedestal. I’m always told if I did more outside of my own form that would stand me in better stand which is insulting, the amount of ballet dancers I have coming to me who want to incorporate Kathak into their work and yet we’re always made to feel inferior and we work just as hard if not more.

I have slanted handwriting – that’s the Kathak style. What I decide to write with that handwriting can be different, but my handwriting is the same, I might write a piece of poetry or a short story, Kathak is a language. When I feel angry, I might write quicker, I can use Kathak to talk about anything I want. I can’t do justice to stories that don’t feel part of my faith or culture so as a British Asian I have to find my own stories. I’m using an age-old language to talk about women’s rights and empowerment and things that matter currently. I’ve grown up listening to urban music and seeing role models inspired by Bollywood and a definite British aesthetic. That music drives the way I move – I’ve done a lot of work with hip hop. There is a classical language definitively that has to be done with live music, but you can expand on that. It’s more than the stories of the Gods and Goddesses. It’s a tool to educate people.

6.3. Lack of investment in audience development has had a detrimental knock on effect for the sector as a whole

The general consensus of the artists who took part in the research was that an audience for South dance and/or music undoubtedly exists. However, the majority of artists articulated a number of key barriers and missed opportunities that significantly impact upon audience engagement, and attendance at and participation in South Asian dance and music. These are set out below. A common thread across all the conversations surrounding audiences was a lack of data and insights directly from audiences themselves and a reluctance from venues to share audience insights.

6.3.1 Representation and relevance create audience connection
Finding ways to speak to the lives and stories of people who reflect the audiences you want to engage was felt to be a key sector weakness. Artists repeatedly warned against the dangers of telling stories that would fail to resonate outside of a niche privileged South Asian cultural lens.

We need to look at the relevance of stories that are on the stage. Are people representing their own lives on the stage and seeing their lives reflected on the stage? The sector stands on a precipice a bit, because it hasn’t found a way to represent contemporary stories on stage. It needs to use traditional movement and vocabulary but find a way to remain relevant. A group of gay men wanted to dance and represent their experience as a gay man in their community, how do they do that?

Largely we present our work in the outdoors and public domain and we want as many people as possible to access our work. When we worked in theatres, indoors, and our parents were never in those seats. It was the same old faces in the seats. The National Theatre’s audience has not changed, all they’ve done in 20 years is create some films they broadcast. We take our work to where our parents might be, the local park, community centre, shopping centre, the places people call home asides from their front room.

I’ve been thinking about this for some time now and non-South Asian audiences definitively seem to be put but off by ‘foreign’ names and terms. They see an Asian name and just don’t want to see it cause they’ve immediately assumed it’s not for them. Unconscious bias in audiences- my tummy says there is one. That’s indicative of the lack of box office success. But there are ways to get around this. If they don’t get connect with South Asian names and styles, then why are we using them on our publicity materials and websites? It doesn’t make any sense.

People are programming their own tastes rather than what audiences need.

One thing that could bring change is a more nuanced media portrayal of South Asians.

Some audiences need to be educated about the art form and some about the spaces it might be programmed in like theatres when they’re used to seeing it temples.

Trying to perform a dance for a general public audience who doesn’t understand the code that dance is written in is dangerous. The artists need to understand the code the western European tradition is written in.
There’s a cycle of people stopping abruptly even though they’re talented. Societal pressure and class is an issue and I think it’s also about the market. I think people don’t go and watch work made by people of colour, our own people don’t even go.

Within South Asian history there is a lot of stories around LGBT+ mythology. There is also an idea of faith. We don’t know about real life experiences. Who’s telling these stories?

All these wider organisations are doing things that mean nothing to the artists. They do things that mean nothing to the artists for audiences who have no idea what they’re experiencing. You have to do projects that artists are passionate about. It’s bullshit. And there’s only 5 people who turn up because even the artists won’t promote it in their networks because they’re not engaged with it.

The current generation have learnt the art form but the audience for the pure classical form is small and older, they’d be in their 80’s and 90’s now – those who understand and have experienced the classical art fully. So that is not relevant or sustainable.

I critique the sector for being insular, but I also educate the audience on the art form and how that’s viewed through white cultural programmers. So, there’s something for everyone and it’s authentic. The title of my work and the content helps sell it.

6.3.2 Audiences engage when product reflects and responds to place

Many of those we spoke to, particularly producers and those running South Asian organisations commented on the importance of bringing audiences along on a journey, particularly those who may be new to the art forms. One off encounters are rarely successful in delivering audiences. Those who had been most successful in developing strong and sustained audiences had developed and programmed work that directly spoke to the communities where the work happened. This understanding and grounding within the community enables the artists to reach more people and a more diverse audience than producing work within a vacuum.

You have to invest in audiences though. You have to build their trust and guide them. We invested in that at Sadlers. The audience for Indian classical music is in small communities where the dance schools are. The music audience is stronger than the dance audience.
We’re embedded in the community because we know how ordinary people think and move and are dogged about the set-up of that. All of the international success is futile if we cannot make a difference at home. In Southbank, one of the reasons there’s a British audience is because they’ve heard of Ravi Shankar, but they haven’t heard of up and coming artists and nobody tries to capture their initial interest and lead them there. I work in schools and the parents always call me after that.

At Watermans they managed to get audiences because there was a sustained drive to do this. Venues do not get that support to invest long-term in these audiences.

Audiences vary depending on where the work is. Those who are making more contemporary work can cause friction with people in the audience who are purists and traditional. Understanding who your audience is is vital but it’s not something that’s built into training and thinking for South Asian dance and music.

You have to invest time to build up those audiences, Watermans, Rich Mix and the Southbank have done well here but places like The Place haven’t been as good. Audiences are fickle and you have to keep at it, or they move to the next thing.

When we’re working in India, we’re not presenting Indian arts to Indians, we’re sharing the culture with everyone. We’ve learnt a lot over 30 years about how to collaborate but being based in Liverpool really helps us. We keep things low cost or free and use different venues but the way we programme and promote has helped and London, Liverpool and Manchester are all very different culturally and we can do much more adventurous risky programming up here than we can down in London. In London it’s more about using high profile concepts and artists and it’s harder to build an audience in London. The venues approach (Southbank) is a challenge for us building our audiences because we can’t access our audience information.

Non-South Asian audiences need an entry point into this world. It’s very daunting and unclear to make sense of this music otherwise.

We’re embedded in the community because we know how ordinary people think and move and are dogged about the set-up of that. All of the international success is futile if we cannot make a difference at home.

There is music in temples and in things like Indian cultural associations, there’s temples all over the place where the art forms feature significantly, and they have their own teaching programmes. You can learn
Bharatanatyam in a temple in Ealing on a Saturday morning. They wouldn’t consider themselves arts organisations. Place and context is important.

Audiences are geographically bound to the areas they live in. Where there are temple bases you will find audiences. There doesn’t appear to be a programme of sustained development of audiences.

We’ve seen BAME audiences seeking permission to come into the Hippodrome, literally asking if they’re allowed through those doors. To build audiences you have to go into the communities and gain their trust which takes time and resources.

Last year there was a contemporary Huddersfield music festival and I was commissioned to write a 20 min piece for them. The piece I wrote was only South Asian because I wrote it but from an audience engagement perspective I worked with local choirs, four choirs performed. It had Indian overtones and Indian musicians, but our audience was completely mixed. It’s a great festival with world music but the people in the town don’t feel they belong to the festival and I wanted to bring audiences in from the local area. It’s keeping to your core but also going creatively bigger. We need time to think things through. That project worked so well.

6.3.3 Evidence of audiences advances opportunity

Many artists experienced that venues and programmers were much less likely to programme their work when they couldn’t articulate or in some cases ‘guarantee’ an audience. Complementing performances with outreach activity, workshops and Q&A style events had proved successful for many artists as ways to develop audiences in response to programming concerns.

The National rural touring circuit has been very helpful. Village Hall programming, South Asian dance has done really well there with that intimate proximity and workshops as well.

Venues need to be less fearful and not shy away from new audiences. Some venues have been scared of my new work because it deals with women old enough to be my grandmother. I get asked who is going to come and see that? Then I have to argue and create pathways for older generations to come in and see their own stories. Start a project with them in their space and lead them into the space to see it. It works.

Lots of venues are a receiving house and they will not share the database of the audience.
The lack of education within programming is a bit of a red herring. When I speak to people like Small Venues Network, they’re right up to speed but are cautious about being continually offered classical recitals and getting audiences for that – they’re being offered exactly the same thing. In terms of the general public dance is a unique interest but audiences have been growing for dance and there is a market for it. The audience agency have some good stuff on that that we could share and would be useful for making a case. Weirdly, dance audiences are completely different for ballet than the rest of the dance.

Audience figures and demographics is not what the sector does or wants to do but without they can’t make a case to venues.

6.3.4 South Asian work is not just for South Asian audiences

Irish rebel and/or traditional folk songs and dancing may mean more to those who come from the Island and have direct experience of the heritage and culture inspiring and depicted by the forms, but there is a wider audience for Irish dance and music than Irish people. In the same way, whilst South Asian audiences will be more familiar with the forms and integral stories and styles, it is dangerous to assume that only South Asian audiences can access and enjoy the work. That said, the non-South Asian audiences are likely to benefit from providing accessible entry points and added learning and context.

People worry the audiences won’t understand so rather than educating them they serve it to people they think will understand it.

What’s interesting about the Asian Arts Agency is that Jas is making progress taking the work into mainstream venues. It’s important to him that South Asian music doesn’t only exist in South Asian venues for South Asian audiences. He knows he can bring in audiences that the venues don’t usually reach as well as touching their mainstream audience. We need to be careful not to pigeonhole them into the creative case for diversity and then exclude them from touring conversations and audience development. Where they sit in the ACE portfolio classifications can have a bearing. Why combined arts and not music?

You don’t open a big huge Bible to a three-year-old, you start with animating it. The most popular piece on Indian raga is an Ed Sheeran piece – across the board people love it. There’s Carnatic elements and it’s an entry point for many non-South Asian audiences.

Who is your audience? None of us know that, no one has taught that. There should be an infrastructure for artists like us to help build audiences.
As well as funding the artists why can’t ACE fund and invest in the audiences? I do so much outreach work before I do the work, I go out into the communities and I learn about them and I tell their stories and then I go back to them and tell them I’m telling their stories and then they come.

We explain to the audience what the moves mean beforehand and that helps.

Sadlers Wells had a big Bollywood musical programming last year and that was 19 nights sold out of a Bollywood themed musical and that wouldn’t have been Indian audiences only.

6.3.5 Quality is as important as, and in some cases more important than, quantity where audiences are concerned

Some artists felt that smaller audiences were undervalued by funders and venues. There was also commentary around the fact that many people watching South Asian performances were community audiences. Artists felt that community audiences who had a strong interest in the artform should be able to access high quality performances.

Sometimes there is a lot of bad dancing that happens in the community. We have a responsibility to show audiences that is not quality. It doesn’t need to be big shows, but at community level you do need the community performances to be high-quality.

It’s not always about having a full hall. That’s the point about a ten-year strategy. Bigger artists need to also target smaller venues, like go from South Bank to Purcell Rooms.

Diverse work will always get programmed where they have to, but the measures are based on frequency data and that’s wrong. We can provide really rich and moving experiences for a smaller amount of people but because smaller numbers, and dare I say it, the ethnicity of those smaller audiences aren’t valued it’s less likely to be programmed or funded.

Just as with Western classical arts, South Asian dance and music should not be only supported if it has a large audience. Our organisation tries very hard to develop audiences, but we are cash poor and unable to really develop the ideas we have. For example, we used to run a very successful competitive festival for South Asian arts which gave a much-needed platform to students and young amateur and budding professionals but had to give it up because of lack of volunteers.
6.3.6 Brand and marketing are weak across the sector

Those artists and organisations that had been most successful in terms of attracting income through audiences all shared strong brands and a recognition that targeted, integrated marketing and communications was mission critical to success. This is in marked contrast to the majority of artists we spoke to, who found this area and skill set both alien and overwhelming. Addressing this skills gap for artists should directly impact the growth and diversity of audiences for South Asian dance and music.

We used to play in the matinee in the foyer of the Symphony Hall. There used to be 200-330 white middle class audiences there because it was free. If it was put on specifically and was ticketed, how many would come? This shows the audience is there but selling it is the art required.

They’re old school and traditional. Their web presence reflects this.

They need to get their product and distribution of that product right. People make assumptions on how it’s presented and conclude it’s not for them.

Colours and branding can really help to make the traditional feel inviting, relevant and contemporary but no one takes marketing seriously enough. Sometimes I feel like it’s a dying art form, not just here but also in India. It’s a limited market. People need tricks to sell their music like packaging it as yoga music rather than this is an album on inseam music classic tradition. The package is more important than the content for selling and that’s a failure or current marketing, I think.

Marketing isn’t everyone’s forte either and that needs to be looked at.

Kings Place is somewhere we programme and, in the Southbank, – we sell out. But places like that don’t allow us to promote sponsors for our concerts and that’s a big problem. We’re not good about promoting our own brand.

When we’re trying to build a new audience, you can’t expect the halls to be full when they only give us the weekend dates, but our audiences don’t go out during the week – they’re all busy professionals. But we’re only offered Monday or Tuesdays for these sorts of venues so even if our marketing was really good, which it’s not, it would still be a struggle.

We need to market it correctly, there are always audiences, but it has to be communicated properly. When we did Waterford Festival and we were on the streets people responded to it so well. It can’t be one and half
hours sitting in your seat. The conditions and the communications have to be right.

We do some very high-quality work, but we have no marketing person to tell people about us.

Resources for marketing and community engagement have been greatly diminished, there are no community engagement officers in venues anymore. We need people from the community in those roles like marketing and programming and management in the venues and then more diverse programming would happen. When you don’t have a clue what you’re trying to sell how can you sell it? Selling our art as Bollywood is just lazy.

6.4. The importance of collective sector leadership and external advocacy

6.4.1 Internal politics and a lack of joined up thinking and practice has isolated South Asian dance and music from within and across the wider cultural sector

A core theme that ran through every conversation was the unhelpful politics and power paradigms of the sector. This has undermined collaborative and partnership working to date, resulting in a lack of joined up thinking and weak sector advocacy. Combined, these factors have impeded the sector’s ability to be truly integrated and influential in the wider dance, music and cultural sector ecology in the UK and internationally.

The big venues have a group too and they come together every year and there’s a contemporary music network etc and there’s a job to be done there. We’re bringing in world class performers but can’t plug them into the big venues because we don’t have those contacts. There’s no one who can sell the huge venues anymore but in the past Indian artists could do that, so we need to build that up again. This definition of what Indian arts should be in the west is put onto us but it’s not what sells or what people want. We’re so busy arguing internally that these venues and opportunities are passing us by.

People of colour are very diverse under that rather large umbrella. A lot of folk traditions are not included in the sector and not in this room or any other when decisions are being made. This often is the result of who has founded a particular organisation and the focus they give. The less affluent
in the sector are often more linked to folk traditions than the classical ones. There is a total lack of awareness on all sides that they are part of a bigger ecology.

I set up my company because there was no artistic leadership in the NPOs. They’re too busy in their power struggles.

There was never a strategy in place all those years ago, it was all accidental, funding was about who was presentable and political and that’s probably not changed much!

There is a lot of politics in the music about who can perform and who can’t. There’s a monopoly of artists who play and not all of them are very good.

The people who’ve made it have found support from outside of the sector.

I don’t find the NPOs welcoming and I’m not the only one. They are comfortable because they have money for four years, but they are like systems with a moat and they don’t let the drawbridge down so how do we get on board? They don’t share their programming. There should be more conversations with the wider sector.

The organisations are so competitive with each other. That’s a real problem. I haven’t seen any solid collaboration in this country that goes outside of their boundaries.

Some of today’s leaders aren’t very inclusive. It’s very personal to them. They don’t look outwards and immerse themselves in the wider scene.

It can be a bit tribal, but I suppose when people have developed something over many years, they will be protective of it.

Those South Asian Dance Alliance and having regular group meetings across the country where we could come, and meet was very useful. There were lively shared discussions and experiences and solutions. Those platforms need to be created and sustained.

To be a professional dancer in India you have to be rich. That’s a big problem here, the artists who came here and brought dance here 30/40 years ago, they made an impact because there was nothing then. But to be an artist in India happened through marriage so they didn’t have to earn money from it, so this is a network related nepotistic thing that has impacted upon how the sector is run, because a lot of those leaders are still there. They look after themselves and your own little area, so territorial. ACE need to be brave and go that bit further and deeper into
the cultural nuances. Nobody talks about the bullies in this sector and it happens a lot. Unless ACE are willing to get dirty and look at some of these things that happen in the sector, we will never really get to the heart of why there is such fracture within the sector.

6.4.2 External advocacy and leadership is required to leverage sector impact and sustainability

The sector clearly contains some hugely talented artists across every career level, making an incredible contribution to the arts and society. It is also doing brilliant work in settings impacting life all over the UK – from health and wellbeing, to social action youth projects and improving community cohesion, shared experiences and understanding. It creates joyful experiences, and experiences that will challenge, inspire and stimulate a desire to learn more. Importantly, the people delivering all this brilliant creativity and societal benefit, represent significant minority communities in the UK and can connect with people who suffer more barriers than most. South Asian dance and music is mesmerising and one of the most beautiful ways to hear and see the stories impacting our lives today. From a public awareness perspective, Akram Khan is undoubtedly one of the sector’s brightest burning stars but he is just one star in a universe of South Asian dance and music that exists in this country.

These are powerful messages and could be transformative for the sector if heard, embraced and acted upon with key stakeholders, but current external advocacy messaging and channels are low. Where they do exist, they tend to be communicated by and for the benefit of South Asian arts organisations rather than individual artists. Uniting and upskilling the sector in advocacy should be a priority for all moving forward.

We’re national but based in Liverpool and that’s hard outside of London because you don’t get the press. We wanted to see awards and recognition for our artists but couldn’t get people like sky or anyone to help with it, so we just started our own.

There are several hundred Indian companies and thousands of UK companies with Indian connections but hardly any support the arts.

We’re undermining our own ecology and landscape by not developing our own talent and shouting from the rooftops about the amazing work we do.

There’s no brown faces on any rosters outside of the Indian classical music bubble which is atrocious. All the diversity is sourced from India not the UK, our artists don’t have management and representation in the wider
music community. The organisations are so narrowly focused that they’re not connecting with the wider sector and that’s wrong.

By the time I got to the idea of setting up an organisation that could provide a support structure and infrastructure it had been shaped by my early years. I was working all over the country, there was a few of us travelling and teaching and performing. That travel gave me a good feel for how people saw us and how the funders and audiences perceived us.

Nicolas Serota gave me an award at the Southbank Centre a few years ago. I want to work with the movers and shakers and those with political backgrounds, that’s how things happen and change.

The best experiences I’ve had though have been at Siobhan Davies and that’s down to the people there. They’re so so on it in terms of championing representing diversity in ways that our sector isn’t. They wanted to me to join their board when they were going through a big organisational change programme because I was a different voice – it wasn’t a tick box exercise – at that level they genuinely wanted to have my opinion and input. They have a real idea of how freelancing works. Akademi are still ticking boxes and chasing funding. Siobhan Davies are past that because they have resources and can really look out for the artist. Bhavan has a lot of potential that’s not being used at the moment. If we look at leaders in South Asian dance now, a lot of them graduated from the Bhavan but then went elsewhere to get the support to become leaders.

I took a 1960’s arthouse film and rewrote the score for a string orchestra and percussion and sarod and took it on tour across the world – wherever we went we’d collaborate with a new orchestra. The pieces changed so much just by those different collaborations and ended up having Shakespeare’s globe as a producer and recording with London Philharmonic. It showed me how nurturing a project in the UK can open up the whole world. So often I see people taking years to do an album or put a tour together and then just not having the right links or something isn’t quite right, like simple things like you can’t take 25 people on tour with you but if no one tells you that then how do you know?

6.5. **Arts Council England visibility, and understanding of quality and the experiences of institutional racism from the South Asian dance and music sector**

6.5.1 **ACE is invisible to many and overwhelming to the majority**
Unsurprisingly, those we spoke to who have received funding from the Arts Council were more likely to feedback positively on their experiences. We noted from the conversations that there is a strong perception that the Arts Council funds the same South Asian artists and organisations repeatedly, on grounds that they are already funded or endorsed by someone already funded, which felt discriminatory to many. This was particularly keenly felt where consultees disputed the current allocation of funds.

What we heard most in relation to the role of the Arts Council and support it has given, or could give, the sector followed two core themes. Most artists, particularly those at the early and mid-career had very low, if any, awareness of who or what the Arts Council is and the support it can provide. For those who have heard of the Arts Council and explored it further found the whole process and requirements complicated and overwhelming at best and inaccessible at worst. These dual factors are undoubtedly preventing more South Asian dancers and musicians from engaging with Arts Council England and leveraging its support.

I’m very lucky because I’ve never had to write any Arts Council applications, but I know from what people say that it’s a minefield. Why does a dancer need to know how to write that? This could filter out talented dancers and I question that. Is there another way of doing it? Having an interview or video evaluated? There’s so many talented people who don’t apply because they’re terrified of the applications. Some of them aren’t confident with English or educated and just don’t have that mindset.

I’ve never had a grant in my life because I don’t know what’s available and when you go on the Arts Council website it’s so confusing.

I’m not so sure that the Arts Council is able to listen to everyone and act on, they seem to only listen to the people they always listen to. They’re not very clear about how they can support us. They talk to the people who are vocal.

ACE is a very faceless organisation. You develop relationships then their staff move away, and you have to start again.

Whenever I’ve applied to ACE for an Indian Classical project they ask if I’m working with Sampad. If I’m not working with Sampad it is overlooked.

There is a big disparity in funding levels for different dance companies which limits creativity. Shobana was drawn to the contemporary because that’s where the money was. Now Shobana’s audience has really shifted to be a white middle class audience.
I want to see this change happen in the music field as well. I have never been successful in getting ACE support because I have no idea how to go about it. Where do I go? How do I go about it? I’ve no idea!

We need to create alternatives to ACE. We can’t just rely on this one source for funds and development.

We need signposting about where to go.

It is time that instead of artists having to initiate the process for obtaining funding, that the arts officers really go out into the field and get to know what is happening and select and encourage and support other artists and organisations to apply.

People are quite intimidated by the Arts Council; I am as well. These forms look like mountains to climb. If you’re not in with the Arts Council and you don’t know it, you will fail. The system is very bureaucratic, it doesn’t help the accomplished artists it should be helping.

Artists don’t how to apply for funding. I’ve never been successful in an Arts Council application. In terms of doing the application I felt I was better investing my own money against the time and energy and lack of flexibility required by Arts Council. From my point of view, it’s not worth it. I just want to make music which seems weird because on the surface I’m apparently what they’re looking for. My work is very diverse – my background and training is very much in the classical sphere. I perform with some of the A listers from the Bollywood scene. It’s lucrative work. I haven’t pigeonholed myself as a South Asian classical musician. That’s always been very important to me. I accompany musicians from lots of other fields. But I can’t write the application to bring excellence into the sector and other artists who don’t have the profile and experience along with me.

I have been part of ACE funded projects but not for things I want funded. I didn’t know how to write the application, it didn’t feel like it applied to me, it’s so rigid that an application needs to look and sound like this but that’s not how I work.

Make the application a bit simpler or at least give different options in how it can be interpreted so it’s less intimidating and more inclusive.

English is my second language so ACE applications are very hard and complicated.
6.5.2 Many artists feel they experience institutional racism

Institutional racism was defined by Sir William Macpherson in the 1999 Lawrence report (UK) as: "The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."

A concerning theme throughout the vast majority of the conversations we had, with both artists and stakeholders, was the presence and experience of institutional racism as a barrier to progression and realising creative potential. The quotes from consultees make for uncomfortable reading but these concerns must be met head on and addressed if the sector is to develop as it deserves to.

I would say there’s been discrimination in London between art forms and what the big venues think Indian arts should be is not what we think should it be even though they’re not experts. In dance mainstream funders and venues don’t understand what classical Indian dance is. There wasn’t an appetite for welcoming in South Indian audiences whereas that’s not the case in Liverpool and Manchester.

They either programme for South Asian audiences or non-South Asian audiences – there isn’t a mindset to invite the two together. We’re a tick box not an artistic decision.

There’s a western perspective in cultural policy in Britain so there’s only a few types of Indian arts. It’s a minority art form so there’s a perception that it belongs to a minority and that’s where the problem lies. Indian arts are for everyone.

There used to be, post-colonial times a big interest in the exotic art of India and the curiosity got lost in the 70’s when racism started to get embedded in this country.

I did a programme called Step Change with the National Theatre and made them interrogate themselves. Up until my cohort 93 people had taken part and only 2 people were disabled and 30% were BAME and 70% were white. For the BAME people, 80% were self-employed with 20% in paid jobs – that statistic was reversed for the white people. People of colour work on one side of the sector, we work for ourselves and have to sell it to people who have no experience of our community or lived experience. There’s something fundamentally wrong here.
Look at the cast of Hamilton, that’s a diverse cast but the only people who’ve got rich out of Hamilton are all white. That mirrors our sector.

I couldn’t go to the Arts Council and ask for half a million above my NPO money, but the opera house can and do do that.

There was never a strategy in place all those years ago, it was all accidental, funding was about who was presentable and political and that’s not changed much!

I spoke to someone in a major London institution recently who said, ‘we’ve already programmed something from a South Asian diaspora, so that’s it for this year.’ Where do we go with that mentality?

Lots of national music conferences do not include BAME audiences. I stopped going because organisations and individuals at these conferences acted like a cartel. They don’t make themselves accessible. Orchestras in the UK get a massive slice of funding. I suggest these organisations should go out and invite diverse people to come and join them.

I’ve literally faced comments from programmers about not wanting the “sari brigade” in their venue. Racism is alive and well within the venues we’re trying to place performers in.

I started dance late and dabbled in lots of styles. I went down the route of contemporary classical because it suited my body. It connected and worked for me. It was something that came naturally. There are only a handful of classical dancers in UK, and even less who are male, and few who are contemporary male dancers who are Asian. So, I always get compared to people who have been successful because I have a brown face like them. When I performed at Resolution one of the reviewers mentioned that I was like Akram Khan, but my dance is so different from that. They just can’t see past the brown face. We’re all the same to them.

There’s a comfort zone of assessors and many understand the contemporary form more than a classical form. Rather than commit to the lesser known you omit and stay where you can make comments you understand.

Regardless of skin colour, we employ people who look and feel and sound like us so the way we do things doesn’t get that healthy challenge. We have been slow to invest in stuff that we don’t understand, and we don’t understand it because we haven’t diversified our workforce.
All of my efforts here come down to this one racist dude who happened to be a gatekeeper in the industry. I was called into the office of a TV executive who told me that my ideas had to appeal to white people. It got me feeling very down for a few days because the same sentiment has been expressed to me many times throughout my career... "M.I.A. and that’s it? We could use a few more South Asians in the industry, I think. You can’t tell from looking at the British music scene that we’re a majority ethnic group!"

It’s almost like Arts Council are saying, ‘ok – let the brown people deal with the brown politics’.

It’s much more subtle than racism, it’s discrimination.

The current leadership has been handpicked and nurtured by the Arts Council. Those of us who refused to give up our commitment to training in the classical repertoire have been left out.

I used to sit on the cultural city executive and what was happening was I was there to tick a box. I’m not here to tick a box. We are a diverse city and the NPOs around here aren’t programming for the people of the City. Ticking boxes won’t connect our community with the arts. The Arts Council is complicit in letting them away with this box ticking.

Classical Indian dance in this country is still held within the conditioned mind of colonialism.

The people that should be being helped with their portfolios and websites aren’t. I know people that if they were white and played the cello, they’d have careers in ways our musicians can’t.

Leadership within arts organisation needs to be diversified UK wide. There are no BAME faces where the actual power lies in the arts. There’s a lot of talking and policies but not a lot of doing in terms of seeing people in positions of power who look and feel like you.

6.5.3 Quality is contentious

Another common theme and bone of contention across the majority of consultees was the issue of what high quality South Asian dance and music is and looks like and who is best placed to make this judgement. This was an area that came up lots when discussing the Arts Council’s funding.

15 This is a quote taken from an article reviewed for the literature review rather than a direct consultation. The article can found at https://gal-dem.com/where-are-the-south-asian-women-in-uk-music/
decisions. It also applied across and beyond the sector in relation to how other funders, organisations, venues, gurus, choreographers, programmers and producers make judgements on quality.

The lack of standardised accreditation and formal exams/pathways was felt to be part of this problem. There was also much debate about the differences in quality between artists from or who had trained in India, and British-born artists who had not. Panels of assessors was considered a potential solution, but only where the quality and experience of the panel was highly credible and proven experts in the areas being judged. It was clear from the consultation that the current measures of quality are not considered fit for purpose by the wider sector.

*The people on any panel should be knowledgeable. They need to really know the art form and the shared principles of the panel that they are forming. They need to be fair to both the purists and the contemporary.*

*Whose perspective are we are looking at quality from? It’s not just the work itself, but also the way the work is structured and reaches out. They also need professionalism. Integrated panels is what’s needed that understand all these areas. There needs to be an array of different perspectives, so we arrive at quality from different angles. Artists are on a continuous journey so it’s also about recognising that and supporting projects that help them to improve their journey.*

*I’ve made work year upon year upon year. There’s a lot of work that goes into it. There’s an old school sense of entitlement, lots of pharmacists and accountants who think they’re dancers, 2nd generation overachiever immigrants, you wouldn’t see them taking jobs in restaurants like dancers or actors. Where’s the quality and equality in that?*

*People who receive funds are not the most dedicated artists.*

*We have a blind global panel and importantly, they don’t know who the other panellists are. We don’t ask for an application or a resume or their awards – we only ask for a 5-minute performance – your work has to speak for itself. We send it to at least 3-4 evaluators who evaluate it on some specific things, like technicality and believability and creative interpretation. We can see when these metrics come back where the truth is. If you’re asked to compare between two wines and someone only likes merlot they will be biased against cabernet. Sometimes we do make mistakes, if someone has rehearsed the piece 10,000 times but when we put it out on social media the audience is very wily and that weeds out poorer quality.*
How many South Asian AQA’s are trained to assess the ballet or opera? They can go there and say the music is beautiful or the costumes are pretty but they won’t know the intricacies on ballet or opera and yet that happens for us.

There is very little understanding of the quality, an artist would write an application form and the bureaucraticness of that form is more important than your artistry and talent. So, you may be an amazing artist but terrible at filling those forms in.

What is South Asian music now? It doesn’t fit their standards of pure classical music but also it doesn’t fit Bollywood music, it stretches into so many other areas. Who sets the quality standards and the interpretation of what South Asian classical music is?

How do you assess the quality of something you don’t really understand? That is a problem for the Arts Council. You need to know if people are producing crap.

I was an ACE assessor and there was never any work to assess except Akram and Shobana. They don’t see even see themselves as South Asian dancers, they see themselves as contemporary dancers. It’s a joke.

I’m trying to grow a generation of dance artists but we’re losing quality because of the creative case for diversity. Quality isn’t validated properly at the moment; they can be on TV and trained for 5 years and get work, but the quality isn’t there and ACE don’t care because they can tick the box.

### 6.5.4 There is confusion over the role and conflicting experiences of South Asian and wider sector NPOs

Regardless of whether artists had had positive experiences of being supported by National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), there is a common confusion over their role and responsibilities to the wider sector. From the conversations we had with artists, there have been some serious concerns about the rationale behind public funding for some South Asian NPOs – with stories of endemic favouritism, ‘jobs for the boys’ and questionable quality standards at best, to bullying and nepotism at worst. The significant length of time that many South Asian leaders of NPOs had been in place was discussed many times as a problem in terms of progressing new voices and ideas within the sector.

Conversely, when we spoke to NPOs they made a valid case that they are not Sector Support Organisations, such as One Dance UK or UK Music. The
NPO representatives we spoke to were deeply passionate about artist development and support, and provided evidence and brilliant examples of where they are making a difference. Whilst the NPOs acknowledged some issues of succession and leadership in the past as a problem, all were keen to assert that this was a historical issue that was changing even as this report was being written.

The NPOs made an important point that whilst some artists may feel they are receiving significant sums of money which should be impacting the sector more widely, the levels of funding received from the Arts Council are low in terms of the needs, barriers and aspirations the sector has. This is particularly true when you compare the funding South Asian NPOs receive in contrast to the funding that other comparable NPOs get.

They further clarified that to become an NPO, organisations are required to submit a business plan which covers a four-year period, which funding was predicated on. NPOs reported that the rigidity of the current ACE funding framework, combined with the very limited funds and capacity, simply didn't enable or empower them to be agile and supportive to the projects artists might want them to support during that funding period.

The disparity between a majority of the artists we spoke to having had no or negative experiences with South Asian and wider sector NPOs; and the work NPOs, particularly those that are South Asian focused, are tasked with delivering with the limited resources available to them needs to be addressed. The role that the Arts Council plays as a bridge between this divide is vital.

To be powerful needs a vision about creating bigger ensemble work. That just doesn’t exist but is where development needs to happened. We need to work with white-led NPOs to take work to new venues and appeal to all audiences, not just South Asian audiences. Artists shouldn’t just be relying on South Asian NPOs.

Gatekeepers define what goes in and out. We have seen a democratisation of the arts at Indian Raga and we make it very clear that quality defines our programme.

I don’t understand why the Northern School of Contemporary Dance and London School of Contemporary Dance get NPO funding when ACE say they don’t fund training? They have national youth orchestras that get funding that are set up as companies but are in essence a source of funding.

People think some NPOs are a sector organisation. One Dance UK is actually the sector organisation and should be the voice for all dance.
The first thing people think about in terms of support is money, but as NPOs we struggle to cover costs and commissioning is very difficult and very limited.

This raises the question of what is the role of an NPO? Judge and Jury for artists? That doesn’t feel right.

The role in the 80s of NPOs was to develop South Asian dance. Now there is no clear role for them, and they have become a bit of an obstacle for progression. I think they need to be disbanded and asked to redefine their roles. They achieved what they set up to do, but now there’s a lack of impact.

As a student any organisation will help you because you’re doing it for free. The minute you’re an artist, they’re always supporting someone from India because that’s where the profit is coming from as they need to improve on their revenue as dictated from Arts Council.

The work we do that lots of people don’t know about is fundamental to what we do as an NPO. We provide support to artists to apply for funding. Artist development is really important to us. We need to make it more transparent now that the organisation is more open, and we will. We also do a great deal of work in healthcare settings and dementia and hospitals and that provides work for artists too.

As a musician you feel there’s a big barrier if you are not known or favoured by these organisations. But their decisions are not based on quality. I used to play eight concerts a year at Southbank and now play none. Southbank are now in touch with organisations who determine who they use. The organisations are very powerful.

I went to a National Dance Network meeting and there was no representation from anyone from this sector but me in that room. So, on a personal level I’ve taken on a role to champion the sector but NPO money is not that much. The pressure is huge on us to be the voice of the sector when we’re not funded to be that.

Once a Business Plan has been submitted to ACE as an NPO it’s not easy to deviate from that. We’ve had an open-door policy for the past 3-4 years to support artists to do their own bids. It’s hard to explain that your hands are tied once you’re committed for the next four years. Something internally at ACE needs to address that lack of flexibility and ability to respond to artist need for a long period of time.

ACE funded organisations, I don’t understand why these organisations aren’t supporting young classical India musicians from this country. They
bring musicians over from India, fly them, put them up and a lot of money is misused this way. There are so few slots for UK based Indian classical musicians. That’s not how publicly funded organisations should be operating. Each of these organisations have full time jobs for administration. They’re not having the checks they should be, the investment into them isn’t reaching the musicians.

One of the important things to remember about South Asian NPOs is that they are really small when you look at funding and staff time. A lot of time people at NPOs are working way beyond capacity.

6.6. ‘South Asian’ as a catch all term is a barrier towards inclusion, relevance and representation for both artists and audiences

The diversity of the countries and communities that comprise the ‘South Asian’ sector is rich in contrast and complexity. This study repeatedly evidenced the use of the term South Asian as short hand for Indian. This is a significant issue for cultivating meaningful inclusion and relevance. The Arts Council’s new ten year strategy, Let’s Create, has a specific ‘Inclusivity & Relevance’ investment principle which states:

"We also expect the organisations we support to change in other ways. We want them to build closer connections with their communities, particularly those that they are currently underserving. We want them to mean more, to more people: to strengthen their relevance to the communities, partners and practitioners with whom they work. We will therefore ask them to demonstrate how they are listening to the voices of the public, including children and young people, artists, and creative practitioners, as well as the partners they will need to work with to deliver our three Outcomes. We will also ask them to tell us how they are reflecting what they hear in the planning of their work.

In future, we will judge organisations for the way in which they reflect and build a relationship with their communities, as well as for the quality and ambition of their work."

With some notable exceptions, the status quo for the majority of ‘South Asian’ work does not appear to be meeting the needs of all of the communities that fall within that broad brush and this must be addressed moving forward.

The Indian music being produced here is considered British by our musicians even though their background is Indian or Shri Lankan.
We offered Bollywood training. There was a lot of folk and classical stuff there and served but not this. When I was growing up there was only folk or classical. As a form Bollywood didn’t really exist until the late 90’s – we were fulfilling a market need. They thought Bollywood was a stain on dance generally at the time.

The ‘sector’ has tendency to say it speaks for everyone and talks the talk about representing the South Asian community. In reality, a lot of the time in the room it’s a small sub-section and they are often amongst the most privileged, sons and daughters of doctors etc. The Pakistani under-privileged lived experience is very different from the Indian privileged lived experience. That’s a reality that isn’t being addressed.

Do we expect Bangladeshi audiences to come and see Indian dance? That just wouldn’t happen but we’re very generic about that word South Asian.

All of our dances mean something but it’s meaningless to most people here, even our own community some of the time.

I can get 200 people to Southbank from greater London because I know the community.

We need to stop referring to ourselves as a South Asian organisation. That doesn’t mean turning our backs on the artists, but I wanted to make us relevant to the community. That’s the most important thing. One of the major things to address with the South Asian sector is we’re not actually talking about the South Asian arts sector – we’re talking about classical South Indian dance and music. Our average audiences for everything used to be between 20-30 people and people couldn’t understand why in such a diverse city but that’s like putting on an obscure French piece and expecting people to come because they’re European. 20% of our population are Pakistani and Muslim heritage so when we talk about South Asian anything we have to talk about the whole of the continent.

6.7. The guru–shishya relationship works best when the guru is open and supportive of wider learning and progression routes

It’s fair to say that nearly every conversation we had with artists referenced a guru who had influenced and/or been instrumental in the development of their practice/career. 91% of those who took part in the survey for this research rated ‘training under a guru’ as very important or important.
Where these relationships were most valued was when gurus actively encouraged their students to immerse themselves in their own and other art forms and to find their own voice. The strongest Guru-Shisya relationships were inspirational and highly motivational to artists. Where artists felt the tradition wasn’t helpful was when gurus imposed rigid views on form and expression and actively discouraged artists from working with or learning from any other teachers or sources. 66% of the survey respondents felt that, ‘Training in different styles outside of my core dance tradition/instrument’ was very important or important. 65% of the survey respondents felt that, ‘Training with multiple teachers’ was very important or important.

Most of the artists we spoke with felt that the guru model itself in England was undergoing an evolution. There is a feeling that the ripple effects of technology, globalization and the rise of second and third generation British South Asian artists with different cultural expectations and experiences will shift historical cultural norms. Furthermore, the one to one teaching method can create gaps in learning and development outside of the guru area of expertise across some key areas including technical skills, choreography and composing skills, performance opportunities and the wider business skills required to have a successful career.

Whilst the majority of the sector clearly feels strongly that the symbol and role of the guru is instrumental to training and progression, there is a growing recognition that it is not the only way to learn and progress. Finding ways to identify, engage, connect and support gurus and place one to one teaching into a wider sector ecology will have a knock-on beneficial effect to the artists and wider sector that they are directly influencing.

6.8. **The impact of technology on the art form and training, progression and leadership are currently under utilised**

Whether used as a training, learning, development or networking tool; advocacy, brand, audience development and promotional purposes or as part of the development and application of creative practice and performance, the potential of technology for South Asian artists is vast but currently heavily underutilised. Whilst undertaking the mapping research for the database, we noted that the digital footprint of the sector in terms of quality and content of websites was, with a minority of notable exceptions, undermining the professionalism and creativity of the artists it is meant to represent.

The success and engagement of Indian Raga ([https://indianraga.com/what-is-indianraga/](https://indianraga.com/what-is-indianraga/)) who we spoke to as part of this research evidences the power and potential of digital platforms. Over
the past 5 years Indian Raga has connected over 3000 artists, aged from 6 to 60, from 40 cities. They have collaborated to produce 400 performance pieces viewed by 10 million people across 65 cities.

www.pulseconnects.com was launched in 2018 and its aim is to connect, inform and energise the South Asian dance and music communities and highlight cutting-edge practice. They commission articles related to training and progression, reviews and send out a weekly newsletter highlighting South Asian arts events – dance and music primarily, but also lectures, talks and visual arts events. Pulse has many requests for reviews from young, upcoming dancers who can then quote the reviews in their publicity and funding applications; this is one of the most useful functions that Pulse performs, along with the weekly newsletter.

However, the future of Pulse is uncertain. Like a huge section of the South Asian sector this important platform is currently run largely on the goodwill of passionate volunteers with no defined business model. Whether it is Pulse or an evolved iteration of Pulse, the research indicates that there is a gap and missed opportunity to both provide a ‘one stop shop’ digital platform and develop digital literacy within the English South Asian dance and music sector.
7. Conclusion

7.1. Outcomes

Having examined the three key areas of training, progression and leadership, alongside the overarching strategic issues that are preventing the sector from realizing its potential, we believe that there are four potential outcomes which would address the key challenges that have emerged from this research. This would require the broader arts and cultural sector to come together to support these outcomes, summarised in the quadrants below:

More young people from more diverse South Asian backgrounds pursuing a career as a South Asian dancer and/or musician and/or wider creative careers such as organisational roles, producers, composers and choreographers.

A new era of equality, excellence, inspiration and inclusion for everyone at every stage of their career in the South Asian dance and music sectors.

A bigger and more diverse audience and appetite for South Asian dance and music across the UK.

A stronger and more diverse arts and cultural sector in the UK overall that is representative of and influenced by its South Asian communities and creative leaders.

7.2. Aligning with Let’s Create\(^\text{16}\)

In early 2021 the Arts Council intends to publish a delivery plan for Let’s Create – which has been delayed due to the impact of Covid-19.

Chapter 1 set out a range of priorities taken from the full strategy, which are supported by this work. This study and the potential outcomes strongly align with the core outcomes and investment principles of Let’s Create as presented in Figures 2 and 3.

\(^{16}\) https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/strategy#
Outcomes summary:
Creative people - Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life.
Cultural Communities – Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture.
A Creative and Cultural Country – England’s cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

Investment principles summary:
Ambition & Quality – Cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work.
Dynamism – Cultural Organisations are dynamic and able to respond to the challenges of the next decade.
Environmental Responsibility – Cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility.
Inclusivity and Relevance – England’s diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture they produce.

7.3. Proposed next steps

Whilst the research for this study was undertaken before the extent of Covid-19 was fully realised, from October 2019 to March 2020, the draft report was produced in April 2020 when the impact of the virus was beginning to hit the UK.
The pandemic has caused a seismic shift across the cultural landscape, with significant Arts Council and government resource focused on supporting the sector’s immediate response to Covid-19 and recovery.

In light of the current context, we would advise the following next steps – to address some of the concerns raised by this research and foster collaboration across the cultural sector to support the development of South Asian Music and Dance:

- **Disseminate this report as widely as possible throughout the sector**
- **Find an existing digital platform to host the excel mapping document**
- **Set up a strategic digital network for the South Asian music and dance sector to engage with one another and the Arts Council**
- **Encourage with the relevant sector support agencies and NPO’s serving South Asian dancers and musicians to specifically target South Asian artists with training, progression and leadership opportunities**
- **Issue a call out to all South Asian NPO’s and the wider sector to provide case studies following a template format of artists across every level of their career**
- **Develop a regular programme of Arts Council ‘open days’ targeting South Asian artists**
- **Convene a sector symposium using the key insights and learning of this report as a catalyst for discussion**