

Arts Council of Wales' Response to Wales Freelance Task Force's DANCE IN WALES Report (Amended version) November 2020

We'd like to thank the Freelance Task Force for taking the time to compile this report. It highlights a number of challenges that dance practitioners in Wales face, many of which we also recognise.. These, while not new, have been further exacerbated by the current COVID-19 crisis and the statistics extracted from the Wales Freelance Survey starkly demonstrate this.

Many of these issues are complex and deep-rooted and financial investment, on its own, is unlikely to result in the change we all want to see. There's no 'quick fix' to addressing the challenges and issues raised. This is not a reason for inaction. The change that is needed will come from us all working collaboratively, and across sectors, to invest resources appropriately and over a longer period of time. This is something that we're committed to doing.

We take this opportunity to respond to some of the specific points that you've raised. We hope that this will provide additional clarity and also a more balanced view in response to some of the findings.

We agree that there's a need for action. And in this response we'll try to be clear about what we can do **now** to start to address some of the concerns raised. There are also some developments that will take more time and discussion - some longer-term strategic thinking - to enable the sector to move forward in a sustainable way.

Our vision is of a strong dance ecology that enables dance professionals to sustain careers in Wales and gives people across Wales diverse and exciting opportunities to engage with dance, as audiences and participants. We want to work with you to achieve this vision.

The challenges

Your report highlights two key areas of focus:

- *The chronic underfunding from ACW for dance in Wales as evidenced in data and statistics, corresponding with and compounded by lack of art form specific knowledge at ACW since 2012.*
- *The systemic challenges facing freelance dance artists and strategic (ACW and APW) ways to support them in the development, production and presentation of dance in Wales.*

In general, we'd agree with these statements. There are mitigating factors around the funding of dance in Wales which we'll explore in more detail later on. We want to invest more funding in high quality, audience-focused dance product that enables us to nurture creative talent and reach more widely.

Supporting freelancers to overcome challenges in accessing funding and support is one of the more immediate actions that we can take to work towards this.

We note the comments and subsequent amendments to the original report in relation to dance expertise within our organisation. Although there was a move away from senior artform officers since 2012, dance is not treated any less favourably than any other artform within the Arts Council of Wales. We agree that since the reduction in our staff numbers we may not be as visible to you or have individuals with sole artform focus to drive forward change in a particular discipline. But we do have within our staff team a dance sector development group that regularly meets to look at ways in which we can support the sector.

All of our work centres on the delivery of our corporate plan, 'For the Benefit of All'. We know that dance has a crucial role to play in supporting us to achieve our ambitions.

For us, there are factors at play that are not recognised in the report. We feel that there's additional work to do to investigate and address associated issues around:

- the type, quality and quantity of available professional dance product created in Wales
- how this product connects with audiences beyond the dance sector
- how this product connects with venues (recognising that not all have expertise or confidence in programming dance and that for some, building a dance audience means starting from scratch)
- how this product has a life beyond Wales that supports sustainable business models and careers
- how we support, nurture and develop the next generation of dance artists in Wales
- the absence of catalysts that can effect change across Wales, supporting growth and development as well as connection to audiences

We're keen to explore further how we can work together to address these.

Funding

Arts Portfolio Wales (APW)

You present an accurate picture of the position of dance within the APW. Dance does indeed receive less investment than other artforms in the Portfolio.

On the positive side, our two dance production Portfolio companies are both performing well and have made significant progress over the past few years. They're creating work of high quality and extending the extent and diversity of their reach. They're both delivering well against the priorities outlined in our corporate plan 'For the Benefit of All'.

We've diversified the Community Dance element of the Portfolio by bringing Jukebox Collective on as a new Portfolio company. But there's still a need to further diversify the range and scale of organisations we fund.

You're right to point out issues that need to be addressed to ensure that provision through the Welsh language is strengthened. We also recognise that it's important that Welsh-speaking dancers and practitioners are able to sustain a career in Wales, should they so wish.

The extent to which the funding patterns will shift when we move forwards with our Investment Review will depend both on how well our existing dance portfolio clients, and any currently project funded organisations who apply, are able to demonstrate how they meet the priorities set out in 'For the Benefit of All'.

Lottery Funding

We agree that the 3.5% of funding awarded to projects where 50% of the project was dance activity in 2019/20 is disappointingly low. The percentage awarded to dance has fluctuated over the years since 2005 and, in our view, doesn't coincide with the removal of a dance specific post (and all other artform specific posts) from our structure in 2012. For example, in 2014/15 19.41% of Lottery funding was awarded to dance projects.

We are, however, concerned by the consistently low percentage since 2015/16. This is despite the success rate for dance applications being in line, in fact a little higher than, the success rate for non-dance applications for the period. The average success rate for non-dance applications 2005-2014 was 73.23% and in 2014-2020 was 56.19%. So, the average success rates for dance applications, at 80.72% and 59.26% respectively, was comparatively higher. We believe that the drop in the dance success rate is comparable with a drop in overall success rates (in line with less Lottery money being available), rather than being specific to dance.

As noted above, the success of any Lottery application is linked to the applicant's ability to support us to achieve our priorities as set out in 'For the Benefit of All'. This means that projects need to consider how they deliver against our equalities and diversity ambitions, be able to reach to connect with audiences and be of high artistic quality. Any strategic funding we offer is directly linked to the realisation of our corporate objectives.

Next Steps – the support we can offer

We'd like to work with you to support you in developing projects and initiatives that fit the criteria and priorities of our corporate plan.

Our overarching priorities are set out in 'For the Benefit of All' and we're clear about our commitment to supporting a broader range of artists and artistic product (including work created by Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Artists and Disabled and D/deaf artists), Welsh language work and work that reaches widely and deeply into communities across Wales.

We also believe there's more we can do to encourage the development of the folk and traditional dance sector in Wales. This is our strategy, and we believe that dance as an artform is particularly well placed to help us deliver it. It isn't, however, our intention to move towards the development of specific artform strategies. Our Development Officers and Portfolio Managers are available to discuss your ideas with you and support you to

develop applications to our available funding streams. While we won't be able to support all applications, our focus will always be on those that can support us to achieve our ambitions, as outlined above. We believe that we can work together more closely with you, and other key stakeholders, to fund initiatives that have the potential to meet most of the needs identified in your report alongside our corporate priorities. Please encourage freelance artists to contact us to discuss their ideas.

We're aware that our current structures and processes present barriers to some artists, particularly those who have less experience of applying for funding. **We're working to simplify our funding processes** to try to address this issue. We have, in particular, taken on board the comments made during our evaluation of the Resilience funding (offered earlier this year) and are in the process of developing an action plan that supports the changes that need to be made. Further information on this will be available in the new year.

We recognise that some artists cannot see the type of work they want to make represented in projects we've supported in the past. They could, understandably, assume that we're not interested in supporting a wider diversity of artists and products. This isn't the case. We're also aware that we're not seen as open and accessible enough to new applicants. **We'll continue to look for new and different ways to communicate to the sector that we're genuinely interested in funding a diverse variety of work that connects meaningfully with audiences and communities across Wales. We'll also work to find ways of being more accessible so that we can open doors to conversations with those individuals we've not funded in the past.**

We're starting to address the need for longer-term funding. This is an issue that has been raised with us more generally and we're taking this into account when designing new funding programmes. Our new "Connect and Flourish" fund, for example, allows for longer-term projects. We're hopeful that we'll see an increase in dance projects coming through.

We note the specific request to make changes to our Investment Review processes and support project funded dance organisations to make a transition to Portfolio status. **We'll publish any criteria for our Investment Review.** All project funded dance organisations can access will be able to access this information on our website ahead of making any submission to us. Any organisation should have enough time between publication and submission to focus their development with an awareness of the criteria, including discussing any proposals to support specific organisational or creative developments with us as appropriate.

Conclusion

We recognise that these actions alone won't resolve all the issues the sector faces. There are deep-rooted issues at play and gaps in provision within the sector that cannot be fixed without us working together. Progress will require all sector partners to come up with long-term initiatives that enable change to happen. We want you to know that we

share your concerns and want to work with you, and others, as ideas develop and more strategic interventions become clear. We welcome further discussion with you around any specific ideas you have in this respect.