For Arts Council of Wales December 2024

WALES DANCE REVIEW

National Youth Arts Wales Photo: Sian Trenberth Photography

ADOLYGIAD DAWNS CYMRU WALES DANCE REVIEW

Researched and written by KAREN PIMBLEY, December 2024

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About the researcher

Karen Pimbley is Head of Arts Management at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff. She also works as a freelance arts consultant and researcher. Throughout her professional career, Karen has been involved in dance in multiple capacities. She worked with Diversions Dance Company across two distinct periods - initially in the early 1990s and then from 2000, playing a crucial role in its transformation to National Dance Company Wales. For nine years, she served as a director of Welsh Independent Dance, helping guide the organisation from a small project-based company to a revenue-funded client of Arts Council Wales. Her industry experience also includes working as an independent producer for small-scale dance touring and dance festivals, serving on the Dance Strategy Panel of Arts Council Wales and producing a feasibility study for the development of a National Centre for Dance in Wales in 1997.

In dance education, she has worked as a Quality Design Writer for Pearson Education, designing modules for the BTEC Level 3 Dance curriculum and serving as Pearson's Lead External Verifier for Dance. She produced a BA (Hons) Dance Performance course for the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, was a steering group member for the BAEd (Hons) Community Dance course at UWIC and also established a level 3 dance course at Coleg Gwent.

Her doctoral research stands as a landmark study, comprehensively documenting the development of professional contemporary dance performance in Wales. Covering the period from the early 1970s to the present day, this research is considered nationally significant as the most complete examination of dance development in Wales. The research is preserved at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, with several collections publicly accessible through People's Collection Wales.

Karen's unique combination of leadership experience, deep understanding of the Wales dance sector, extensive touring knowledge, comprehensive venue network connections and research expertise make her exceptionally well-suited for research projects in the field of dance.

Karen maintains a non-partisan approach to her work. Currently a trustee of National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW), all comments and analysis in this review have been carefully crafted to remain impartial and objective and her relationship with NYAW has not influenced its content and/or recommendations.



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KAREN PIMBLEY

December 2024



executive summary

BRIEF AND SCOPE OF REVIEW

One of the published outcomes of Arts Council Wales's (ACW) Investment Review 2023 was to commission a review of community dance in Wales. However, following calls from and meetings with the dance sector, the scope of the review was broadened to consider the whole ecology of dance in Wales.

Building on existing sector knowledge, this review provides insight into current issues and the future of dance in Wales and forms part of a range of ACW's Strategic Interventions for dance. It draws on previous stakeholder feedback and considers the Welsh dance sector through:

- field research
- published research
- consideration of success models from both within and without the UK and across various artforms.

The review focuses on the entire dance ecosystem in Wales, including dance production and performance, community dance, dance in education, dance for health, amateur and social dance and commercial dance schools. The report provides an overview of the current state of dance in Wales, explores comparable models to guide potential sector development and offers recommendations for the future of dance in Wales.

While acknowledging the past, the main priority of the review is to consider how dance in Wales can move forward by harnessing the expertise, passion and commitment of those in the sector. The aim is to create a more diverse and equitable environment, enhance health and well-being, promote best practice and recognise the voices of those who have long felt marginalised.

The review captures a moment in time in late 2024 and recognises that conditions are continually changing and evolving. Some issues raised as part of the review may therefore resolve over time without any need for further intervention.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review's research framework adopted a qualitative, mixed-methods approach, incorporating:

- Desk research, using existing written materials, data and case studies.
- Field research, focusing on capturing individual and collective perspectives, emphasising thoughts and feelings.

The two-month field consultation period used various methods to gather insights, including an online questionnaire, an online comments board, a series of forum-style meetings called 'Creative Conversations', individual 1-1 meetings and email submissions. A number of educational visits were also organised to canvas student opinion on dance as well as attending professional dance productions by Wales-based dance artists. The focus of the review has been on insight generation via field research as a qualitative approach produces rich, detailed and valid process data based on the participants', rather than the investigator's, perspectives and interpretations. This methodology was therefore the most appropriate to use for the review.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Whilst a number of different mechanisms were used to collect data for the review, many reiterated the same or similar issues. The full report breaks findings down into the key research components, but a summary of findings from respondents across all mechanisms is as follows:

Sector Fragmentation & Competition: A competitive ecosystem exists between dance artists due to scarcity of resource that often stifles collaboration and creates a protectionist working environment.

Geographical Disparities: Urban-rural and north-south divides limit access to dance for dance artists and audiences, with rural areas like Pembrokeshire and Powys facing particularly acute challenges.

ACW Funding: Revenue funding from ACW is concentrated in South East Wales, limiting opportunities in other regions. A more equitable, collaborative approach across both Lottery and revenue funding streams was called for. A review of National Dance Company Wales was also suggested.

Community Dance Challenges: Financial instability affects freelance dance artists working in community settings across Wales. There were numerous calls for hub development to assist with resource and good practice sharing, providing sustainability. This developed into the idea of colocated artform hubs across Wales to enable dance to be integrated with other artforms. A focus would be on outreach to under-served communities and fostering of cross-artform collaboration. Intersecting with findings from the review of English language theatre will be beneficial.

Siloed and Elitist Practices: The sector is seen as elitist, tokenistic and non-diverse by many respondents – for example, a number of dance artists felt excluded by the established freelance community when moving into Wales and some are left feeling less worthy of support than others.

Infrastructure Needs for Dance Artists: Accessible, affordable studio spaces and resources need to be available for dance artists, including physical (e.g. touring equipment) and non-physical (e.g. support for application completion). Calls for some form of artist-led national dance development agency and dance artist in residence programmes across Wales were apparent.

Performance & Touring Opportunities: Improved partnerships with venues and connection with international organisations, festivals and residencies is needed. A vibrant home programming landscape from large scale down to small studio as well as co-ordination of support for dance touring was called for.

Career Pathways: A lack of structured career pathways for dance artists was apparent - calls for better training, leadership development and career transition support.

Welsh Culture and Language: Many felt there is tokenistic inclusion of Welsh culture and Welsh language in dance. There is a call for greater investment in and recognition of traditional Welsh folk dance forms as being integral to cultural identity. Embedding Welsh language into relevant activity should also be addressed. Intersecting with findings from the review of traditional Welsh music will be beneficial.

Training & Professional Development: Professional development support for dance artists working in education settings, including specialised training in areas such as dance in health and Welsh language engagement and practice.

Wellbeing: Support for mental and physical health as well as fair compensation standards for dance practitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There needs to be change, with sector support and infrastructure development across all areas. The dance sector was described by many as 'on its knees' with committed artists working in an incredibly resilient manner to try to shore up a failing system. Without intervention, there is danger of artist burnout, loss of developments already achieved and even complete sector collapse. To achieve a vibrant and sustainable dance culture across Wales, key areas suggested for intervention include the following:

SHORT TERM: immediate, 1-6 months

Recommendation 1: Establishment of an independent and remunerated strategic panel to determine a robust way forward for dance in Wales. This group would be recruited by ACW, be representative of the sector and tasked with:

- Evaluating and prioritising the review's recommendations requiring immediate and longer term financial support
- Contributing to a comprehensive dance development plan for Wales
- Ensuring co-ordination between immediate interventions and longer-term strategic objectives



Success metrics:

- Implementation of an activity timeline for review's recommendations
- Identification of projected costs associated for adopted review recommendations

Recommendation 2: Establishment of a critical friend / critical friends bank that can interrogate the practice of revenue funded companies at the highest artistic level. The critical friend role would provide:

- mentorship, guidance and support for Artistic Directors
- foster conversations around practice and programming choices for venues
- consider overall cultural relevance and context to Wales

The role could potentially be extended over time to support smaller companies and freelance artists to challenge and champion their practice.

Success metric:

 Appointment of one suitable critical friend within 6-month time period for each revenue funded dance client (different critical friend for each organisation or same if appropriate). Strategic panel (from recommendation 1) to work with companies to shortlist appropriate personnel. Critical friend engaged on a daily fee basis – 1 day per quarter. Suggested daily freelance fee £350.

Recommendation 3: Appointment of a dance specialist to ACW Council as there is currently no dance advocate involved in decision making at that strategic level. If the imminent call-out for Council members does not result in a dance specialist appointment from Spring 2025, it is recommended that someone with suitable experience is co-opted/seconded into the role until a more permanent solution is established.

Success metric:

• Interim co-opted/seconded appointment or full Council appointment in early 2025

MEDIUM TERM: 1-3 years

Recommendation 4: Development of a network of co-located community hubs across Wales by leveraging existing organisational infrastructure¹. The strategy would need to maximise existing assets, fostering cross-sector co-operation and development with minimal financial investment and would:

- Enable collaboration across communities and art forms
- Facilitate connections with education, health and business stakeholders

¹ Example of how this recommendation could work is included as a case study in section 4.2 of the main report

- Minimise additional costs by utilising existing resources and infrastructure
- Create integrated support networks without developing new resources from scratch

NB: development could link with interventions suggested by the separate review of English language theatre in Wales that is currently underway

Success metric:

• Development of a costed network of co-located community hubs across Wales - number and locations to be decided by the strategic panel identified in recommendation 1

Recommendation 5: Development of an artist-led national dance development agency for Wales. Informed by the strategic panel identified in recommendation 1, how this would be funded would depend on:

- where it would be based (if a physical base is needed)
- its role in order to be truly pan-Wales
- its role as sector advocate
- how it would link with the existing freelancer network and community hubs
- whether it is designed as a distributed funding model

Success metrics:

Development of a suitable agency model for Wales that:

- embraces digital solutions for geographic challenges
- integrates bilingual and cultural considerations
- builds on the strong regional network of community hubs in recommendation 4
- develops sustainable partnerships
- maintains artist-led principles while adapting to local context

Recommendation 6: It is crucial that arts-based initiatives that have a connection to Welsh language and heritage are supported by arts funding. Focus on developing and strengthening the Welsh language and Welsh culture through dance-related activities to embed language and culture into appropriate interventions. Initiatives should always aim to support and celebrate Wales's cultural heritage and language while locating work firmly within community contexts.

Success metrics:

- Welsh language embedded into dance delivery via suitable projects
- Welsh culture embedded into dance projects and commissions

Recommendation 7: Development of English, Welsh and BSL resources to support dance in the curriculum. Include Welsh choreography and companies on the new GCSE dance syllabus.

Success metric:

• Resources embedded in new GCSE dance curriculum



Recommendation 8: Proposal of a tiered ACW funding approach that simplifies application processes for smaller companies and independent artists. This simplified system should be applied to Investment Review applications, Lottery and other funding streams.

Success metric:

• Application processes simplified for those within and without the multi-year funding portfolio and directly related to the capacity/size of organisation/artist – i.e. administration support available, time required to complete application process if unpaid

LONGER TERM: 3+ years

Recommendation 9: Development of a dance artist in residency (AiR) model across 5 centres in Wales, on a 2-year max tenure at each venue. Brokerage by the strategic panel identified in recommendation 1. Costs are estimated of between £70-£100k per annum per venue – this would provide 1 or 2 full or proportional artist salaries and cover costs. Working in partnership with venues and other stakeholders might enable alternative funding streams to be realised.

Success metrics:

- Identification of venues appropriate for the scheme's development
- 5 AiR programmes set up around Wales on a rolling programme

Recommendation 10: Research the potential of a post-graduate dance training model in conjunction with suitable partner(s).

Success metric:

• Suitable vocationally focused Higher Education institutions to consider producing a feasibility study on the viability of running a multi-pathway industry focused post-graduate MA/MFA programme, working in conjunction with suitable partners

Recommendation 11: Development of a Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) scheme model with bases in North and South Wales – or – negotiate with the England CAT scheme network to secure places for young Wales based dancers nearest to where they live.

Success metric:

• Improved access to high level training across a range of dance genres for young dancers who are hoping to move into professional dance training



o Infrastructure development

If all review recommendations are implemented, infrastructure developments would be progressive at key milestones over a ten-year period. To ensure effectiveness, all infrastructure models must be designed to collaborate seamlessly rather than cross over each other's delivery models whilst also working with and building on any future developments across the whole of the performance sector. Working in harmony to become a truly pan-Wales eco-system would naturally require linking mechanisms between the AiR programme, the national development agency and the community hub network. Without this integration, there would be a risk of establishing costly, isolated systems that operate in silos.

o Equitable distribution of dance funding across Wales

More equitable funding distribution across Wales would ideally see more revenue clients across the whole of Wales.

o Professional retention rates

Evidenced by a decrease in the talent drain from Wales with dancers choosing to return to Wales to work post-training. It would also be evidenced by a freelance dance community that is thriving to the degree that performance opportunities are increased for artists within Wales negating the need to relocate outside of Wales to have a fulfilling career.

o Community engagement levels

Evidenced by ACW data showing community engagement levels across Wales remaining strong and/or growing.

• Career progression rate

A persistent gap in the 'ladder of opportunity' prevents experienced dancers from advancing their careers. Evidence of success would be via celebration of the experience and knowledge of mid-career artists with each artist able to develop their practice and progress their careers, rather than repeatedly forced back to starting positions due to project-based funding limitations.

o Audience development levels

Milestone development over a sustained period of time following specific initiatives from the review's recommendations. Increasing performance opportunities outside of traditional venues.

Overall, future approaches to dance infrastructure development should celebrate Wales's unique potential and focus on rebuilding from the ground up rather than top down, to serve the whole of the sector and the country.

Moving forward, it is recommended that ACW shares the review's findings with the dance sector and other stakeholders for their responses, with a view to actioning the review's findings from Spring 2025 onwards.

part 1 BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Dance in Wales has long suffered as a *Cinderella* artform, historically overlooked in favour of other creative disciplines. In the late 1970s, Wales's first dance officer, Faith Wilson, attended meetings of the drama committee at Arts Council Great Britain, as there was no dedicated dance committee. In the 1980s, Maldwyn Pate, the Welsh Arts Council's (WAC) first director of dance campaigned to elevate dance's profile in Wales, helping Roy Campbell-Moore develop Diversions Dance Company into a mainstream touring company and bringing international dance company performances to Welsh audiences. This led to a vibrant dance scene from the 1980s to the early 2000s, with Cardiff recognised as a centre for dance talent and innovation, influenced by companies like Brith Gof and Moving Being. As a result, dance from Wales developed its own language based on dance theatre and physical theatre.

This period could be considered a golden era for dance in Wales, with Diversions evolving into National Dance Company Wales (NDCWales). Under Anna Holmes's tenure as Dance Officer at ACW (1997-2002), Earthfall Dance secured revenue client status² and Welsh Independent Dance (WID) was established as a national, artist-led organisation, also with revenue client status. There was funding available for independent artists, support from the Dance Buddy scheme and international dance tours into and out of Wales. A number of artists who are still working in the sector benefitted from the Dance Buddy scheme at its start - the connections and networks the scheme provided enabled their careers to develop. Regular festivals including British Dance Edition, Wales Dance Platform, Family Dance Festival and others were hosted in Wales in the teens of the 21st Century. The community dance sector was also strong, supported across the country by revenue-funded Community Dance Wales (CDW) who helped develop what were often classed as "world-leading activities" (Stenton, 2024). Dance training courses were available in higher and further education and Wales Dance Consortium ensured an open dialogue between artists and venues. Pre-Covid, disability dance had developed a number of relevant initiatives, although whilst there is evidence of current success stories, this remains an under-developed area in dance across Wales.

However, not everything was rosy as dance in Wales faced challenges throughout this time, including sectoral divisions, a geographical funding imbalance and limited career development for independent artists. Over the past 15 years, dance has experienced significant setbacks whilst retaining these historical challenges. Since 2010, ACW's arts budget "has been cut by 40% in real terms" (Rhys, 2024 cited in ArtsWales, 2024) and the overall arts budget is currently the lowest it has been since 2007/8³. Overall support for dance has also steadily declined:

- Arts courses in secondary schools have been reduced in favour of STEM⁴ subjects
- Dance training programmes in higher and post-16 education in Wales have closed
- Public funding for venues has decreased, affecting staffing, programming and marketing

² Meaning multi-year rather than project funding became available

³ <u>https://arts.wales/news-jobs-opportunities/arts-council-wales-response-welsh-budget</u>

⁴ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

- The pandemic shifted audience appetite for live performance
- The sector has lost many advocates and *dance champions*
- Funding for dance has declined, from both subsidised and other income streams
- Key organisations like WID and CDW were cut from the ACW portfolio in 2012
- The 2015 Investment Review removed funding from Earthfall Dance, Wales Dance Platform closed and Coreo Cymru was cut after its initial three-year cycle
- The 2023 ACW Investment Review further impacted dance, with Dawns i Bawb in Caernarfon remaining the only funded community dance organisation. Only two dance companies are funded in the portfolio NDCWales and Ballet Cymru both based in South-East Wales.

Economic challenges, social shifts and changing public interest in dance can be seen to have contributed to its overall decline in Wales. However, ACW's decisions, both historically and more recently with the 2023 Investment Review, have had significant and lasting negative impacts on the dance landscape in Wales.

The dance sector in Wales finds itself at a critical point in its history. This Review of Dance in Wales highlights serious concerns from those within the industry, including systemic challenges and a lack of an adequate infrastructure nationwide. Limited support and resources are straining dance artists and leading to burnout, while many dance communities feel neglected. Overall, many have described the dance sector as being *in crisis*.

part 2 THE PROCESS

2.1 Methodology

Work on the Review of Dance in Wales began in mid-August 2024. Following agreement on the project parameters with Arts Council Wales, the preliminary research phase focused on project planning and logistics. An initial callout was made at the end of August, with the full consultation period spanning just over two months, concluding on 03 November, 2024.

Desk research in the first phase drew on reports published by Arts Council Wales, the Welsh Government and other dance-related studies - from within Wales, the United Kingdom and internationally.

The field research phase centred on gathering insights through interviews and forums. Rather than quantifying the number of participants in Wales's dance sector, this phase took a qualitative approach, aiming to understand how people engage with dance, the reach and potential of professional work, the support needed by artists and venues for success and the broader vision for the future of dance in Wales.

To foster open and honest contributions, several mechanisms were employed to ensure participants could share their views anonymously and without hesitation. This strategy resulted in a higher level of engagement than anticipated from across Wales. Conversations covered a broad spectrum, including presenting venues, dance companies, independent artists, commercial dance schools, educators and community practitioners. Some participants also contributed as supporters of dance, even if they were not directly involved in the sector. However, engagement from schools, local authority representatives and practitioners of non-Western dance traditions was notably limited.

Responses from all research mechanisms were analysed to form the basis of this review.

Creative Conversations: Focus groups were held across Wales⁵ with 75 people attending in total. Interested parties registered in advance to attend a bilingual forum. Each Creative Conversation offered Welsh – English interpretation and was driven by the same three provocations in order to be able to compare findings. Live captioning was available and all participants were canvassed about their individual access needs prior to attending. Thematic content analysis was applied to session recordings and notes - whilst data collected varied according to regional differences (for example, travel infrastructure), many issues were found to be the same across Wales. As dance is a dynamic artform, an innovative approach to the Creative Conversation process was employed and a visual artist captured the emphasis of each meeting in both Welsh and English – their images appear in the relevant section of this report.

⁵ See Fig 1 - a total of 10 meetings were planned, but one meeting was cancelled on the day: 1 delegate turned up to the meeting at its start but experienced technical issues so was unable to contribute. A second delegate arrived late. Both parties agreed to 1-1 meetings as an alternative.



Fig 1: Creative Conversation locations around Wales

One-to-one Meetings: Individual meetings were held between the researcher and stakeholders from the end of August to the end of October 2024⁶. Responses were considered and insightful throughout. It was challenging to extract themes from these meetings as they were non-directed and as such, provided non-linear responses. Many attendees from across Wales brought the same or similar issues to the table however, interpreted through the lens of their own practice or challenges faced in their particular geographical location. Initially, coded data was split and merged a number of times to establish a framework, but this approach weakened many of the findings through its deduplication. An alternative approach was used involving splitting data into specific issues which rendered a more accurate representation of conversations.

⁶ A full list of 1-1 meetings can be found in Appendix 2.

Virtual whiteboard: An online platform was provided for people to share short, anonymous comments about dance. As anticipated due to the nature of the mechanism, most of the feedback received through this channel was negative.

Online Questionnaire: A bilingual online questionnaire was created to canvas participants on their relationship to the dance sector in Wales, their perspective on the current landscape and their thoughts on potential initiatives. Responses were detailed and diverse. Responses were coded using a thematic framework and content analysis included use of pie charts, graphs etc.

Educational Visits: structured meetings were held with the National Youth Dance Wales (NYDW) ensemble whilst they were in summer rehearsals, with BTEC full-time dance students at Rubicon and with NDCWales' Associates. A visit to a dance workshop at a primary school in Cwmbran and the UDO Dance Championships in Weston-Super-Mare⁷ were also included in this information gathering mechanism.

Alongside the field research methods, a comprehensive communications strategy was developed to maximise engagement with the review. This included branding, Ticketsource and Substack⁸ platform account set-up, engaging interpretation and translation professionals, commissioning a visual artist, creating communication and action plans and initiating desk research. At the start of the review, 152 targeted emails were sent to individuals representing various areas of Wales's dance sector, inviting their input. An initial announcement published on the ACW website news page was then followed by regular posts from the researcher across social media platforms - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Four professional dance performances were attended across the consultation period. These are noted in Appendix 2.

Responses to all field research were welcomed in Welsh or English. Two dedicated email addresses were set up for the review - one for correspondence in Welsh and one for English. Responses were provided in the language received.

All Creative Conversations could be booked in either English or Welsh through Ticketsource. These meetings were conducted bilingually, with full interpretation services. Delegates were encouraged to contribute in their preferred language.

All but one of the 1-1 meetings were conducted in English. The online questionnaire was bilingual throughout and responses were received in both languages. The online whiteboard was presented bilingually and responses were received in both Welsh and English.

⁷ The only competition for Wales entries scheduled within the timeframe of the review

⁸ attracting 31 subscribers over the course of the review



2.2 overall engagement



Fig 2: How those involved across the full review identified

engagement event	nos. expected	nos. achieved
Creative Conversation attendance – 9 locations around Wales, Sept- Oct	100	75
Online whiteboard comments	10	22
1-1 meetings: Aug-Oct	30	63
Questionnaire responses	50	81
Detailed views expressed via email	0	8

2.3 ethical considerations

Research was conducted independently, maintaining a non-partisan approach. Extensive sector knowledge proved advantageous during interviews, providing a well-informed perspective on various contexts while a facilitative listening approach was employed to minimise confirmation bias.

Maintaining research integrity was a priority, with individual comments remaining anonymous, except those from staff representing multi-year funded organisations in the ACW portfolio. Prior to all Creative Conversations, participants were invited to share any access needs, which were accommodated as required. Similarly, individual access requests for one-to-one meetings were fully respected.



Given the strong emotions tied to the future of dance in Wales, ethical considerations were a central focus. As a trained Level 2 Restorative Practitioner and Level 5 Coach, the researcher managed discussions to ensure that potentially harmful comments or controversial language were minimised / avoided, while making space for diverse perspectives to be acknowledged.

part 3 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 desk research

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act recognises the importance of cultural well-being in improving the lives of people. One of the central goals of the Act is to create 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language' (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2015).

The Welsh Government is committed to developing a new culture strategy, setting out its broad priorities (under three headings) for a public consultation in September 2024. The Welsh Government plans to update priorities in 2026 and review thereafter (GOV.WALES, 2024). Arts Council Wales works to six principles as part of its strategic priorities when allocating funding from its revenue and Lottery streams (Arts Wales, n.d.).

Deborah Light's *Dance in Wales Report* produced for the Wales Freelance Taskforce (Light, 2020) provided key statistics and an impassioned evaluation of the freelance dance sector in Wales during the pandemic. The report called for action from ACW, who responded to the report in November 2020, acknowledging dance's "deep-rooted issues" and that "dance does indeed receive less investment than other artforms in the Portfolio". ACW also noted that they would be working to "simplify funding processes" as application structures presented "barriers to some artists, particularly those who have less experience of applying for funding" (Arts Wales, 2020). This review will find that these barriers are still in place - despite a revised Investment Review process for revenue funding in 2023 - and that gaps in provision and deep-rooted issues still remain.

An Open Letter to ACW's Chair and Chief Executive from members of the dance community across Wales and beyond followed the 2023 Investment Review⁹ as the landscape had not improved – it had in fact been made worse by cuts to the overall dance portfolio. The open letter called for a number of strategic interventions for dance which were acknowledged by ACW in its update to the Investment Review (Arts Wales, 2024b). Meetings were subsequently held with members of the open letter co-ordinators in December 2023 and with the dance community in March and July 2024. This review is one of the agreed Strategic Interventions.

Wider reading was undertaken to include research studies and reports from outside of Wales. This provided a broader context to the dance landscape and enabled Wales based dance to be critiqued from a wider perspective¹⁰. Whilst the opening of a fourth London stage for Sadler's Wells Theatre in Stratford (Sadler's Wells East) suggests that dance in London is flourishing, elsewhere in the UK, the situation remains more challenging. The European company model and Dance House network is also experiencing a changing arts landscape.

⁹ <u>https://organise.network/actions/petition-open-letter-to-arts-council-of--xTAyzyQf</u>

¹⁰ Full list of reports and articles referenced is available in Appendix 1

The recently published summative report on *Prosiect Wyth* (Mair, 2024) suggests a number of interventions that could assist the development of Welsh folk dance and clogging alongside the Welsh language. These interventions have been included as a recommended action in Section 4 of this review. It is worth noting that a review of traditional music in Wales is currently ongoing and its findings in 2025 may well intersect with findings in this review.

The 3-year Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) has provided funding for arts and culture across Wales as part of the UK Government's levelling up agenda. It is notable that Impelo in Llandrindod Wells is currently dependent on SPF funding¹¹ following loss of its ACW revenue funding. Dance Collective in North Wales is also in receipt of SPF funds. The funds will cease in Spring 2025, which will further impact the future for some in the dance sector in Wales.

Arts Council Wales announced the Resilience and Job Protection programme application outcomes on 02 December 2024 (Arts Wales, 2024c). Of ninety-five applications, sixty were approved, five of which are dance organisations. The grants aim to prevent redundancies and enhance organisational resilience. Though no doubt very welcome by recipients, the grants represent a short-term solution to a deeper sector challenge.

The recently published Economic Impact Report (Deyton Bell, 2024) clearly shows the economic benefits from investment in the arts in Wales in terms of creating jobs and impacting the Welsh economy. It demonstrates that for every £1 the Welsh Government invests in the arts, £2.51 goes back into the economy (Deyton Bell, 2024, p4). However, Alun Davies recently highlighted the limit of arts funding in Wales compared to Scotland, noting that while Wales spends 0.15% of its budget on arts and culture Scotland averages 0.5%. He asked the question: "Do you think the Welsh Government actually cares about arts and culture?" (Davies, 2024 cited in Somerset, 2024). The Economic Impact Report states that a very modest 10% increase in arts funding could yield "significant growth in return on investment' from the current £2.51 to £3.29 per £1 by 2035 (Deyton Bell, 2024, p9). If each artform notionally receives a 10% increase in this scenario, this would equate to c.£155,600 revenue increase for dance. In real terms, the figure would unfortunately only provide a superficial sticking plaster to a sector that describes itself as being 'on life support'. The Economic Impact Report also states that the biggest gains in economic impact (GVA) and employment "are likely to be made through increased investment in medium-sized organisations, with grants in the £100,000-£250,000 bracket" (Deyton Bell, 2024, p9). It is rare for dance to leverage funding pots of this amount, disadvantaging the sector even more from the potential economic return it could generate for Wales.

In ACW's 2023 Investment Review, dance revenue portfolio funding amounted to £1,300,229. From data provided by ACW, the dance sector demonstrated strong success in grant applications across the range of Lottery schemes run by ACW, achieving a 74% success rate and securing £738,425. While theatre showed comparable success with a 72% rate, its total awards were notably lower at £210,864, representing a positive differential for dance. The Create funding stream in 2023-4 painted a different picture however. Despite similar success rates between dance and theatre (41)

 $^{^{\}rm 11}$ In addition to ACW transition funding and capital and business development funding

and 43% respectively), the monetary outcomes varied significantly. Dance secured \pm 305,517, whereas theatre was awarded \pm 1,145,314 - meaning dance achieved only 27% of theatre's funding.

For 2024-5, the dance portfolio comprises just three organisations¹², with revenue funding of £1,556,681, positioning it the fifth lowest among twelve artform areas. In comparison, theatre funding (excluding venues that may also be producing houses) stands at £3,866,962, making it the third highest funded artform area. While 2024-5 data for non-portfolio awards is pending from ACW, the situation echoes a persistent challenge identified in 2020: dance continues to receive "less investment than other artforms in the Portfolio" (Arts Wales, 2020). The current portfolio's reduction to only three organisations identifying as 100% dance, combined with reliance on project grants through other funding streams, perpetuates what ACW has already identified as "barriers to some artists, particularly those who have less experience of applying for funding" (Arts Wales, 2020).

Some ACW empirical data was found to be flawed in its raw form – for example, dance spend can sometimes appear in theatre budget lines instead of dance due artist preference in self-categorising, whilst performance data for 2023-4 contains methodological flaws - its reported "80 professional dance productions" includes free events, open rehearsal attendance and programme repetitions. A more precise assessment reveals only 32 discrete professional productions, which encompass home-grown dance productions, bought-in product and children's performances across presenting venues. For the future it might be useful to provide data on the proportion of funding provided to the different strands of dance: dance in health, community participatory dance, dance in education, freelance and small company performance projects, dance as a proportion of another artform etc.

 $^{^{\}rm 12}$ Dance organisations that are 100% dance funded

3.2 what's working well

Ballet Cymru successfully balances artistic excellence with community impact. With a lean team of eight staff supporting nineteen dancers across professional and development programmes, its current repertoire spans traditional and modern ballet, integrating contemporary, South Asian and Welsh folk dance across three touring programmes. The company's holistic approach to communityfocused initiatives, such as Dance to Move and ReWild Play partner with healthcare providers, while its curtain raiser programme offers performance opportunities for groups like Boys Dancing and SEN participants. The Duets programme delivers free tuition in Welsh primary schools and Ballet Cymru 2 & 3 create pathways to professional dance. Youth voice is being integrated into governance and the Culture Change programme enhances accessibility through relaxed performances, bilingual audio descriptions and the breaking of traditional ballet barriers. These inclusive efforts, rooted in the founder's vision, position Ballet Cymru as a model of best practice in Wales. Looking forward, Ballet Cymru is focused on measured growth, balancing increased funding with resource sustainability. The company's strategic approach positions it well for continued development in the future, which could facilitate natural partnerships that come between ballet, opera and orchestras. While the company remains committed to supporting the broader Welsh dance ecosystem, it maintains a pragmatic view of its capacity. Its vision for Wales's dance future emphasises the need for strong, Wales-rooted leadership and argues that the nation's position creates unique opportunities for artistic innovation. This careful balance of ambition and pragmatism has created a company that is simultaneously growing in stature while remaining true to its foundational values of inclusion and excellence.

Dance Collective CIC stands out as a vibrant example of artistic expression, inclusivity and cultural celebration in North Wales. Rooted in the rich tapestry of its North Wales heritage, this dynamic organisation transforms dance into a powerful medium of development, empowerment and community cohesion. Working within the project grant systems of ACW and other funders - which naturally puts a strain on the organisation's resources – its company of dedicated dance professionals has a commitment to nurturing artistic talent and providing dance activity across diverse communities. By providing targeted professional development, mentoring and training, the organisation supports dance artists across Conwy, but also extends its reach into Powys, Cheshire and the Wirral. Its approach creates pathways for artists to explore, grow and contribute meaningfully to the cultural landscape of North Wales and beyond. The organisation's community dance initiatives are innovative. By offering specialised dance sessions for children with additional needs and learning disabilities, Dance Collective ensures that artistic expression remains accessible to all, regardless of individual challenges. Celebrating Welsh culture and language is fundamental to the organisation's work. By collaborating with folk musicians, hosting traditional Twmpath evenings and working closely with choreographers such as Meinir Siencyn, Dance Collective weaves the threads of local heritage into its contemporary artistic practice. Its performances and projects are not just artistic expressions but living, breathing narratives of North Wales's identity and creativity.

The Matsena brothers, founders of Matsena Productions, are dance artists from Wales who have gained significant acclaim for their innovative and emotionally compelling performances. Their work has earned recognition both nationally and internationally - including a BAFTA Cymru nomination and a Celtic Media Festival award - and the company is currently based at Sadler's Wells East, where they contributed to the venue's recent opening season. However, there is a concern that Wales

might lose these talented artists to more supportive infrastructures in England, a fate previously experienced by Wales with other notable choreographers like Nigel Charnock and Henri Oguike. Retaining creative talent is crucial for maintaining Wales' vibrant and dynamic performing arts scene.

Jo Fong's artistic work has gained significant acclaim, with the company receiving national and international recognition while also actively touring a range of diverse venues across Wales, from intimate community spaces to established arts centres. With strategic support from British Council Wales and Wales Arts International, Fong has expanded the company's reach internationally, successfully presenting Welsh dance in venues in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, introducing current Welsh dance to global audiences.

The Dance for Parkinson's programme, hosted by National Dance Company Wales and initiated through English National Ballet's (ENB) methodology, represents a strategic approach to managing neurological health through specialised physical intervention. Delivered across multiple Welsh locations including Cardiff, Wrexham, Bangor and online, the programme provides a comprehensive approach to supporting individuals living with Parkinson's disease. The initiative demonstrates an innovative intersectional approach to healthcare, arts engagement and community support, positioning dance as a viable therapeutic intervention for neurological condition management.

The programme is implemented by a team of professional dance artists, rigorously trained and invested in ENB's specialised methodology. Their expertise ensures a targeted, evidence-based approach to movement intervention for Parkinson's patients. Future implementation strategies could include developing a comprehensive training framework to cascade learning across Welsh dance artists and healthcare networks, potentially expanding the programme's impact and professional knowledge base. In the future, the programme could be managed by and also co-located in the community hubs as part of recommendation 4 of this review.

Community dance artists in Wales exemplify extraordinary commitment to their artform, operating at grassroots level with passionate dedication despite substantial financial limitations. Joon Dance represents just one illustration of this approach, actively cultivating a network of dance artists who engage with rural communities throughout Pembrokeshire. However, the sector faces a critical challenge: community dance organisations operating outside Arts Council Wales revenue funding struggle to provide fair compensation to dancers, compelling these artists to balance their deep community commitment with personal financial sustainability.

In Wales, the dance sector predominantly features short-term and project-based employment, with only the two revenue-funded dance companies offering more stable, long-term contracts. Despite this challenging landscape, some Welsh dancers have opportunities to secure contracts through alternative pathways. For instance, Welsh National Opera provides performance contracts for multiple touring productions each year, offering an additional avenue for professional dance employment beyond traditional dance organisations.



3.3 online questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

Section 1 asked respondents about their background, including where they live. This section was then divided into three sub-sections, allowing respondents to choose which best represented their relationship to dance in Wales before answering further questions on that area:

- **1A: Dance professionals** included dance artists, dance practitioners and those currently involved in dance delivery.
- **1B:** Supporting roles included those involved in dance in other ways such as individuals working in venues that programme dance, supporting roles such as producers, Local Authority employees as well as dance attenders/enthusiasts.
- **1C: Dance students** those studying dance at any level, either within Wales or from Wales but studying elsewhere.

Section 2 invited all respondents to reflect on several provocations about the current dance ecology in Wales. Topics included funding for dance, the role of a national dance organisation, equity and gaps in provision, equality and diversity, the Welsh language, connectivity across Wales, ACW funding and dance's profile within and beyond Wales.

Section 3 asked all respondents to consider the future of dance in Wales, including a question that ranked issues in order of priority. It also explored whether there is potential for greater integration between the commercial and subsidised dance sectors and if so, how this might be achieved. Additionally, it asked how to move the sector towards a more sustainable future.



FINDINGS

3.3.1 respondents

Blaenau Gwent				
Pen y Bony ar Ogwr / Bridgend				
Caerffili / Caerphilly		0		
Sir Gar / Carmarthenshire		-		
Ceredigion	-			
Caerdydd / Cardiff	-	_		
Conwy	0			
Sir Ddinbych / Denbighshire				
Dir y Fflint / Flintshire		•		
Gwynedd	6			
Sir Ynys Môn / Isle of Anglesey				
 Merthyr Tudful / Merthyr Tydfil 				
Sir Fynwy / Monmouthshire				
Castell Nedd PT / Neath PT				
Casnewydd / Newport				
Sir Penfro / Pembrokeshire				
Sir Powys / Powys				
• RCT				
Abertawe / Swansea				
Torfaen		-		
Bro Morgannwg / Vale of Glamorgan				
Wrecsam / Wrexham	-			
• Other	0	5	10	15

Fig 3: Section 1 - All respondents by region

Figure 3 shows that the majority of questionnaire responses came from individuals living in Cardiff, followed by Powys. This was to be expected, as Cardiff is the capital city and home to a large amount of dance activity, while community dance in Powys was affected by a funding cut to Impelo in the 2023 ACW Investment Review. No responses were received from the Neath/Port Talbot area. Additionally, three people living outside Wales, but with experience working in dance within Wales, contributed.



Fig 4: Split of respondents into group 1A, 1B and 1C



Years

Fig 5: Respondents identifying with Group 1A - career length in Wales

In Fig 4, the majority of respondents fell into group 1A and reported working across a variety of dance genres and having portfolio careers spanning dance performance, community dance, dance in health and dance in education. Some also worked in commercial dance schools. Fig 5 shows that there is a range in the length of career of respondents in group 1A with many having worked in dance in Wales for 15 years or more, but only 8 working for <5 years. Most individuals in this category stated that their entire income comes from working in dance, although many described living a hand to mouth existence, with some relying on universal credit or earning below the national living wage. Many freelance dance artists living rurally across Wales said they find it difficult to access a professional level class in order to maintain their dance practice. A significant number highlighted the extent of unpaid work they are expected to do as part of their role, including tasks such as choreography, teaching (when employed as a dancer), producing, fundraising and



completing ACW applications and monitoring forms. However, no respondents indicated support for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) scheme for dancers, despite Sophie Howe calling for this to be a Government consideration for artists in August 2020 (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020) and it being mentioned in the Wales Freelancer Taskforce Report (Light, 2020).





Personal preferred styles for performance and/or activity attendance is shown in Figure 6; 'other' included a number of dance styles, ranging from burlesque to street, kathak to ballroom, flamenco to fusion. Interest in Welsh folk dance scored as highly as contemporary dance – this may be due to the review's engagement with a good number of people involved in folk dance who were encouraged to be involved by the Welsh Folk Dance Society. Musical Theatre was the most popular genre – even more so if you add interest in jazz and tap to that segment as these styles are often found in musical theatre performances. Ballet was the second most popular choice. The popularity of Musical Theatre performance correlates with published post-pandemic audience data showing that attenders look to perceived value for money as well as wanting to experience 'an uplifting night out'.

In group 1C, 84% of respondents identifying as dance students reported that they are not currently, or have never been, members of youth ensembles in Wales. This correlates with information gained from 1-1 conversations that found a decline in youth dance ensemble membership in recent years. Most dance student respondents are studying dance in Higher Education (HE) outside of Wales and expressed that they would have benefitted from access to a Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) scheme in Wales prior to moving into HE training. Surprisingly however, only 24% of respondents said they would have considered staying in Wales to undertake dance training had there been a conservatoire style under-graduate course available – the consensus is that young people enjoy lived experience elsewhere and that a course in Wales would not necessarily offer the training rigour available from established courses elsewhere. Despite a strong sense of connection to their home nation and a desire to return to Wales post-training, most do not see themselves coming back to

Wales to begin their careers, citing a lack of opportunities and support systems within the country. Responses included:

"I feel like I have been quietly sacked by Wales"

"why come back.....when the situation and opportunities are so limited?"

"I find the dance ecology in Wales quite depressing"

3.3.2.1 current dance ecology

Respondents provided insight into the current dance ecology in Wales in Section 2, commenting on areas such as geographical access, community engagement, professional opportunities and the representation of traditional Welsh dance. Responses portray a sector that is highly uneven, with notable disparities in access and provision across regions. Commonly underserved areas, especially rural regions, face significant barriers leading to gaps in quality and opportunity.

There is a broad desire to address gaps in dance provision across Wales, particularly concerning the accessibility and diversity of dance education, community programmes and professional development opportunities. Despite challenges, initiatives like *Prosiect Wyth*¹³, an example of successful community engagement and Welsh language development through dance, Dance Collective for devising bespoke training initiatives, Dance for Parkinson's chapters across Wales as a dance for health initiative and Ballet Cymru as a company developing with an authentic voice were cited as best practice¹⁴. The pandemic also underscored the value of community dance organisations and individuals across the nation in promoting mental and physical wellbeing.

While there are pockets of best practice, the overall impression is of a sector that is uneven, often siloed and struggling to serve communities across the country. It is no surprise to find people hanging onto their own areas of work and/or the amount of community contact decreasing. The loss of revenue funding for community dance organisations in the 2023 ACW Investment Review is considered particularly damaging as community dance organisations are often the primary connectors between professional dance and local communities. Underlying issues are systemic, such as the centralisation of resources and decision-making power, a lack of regulation in the dance teaching sector as well as a perceived disconnect between some dance companies and local dance communities across Wales. Many respondents feel that existing infrastructure, funding and training pathways do not fully support a vibrant and sustainable dance culture, leaving significant gaps that limit participation and career growth.

Addressing these structural imbalances requires a concerted, long-term effort to invest in and strengthen the dance ecology across all regions of Wales, with a particular focus on elevating and supporting marginalised forms of dance and underserved geographic communities. Diversifying the

¹³ See case study on Prosiect Wyth in section 4.4

¹⁴ See section 3.2



styles of dance offered will also enable wider access for those forms not currently supported to their full potential. Supporting both Welsh language and Welsh cultural dance forms and prioritising grassroots engagement are also imperatives.

3.3.2.2 subsidised -v- commercial sectors

There is a huge network of commercial dance schools across Wales that engage hundreds of young people in evening and weekend activities each week, from ballet and tap classes to acro and street. The subsidised and commercial sectors don't tend to mix, so a question asked respondents why they felt this was the case and whether there is potential for crossover in the future.

The relationship between the commercial and independent participatory dance class sectors in Wales reveals complex tensions and quality concerns. Commercial dance teachers, particularly those affiliated with established examination bodies like the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), express reservations about the standard of dance instruction across Wales. They point to freelance dance artists teaching without proper qualifications in specific styles and note particular concerns about cultural insensitivity in the teaching of street dance forms.

The competitive landscape further highlights these perceived quality gaps. Many Welsh dance schools regularly participate in prestigious events like the United Dance Organisation (UDO) festivals and championships but find themselves taking their most promising students to compete in England, where they believe the standard of competition is significantly higher. This quality debate intersects with deeper tensions around business models and accessibility. Commercial schools, operating as businesses, prioritise income generation and view the independent dance sector as potential competition. From the other side, independent dance practitioners criticise commercial schools for prioritising profit over inclusive access to dance.

Yet there are signs for potential bridge-building between these sectors. Some commercial schools see value in greater collaboration with independent dancers, particularly through funding initiatives such as ACW's Connect and Flourish programme. Successful community events like Swansea's *Dance Days* programme run by Taliesin Arts Centre, which embraces diverse dance styles, could offer a model for how the sectors might find common ground and work towards better integration in the future.

3.3.2.3 ACW funding for dance

Section 2 of the questionnaire also asked respondents to consider ACW funding for dance,

Responses revealed a general dissatisfaction with the current state of dance funding in Wales, with calls for a re-evaluation of both revenue funding levels and distribution strategies. 95% of respondents feel that ACW dance portfolio funding is overly concentrated in South East Wales, questioning why two companies are almost equally funded at a high level and suggesting a shift toward supporting smaller, grassroots companies (two of the three companies in the portfolio identifying as 100% dance and others including a notable percentage of dance in their output are



based in South East Wales¹⁵). Many respondents also feel that the ACW's dance focus is too narrow, disproportionately supporting certain genres while leaving others underfunded or excluded. The burdensome application process for many smaller organisations further exacerbates these issues, limiting access to funds and discouraging many from seeking support.



Fig 7: Responses to whether ACW dance funding could be better used

The challenges facing dance funding in Wales are multi-faceted, with issues ranging from perceived complex and opaque application processes to the erosion of community and cultural dance due to financial cuts. Many respondents describe dance funding in Wales as inadequate, using terms like "poor" and "abysmal". Respondents also express frustration with grant application processes, describing them as "complex", "lengthy" and "lacking transparency". Concerns are also raised about geographic imbalances, with a concentration of financial support in the South and limited support for North and rural Wales - respondents perceive ACW's funding criteria as following a 'tick-box' approach, leading to projects that feel formulaic or disconnected from local needs. Many also commented on 'art' and 'quality' being very low down the funding application agenda. They argue that the approach taken can stifle creativity and result in work that feels patronising or unresponsive to Welsh communities.

Many also express views about unclear criteria, limited feedback and inadequate support for unsuccessful applicants being discouraging, especially smaller or newer organisations with limited administrative resources¹⁶. To address these concerns, there is a strong demand for a move away from formulaic funding models towards a more inclusive, flexible funding approach that recognises organisational and individual capacity.

¹⁵ Respondents were referring to NDCWales, Ballet Cymru and Dawns I Bawb as dance portfolio organisations and National Youth Dance Wales, Urban Circle and Jukebox Collective as organisations with a percentage of dance included in their respective outputs

¹⁶ ACW has low capacity and resource levels since its own Welsh Government cut in 2023.



3.3.2.4 role of a national dance company

There were many responses to a question referring to the role of a national dance company that named NDCWales, as well as more general responses to the perception of the role of a national dance company.

Many respondents see the role of a national dance company as an ambassador for Welsh dance and culture, both domestically and internationally. There is an expectation for a national company to raise the profile of Welsh dance globally, lead the sector within Wales, set standards, provide mentorship and support and advocate for resources for others in the sector. There is strong support for a national company to consistently engage with all regions, particularly North Wales and rural areas. Respondents also emphasise the importance of traditional Welsh dance within a national company's portfolio, viewing it as essential for a comprehensive representation of Welsh cultural identity and expression.

Ballet Cymru was highlighted as a model for inclusivity and accessibility, with some respondents suggesting it as a future national dance company for Wales. Respondents however called for a review of NDCWales, as it is currently seen as falling short of expectations as a national representative of Wales.

The case study below defines a company rooted in its indigenous culture, respecting and developing the dance artist infrastructure and being responsive to communities - whilst also being a critically acclaimed international touring dance performance company. The company's best practice could be applied to a Wales based company holding national status.

A CASE STUDY EXAMPLE OF A DANCE COMPANY WITH A COMPANY BASE,

WORKING AS A CULTURAL LEADER,

Chunky Move, Australia

www.chunkymove.com

Organisation Overview

Chunky Move is a leading contemporary dance company based in Melbourne, operating on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nations. Whilst it is not a national company, it has developed an international contemporary dance touring company that genuinely serves its community and develops and represents the dance sector, while maintaining artistic excellence and cultural responsibility. With a hybrid funding model combining public support and philanthropic donations, the company has established itself as a cultural leader in Australian dance.

Approach

The company implemented a multi-faceted strategy:

- 1. Indigenous Engagement
 - Established formal partnerships with Aboriginal co-operative and Aboriginal Wellness Foundation
 - Developed programming acknowledging and celebrating First Peoples' contributions
 - o Created pathways for Indigenous participation and cultural expression
- 2. Community Access
 - o Diversified dance offerings from contemporary through to hip-hop and fusion styles
 - o Implemented youth-focused programming with holiday intensives
 - o Provides open classes taught by company dancers
 - o Maintains professional development through residencies and workshops
- 3. Artistic Excellence
 - o Sustained contemporary touring programme reaching international audiences
 - o Commissions new works expanding contemporary dance boundaries
 - Facilitates cross-cultural collaborations
- 4. Artist Development
 - o Choreographer in residence programme
 - o Choreolab for dance artists
 - o Activators commissioning experimental work
 - o Minimax artist programme providing space and research facilities



Results

Chunky Move has successfully:

- Positioned contemporary dance as an accessible, everyday artform
- Built meaningful relationships with First Nations communities
- Established sustainable community engagement models
- Developed the dance artist infrastructure across its region
- Achieved recognition as a cultural leader in Australian dance

Key Success Factors

- Long-term commitment to Indigenous relationships
- Balanced funding model
- Diverse programming addressing different needs
- Working as a dance ecosystem
- Professional artistic standards maintained to a level where company gains 5* performance reviews

Lessons Learned

- 1. Cultural leadership in dance requires both artistic excellence and community relevance
- 2. Sustainable engagement demands formal partnerships and structured programmes
- 3. Access and inclusion initiatives must be meaningful and ongoing
- 4. Support for artists should be respectful, sustained and collaborative

3.3.2.5 diversity and inclusion

Respondents were also canvassed about how well dance tackles diversity and inclusion and responses paint a complex and uneven picture of diversity and inclusion efforts within the dance ecology in Wales. While there are some positive examples and a general acknowledgment of the importance of these issues, many respondents express concerns about the sincerity, depth and impact of current approaches.

Responses emphasise that efforts should be grounded in the needs of local communities, rather than imposed from the top down. Community dance groups, especially those serving marginalised populations, are viewed as being essential to a more inclusive dance ecosystem. Respondents point to a lack of funding for diverse and inclusive dance initiatives, which they feel disproportionately impacts marginalised groups and smaller organisations. Some respondents question the sincerity of current diversity and inclusion efforts of some companies, viewing them as tokenistic or as completing 'tick-box exercises'. There is a perception that ACW applications focus on meeting quotas rather than fostering meaningful, sustained engagement with under-represented communities. Concerns are also raised about a lack of follow-through for diverse artists and participants beyond initial project stages. Traditional Welsh dance and the voices of local artists are perceived to be under-represented, with elitism also seen as a barrier to broadening participation. Overall,


respondents advocate for a more community-driven and sustained approach that genuinely reflects and serves the diverse populations of Wales.

In Section 3 of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to consider a number of initiatives for the future sustainability of and support for dance in Wales, including development of community hubs that could support dance.



3.3.3 development of community hubs that support dance

Fig 8: Support for development of community hubs to support dance across Wales

80% of respondents support the idea of creating co-located community arts hubs across Wales that would include and support dance. Comments also provide insight into how local hubs could cocreate across artforms and work together across Wales, leveraging connections with other agencies, local authorities (LAs), schools and community stakeholders.

Co-located cross-artform hubs across Wales would aim to build on existing arts infrastructures, providing comprehensive support centres for dance artists working with community groups. These hubs would offer affordable spaces, marketing support, networking opportunities and technical logistics assistance. A critical focus would be developing dance from the ground up, increasing accessibility for rural and under-represented communities, with inclusive programming for all abilities¹⁷.

Professional development emerges as a crucial component, with stakeholders calling for workshops and specialised training being available. It is felt that hubs could also facilitate dance education and dance in health resources as well as youth-focused cross-artform offers that promote a variety of dance styles. Practical support services, including grant writing assistance, resource sharing and fundraising guidance, are considered essential for sustaining the local dance ecosystem.

¹⁷ A review of English language theatre in Wales (currently underway via ACW) may offer its own insight into how a colocated hub model using an existing infrastructure could develop in the future



To be successful, these hubs must integrate deeply within Wales's arts infrastructure, maintaining strong connections to national arts networks. This involves collaborating with local authorities and stakeholders to ensure cultural relevance. Sustainable funding models, clear operational guidelines, and co-locating dance with other art forms will help to create a vibrant, interconnected arts ecosystem that prevents artist isolation and supports local dance communities.

3.3.4 development of a national development agency for dance

Fig 9 shows overall support for some form of national dance development agency working with the freelance and small company dance community, developing local talent and advocating for and promoting Welsh dance.



Fig 9: Support for development of a national dance development agency for Wales

There is strong support for establishing a national dance development agency in Wales to serve as both advocate and practical support hub for the sector. The preference is for it to be artist-led. An agency would aim to address critical infrastructure gaps by providing comprehensive services including training, mentoring, business advice and administrative/producing support. It would maintain a database of freelance practitioners and streamline funding access, particularly benefiting independent performance artists and smaller companies.

Professional development would be a core focus, offering business skills training, leadership development and research opportunities. The agency would raise the profile of Welsh dance nationally and internationally by facilitating global partnerships, promoting Welsh dance at international festivals, having affiliations and memberships with suitable international organisations and creating opportunities for cultural exchange and artistic growth.

Beyond artistic development, the agency would function as a resource bank and champion for dance, offering shared resources and advocating for professional standards around contracts and pay.

The final survey questions asked respondents to rate the overall dance sector in Wales and consider how it could move towards having a more sustainable ecology across Wales. Responses emphasised several critical themes and provided a broad vision for a sustainable and vibrant dance sector for the future.



3.3.5 dance sector rating and its future

Overwhelmingly, Fig 10 shows that respondents feel Wales's position in the wider dance world is poor or stagnant. Many respondents felt that existing infrastructure, funding and training pathways in Wales are inadequate to support a vibrant, sustainable dance ecosystem with significant gaps that limit participation and career growth.



Fig 10: How respondents rated the current dance ecology in Wales

The vision for a sustainable future for dance in Wales is one that is inclusive, collaborative, and wellsupported. Despite the challenges, there's a resilience and an understanding that the dance community in Wales needs to remain strong and to somehow unite. Respondents hope for a dance ecology where all genres are celebrated, artists are given the freedom to innovate and create and young dancers are supported to build lasting careers within Wales. Ultimately, the vision is for a thriving, resilient and inclusive dance culture that forms an integral part of Welsh life.





3.4 creative conversations

Visual note-taking occurred during each conversation; the resulting artwork appears in this section of the review. For continuity, attenders across all Creative Conversation forums were set the same provocations to frame their conversations:

- 1. Their thoughts on the current state of the dance sector
- 2. How to make a case for increased funding for dance
- 3. What the future for dance looks like

FINDINGS

3.4.1 current state of the sector

The sector faces severe sustainability challenges, including limited full-time employment, complex project-based funding and an administrative burden that leads to artist burnout. The loss of support structures like Welsh Independent Dance and Community Dance Wales has further exacerbated these issues. A Cardiff-centric resource distribution has left rural areas and North Wales feeling isolated, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of reduced infrastructure and funding.

North Wales epitomises the geographic challenges facing the dance sector, paradoxically with stronger connections to England than to South Wales, highlighting the fragmented nature of Wales's dance infrastructure. Isolation manifests not just in physical distance in rural areas across Wales but in limited professional opportunities, scattered communities and sometimes inadequate public transport links. The situation has created what practitioners describe as an 'infrastructure crisis', with a critical shortage of suitable dance spaces and limited regular professional training facilities.

Educational challenges compound these problems, with dance facing declining formal provision and losing its distinct identity having been mostly merged into broader performing arts or physical education curricula.

3.4.2 making a case for dance

It is universally felt that dance could celebrate its successes more as whilst it collects statistics, these are often led by summative funding reporting that focuses on 'how many' rather than the impact of projects. The sector collects some data on social return on investment (SROI) which would prove useful alongside economic impact reporting to leverage funding, but feels that more robust, longitudinal studies need to be completed, particularly on outcomes in areas such as dance in healthcare settings. Respondents strongly feel that ACW's role should be to collect this data and advocate on the sector's behalf. They also feel that there is generally an absence of interest in the process of work from ACW officers and that visiting sessions outside of performances and seeing how impactful work is would be beneficial.

Key areas for transformation echo calls from the review's questionnaire - the establishment of dedicated hubs across regions, reform of funding mechanisms to support longer-term structural development and the creation of clear professional development pathways. The education sector has also been flagged as needing particular attention, with opportunities to develop Welsh-specific curricula and support for teacher training.

Respondents note that any funding reforms must move beyond project-based models to support sustainable, long-term artist development. Professional development pathways need strengthening through regular training programmes, mentorship opportunities and residency projects.

3.4.3 the future

Despite challenges, several clear opportunities for development emerge. Respondents showed remarkable resilience as well as commitment, with innovative approaches to challenges emerging from conversations. The growing recognition of dance's role in health and well-being offers new opportunities, potentially opening up new funding and development pathways. Community dance sector practitioners who already provide the foundation for broad arts engagement and development across communities are in a position to seize these new opportunities.

It is felt that with strategic intervention and support, Wales's dance sector could transform its current challenges into opportunities for growth, creating a more equitable and sustainable dance ecosystem that serves all regions of the country.



Artwork relating to *Creative Conversat*ion element of the review: Helen Frost, drawtheideas.com





3.5 1-1 conversations

Many issues raised mirror findings from other data gathering devices used in the review, but have been contextualised according to different areas of the sector.

FINDINGS

3.5.1 venues & touring

Financial challenges are significantly impacting dance programming across Welsh venues, creating tensions between artistic ambitions and practical constraints. While mid-scale venues such as Pontio, Taliesin, Aberystwyth and Theatr Clwyd remain committed to supporting dance, they struggle with audience development. The relationship between venues and dance artists/companies requires strengthening: venues emphasise that merely booking a company is insufficient without the company undertaking concurrent audience development work in the local community, while dance companies and artists often cannot afford to provide extensive community engagement within their limited financial envelope. Venues lack resource at their end and also often lack specialist marketing expertise in dance, so a Catch 22 scenario develops where each party in the agreement seeks support the other doesn't have capacity to provide.

Multiple venues report diminishing engagement with NDCWales in recent years, questioning its repertoire choices, marketing and outreach approaches. Whilst quality of its productions is regarded positively, recurring criticism suggests the company fails to establish meaningful connections with venue managers, with audiences via its repertoire choices or in local communities. Reports on Ballet Cymru productions and relationships are positive, with stable or growing audiences reported for its productions, particularly for traditional productions. Ballet Cymru's approach to community engagement, including wraparound activities and curtain raisers earned widespread praise from venues. This success demonstrates the value of sustained local engagement in building and maintaining audiences.

Currently, Wales lacks comprehensive dance celebration events, with Swansea's Dance Days reporting development to include other artforms from 2025. The absence of meaningful incentives to bring international dance artists into Wales further limits the sector's visibility. However, a promising alternative emerges in the growing outdoor dance movement. Artists are increasingly exploring opportunities to showcase their work at outdoor festivals, both within and beyond the UK. This approach not only expands performance potential but also makes dance more accessible and engaging to broader audiences by presenting it in dynamic, less formal settings. Providing opportunities for dance is an area the proposed ACW Outdoor Arts review could consider in more detail.

Wales Millennium Centre (WMC), a Dance Consortium member, has faced planning clashes that prevent consortium programming. Despite declining dance audiences, WMC however remains committed to showcasing top-tier dance and sees potential for more innovative, cutting-edge work over neo-classical contemporary dance. The New Theatre in Cardiff is also hoping to re-introduce dance into its programme, although it is largely dependent on programme control by its operators.

Whilst there are some positive initiatives on the horizon at large scale, there is currently a very limited dance programme on offer across the country. The need for sustained programming at all levels, working from the ground up with offerings from festival, small and middle scale right up to the larger scale, to build a healthy performance ecosystem and develop audiences is evident.

The ACW 'Night Out' scheme provides crucial financial support for artists and performing companies.

Setting higher performance guarantees than most venues can afford, the initiative helps artists secure bookings and supports the sustainability of dance performance and touring.

3.5.2 independent artists and small companies

The current ACW funding structure has created significant disparities within the dance sector, with concerns about its effectiveness and fairness. The current application processes for all funding streams has been widely criticised as overly bureaucratic, emphasising compliance over artistic merit. This situation has led to some artists adopting strategic approaches to 'play the system', a concerning development that reflects the desperate and competitive nature for funds. Independent artists and small companies face particularly acute challenges in this environment as the current funding application process mostly requires artists to provide unpaid labour, creating an unsustainable model where work is completed on the speculative promise of future funding.

Most critically, artists juggle multiple administrative roles alongside their creative work, competing against larger organisations that benefit from having dedicated fundraising and administrative staff. This practice raises serious ethical concerns and perpetuates systemic inequalities within the sector, particularly affecting those that lack the financial reserves to sustain extended periods of unpaid work. This relationship between resource limitations and funding success represents a classic cause-and-effect scenario that must be addressed to ensure the sector's long-term vitality and diversity. Without intervention, the current system risks further entrenchment of existing inequalities and limits the development of artistic voices in Wales's dance community.

The challenges for artists extend beyond administrative burdens to other fundamental resource access issues. Both venues and artists attest to the touring infrastructure as 'unsustainable', with a disconnect between artists' creative goals and venues' practical considerations. Many artists and small companies commented on the lack of touring infrastructure and would benefit from producer support, from inception through touring to post project evaluation. In terms of the artist/venue relationship, artists often find negotiations with venues a challenge and they themselves lack the infrastructure to service wraparound activities, marketing needs and manage overall venue expectations. It was suggested on a number of occasions that a producer role is needed to act as interpreter in the artist/venue relationship as well as managing an overall project. Unfortunately however, financial resources via project grants don't often stretch to supporting such a role in a sustained way and/or the producer acts as unpaid fundraiser on the promise of a fee if the funding bid is successful. This links back to the unsustainable and ethical inequalities already mentioned.

Independent artists and small companies also frequently struggle to secure adequate rehearsal and performance space; for example, numerous practitioners in the Cardiff area noting inconsistent

availability of resources at the Dance House. While some organisations, such as Ballet Cymru, have expressed willingness to share their spaces when available, the actual utilisation and accessibility of such arrangements remains unclear. A similar situation occurs in other areas of Wales as well, with artists in North Wales often feeling they are unsupported by organisations that have suitable spaces for dance.

Implementation of recommendations will help mitigate some of the issues herein that independent artists and small companies encounter; for example, a producer network working as part of a national dance development agency could support a range of artists across Wales with administration, fundraising, marketing and production resources.

Some responses pointed out that the dance sector in Wales needs to enable artists to take more risk, experiment and push boundaries in their work. There's a desire for more ambitious projects, such as immersive performances or outdoor works, that reach both local communities and broader audiences. Respondents urged for a re-distribution of funding to support new and innovative work that can showcase Wales's dance talent in different locations. This funding should not just be for participation but for high-quality, professional-level productions.

3.5.3 community dance

Wales once had a globally respected community dance sector, but under-investment in infrastructure and artists has caused fragmentation. Today, community dance spans recreational, educational and health-focused activities, creating a complex, often disconnected landscape. Adult participatory classes are sparse, even in Cardiff and regional disparities limit access outside South Wales.

Artists increasingly juggle portfolio careers but face frustration over the lack of recognition for community dance as legitimate artistic practice. Many practitioners find themselves trapped in a hand-to-mouth existence, focusing on micro-level survival rather than contributing to sector-wide development. This diminishes professional standing and exacerbates challenges such as low pay and demanding schedules. The lack of 'glue' holding the community dance sector together was often mentioned.

Territorial tensions also arise, as some artists feel threatened by external companies 'parachuting in' to regions without an understanding of local contexts. This protectionist viewpoint stems from the significant personal investment artists make in their community work.

This review has however exposed structural issues within the regional dance ecosystem, particularly in North Wales where there's a noticeable disconnect and limited co-ordination between different dance initiatives across the region. Mixed reviews on Dawns i Bawb's practice from freelance dance artists and the sidelining of dance at Galeri, Caernarfon, suggest there are broad questions to answer about how the dance landscape across North Wales intersects. A number of artists in North Wales advocate for co-locating dance with other artforms in a community style hub, while some would prefer to maintain a purely dance-focused approach in community work across North Wales. This is

because they feel that dance has been overlooked for so long, investment solely in dance is needed to galvanise the region and its resources.

The absence of co-ordinating mechanisms, conferences or regular gatherings hinders Wales-wide development, leaving practitioners focused on survival rather than growth. Collaboration remains underdeveloped, with calls for stronger partnerships. Dedicated dance spaces and community hubs could address infrastructure challenges, though examples like Galeri in Caernarfon reveal ongoing struggles for an equal footing with other art forms.

Many initiatives operate outside Arts Council Wales funding, relying on alternative sources that offer creative autonomy but lead to financial instability and burnout. Dance project leaders report often subsidising activities by forgoing salaries. Replicating best practice models like Dance for Parkinson's and Dance Collective CIC's training programmes in North Wales could help strengthen the sector, fostering resilience and adaptability for future growth

Geographic barriers further restrict access, especially in rural areas, highlighting the need for hyperlocal, context-specific approaches. Many dance artists have cultivated their practice by working within communities, focusing on co-creation and embedding their work within hyper-local community groups, for example, the *Maynard*¹⁸ project's Twmpath events. This style of approach could make links with the Rural Touring Dance Initiative scheme currently piloted through venues in a partnership with Creu Cymru. Some dance artists have also adopted Community Interest Company (CIC) models to expand their reach across regions in a social participatory dance model. Approaches such as Tango, Tea Dance and Lindyhop have proven particularly successful in these contexts. However, these models face perception challenges: some organisations report that their work is perceived as amateur despite being run by professional dance artists. While a number of these practitioners access funding through social and health initiatives, such as social prescribing programmes, they firmly maintain that their work is fundamentally arts-based. As well as being able to access a range of ACW funding streams, overall, these artists feel they would benefit from both financial and business support when setting up projects.

Community-centred social dance initiatives provide unique and life-affirming experiences. They play a vital role in fostering inclusion and reducing isolation, particularly among hard-to-reach groups, including retired people and residents of care homes. Dance has emerged as a powerful tool not just for supporting physical health and mobility, but also in supporting people's mental health, alleviating anxiety and enhancing social well-being. Dance for Health programmes and those rooted in social prescribing not only improve mental health outcomes but also broaden participation and deepen community engagement.

¹⁸ Maynard CIC - <u>https://www.may-nard.org/about-maynard</u>



Folk Dance Society members across Wales were eager to participate in the review, expressing concerns that folk dance has been overlooked in the past. Underfunding is compounded by fears about the potential disappearance of both folk dance and clogging without timely intervention. Additionally, Welsh folk dance struggles with an identity crisis, often dismissed as old-fashioned rather than celebrated as a vibrant representation of Welsh culture. While some groups aim to preserve traditional forms, others push for innovation, leading to tensions between traditionalists and progressives. This struggle for relevance is reflected in declining competition entries reported by organisations such as the Urdd and Eisteddfod. However, Welsh folk dance and clogging holds untapped potential as a tool for Welsh language learning and as a means to engage with cross-curricular themes under the new Curriculum for Wales. Dance artists such as Angharad Harrop, Meinir Siencyn, Tudur Phillips and Osian Meilir are among the advocates for integrating Welsh folk culture into their dance practice and positive examples of innovation include initiatives such as *Prosiect Wyth* funded through the Arts Council of Wales' Connect & Flourish programme (2022–2024), which has been hailed a model of best practice¹⁹.

The summative report, *Addroddiad Prosiect Wyth* (Mair, 2024), outlines a strategic framework to build on *Prosiect Wyth's* legacy and develop Welsh folk dance across Wales. It emphasises leveraging existing strengths such as grassroots interest, youth participation through the Twmpdaith model and the successful modernisation of traditional forms. Despite evidence of public enthusiasm and a committed community of practitioners, the report also identifies persistent challenges, including an inadequate professional infrastructure, limited institutional recognition and an over-reliance on volunteer efforts.

To address these issues, the framework suggested by Mair's report proposes four strategic pillars with an implementation strategy spanning eight years, divided into three phases, focusing on professional development and community engagement. Recommendations from this report on folk dance will find synergy with the review on traditional Welsh music in 2025.

3.5.5 continuing professional development (cpd)

Professional development in Wales's dance sector faces several structural challenges. There will always be a need for dance artists to access suitable fitness / technique classes in order to maintain their practice and while some initiatives exist, their effectiveness and accessibility vary significantly across the regions, with transport access further compounding the situation. The CPD landscape is particularly acute in rural areas, where geographic isolation compounds existing barriers to career advancement. Financial barriers to training presents another significant challenge, with many dancers struggling to balance the need to earn income with investing in their own professional development. This is not something you would find in a sports-related environment where training is central to development.

¹⁹ See section 4.4

While appreciated by some participants in this review, the Wales Wide Training Programme (WWTP)²⁰ has drawn criticism for becoming less responsive to sector needs in recent times. The shift to a paid model, combined with reduced participant input to programme development has altered its original collaborative spirit. Though its online delivery ensures broad accessibility, the current format is viewed as homogenised by many through its series of presentations rather than practical application and personalised support.

Local initiatives have emerged to address these gaps. In North Wales, Dance Collective has developed a well respected training programme that responds to local dancer need. Similarly, Groundwork Collective in Cardiff offers artist-led training, though some respondents report feeling excluded from what they perceive as a closed community. Meanwhile, NDCWales's approach to open classes has been described as restrictive, particularly toward community dance practitioners who feel their expertise is undervalued.

The professional development challenges in Wales's dance sector are deeply rooted in structural, geographic and economic constraints. Addressing these requires a collective commitment to recognising professional development as vital to artistic growth. By fostering more accessible, flexible and responsive training environments, Wales can build a stronger infrastructure to support its dance practitioners.

A key solution is establishing a de-centralised training model that combines in-person and digital platforms to ensure geographic isolation doesn't hinder skill enhancement. This could involve comprehensive training that prioritises practical, interactive experiences over passive online content and, where needed, subsidised transport options for in-person sessions. This could be co-ordinated by the community hub model suggested in the recommendations section of this review.

Transparent and participatory funding mechanisms are also essential to support dancers' continuous learning. Grant programmes designed to offset training costs would acknowledge professional development as a critical investment rather than an optional expense, encouraging more practitioners to pursue growth opportunities.

Collaboration must also be at the heart of the solution. Bridging existing initiatives - such as Dance Collective, Groundwork Collective and Rubicon - with bespoke regional programmes could help dismantle perceptions of exclusivity. This approach would foster a more inclusive and supportive professional development ecosystem, leveraging collective strengths to benefit the sector as a whole.

Reimagining the Wales Wide Training Programme is another vital step. Restoring its original collaborative spirit, with increased participant input and linking more with One Dance UK and People Dancing initiatives would ensure a balanced and joined-up approach to delivery. By integrating its digital offer with practical skill development, the programme could better meet the diverse needs of practitioners and strengthen its impact across the sector.

²⁰ A partnership project held by Rubicon



3.5.6 dance in education

Dance education in Wales faces numerous challenges, with a significant decline across schools, post-16 and higher education settings. Dance programmes have increasingly been subsumed into broader performing arts or physical education curricula, leaving limited dedicated training options. Currently, only one higher education dance programme exists: UWTSD's commercial dance degree, alongside two BTEC tertiary programmes offered by Cardiff and Vale College (delivered at Rubicon) and Neath College.

Rubicon's BTEC programme is particularly vulnerable, struggling with recruitment and operating small cohorts that threaten its long-term financial viability. Its focus on neo-classical genres seems out of step with student interests, which lean more toward competition dance styles and musical theatre. Similarly, the NDCWales Associates programme functions more as a high-level extracurricular activity than a true training pathway - only five of the current twenty-two participants expressed definite interest in pursuing higher education dance training. A lack of progression from the Associates programme back into NDCWales and with just one Welsh dancer in the full-time performance company, there's a clear need to improve talent retention and create more high level opportunities for local Wales based dancers.

The decline in degree-level dance courses in Wales has raised concerns among professionals, but the reality is more complex. A disconnect between young dancers' aspirations and the sector's professional goals is evident. While there are passionate calls to retain talent within Wales and restore an HE training infrastructure, young dancers overwhelmingly express a desire to pursue their education elsewhere²¹. Out of tertiary-level dancers interviewed at Rubicon, only two showed genuine interest in studying within Wales, even if more undergraduate programmes were available. This preference stems from a desire for new cultural experiences and the prestige associated with certain schools. Nevertheless, 86% of respondents expressed a long-term desire to return to Wales to work, citing pride in their heritage and a wish to contribute to the Welsh dance ecosystem. However, limited career progression opportunities make this difficult to achieve, presenting a critical challenge for the future.

National Youth Dance Wales faces criticism for its focus on recruiting students already in professional training rather than developing young Welsh-based talent. Limited funding however constrains its ability to deliver broader training programmes and it relies heavily on youth ensembles and the dedication of local teachers to nurture emerging talent. Youth dance groups across Wales have however diminished over time due to various challenges. NDCWales confirmed this trend, with fewer applications to its *Launch* programme in Autumn 2024 compared to previous years.

In comparison to England, young Welsh dancers face significant disadvantages when transitioning to higher education training due to inconsistent, lower-quality training opportunities. Unlike England's Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) schemes, Wales lacks structured pathways. Informal feedback

²¹ 24% of dance student respondents to the online questionnaire said they might have considered training in Wales had a suitable course been available, whilst 76% preferred to train outside of Wales, even if options were available in Wales.

from institutions like the Northern School of Contemporary Dance and The Place suggests that Welsh applicants are often underprepared for the rigour of auditions and lack necessary technical skills.

In schools, dance is increasingly marginalised. When offered, it often focuses on musical theatre, sidelining contemporary and creative dance. Commercial dance schools also prioritise competition styles over artistic development. The new Curriculum for Wales provides an opportunity to integrate creative dance into the expressive arts curriculum, but teachers and dance artists need robust support through the development of Welsh, English and BSL resources to ensure dance achieves parity with other art forms. Without these resources, there is concern that dance could be overshadowed. Practitioners also advocate for a greater role in professional learning delivery, not just as visiting providers. The Lead Creative Schools Programme faces criticism as resource constraints limit schools' ability to work with dance practitioners outside of the programme. Dance artists also report a perceived prioritisation of other art forms over dance within the programme. These factors could lead to a lack of direct access to schools for dance artists and marginalisation of dance outside of an established delivery service.

The language of delivery adds another layer of complexity to dance education in Wales. Views are divided: some argue that dance transcends spoken language, while others strongly believe Welsh-speaking communities should receive dance instruction in Welsh. While there are Welsh-speaking dance artists working in communities, demand often exceeds availability. A growing concern is that Welsh language ability might take precedence over dance expertise, potentially excluding skilled practitioners who don't speak Welsh.

The new GCSE dance syllabus in Wales presents a promising opportunity to reshape dance education. Stakeholders envision a curriculum that reflects Welsh cultural identity by incorporating a comprehensive programme of work from Wales-based choreographers and embracing a multi-genre approach. This could include contemporary styles like hip-hop alongside traditional Welsh folk dance, making dance education more relevant and accessible to young people. However, there is concern about the availability of suitably qualified teachers to deliver culturally appropriate sessions with integrity.

Ultimately, the disconnect between the sector's professional aspirations and young dancers' desires highlights deeper issues. Young dancers' eagerness to seek opportunities beyond Wales contrasts starkly with professionals' enthusiasm to rebuild a local training infrastructure. Strategic interventions are urgently needed to address gaps in training, cultural relevance and career progression opportunities. Reimagining dance education to align with emerging aspirations is essential to preserve and grow Wales' dance ecosystem.

3.5.7 diversity and cultural shift

The landscape of dance in Wales reveals a complex interplay between tradition, contemporary preferences and representation. While dance students show enthusiasm for diverse styles including acro, street, ballet, lyrical dance and musical theatre, contemporary dance appears to be losing its appeal among younger generations, possibly reflected in the broader decline in audience interest for contemporary dance performances.

The current emphasis on ballet and contemporary training in formal dance education has created an unfortunate ripple effect. By limiting exposure to other dance styles, the narrow focus has erected barriers to access and shaped society's definition of dance success through an unnecessarily restrictive lens. This situation has left many dance artists, particularly those working in different forms, feeling excluded from Arts Council Wales funding streams, where neo-classical styles appear to be favoured as the accepted canon. Adding to these challenges is a perceived resistance from ACW to recognise alternative dance forms in funding applications – some organisations and artists feel that they successfully connect with younger generations through social media platforms but find their engagement statistics dismissed in official evaluations. This highlights a potential disconnect between traditional metrics and contemporary reality.

Some organisations, such as Jukebox Collective and Urban Circle have developed programmes celebrating diverse and inclusive dance forms, focusing on specific communities. Both organisations have a global outlook with a level of success outside of Wales and the UK that helps build national and international networks for dance.

Dance artists from the global majority report facing additional challenges in the dance sector, often questioning whether their employment stems from genuine recognition of their expertise or because it merely serves to fulfil diversity quotas. Some also feel excluded due to being outside of established 'cliques' in the freelance sector. One artist used the phrase 'gaslighting', another as not feeling within 'an inner circle' and a third described the freelance dance community as 'exclusive'.

Challenges were highlighted in accessing funding for non-neurotypical individuals, suggesting that streamlining application processes would be beneficial. Notably, one respondent shared a highly positive experience of support from ACW, indicating that while systemic barriers may exist, individual interactions with ACW officers can significantly impact the overall experience.

Overall, some dance artists feel excluded from the dance scene across Wales, describing it as 'perpetuating privilege'. They describe the Welsh language as being more important than inclusivity across the board and would like to be recognised and valued as Welsh/Wales based dance artists rather than needing to seek work outside of Wales in order to feel valued.

The current ecosystem reflects a complex interplay of systemic barriers that restrict artistic expression and marginalise diverse voices within the dance community. To address these fundamental issues, a transformative approach could be employed that broadens the definition of dance excellence beyond traditional neo-classical forms, recognising the value of diverse dance styles and their cultural significance. Rebalancing the current approach to cultural representation could also be considered to ensure that linguistic targets work in tandem with overall inclusivity, rather than potentially at the expense of broader inclusivity. This means creating environments where artists feel valued for their artistic contributions regardless of their background or language.

The future of dance in Wales depends on its ability to embrace diversity, challenge existing paradigms to create a more open, supportive ecosystem that celebrates the full spectrum of artistic expression. By addressing these structural challenges, Wales can transform its dance sector into a more dynamic, inclusive and globally relevant artistic landscape.



3.5.8 leadership

The review highlights significant concerns about leadership and governance in Wales's dance sector. A key issue was the number of community dance organisations who felt their Investment Review applications were unsuccessful due to management and leadership and/or governance related weaknesses. While some organisations can access management consultants or have received resilience funding in the past, many rely heavily on freelance workers and lack the resources to develop business models or establish robust governance structures. Given that ACW found many 2023 Investment Review applications "unfundable" (Rhys, 2024), there is a clear need for training, support and simplification of procedures to improve future outcomes.

Leadership challenges extend to ACW itself, where the absence of a dance specialist at Council level has created widespread frustration among dance practitioners in Wales. Artists report a lack of comprehensive guidance and support, leading to a call for immediate action - either through securing a dance specialist to Council in the next Government recruitment round or implementing a temporary secondment to Council.

Another critical gap is the lack of robust quality monitoring and artistic feedback within the sector. Practitioners questioned how the artistic programming of portfolio companies is evaluated, particularly regarding the relevance of some programming choices to Welsh audiences. Some artists also expressed uncertainty about where to seek meaningful critique of their work. The absence of the 'critical friend' role is particularly concerning, especially given that ACW lacks a dance specialist and one portfolio company has experienced multiple artistic leadership changes, currently leaving it at a crucial juncture. To address this, there is a call in the recommendations section of this review for either a dedicated organisation or a network of respected mentors to serve as critical friends, providing constructive support and mentorship to both emerging and established companies.

3.6 online whiteboard and email comments

The anonymous online whiteboard revealed a pronounced bias, with it exclusively generating negative feedback. Comments did not meaningfully diverge from findings obtained through alternative qualitative data collection techniques. Data collected through email correspondence also did not introduce any new substantive insights beyond the main review methodologies, although development of dance in outdoor spaces and the future role of Taliesin in Swansea were areas of note. There is potential for intersection between this review and one planned by ACW for Outdoor Arts in Wales in 2025 in order to explore further opportunities for dance performance. In relation to Taliesin, the e-mail commentary centred around ACW's accountability and shifting policy, as the venue historically had a clear direction of travel in its role in the dance sector²². This proved to be an unsustainable model and has contributed to the venue's demise in recent years.

²² From documentation during the early 2000s when Sybil Crouch managed the venue



This review reveals that the dance sector in Wales has reached a critical moment. While demonstrating notable resilience in certain areas and clear potential for growth, the sector faces substantial structural challenges that require strategic intervention.

Analysis indicates significant geographic inequalities in provision, gaps in essential infrastructure and fundamental sustainability issues. However, the sector continues to be sustained by a dedicated community of dance professionals, volunteers and participants who remain committed to its advancement and development.

The dance sector makes substantial contributions to Welsh life, delivering measurable benefits to both social and economic wellbeing and consistently aligning with key strategic objectives set out by Welsh Government and Arts Council Wales. Any further diminishment of the sector would represent a significant loss of both financial investment, cultural and workforce capital.

The severity of the current situation cannot be understated. Stakeholder feedback consistently indicates that immediate, decisive action is required to prevent further deterioration of dance provision across Wales. Status quo is not an option as provision is declining year on year – the implications of inaction present significant risks to the sector's viability, so action should be implemented.

Achieving a vision for the future of dance in Wales will necessitate a fundamental shift in approach, moving away from competition and siloes towards a more integrated, strategic and communitydriven model of dance development and provision from the ground up. By implementing the suggested recommendations, the Welsh dance sector could become a more connected, diverse and accessible environment that serves communities across the country.

The recommendations presented herein have been developed according to SMART criteria²³.

To successfully implement these recommendations however, ACW will need to develop a comprehensive change plan that outlines precise implementation strategies. Some recommendations can be executed quickly with minimal resources, while others will demand strategic planning and financial investment.

SHORT TERM: immediate, 1-6 months

Leadership was mentioned in various guises across all of the review's mechanisms, ranging from queries relating to the current lack of permanent leadership in NDCWales, through leadership challenges for freelances to leadership at Council level at ACW. In the short-medium term, leadership challenges at NDCWales may resolve, while medium-longer term recommendations could help address the leadership challenges faced by independent artists.

²³ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

In the short term, the following recommendations are achievable with minimal cost to ACW and/or

4.1 leadership

the sector.

Recommendation 1: Establishment of an independent and remunerated strategic panel to establish a solid way forward for dance in Wales. This group would be recruited by ACW, be representative of the sector and tasked with:

- Evaluating and prioritising the review's recommendations requiring immediate financial support
- Contributing to the development of a comprehensive dance strategy for Wales
- Ensuring co-ordination between immediate interventions and longer-term strategic objectives
- Efficiency of recommended actions

Success metrics:

- Implementation of a timeline for action for adopted review recommendations
- Identification of projected costs associated with the review's recommendations

Recommendation 2: Establishment of a critical friend / critical friends bank that can interrogate the practice of revenue funded companies at the highest artistic level. This role is not currently in evidence. The critical friend role would provide:

- mentorship, guidance and support for Artistic Directors
- foster conversations around practice and programming choices for venues
- consider overall cultural relevance and context to Wales

The role could potentially be extended over time to enable smaller companies and freelance artists to challenge and champion their practice.

Success metric:

 Appointment of one suitable critical friend within 6-month time period for each revenue funded dance client (different critical friend for each organisation or same if appropriate). Strategic panel (from recommendation 1) to work with companies to shortlist appropriate personnel. Critical friend engaged on a daily fee basis – 1 day per quarter. Suggested daily freelance fee £350 **Recommendation 3:** Appointment of a dance specialist to ACW Council as there is currently no dance advocate involved in decision making at that strategic level.

If the imminent call-out for Council members does not result in a dance specialist appointment from Spring 2025, it is recommended that someone with suitable experience is co-opted/seconded into the role until a more permanent solution is established.

Success metric:

• Interim co-opted/seconded appointment or full Council appointment in early 2025

MEDIUM TERM: 1-3 years

Medium-term interventions have some financial implications that could be addressed through strategic use of ACW funding. One potential approach presents a financial challenge, either securing additional funding for dance from the wider ACW budget or leveraging additional funding from Welsh Government, committing more to dance. If this is not feasible, ACW could investigate the potential of an interventionist approach, re-distributing some of its existing dance revenue funding or other revenue funding in the next funding cycle. Any action of this type would naturally impact on those in the current portfolio. However things are achieved, either increased or release of revenue funds would be necessary to enable ACW to distribute dance funding more equitably around Wales, developing community dance and the freelance and small company portfolio.

4.2 implementation of co-located community arts hubs

The community dance sector maintains a strong commitment to accessibility, recognising dance's potential to serve diverse communities and interact meaningfully with health, education and other community sectors. Health-centred programmes not only expand participation but can also demonstrate the broader value of dance to the community. Realising these aspirations requires sustained investment and support. Respondents were quick to highlight the potential that exists, with pockets of best practice and a strong desire to see a more equitable, inclusive and collaborative dance sector that can truly connect with and serve communities throughout Wales. Achieving this vision will however necessitate a fundamental shift in approach, towards funding a more integrated, strategic and community-driven model of dance development and provision.

The sector's future vitality depends on finding ways to better cascade knowledge and expertise while building sustainable career paths for dance professionals committed to community engagement. Colocating dance geographically with other artforms in community style hubs could potentially be accomplished without major additional financial investment, as many small arts organisations that work across artforms are already working in this way (see case study below). Adding dance to their portfolio could be realised with a small injection of ACW funding to create stability, enhance collaboration, improve resource-sharing among artists and develop more equitable distribution of opportunities across Wales.

Programmes could establish links with organisations like People Dancing, create a network of regional training that could share resources and expertise and develop a forum for sector-wide dialogue about training needs that could be applied in a local context. Dance specialists could link with their local hub for support but also access hubs in other regions across Wales as needed to develop specific skills – this would help to build and support a national network of dance artists working in communities across Wales. With additional funding, support hubs could also develop peer-to-peer skill sharing and mentoring/apprenticeship opportunities as well as potentially, an academic research profile for Wales based dance. Naturally, a bursary system for travel would be welcomed by the dance community.

These changes would help create a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable professional development ecosystem for Wales's dance sector.

Recommendation 4: Development of a network of co-located community hubs across Wales by leveraging existing organisational infrastructure. The strategy would need to maximise existing assets, fostering cross-sector co-operation and development with minimal financial investment and would:

- Enable collaboration across communities and art forms
- Facilitate connections with education, health and business stakeholders
- Minimise additional costs by utilising existing resources and infrastructure
- Create integrated support networks without developing new resources from scratch

NB: development could link with interventions suggested by the separate review of English language theatre in Wales that is currently underway

Success metric:

• Development of a costed network of co-located community hubs across Wales (number and locations to be decided by the strategic panel identified in recommendation 1)

A number of community arts organisations could be suggested as a starting point for network discussions – for example: Rubicon, Theatr Brycheiniog, Span Arts. The case study chosen below demonstrates an example of an organisation rooted in a community context in South Wales, working with co-located artforms and responsive to the needs of its immediate community.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY ARTS HUB

YMa, Pontypridd

https://www.ymaonline.wales/

Operated by Artis Community, YMa is a re-imagining of the Pontypridd YMCA building which was opened in 1910 on the main high street of Pontypridd Town Centre. YMa is a place where culture, creativity and the arts intersect with the community in Pontypridd.

- 1. Focus on Social Impact: The organisation is guided by a commitment to using creativity and the arts to make a positive social impact in the local community. This helps ensure the facility's programming and activities are relevant and beneficial to residents.
- 2. **Co-Creation and Co-Design**: YMa actively engages the community in deciding the direction and programming of its performance space through co-creation and co-design processes. This generates a strong sense of ownership and investment from the community.
- 3. **Resident Arts Companies**: Having a resident dance company Ransack Dance Company provides an anchor tenant that can help drive programming and activities, while also benefiting from the shared infrastructure and resources.
- 4. **Diverse Programming**: Beyond the dance studio, the variety of other spaces (performance, training, meeting, community, etc.) allows YMa to offer a wide range of arts, cultural and community-oriented programming to serve different needs and interests.

Replicating the Model Across Wales:

The key to replicating the YMa model across Wales would be to maintain the core principles of community engagement and social impact focus, co-locating artforms and integration of diverse arts/cultural spaces and programming. By adapting this model to the unique needs and assets of each local community, new community arts hubs could be developed to better support and advance dance and other creative practices.

Key steps could include:

- 1. Identifying Suitable Facilities: Look to utilise existing venues such as Galeri in Caernarfon, Rubicon in Cardiff, Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon, Span Arts in Pembrokeshire, as well as other community spaces that could be re-imagined/tweaked into integrated arts hubs that support dance more proactively
- 2. Engaging the Local Community: Establish strong partnerships with local residents, community groups and arts/cultural organisations to understand their needs and priorities. Actively involve them in the co-creation and co-design process.
- 3. **Fostering Resident Arts Companies**: Recruit and support resident collectives (dance, theatre, visual arts, etc.) that can help anchor programming and engagement in the community.
- 4. Securing Sustainable Funding: Identify and secure funding sources (grants, community investment, earned revenue, etc.) to ensure the long-term viability and impact of each community arts hub.

By replicating the core elements of the YMa model, similar community-driven arts hubs could be established across Wales to support dance artists, provide training, amplifying arts in health and grassroots participatory practice.

4.3 a national artist-led dance development agency for Wales

The independent dance sector has consistently advocated for more equitable distribution of dance funding for artists creating work, along with greater recognition of the sector's diverse needs. These calls for reform emphasise the importance of supporting and stabilising the industry at all levels, not just its largest performative institutions. The current situation clearly demonstrates a direct relationship between limited administrative resources and unsuccessful funding applications, suggesting the need for comprehensive structural reform in how dance initiatives are funded and supported.

Recommendation 5: Development of an artist-led national dance development agency for Wales. Informed by the strategic panel identified in recommendation 1, how this would be funded would depend on:

- where it would be based (if a physical base is needed)
- its role in order to be truly pan-Wales
- its role as sector advocate
- how it would link with the existing freelancer network and community hubs
- whether it is designed as a distributed funding model

Success metrics:

Development of a suitable agency model for Wales that:

- embraces digital solutions for geographic challenges
- integrates bilingual and cultural considerations
- builds strong regional networks
- develops sustainable partnerships
- creates flexible participation pathways
- maintains artist-led principles while adapting to local context

Implementation of a dance development agency model, run in a similar way to the case study below - *The Workroom (GWR)* - would enable dance artists to have support to develop their practice²⁴. An artist led national development agency for dance could also work within a distributed funding model similar to Ffilm Cymru Wales/Ty Cerdd. There were many responses across all review mechanisms about where an agency should be based. Cardiff would appear to be the obvious location as the capital city, but Taliesin in Swansea expressed an interest in taking on the role if it became a viable

²⁴ Dance Ireland is also a model to consider but it is larger than TWR with access to multiple spaces



option and North Wales should also be considered if a base is considered essential. Funds would be needed to set up and run the agency as an independent body, as well as funds for distribution if it was to run on a similar model to Ffilm Cymru Wales or Ty Cerdd.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE OF ARTIST-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FOR DANCE

The Workroom, Glasgow

https://theworkroom.org.uk/

The Work Room (TWR) represents an innovative model for supporting independent dance artists through its artist-led membership structure, purpose-built facilities and comprehensive support framework. This case study examines TWR's approach and identifies key elements of best practice that could be adapted for Wales. TWR's governance structure represents a sophisticated approach to artist-led organisation that:

- 1. Empowers artists as decision-makers
- 2. Builds sector leadership capacity
- 3. Ensures professional management
- 4. Maintains organisational accountability
- 5. Supports sector development
- 6. Creates sustainable practices

The model is particularly notable for how it builds leadership capacity within the dance sector while maintaining professional standards and developing artistry. TWR has one purpose-built studio space at Tramway, office space is provided through partnership with Glasgow Life and it receives regular funding from Creative Scotland. Strategic partnerships reduce operational costs and there is a focus on low overhead costs to maximise artist support. Its comprehensive support mechanisms acknowledge the complex nature of portfolio dance careers and it has adopted a holistic approach to artist support including:

- Supported residencies for choreographic research
- Networking opportunities
- Creative resource sharing studio and production space, expertise
- Professional development workshops including leadership development
- Advisory sessions and career support
- International capacity building
- Active artist network
- Members' Facebook group for informal exchange
- Monthly newsletters
- Online member profiles
- Regular community gatherings

It also works in a dance advocacy role across the sector:

- Supporting artistic innovation
- Community engagement
- Cultural diversity
- Social change through arts

APPLICATION TO WALES

The TWR model could be successfully adapted for Wales by:

- 1. Integrating bilingual and cultural considerations
- 2. Building strong regional networks
- 3. Developing sustainable partnerships
- 4. Creating flexible participation pathways
- 5. Maintaining artist-led principles while adapting to local context

4.4 development of Welsh language and culture through dance

The Welsh culture can be championed by dance projects and there are already examples of best practice across Wales, including Ballet Cymru reflecting Welsh heritage in its productions and NDCWales programming a Welsh choreographer in 2025 that is known for celebrating their Welsh heritage. Hyper-local initiatives help build community cohesion and co-created projects with communities, that are rooted in a social model, will help to democratise the arts.

The success of *Prosiect Wyth's* summative strategy (Mair, 2024) hinges on securing sustainable funding for its future development, achieving professional recognition for Welsh folk dance and clogging while maintaining community ownership and ensuring artistic excellence. Crucially, these efforts must navigate the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing innovation. This review recommends embracing the report's recommendations as part of any future dance strategy. Costs associated with the project have not yet been identified but would require ongoing funding.

Recommendation 6: Focus on developing and strengthening the Welsh language and Welsh culture through dance-related activities to embed language and culture into appropriate interventions. Initiatives should always aim to support and celebrate Wales' cultural heritage and language while locating work firmly within local community contexts. It is crucial that arts-based initiatives that have a connection to Welsh language and heritage are supported by arts funding.

Success metrics:

- Welsh language embedded into dance delivery via suitable projects
- Welsh culture embedded into dance projects and commissions

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF WELSH FOLK DANCE (Mair, 2024)

Case Study

Professional Development Pathways & Community Engagement Strategies

Professional Development Pathways:

1.Entry-Level Development

Youth pipeline (16-25)

- Expand *Twmpdaith* model year-round
 - o Seasonal intensives
 - o Regular workshop series
 - Mentorship opportunities
 - Performance opportunities
- Create youth ambassador programmes
- Develop leadership training modules
- Provide technical training in both dance and production

Early Career Support

- Apprenticeship programmes with established practitioners
- Shadowing opportunities at festivals and events
- Basic business skills training
- Digital media and promotion training
- Event management experience

2. Mid-Level Professional Development

Technical Advancement

- Master classes with international practitioners
- Cross-cultural exchange programs
- Advanced choreography workshops
- Music and rhythm workshops
- Teaching methodology training

Creative Development

- Commission opportunities
- Collaborative project funding
- Research and development grants
- Experimental work support
- Digital content creation training

3. Advanced Professional Pathways

Specialist Roles

- Traditional dance notation specialists
- Cultural heritage consultants
- Festival programmers
- Community outreach co-ordinators
- Educational programme developers

Leadership Development

- Arts management training
- Funding application workshops
- Strategic planning skills
- Advocacy training
- Network development

4. Teaching Pathways

Qualification Framework

- Develop teaching certificates
- Create assessment criteria
- Establish quality standards
- Design continuing professional development

Specialisations

- Youth teaching
- Community practice
- Professional training
- Inclusive practice
- Heritage preservation

4.5 dance in schools

To build a strong foundation for the future, the new GCSE dance syllabus should incorporate the work of multiple Wales-based choreographers. Reforms at GCSE and A level could help create stronger foundations for students considering higher level dance education, while also supporting the broader goal of developing a distinctively Welsh approach to dance training.

Support for teachers and dance artists via the production of English, Welsh and BSL resources to satisfy learning outcomes is required. These could be cross-curricular as dance resonates with a number of subject areas. The Urdd commented positively on potentially being involved in developing resources for dance; full funding could be considered from the Creative Learning fund at ACW and/or the Education Department.



Recommendation 7: Development of English, Welsh and BSL resources to support dance in the curriculum. Include Welsh choreography and companies on the new GCSE dance syllabus.

Success metric:

• Resources embedded in new GCSE dance curriculum

4.6 funding application processes

Critical concerns were raised repeatedly during the review about the lack of an equitable funding system. Creation of more transparent and accessible funding mechanisms that actively support marginalised artists and freelance individuals who have little or no administrative support would be welcomed. This should involve simplifying application processes and developing more holistic SROI evaluation methods that go beyond traditional metrics.

Recommendation 8: Proposal of a tiered ACW funding approach that simplifies application processes for smaller companies and independent artists. This simplified system should be applied to Investment Review applications, Lottery and other funding streams.

Success metric:

• Application processes simplified for those outside of the multi-year funding portfolio and directly related to the capacity/size of organisation/artist – i.e. administration support available, time required to complete application process if unpaid

LONGER TERM: 3+ years

Longer term strategic interventions offer critical opportunities to nurture a sustainable community of dance artists in Wales. Again, some interventions pose a financial challenge and will require additional funding - either from the wider ACW budget/additional funding from Welsh Government/a.n.other source, or by an interventionist approach, re-distributing some of the existing ACW dance or other revenue budget in the next funding cycle.

By focusing on dance education at both pre-professional and post-training levels, the sector can develop a comprehensive approach to preparing young dancers for professional careers. A targeted, vocational post-graduate training model could serve as a catalyst for building a thriving and interconnected dance ecosystem in Wales, whilst an artist in residence (AiR) programme across Wales would develop a number of artists' practice over time.

4.7 dance artist in residency model development

With suitable financial support, a number of venues across Wales were positive about being involved in a dance artist in residence model that could rotate on an annual or bi-annual basis. A scheme would work in a similar way to any AiR model – as well as enabling a dance artist to develop their

practice over a sustained period (the role could also be shared between two dance artists), the venue would provide a supportive infrastructure – for example, mentorship in leadership, marketing, fundraising and production. The dance artist(s) in residence would be able to support other dance artists working in the local area and act as a point of contact and support for any touring product coming into the area. There would also be a requirement for the dance artist(s) in residence to build capacity in local communities, linking with the co-located hub network and the dance development agency model as appropriate.

Recommendation 9: Development of a dance artist in residency model across 5 centres in Wales, on a 2-year max tenure at each venue. Costs are estimated of between £70-£100k per annum per venue – this would provide 1 or 2 full or proportional artist salaries and cover costs. Working in partnership with venues and other stakeholders might enable alternative funding streams to be realised.

Success metric:

• 5 AiR programmes set up around Wales on a rolling programme

Developing a network across Wales of five dance artists in residence could start to expand reach and re-build audience capacity from the ground up, while being visible in communities and supporting a number of dance artists in their locality. The case study below demonstrates how a model could work in Wales.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE OF AN ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAMME

National Theatre of Scotland: Empowering Diverse Artistic Voices

https://www.nationaltheatrescotland.com/for-artists/residencies

Background

The National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) has developed a unique approach to artist residencies that centres on amplifying under-represented voices and fostering innovative artistic creation. As Scotland's national theatre company, NTS is committed to a mission that goes beyond traditional theatrical production, focusing instead on artist-lead ideas that can resonate with diverse audiences.

NTS's AiR programme is built on three core principles:

- 1. <u>Artist-Driven Innovation</u>: the organisation prioritises ideas conceived by artists, believing that authentic, community-rooted creativity leads to the most impactful outcomes
- 2. <u>Audience Inclusivity:</u> residencies aim to develop work that speaks to the broadest and most diverse audiences across Scotland and potentially internationally
- 3. <u>Community Representation</u>: there is a deliberate focus on supporting artists whose voices, stories and communities have historically been underserved by the traditional theatre industry

The National Theatre of Scotland's AiR programme demonstrates a commitment to:

- Nurturing emerging talent
- Supporting interdisciplinary artistic practices
- Amplifying marginalized voices
- Creating art that reflects Scotland's diverse cultural landscape

Chinyanta Kabaso, a dance artist specialising in African and Afro Caribbean diaspora dance, exemplifies the NTS programme's transformative potential.

Their Residency Objectives

- Explore relationships within African dance
- Interrogate personal artistic practice
- Connect with local communities
- Create inter-disciplinary performance work

Their Residency Outcomes

- Artistic Exploration: Kabaso critically examined her dance practice through an academic lens
- Collaborative Development: Kabaso engaged with other artists, including a documentary filmmaker, to broaden her creative approach
- Community Engagement: The residency enabled her to interview local communities and share her work
- Final Performance: Kabaso produced a cross-artform performance that showcased her research and artistic growth

Key Takeaways

- Artists are given resources and freedom to explore and co-create
- Residencies are not just about production, but about artistic development
- The program prioritizes ideas over predetermined outcomes
- There is a strong emphasis on representation and community connection

4.8 dance in further / higher education

Looking to the future of dance education in Wales, stakeholders envision a path distinct from simply replicating undergraduate and postgraduate programmes found elsewhere. Instead, they see an opportunity to forge a uniquely Welsh approach to dance training. At the heart of this vision lies a specialised programme that would cultivate dancers deeply rooted in Welsh cultural traditions, while equipping them with the skillsets to thrive as choreographers, teachers, community practitioners and performers. The model would not necessarily need to be located in one place but could move around Wales according to need. This programme would be at post-graduate level and prioritise artistic growth while strengthening connections between dancers and Welsh communities across the nation. While the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama could be a natural home for vocational dance training and has indicated a willingness to consider development of an MA or MFA course in the future, the model could work in a hybrid way, moving students into industry across the whole of Wales so it is completely responsive to the needs of each individual.

Recommendation 10: Research the potential of a post-graduate dance training model in conjunction with suitable partner(s).

Success metric:

• Suitable vocationally focused Higher Education institutions to consider producing a feasibility study on the viability of running a multi-pathway industry focused post-graduate MA/MFA programme working in conjunction with suitable partners

It is apparent that young dancers from Wales are disadvantaged when attending auditions for further training. As part of this review, there were also concerns raised by some respondents about dilution of quality in dance classes. Across England, Centres for Advanced Training (CATs) provide young people with specialist dance training and help them prepare for careers in dance. They offer training in a variety of styles, including contemporary, ballet, street dance, South Asian and circus. Schemes are funded by the Department for Education (DfE) in England and grants to eligible students are based on the family income. It is recommended that development of a CAT scheme in Wales would prepare dancers for further training and expose them to a variety of dance styles and technique training at the highest level available. If it's not possible to develop a bespoke model for Wales, it might be possible for the Departments for Education in Wales and England to collaborate to make places available for aspiring Wales based artists on an England scheme.

Recommendation 11:_Development of a Centre for Advanced Training (CAT) scheme model with bases in North and South Wales – or – negotiate with the England CAT scheme network to secure places for young Wales based dancers nearest to where they live.

Success metric:

• Improved access to high level training across a range of dance genres for young dancers who are hoping to move into professional dance training



DANCE SECTOR OVERALL SUCCESS METRICS

o Equitable distribution of dance funding across Wales

More equitable revenue funding distribution across Wales would ideally see more revenue clients across the whole of Wales. Infrastructure development milestones would measure impact in this area.

o Infrastructure development

If all review recommendations are implemented, infrastructure developments would be progressive at key milestones over a ten-year period. To ensure effectiveness, all infrastructure models must be designed to collaborate seamlessly rather than cross over each other's delivery models whilst also working with and building on any future developments across the whole of the performance sector. Working in harmony to become a truly pan-Wales eco-system would require linking mechanisms between the AiR programme, the national development agency and the community hub network. Without this integration, there would be a risk of establishing costly, isolated systems that operate in silos.

o Professional retention rates

Evidenced by a decrease in the talent drain from Wales with dancers choosing to return to Wales to work post-training. It would also be evidenced by a freelance dance community that is thriving to the degree that performance opportunities are increased for artists within Wales, negating their need to relocate outside of Wales to have a fulfilling career.

o Community engagement levels

Evidenced by community engagement levels across Wales remaining strong and growing.

• Career progression rate

A persistent gap in the 'ladder of opportunity' prevents experienced dancers from advancing their careers. Evidence of success would be via celebration of the experience and knowledge of mid-career artists with each artist able to develop their practice and progress their careers, rather than repeatedly forced back to starting positions due to project-based funding limitations.

o Audience development levels

Milestone development over a sustained period of time following specific initiatives from the review's recommendations. Increasing performance opportunities outside of traditional venues.

REPORT ENDS

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Appendix 2

1-1 meetings

Acaron, Dr. Thania - The Body Hotel

Angharad, Jên - Artis Community

Arts Council Wales

Ballet Cymru

Baxter, Aisling

Boost, Tommy

Briton, Jesse – Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

Campbell-Moore, Roy

Chappell, Richard – Richard Chappell Dance

Creu Cymru venue members

Davis, James & Philpott, Zoe – Wales Millennium Centre

Defis, Nerys - Welsh Folk Dance Society

Doyle-Roberts, Bridie - Agent for Change

Edwards, Sioned - Eisteddfod

Eldridge, Paula - Lindyhop

Ellis, Louis

Emberton, Gwyn - Jones The Dance

Evans, Emma – Wales Millennium Centre

Evans, Margaret - Eleni

Evans-Ford, Liam - Theatr Clwyd

Gough, Matthew – University of South Wales



Halfhida Vuetta
Halfhide, Yvette
Hallam, Emma - Motion Control Dance
Harrop, Dr. Angharad
Jenkins, Jamie - Coleg Cambria
Jo, Zosia - Joon Dance
Jones, Eleri - Theatr Brycheiniog
King, Marla
King, Penny – Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama
Ladd, Eddie
Lawrence, Kate
Leslie, Struan – Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama
Light, Deborah
Maddocks, Llio - Urdd
Miles-Payne, Louise - Creu Cymru
National Dance Company Wales
Nicholson, Jodi
Patterson, Lauren - Jukebox Collective
Pedley, Rachel - Avant Cymru
Philp, Jack – Jack Philp Dance
Prosser, Louise - Afon Dance
Ramamoorthy, Krisnapriya - Paallam Arts
Ricketts, Chris – National Dance Company Wales
Roberts, Kama
Roberts, Marc - Rhos Consultancy
Roberts, Wynne - The Welfare, Ystradgynlais
Rubicon Dance
Rogers, Sarah - Ransack Dance



Sholem, Ann Sinnadurai, Katy - Brecon Festival Ballet Sirina, Anya - The Workroom, Glasgow Stables, Lottie - Equity (Singers & Dancers) Stenton, Chris - People Dancing Steward, Stirling Wallace, Liam Warrington-Morrow, Craig - Taliesin Weedon, Helen – Arts & Humanities Research Council (Dance) Welsh Folk Dance Society Whitehead, Simon Wilson, David – Aberystwyth Arts Centre Wilson, Heidi - Cardiff Metropolitan University Young, Catherine - Dawns i Bawb Zandersona, Gundija - Kokoro Arts

educational visits:

Dance Competitions Wales/UDO, Weston Super Mare | 03 Nov Greenmeadow Primary School, Cwmbran - Drama Queens dance session | 10 Oct NDCWales Associates class and interview | 13 Oct NYDW ensemble rehearsals + interview | 15 Aug Rubicon BTEC level 3 dance cohorts year 1 & 2 interviews | 07 Oct

performance visits:

Ballet Cymru & NYAW at Riverfront Theatre, Newport | 31 Oct Jo Fong and George Orange *The rest of our lives* at Chapter Arts Centre | 07 Sept NDCWales *Frontiers* at Sherman Theatre, Cardiff | 20 Sept NDCWales *Launch* at Dance House, Cardiff | 10 Nov