

## Clore Leadership-AHRC Online Research Library Paper *The Professional Development Needs of Dancers*

**Author:** Dorcas Walters M.A.

**Supervisor/s:** John Holden, City University

**Year paper completed:** 2011

**Leadership Content Theme/s:** Sector Insights

**AHRC Subject Area/s:** Policy Arts Management and Creative Industries

### **A note on contents:**

Since 2005 Clore Leadership and AHRC have partnered to offer a diverse range of cultural leaders the opportunity to produce a piece of extended research relating to leadership and to their specific cultural discipline. These papers, published from 2023 onward on the Clore Leadership-AHRC online research library, reflect an important contribution to the field and we are extremely pleased to make them available to practitioners, scholars, and other interested parties. We recognise that this research library contains a range of terminologies and outlooks: these are reflective of the significant and ongoing changes within the cultural sector over the past 20 years. As such we urge readers to recognise that the authors' thinking and language may have shifted since completion of these papers, or may be in the process of shifting as consequence of their enquiries.

Unless otherwise stated, research papers included in the Clore Leadership-AHRC Online Research Library have not been formally peer reviewed or published in an academic journal.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/uk/).

## **The Professional Development Needs of Dancers**

### **Introduction**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) refers to study, training or development that is designed to upgrade skills, knowledge and abilities in a profession or job.

Most people who work in the public sector, as well as many in private businesses are encouraged, and often contractually required, to participate in some form of CPD. It is seen as updating and increasing skills and knowledge, improving quality of work and enhancing the competitiveness of the organisation. Yet in the dance profession CPD is rarely addressed in any structured way.

In general, dancers train from a young age, approx 7yrs old and often younger, and if they are lucky they enter full time work around the age of 18 or 19yrs, though many small dance companies (especially contemporary dance companies) do not offer full time contracts, so some dancers will work on a contract by contract basis or have to find freelance work in addition to contract work.

There are approximately 200 dance companies in the UK and more than 800 professional dancers (in both ballet and contemporary dance fields). This does not include those in west end shows or commercial productions and the Equity Union report 3000 members listed as dancers.

It could be assumed that professional development in the dance world happens in the studio and is inherent in the job. Of course a certain amount will happen as a dancer matures technically and artistically, takes on new roles and works with a variety of choreographers, but not all these opportunities are always available to all dancers. A dancer's opportunities for development will be very dependent on the facilities available in their company, the roles they are given, the people they get to work with and the funding available. But, with the possible exception of some freelance dancers or big stars, these opportunities are not in the dancer's control, they are not often free to make their own choices in these matters.

In 2004 the DCMS report Arts Development: Dance said that: *"The dance industry has also informed us that, at present, the sector does not receive enough funding for the on-going professional development of dancers."*

It noted that dancers often subsidise their own on-going development, which enables the profession to flourish. (DCMS, 2004)

The issue of professional development is further complicated and affected by the fact that dancers generally need to re-train and/or change career in mid-life, around the age of 35-40yrs. This makes the development of new and increased skills even more vital, as they are less than halfway through their working life and still have a huge contribution to make to society, art and the wealth of the country.

### **What would CPD look like in Dance?**

A framework developed at Ashridge Management College (Willie 1991) suggested that effective CPD should be:

- Viewed as an investment rather than a cost
- Concerned with improved performance
- About 'learning' as opposed to 'training'
- Linked to both individual and organisational needs

If we apply these principles of effective CPD to dance, a focused development programme would aim to do the following:

- Improve artistic capabilities
- Improve physical capabilities and wellbeing
- Improve psychological capabilities and wellbeing
- Improve wider organisational or dance sector knowledge
- Enhance career transition
- Enhance the skills available to the organisation
- Benefit companies and individuals

Many types of training or development will cover more than one of these aspects.

### **What is the benefit?**

Dancers with a wider range of artistic skills and abilities will contribute to an improvement in performance and creative standards within a company, which in turn will enable the company to attract and retain talent.

Professional development that enhances physical fitness and develops psychological skills relating to confidence, stress, performance anxiety, visualisation and injury rehabilitation could have the effect of reducing injuries and speeding up recovery, as well as enabling experienced dancers to dance for longer, enhancing performance and increasing morale.

Dancers with a greater knowledge of management, fundraising and marketing issues can be more involved in advocating for and promoting the company.

The recent Arts Council Dance Mapping report found that:

*"The workforce needs to be equipped with teaching, entrepreneurial and management skills alongside performance and choreographic skills. Workforce development should take into account the diversity of the field and adopt a more holistic approach to solutions"*

(Burns, S. & Harrison, S. 2009)

According to the DCMS *"The industry must work to reduce the dependency it has on public sector funding (this currently constitutes 43% of all funding it receives), through trying to increase commercial income and income from sponsorship."* (DCMS 2004)

Since so many ex-dancers go on to managerial and other dance related roles in the field, these are the people that need to be equipped with the knowledge, training and development that enables them to take on these entrepreneurial and sponsorship challenges.

So in supporting and funding the development of new skills within the dance workforce, even those skills that may not appear to have an immediate and direct benefit to the output of an organisation are likely in the long-term to benefit and enrich the dance field as a whole, and therefore the future vitality of the dance profession.

## **Research methodology**

This report focuses on the needs of dancers working for dance companies, however the same issues do also exist for freelance and independent dancers.

The research used interviews and online surveys, as well as conversations with several experts involved in training for dancers and my own 18 yr experience as a professional dancer in a large ballet company.

I have also drawn together information from a survey carried out by Dancers Career Development (DCD) an organisation that provides funding and advice for dancers re-training after retirement (DCD Success Rates 2007), as well as from 'Beyond Performance' by The ADVANCE Project; an international study that examines the conditions and challenges that professional dancers face as they experience the inevitable transition out of active performing to the next stage of their lives (Levine, M. 2004).

### **Interviews**

#### **23 ballet dancers**

##### **4 heads of department**

In a regional touring ballet company of medium size (approx 40 dancers and around 50 other staff), which gives around 170 performances a year (based outside London)

##### **7 contemporary dancers**

In a small scale regional touring company (based outside London)

The interviews with dancers were in groups of 2 – 4 people, and those with the Heads of Departments were individual interviews.

The group interviews were loosely structured around several issues and questions, but allowed dancers to bring up issues themselves and discuss their thoughts with each other as well as responding to open-ended questions and ideas. The interviewees were selected randomly according to who was available between rehearsals. They came from all ranks of the company and varied in age from 19 to about 39.

The recurrent issues from the interviews were then used to shape the online survey questions in order to build a broader picture of whether the opinions voiced in the interviews were more widely shared.

### **Online surveys**

#### **Professional dancers – 50 respondents**

#### **Ex-professional dancers – 43 respondents**

The surveys were a mixture of open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions, and were anonymous.

The surveys were disseminated via my existing contacts and passed on to their friends and contacts using email and social networking sites, and respondents were asked to forward them to their friends in the profession. Therefore they are not scientifically balanced and could be biased towards ballet rather than contemporary dancers (since that is my background). Although I have where possible compared my data with that from other existing sources, the data cannot be regarded as completely representative of all dancers, but rather as complementary to the interview data, and as a general indication and confirmation of the issues.

### **Research Findings**

Statistics from the online survey show the following about the dancers' working lives:

#### **Dancers – careers now and in future**

**80%** were full time members of a ballet/dance company  
The remainder were freelance or guest artists

**30%** had been professional for 10-15 yrs  
**24%** for 5-10 yrs  
**18%** for 20+ yrs  
**14%** for 15-20yrs  
**14%** for less than 5 yrs

**64%** envisaged working in, or connected to, dance when they retired from dancing  
**13%** envisaged working in a different field  
**23%** did not know

**50% +** found knowing what to do, finding time to study & paying for courses difficult  
**69%** found it difficult to find courses to do while they were dancing

#### **Ex-Dancers – dance careers and current careers**

**95%** had been members of a full-time ballet/dance company  
**58%** had been freelance for some, or all, of their career

**54%** had danced for more than 15 yrs  
**30%** had danced for 10-15 yrs  
**12%** had danced for 5-10 yrs

**75%** of the ex-dancers still work in or connected to the dance profession  
**23%** work outside the dance profession

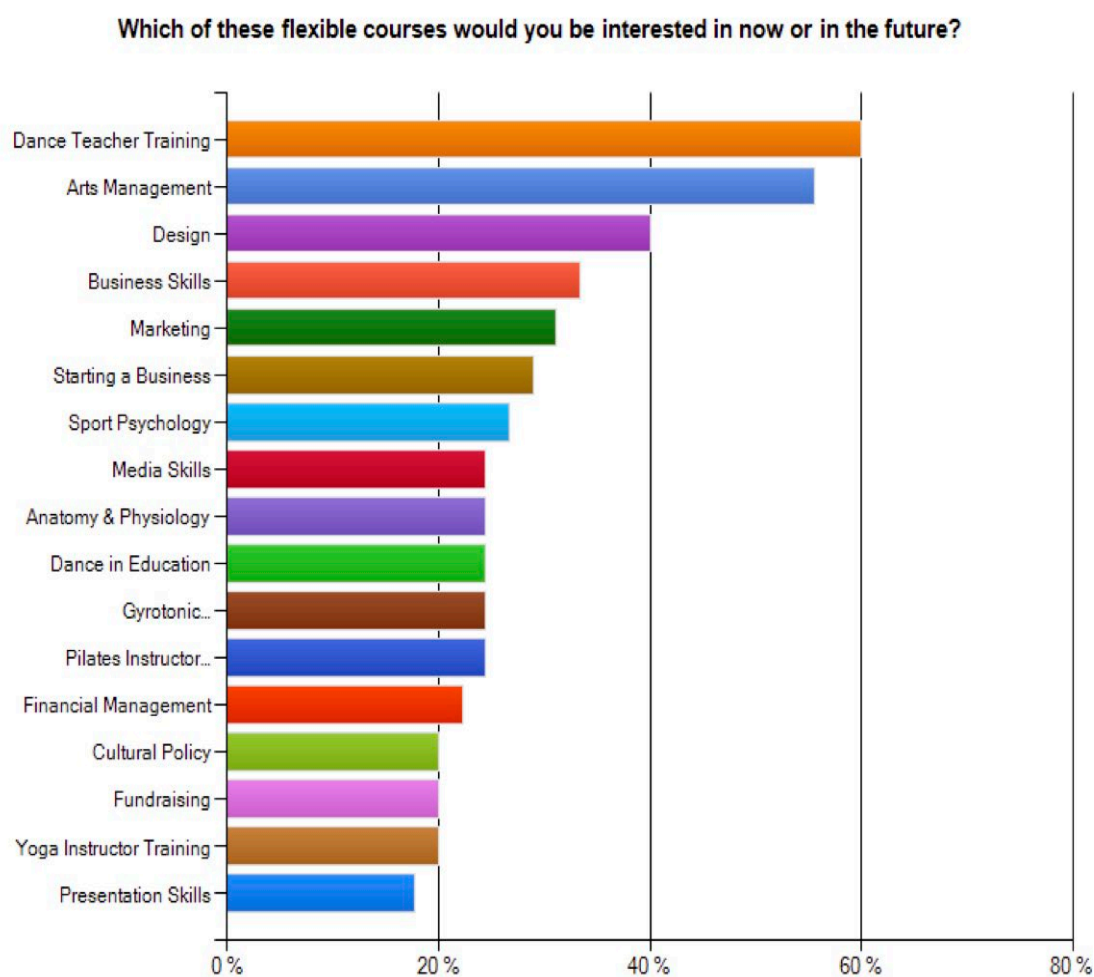
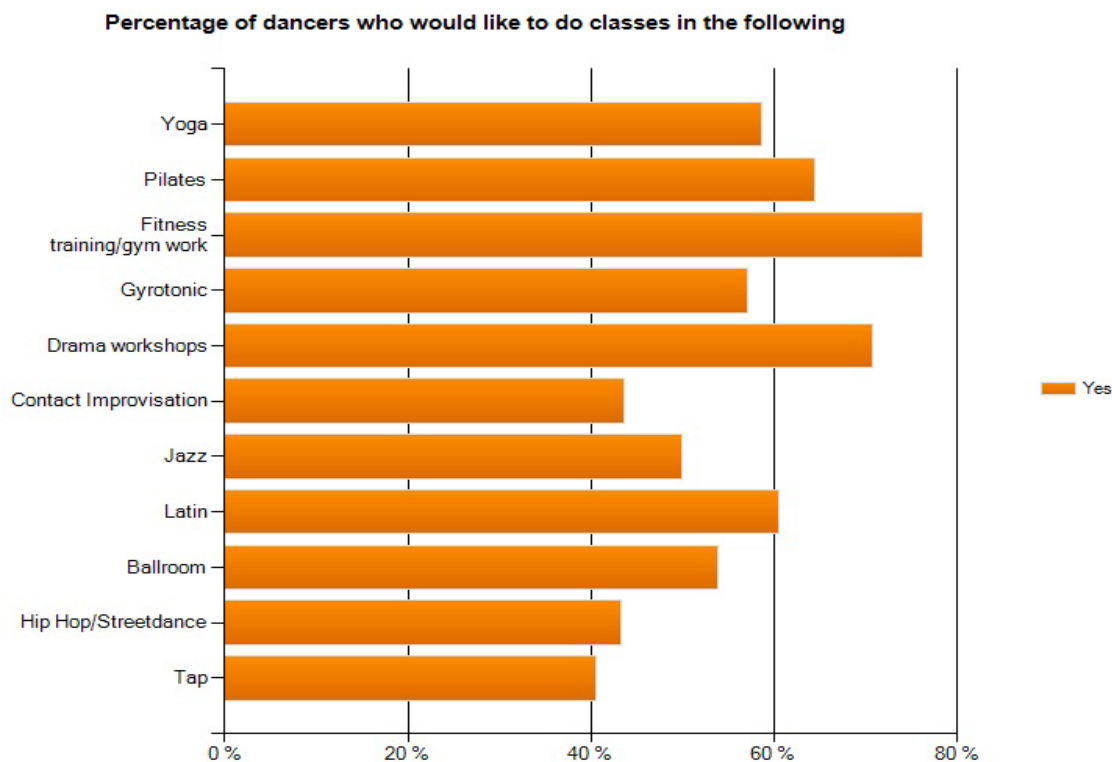
**62%** had benefited from a re-training grant from DCD

**61%** did not do any training or courses while they were dancing

**70%** of ex-dancers are now self-employed or freelance

#### **Artistic development and other training**

The online survey showed the level of interest in a range of different types of development opportunity, from artistic and physical through to academic and career development, and the results shown below confirm many of the responses from the earlier group interviews.



During the interviews many of these development areas were discussed:

### **Dance Classes**

In interviews many dancers talked about the benefits of having a variety of teachers. Some also mentioned they would like the chance to learn a wider variety of styles. Jazz, improvisation, Ballroom, Hip Hop and Latin were all mentioned but it was thought to be most useful if they related to works that were in, or coming in to the repertoire at the time.

*"When we were doing a jazz ballet we had a jazz teacher give us classes to 'loosen us up' because we were too classical, and it worked and we all really enjoyed it"*

*"It furthers your ability as a dancer, adapting to other styles"*

*"Because now choreographers ask you to do stuff that's not in your vocabulary"*

*"Contact improvisation would be interesting, for people that are ballet trained it is so alien... most ballet dancers are terrified of improvising"*

In the online survey 70% of ex-dancers thought that classes in different styles would be beneficial, though only 30% actually had the chance to do them during their career. Among the current dancers Latin, Ballroom & Jazz were most popular, with more than 50% of current dancers being interested in learning these styles.

Of course some of these classes are available at dance centres but they are usually not at the right level for professional dancers and not at times when dancers can attend.

### **Pas de Deux**

'Pas de Deux' (partnering) was brought up in several interviews as an area of professional development that is often neglected after leaving ballet/dance school at around 18/19 yrs. Dancers described suddenly finding themselves, after a few years in the company, with a bigger role requiring more advanced partnering skills and not feeling ready or skilled enough.

Male dancers in particular are still growing and gaining strength during their first years in a company, making it crucial that they keep developing their partnering skills at this time.

*"You come from school then stop having lessons and the next thing you get caught out and if the right person isn't there to help you, you miss all your opportunities. Plus that takes up rehearsal time"*

*"They could do it in-house and have some of the principals teach the younger ones"*

### **Choreography**

Most dancers thought there should be more opportunities for choreographic development such as workshops and intensive courses. 80% of ex-dancers said that dancers and choreographers benefit from choreographic programmes. 50% of dancers wanted more chances to choreograph and over 80% wanted more chances to be involved as a dancer.

The ACE Dance mapping report also highlighted this issue:

*"Dance artists need more time for both creation and research and development. There should be opportunities for new choreographers to experiment in safe environments, be mentored by more experienced choreographers and get feedback about their work from their peers and audiences."*

The chance to work with as wide a variety of choreographers as possible was seen by all as increasing the responsiveness and versatility of dancers which will benefit both individuals and companies.

As some interviewees put it:

*"It limits you if you are working with one person all the time"*

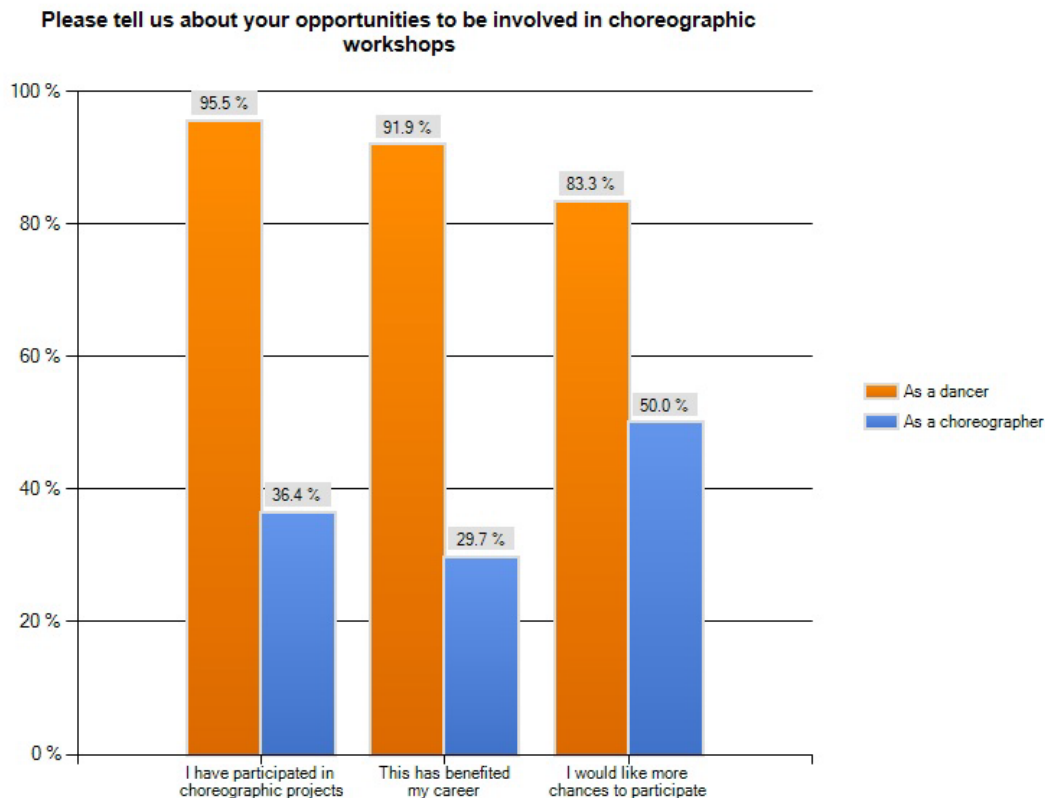
*"You get stuck in one way of working".*

On the whole the contemporary dancers felt they were given good opportunities to develop their own choreography, but said that there was a danger in that a lot of contemporary companies were choreographer led and did not perform work by other choreographers, and that this could limit you as a dancer if you mostly worked in one person's style.

There has in the past few years also been discussion in newspapers and dance journals about why there are fewer and fewer female choreographers, especially in the classical ballet.

*“The present reality of the dance sector is that most managers, choreographers and directors are men. Once in a company, especially ballet, women rehearse most of the time, while men have more time to choreograph. So, when men reach their thirties they have a wider portfolio of experience and works than their female counterparts.”* (Carlés, A. A. 2010)

A panel discussion organised by Dance Umbrella in October 2009 also debated the issue, where issues of childcare, touring and the men being more assertive were brought up, but while the reasons may be varied it is certainly possible that a structured choreographic development programme could go some way to addressing them and encouraging more female choreographers.



### **Bodywork (Yoga, Pilates, Gyrotonic, Fitness Training)**

There was a strong interest in being able to do yoga, Pilates and Gyrotonic classes and fitness training because this would help with injury prevention, rehabilitation from injuries and strengthening. Some larger companies have their own Pilates or Gyrotonic instructors for the dancers, but this company did not, and the majority of smaller companies do not have access to such facilities.

Approximately 70% of ex-dancers thought Pilates, Gyrotonic and/or yoga would be beneficial to dancers and about 50-60% of current dancers would like to do them.

However only 37% of current dancers had had access to Pilates classes and 25% to yoga or Gyrotonic. Some dancers interviewed had managed to go to the occasional yoga class on a Sunday but one of the problems highlighted was that these classes were not at the right level for, or specific to, dancers. Outside of London it can also be more difficult to find independent facilities or classes.

75% of dancers wanted to have access to fitness training or gym work, but while some of the larger companies do have some weights and exercise machines many again do not have access to those facilities or experts to advise on the right type of programme.

The Artistic Director of the ballet company described how male dancers who had been given an upper body programme by the physiotherapist, experienced a considerable increase in strength and stamina, which benefited their performances and recovery. He also said of his own career:

*“If I had known more about how the body works, good technique, fitness and stamina, I might have avoided injuries”*



These types of bodywork are also popular future career paths for dancers, with many becoming Pilates, Gyrotonic & fitness instructors, and it may be that companies could benefit from helping dancers to train as instructors while still in the company, in return for teaching classes.

### **Anatomy, physiology & nutrition**

5 out of the 8 interview groups brought up an interest in anatomy and physiology courses or workshops specifically related to dance, as this would help with understanding technique, injury prevention and rehabilitation. There were also some who were interested in future career opportunities in these areas.

Sports nutrition was another subject that many were interested in because they felt that increased knowledge would have an impact on performance, injury prevention and recovery as well general wellbeing.

Many dancers will learn 'on the job' about anatomy and nutrition from physiotherapists (if the company has its own), but this tends to happen only after an injury has been sustained.

Approximately 60% of ex-dancers and 74% of current dancers felt they would benefit from regular advice from a sports nutritionist.

It was recognised that schools did give some education in these areas, but that quite often it was not specifically related to dance, so was not felt to be as useful as it could be.

### **Drama**

The dancers interviewed all talked about a very positive experience they had with drama workshops that were held some years ago for the company and how it has continued to feed in to the company's approach to their work, the identity of the company and developed their skills as dancers in dramatic roles.

*"It's done an incredible amount for us as dancers, the difference is amazing"*

They said that, although there was some initial resistance, because the whole company did it together, the facilitator was very supportive and the workshop was specifically designed for them as dancers, this encouraged everyone to throw themselves in to it and support each other. However it was noted that this workshop was a one-off and that the positive outcomes would be sustained for longer if it became a regular feature.

It is obvious from the survey that interest in this is not limited to those who have experienced it, as 60% of dancers said they would like the chance to do drama workshops.

### **Sport/Performance Psychology**

Psychological support and/or performance psychology came up in nearly every interview with the dancers. There was recognition that while some teachers were naturally good at developing the psychological aspects of performance, a more structured approach to mental training and psychological support for all aspects of the career is needed.

Some people noted that while there was often access to psychologists in companies and schools, they were generally off-site so required a special trip, appointments had to be requested and they tended to be used only when there was a big problem or after an injury. As a result seeing a psychologist was sometimes stigmatised or seen as a sign of not being able to cope, rather than it being seen as a way to develop skills that will enhance performance.

As an example of the difference in attitude one dancer pointed out that they knew several professional sportsmen who regularly worked with sports psychologists to improve their performance as a contractual obligation. Another dancer said that they would not have returned from a previous injury if it had not been for the help from a psychologist.

75% of dancers in the survey also thought dancers should have regular advice from a sports psychologist.

### **Dance Teacher Training**

A large number of dancers move in to teaching when they retire from the stage, but at the time of writing there are only 2 courses designed for a professional dancer to gain a teaching qualification (though neither are as yet accredited). The Royal Ballet School course runs over the course of 1-2 years involving 1 or 2 days p/week in term time and the Royal Academy of Dancing course runs for 12 consecutive weeks full time.

To do either of these courses a dancer would need to have already retired, or take time off work (if allowed), and be able to go to London for the training.

The online survey showed that 60% of dancers would be interested in a teaching qualification which they could complete while still working, and that did not require time off work.

Companies and associated schools could also benefit from enabling this and having practising dancers who are also qualified to teach.

### **Career transition**

This is a very complex subject and there are a lot of issues in relation to career transition, however, for the purposes of this research I was only looking at issues surrounding the availability and types of courses or training required by dancers. The issues that were repeatedly brought up were those of just not knowing what they might want to do, and then having identified areas of interest, the difficulty of getting qualifications or gaining new skills while still dancing.

The prospect of transition brought up practical, psychological and financial worries relating to re-training that can have an impact on what dancers choose to do and when.

#### **- Identifying a path**

Most of the dancers interviewed said they needed more help in identifying what transferable skills they have, and what other careers would suit or interest them. They actually need this kind of help many years before they stop dancing in order to prepare for transition and make choices about what courses, training or development opportunities to follow. In general dancers are willing to put in the time and are very self motivated but they often don't know where to start, consequently they find the idea of career transition "scary".

*"I think about it, but it all kind of goes round in my head and I don't get anywhere"*

*"Well where do I start. I bet there are ideas in there but I can't get them out"*

*"It's not even the preparing, it's the making your mind up what you're going to do. You've been in dance so long that the only logical things that come to you are teaching, choreographing or something in dance"*

*"Maybe if the DCD could do taster days or workshops for different careers?"*

Extensive research in to dancers' transition carried out by 'The aDvANCE Project' (Levine, M. 2004) said, **"Dancers do not fully explore career options whilst dancing for fear it will jeopardize their career"**.

This sentiment was borne out in my interviews too:

Although in the interviews many dancers felt the Director of this ballet company was more supportive and open than most to discussing career options without it jeopardising your career, this was still an issue for lots of dancers.

*"You feel if you are seen doing something else it might affect your career"*

*"You're not supposed to have time for anything else, just ballet ..... they will think you're not interested anymore and stop casting you"*

Several dancers talked about how more could be done within companies to help dancers make a gradual transition and in preparing mentally for transition.

*"My friend went straight from performing to do a teachers course, there was no transition, no help and basically she had a breakdown"*

However, it was noticeable that the ballet dancers found the prospect of transition more frightening than the contemporary dancers, which the contemporary dancers put down to the fact that right from the beginning their careers were more freelance and unpredictable. Consequently they have to be more proactive and resourceful about their careers and are more likely to develop a wider network and alternative career skills from early on. The contemporary dancers also felt that their training differed in that it was more about individuality and personal development than traditional ballet training.

*"Here (in the contemporary company) the Director encourages leadership, teaching and choreographic skills which is very important in transition and I don't think you get that much in ballet companies"*

### - Courses & qualifications

Whether they have identified an area of interest or are still doing so, dancers need more opportunities to start preparation for their transition before they stop dancing professionally.

Among my interviewees were many dancers who had enrolled in short Open University courses but there were real limitations to the types of courses they could realistically fit in to their unusual schedule. A number of those interviewed had either done, or were doing, Open University short courses or other distance learning courses. Some chose to do a course just to "keep the brain going" and some were pursuing something as a step to a next career. In all cases they found it difficult to fit the work in to their schedule and meet essay deadlines, and most could not attend tutorials. One dancer had tried to do a weekend Business Link course but had had to cancel 3 times due to last minute changes in the rehearsal schedule.

*"The fact that we don't know our schedule more than a few days in advance, travel around and work evenings means we just can't participate in outside courses"*

It was suggested by some that if dancers were allowed a certain amount of study/development leave per person then they could probably attend some weekend or shorter courses.

Issues of cost and suitable quiet places to work during breaks were also brought up, as well as just having the energy to take on extra work.

However, the main issue in relation to courses & training is that there just aren't enough suitably flexible courses for dancers in the areas they want to study, so more often than not study and re-training has to be left until after retirement from the stage.

Shadowing was discussed as a great chance for a dancer perhaps several years away from transition to learn new skills. One dancer who is now a stage manager was allowed to shadow the stage manager in his company. He had planned to stop dancing earlier but is very glad he allowed himself the extra time to come to terms with the end of his career while beginning to find out about his new chosen path. He felt this made his whole transition process and subsequent training, much easier and less stressful.

The Director of the ballet company also said that before becoming a Director he would have benefited from training in a variety of business related areas as well as opportunities to shadow other Directors and see how they worked.

The Communications, Fundraising and Learning department Directors all said they would love to be able to involve the dancers more in what they did, but that the dancers' schedule seemed to make this extremely difficult.

*"The dancers are an incredible resource because they have the passion and knowledge. If they could come to meetings sometimes it would make all the difference"* (Communications dept.)

*"To have dancers who could develop and lead workshops but also have the ballet background would be invaluable"* (Learning dept.)

This was also reiterated in the New Directions Report:

*"As a dancer you don't often find you are involved in the company vision. Our knowledge and experience is not tapped in to. The transition process needs to start within the company. Dancers need to be seen as more than just machines who execute steps."* (Burns, S. 2010)

### - When preparation for transition should start

We also talked about when the right time was to start preparing for transition and a lot of people felt that it was best start focussing on it when your dance career was slowing down, because when you were at the beginning of your career you didn't really want to think about anything else.

*"The trouble is at the beginning you are so terrified about keeping your job, that every minute of the day you are in the corner doing an exercise!"*

*"But you never know, injuries can come from nowhere and if you haven't done anything earlier on then you could be left with nothing and you have to retire."*

One person pointed out that the early career is often the time when you have less work and could more easily find the time to do a course, whereas if you make it to soloist your workload increases.

However another said that gaining qualifications part-time can be very time consuming and to get an Open University degree could take several years, especially if you have to start with a foundation course, so you need to start early.

*"You should think seriously about it after your first operation!"*

On the other hand the Artistic Director also pointed out that if a dancer spent too much time thinking about a future career early on there was a danger they might not make the most of enjoying what was already a short career. However he was also very keen on enabling dancers to take several years developing new skills and choosing a new path before retiring from dancing, because 1 year was too sudden.

The biggest difficulty for the Director was that *"conversations about career transition often don't work because the dancers think you are trying to get rid of them"*

Another issue that came up was that for dancers who are not based in London (and often for those who are) it is extremely difficult to see any other dance companies perform or attend other cultural events and performances, because they finish work too late, work 6 days a week and get so little notice of their weekly schedule. The effect of this is to isolate them from what is happening elsewhere in the dance world as well as the broader arts or business sectors, which in turn can limit their horizons and experience of other career possibilities.

The company director agreed that *"Dancers should take an interest in all art forms and be able to go to theatre, art and music that will inform them as artists"*.

### **Factors that affect or prevent development needs being met**

***"Professional development should be a priority but it doesn't get tackled because of time constraints and because no individual has responsibility" (Department head – non dancer)***

The main reasons why so much of this does not get addressed effectively are fairly straightforward:

1. Time & work schedules
2. Provision of services
3. Money
4. Organisational support

#### **1. Time**

Time is always going to be an issue for a busy touring company, but there are examples of dancers taking courses and degrees while dancing, so there is a willingness to find the time and make sacrifices to achieve the ends. The degree run by Birmingham University and Birmingham Royal Ballet is run entirely around the company schedule and does not require dancers to lose any of their normal working time, but does require time to be spent in organisation and liaison by the Education department.

The issue of scheduling came up regularly in interviews with both dancers and other departments, because of the impact it has on the ability of all those parties to plan any aspect of their work, study or lives. Many companies do not plan the daily rehearsal schedule until the end of the previous week and some only 2 days before, and very often the contract allows for changes of any sort just 1 day in advance. This makes it impossible for dancers to book courses or classes of any sort outside of work, but also means that other departments are often unable to involve dancers in their work because they cannot plan this in advance. I would suggest that although some degree of flexibility will always be needed, an attempt to improve advance notice of schedules could have benefits to all and merely needs some creative thinking and persistence.

#### **2. Provision**

The availability of suitable flexible courses is the biggest issue, and it is clear that there are not enough options for dancers. In Beyond Performance (Levine 2004) **"Flexible College and University Programs which target the needs of 'non-traditional' students and provide credits for 'life experience'"** as well as **"On-the-job Arts Management and Leadership Training programs where**

**they can gain necessary skills to build careers in arts administration and which can provide critical field entry points”** are cited as vital to the transition process.

BRB (Birmingham Royal Ballet) education department in partnership with Birmingham University pioneered a Masters Degree programme designed especially for the dancers around the company schedule and enabled dancers to gain an MA, MPhil or BPhil in 3 years part-time study. This requires flexibility on the part of the University and tutors, and an agreement about equivalence of professional experience for entry requirements, since many dancers will not have the normal academic qualifications of university students. So far this is the only course of the type to be available in this country.

In the online survey, gaining a qualification was important to 56% of dancers, but 67% also said that they were more interested in work experience or just a good quality relevant course. Therefore non-accredited courses could also be a valuable option for many areas of study.

Provision of such training, if it is to be widely available, needs to take in to account the varying performance schedules of dancers in companies, as well as those of freelance dancers, short notice of schedules, significant numbers of foreign nationals with varying degrees of English, and possible lack of formal qualifications, balanced against the unusual determination, commitment and creative intelligence of dancers.

### **3. Money**

Much of the provision discussed here could actually be met within companies without costing much, since the expertise is often already there. For example partnering classes taught by company soloists/principals who are interested in being involved, need only to be fitted in to the schedule, and would give teaching experience to older dancers increase the skills of the younger ones and help to develop a mentoring culture.

Existing departments could also be utilised in delivering introductory workshops/courses on dance in education, marketing, fundraising etc. Admittedly this would require time from already busy people, but it would also have a payback in the form of dancers whose knowledge & skills can be more effectively tapped into and may benefit the company in future.

Several interviewees in the ballet company talked of their trial ‘Company Days’ in which all departments, including dancers, got together and worked in mixed groups on a project relating to the company. They all described this as extremely useful and something that should be developed further. It was also suggested that something similar could be developed as a form of induction for new employees.

The ability of dancers who are fairly low paid to afford courses is an issue, but this is often more of an issue for freelancers. If course fees are not too high dancers will be willing to pay what they can afford in order to gain the skills they see as valuable. For those who qualify there are also re-training funds available from the DCD (Dancers’ Career Development) and it may be that a combination of existing funding, new funding, and contributions from dancers and companies could allow many of these courses to happen.

### **4. Organisational support**

It is clear that many dancers feel a pressure to prove their dedication to dance by not being seen to do anything else or have other interests, and a change in this culture can only be brought about by conscious effort on the part of managements. However, funders can play a role here in providing incentive and support for organisations to change, in the same way some regularly funded dance companies have been encouraged or required to contribute to the Dancers Career Development fund.

Companies are constrained by not having enough staff or money to provide or organise ‘extra’ services, but small changes to provision by utilising talent within the organisation, communicating a willingness to support development, and some creative approaches to solving the problems could all make a considerable difference at very little cost.

In addition, if a single national centre were to provide advice, courses and co-ordination of development and training programmes then costs to companies in terms of time and money could be minimised and a greater equality of provision achieved, rather than the current dependence on individual companies, individual managers and local training provision.

### **Conclusion: A CPD Programme for Dancers**

The interview and survey findings both showed the need for a range of development opportunities covering artistic, physical, psychological, and career transition areas.

Increasing these opportunities can be linked to benefits for individual dancers, dance companies and the wider dance sector, since even after a performing career the majority of dancers work in areas connected to or benefiting dance such as teaching, company management, choreography, design, advocacy or dancer health.

This was also clearly highlighted by the Arts Council Dance mapping report in 2009, which said: *"The workforce needs to be equipped with teaching, entrepreneurial and management skills alongside performance and choreographic skills"* (Burns, S. & Harrison, S. 2009)

So an effective and rounded CPD programme for dancers would involve:

- A wider range of flexible learning opportunities available to dancers during their dancing careers
- Opportunities to develop dance related and arts related entrepreneurial and management skills, that will improve career transition possibilities and extend the ways in which dancers can work within the company
- Opportunities to experience classes and workshops and well as teacher training in a variety of techniques and styles that will improve and enhance a dance career, including drama, fitness, Pilates, Gyrotonic, yoga & partnering
- More chances to be involved in choreographic development, with a structured programme to develop new choreographers, and for dancers to work with a range of choreographers
- More psychological support for performance & opportunities to develop knowledge of sport and dance psychology to enhance training and performance as well as career transition
- Earlier help in choosing a focus for future training, such as coaching mentoring and career advice
- The fostering of a creative, learning environment within companies, that encourages and supports the development of new skills and positively supports the transition process

The various areas of professional development highlighted during the research can be viewed as falling in to one the following 3 categories:

#### **1. Dance skills**

These are most overtly related to the job of a dancer and can have an immediate positive impact on the performance standards, artistic capabilities and creative output of a company.

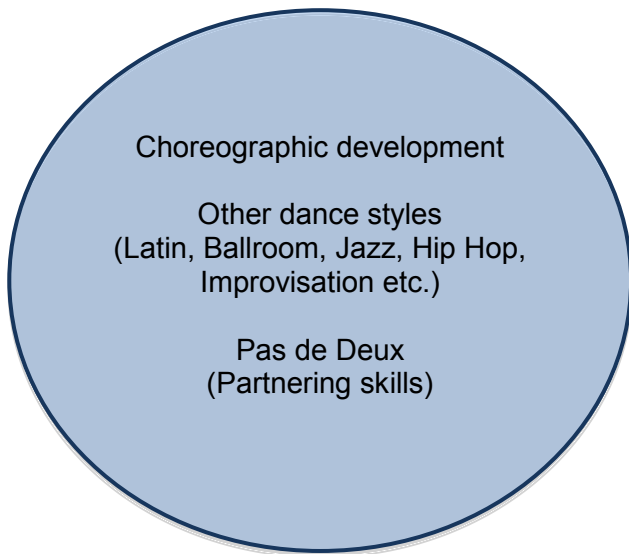
#### **2. Skills directly related to dance**

These can have an impact on performance standards, artistic capabilities, physical capabilities and psychological health, either immediately or in the longer term. They may also provide possible career transition opportunities.

#### **3. Skills indirectly related to dance**

These are most likely to benefit career transition and eventually the dance sector as a whole, but could also have more long term benefits to companies because dancers with these skills could be involved in other aspects of the companies' work (such as fundraising or education) and could even be re-employed by the company in other roles.

### 1. Dance skills



### 2. Directly related skills



### 3. Indirectly related skills





### **How can it be provided?**

Government, The Arts Council of England and dance organisations such as Dance UK and DCD, have all highlighted the need for more support in the area of professional development and career development for dancers.

The DCMS report in 2004 said:

*"We believe that it is imperative that dancers are paid sufficient amounts to cover any training costs, or that support should be given to them to enable participation in development courses so that their future careers are not hindered."*(DCMS 2004)

So how can development needs be met, and support be provided?

1. Areas of development that fall in to the 'dance skills' category can to some extent be provided in-house by dance companies that are willing to put in the organisational time; such as Pas de Deux classes, choreographic development and dance classes. The cost would not be prohibitive and in some cases the expertise would exist within the company.

This would not though provide access for independent or freelance dancers and very small or project based companies would find it much harder to include them in their work practice without extra funding. However, may be an opportunity for larger companies to partner with smaller companies and to open up development programmes or classes to independent dancers.

2. In the case of the 'directly related skills' some of the expertise to teach these skills may exist within the company, but in many cases professionals would probably need to be brought in. However there are many ex-dancers working in these fields and in the case of Yoga, Pilates, Gyrotonic & Fitness it would also be possible for dancers who had trained as a teacher in some of these disciplines to give classes to company members. In this way companies could play a positive role in a dancer's career development and benefit from the increased skills.

With many of these skills there are two possible types of provision, the first being informative workshops, regular classes or short courses, and the second being training leading to a qualification. Some dancers would only want to participate in the first while others might go on to gain qualifications.

While one-off workshops or classes may be relatively easily arranged, training courses with a longer timescale and perhaps accreditation are much more labour intensive to organise. As we have seen, existing qualifications do not fit the requirements of working dancers, but if funding was provided to organise flexible programmes, then I believe the interest exists.

3. Many of the courses and types of training that fall in the indirectly related skills group exist already, both accredited and non-accredited, but not in a format that allows dancers to participate. One or two companies have managed to develop some courses for their dancers and there have been one-off courses for independent dancers, but this means that the work involved in setting up partnerships and courses is often being repeated by different companies, or achieved in one company and not in others. It would seem that a co-ordinated programme working in partnership with the relevant trainers or education institutions, that served all dancers regardless of which company they are in, could ensure that the opportunities were equal, more widely available and ongoing rather than short-term or one-off.

In short, with current funding levels, time constraints, and limited staff, dance companies cannot realistically be expected to meet all these needs themselves, but an independent organisation with appropriate funding could act as a facilitator and provide ongoing courses and support services in partnership with educational and training institutions, dance organisations, companies and dancers.



## **Bibliography**

**Carlés, A. A. (2010)** – ‘Dancing to a Different Tune’, Arts Professional Magazine Nov. 2010

**Burns, S. (2010)** – *Report on ‘New Directions: A Symposium to Discuss the Career Progression of Dancers’*. The Dancers Career Development, The Clore Leadership Programme & Paul Hamlyn Foundation, London

**Burns, S & Harrison, S. (2009)** – ‘Dance Mapping, A Window on Dance 2004-2008’, Arts Council England

**DCD (2007)** – DCD Success Rates 2007, Dancers’ Career Development

**DCMS (2004)** – ‘Arts Development: Dance’, *Sixth Report of Session 2003–04*, House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

**Levine, M. (2004)** – ‘Beyond Performance: Building a Better Future for Dancers and the Art of Dance’, New York: the aDvANCE Project.

**Willie E. (1991)** – ‘People Development and Improved Business Performance’. Ashridge Management Research Group, HMSO