

Written evidence submitted by One Dance UK, Sector Support Organisation for Dance

One Dance UK is a registered charity which supports and represents all those working and taking part in dance in the UK, the Sector Support Organisation for dance in Arts Council England's National Portfolio, working to remove barriers and promote the national profile and diversity of dance for everyone in the UK, and also the Subject Association for Dance in schools.

The UK is a global leader and innovator in dance.

A flagship creative industry, the UK dance sector boasts world-class companies such as English National Ballet, The Royal Ballet, Akram Khan Company, Hofesh Shechter Company, Rambert and many more, alongside a myriad of independent artists, teachers, leaders and practitioners who bring a broad range of dance activity to audiences and participants across the UK and the rest of the world. There is a complex ecology, and individuals and organisations alike depend on an intricate blend of activity that includes government-funded, partially subsidised and income-generating work which has developed over decades to develop and sustain a diverse workforce.

Most recent statistics show that the UK dance sector is made up of a 40,000 workforce, and the sector provides employment for not only dancers but also artistic, administrative and technical support staff as well educators, musicians and a wide supply chain of individuals and businesses supporting the sector. 17,000 members of the workforce are dancers and choreographers (with 12,000 of these working as freelancers/self-employedⁱ).

BBC's Strictly Come Dancing is regularly watched by over 10 million viewers; 17% of adults engage in dance; dance attendance is growing with over 11.2% of the population attending dance performances; 4.8 million people participate in community dance each year in England; dance is one of the most popular activities amongst young people in curricular PE and in extra-curricular time; and 4,500 dance degrees are awarded per year.

The freelance dance workforce is a significant contributor to the UK's knowledge based economy, reducing public expenditure on national healthcare, improving labour productivity, and increasing national income through tourismⁱⁱ.

As well as being a celebrated UK art form, dance has a unique and important role to play in education, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, technological advancement, social mobility and diversity.

1. What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

The impact on dance activity has been immediate and severe. Our members say the impact will be felt for between 6 months and 3 years, and over half expect their income to decrease by at least half or moreⁱⁱⁱ. A large portion of activity takes place in either theatres or studios, and all theatres and dance spaces (including multi-use arts venues, dedicated dance houses and buildings, dance studios, village halls and community

centres) have been closed for nearly three months. Timescales for reopening remain unclear. International work which normally generates significant income has stopped.

- 1.1 Freelancers make up the majority of the arts workforce in general, and in dance specifically. At the onset of the pandemic freelancers lost all work for weeks and months ahead, and many for the rest of the year. Many dance freelancers are ineligible for government support schemes, and this particularly impacts diverse practitioners.
- 1.2 The BAME community, and disabled artists and practitioners have been particularly hardly hit by the pandemic and the control measures put in place. Organisations and individuals working with these communities have come under strain to provide grief counselling, or address grief, loss and fear. BAME organisations and individuals are less successful in securing funding and have been doubly impacted in resourcing online and digital work needed to maintain profile and presence in communities.
- 1.3 Most participation in dance has had to stop. Whilst professional dancers and students have had to try and maintain daily training in kitchens and living rooms, and teachers have delivered as much of their work as possible online, young people who may only engage with dance at school have been deprived of the important contribution it makes to the physical and mental education and wellbeing, and there are very real and worrying impacts on the physical and mental health of professional and non-professional participants of all ages.
- 1.4 Small scale venues and some building-based organisations have lost revenue from studio hire, participatory and class programmes, HE courses, as well as restricted income from participatory work funded by Trusts and Foundations, in addition to the box office income that touring organisations and larger venues have lost.

2. How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

Government and arts councils' support schemes have thrown a lifeline to the sector, and the speed and clarity of the response from Arts Council England (ACE) has been particularly welcomed. However, many dance freelancers are not eligible for current support schemes and with freelance and portfolio working more prevalent in dance our sector is disproportionately affected.

- 2.1 Some dance freelancers have been able to access support from arts councils, benevolent funds and the government SEISS scheme, but many are not eligible. Many dance freelancers work on a project basis and are to a large extent reliant on arts councils' project funds, so more clarity is needed on when these funds will reopen and project based activity will be able to resume.
- 2.2 Workers with protected characteristics, and those who are members of or work with the most vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected. There is currently no dedicated support for their emotional and physical fitness. Dance brings

people together, and often those who need this most. This has not been possible with the support provided to date.

2.3 Much participatory work has continued without specific support, but more targeted support is needed in the medium term to provide the workforce (including leaders) with the necessary skills for increased pastoral responsibilities to address mental health and wellbeing amongst colleagues and participants.

2.4 Support is lacking to bridge the gap to fully earning income from diversified sources, which vary at different scales and are not always simply box office receipts. Presenting performances to severely reduced capacity audiences due to social distancing measures is not financially viable, and many buildings need capital investment to make them fully accessible for socially distanced work. Capital funding programmes are currently closed.

3. What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

Recovery will happen in stages, and our sector is likely to be one of the last to fully reopen or recommence all activity. Targeted support will be needed to protect those individuals and organisations not able to restart all aspects of the diverse blend of activity needed to sustain both complex portfolio careers, and diversified business models that in turn sustain the complex national ecology for dance.

3.1 Without urgent and immediate support dance freelancers will not be able to continue working in our sector and their significant contributions to the UK's knowledge based economy^{iv} will be lost. Many are calling for some version of universal basic income available in many other countries to protect those ineligible for government support schemes. BAME freelancers are disproportionately affected.

3.2 Workers with protected characteristics will be more severely impacted if social distancing and isolation measures continue, so may take longer to return to work and will be at a disadvantage in the longer term as a direct result of the crisis with fewer entering the sector and those already in it finding it harder to survive. The diversity of the workforce will suffer as a result without targeted intervention.

3.3 The move to digital and online delivery has encouraged and enabled those who have not previously taken part in dance, but it has also left large segments of those we previously engaged with behind. There is a very real and serious digital deficit which affects those most in need disproportionately and will cause a serious challenge on reopening or recommencing activity which will need to be addressed. Many young people in particular often lack access to the digital devices needed to access online content, and many older people struggle to connect. BAME communities have been more severely affected and participatory work here requires targeted support.

3.4 Research shows that audience confidence in return to performance venues of all types is low and government support for a public campaign to reassure audiences it

is safe to return, and improved accessibility to venues will be vital. Without targeted intervention there will be less diversity in performing arts programming as venues rely on the popular, mainstream and “classics” to bring in mainly white, paying audiences. International touring will need underwriting in the short to medium term.

4. What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

We have built a strong positive working relationship with DCMS Ministers and officials over the past four years, and work constructively with them as a trusted partner helping shape policy decisions whilst ensuring dance-related issues remain on the agenda. We are grateful for regular and consistent engagement with both DMCS and ACE throughout the current crisis, and recognise that ACE in particular have carried out extensive consultation on reopening with a representative cross-section of the sector, but broader and more inclusive consultation is needed.

- 4.1 Freelancers do not feel directly represented in the taskforce or working group structure set up to develop “Covid-secure” guidance for return to work in the performing arts, or sufficiently consulted in the process. Whilst One Dance UK champions and represents the issues most important to dance freelancers (and the sector as a whole), more consideration should be given to their inclusion in consultation and policy development going forward, and better communication even in the face of uncertainty, is needed. Freelancers, drawing on the broad range of their experience and skill, can be an effective part of developing creative solutions.
- 4.2 The lived experience of isolation and/or social distancing that many disabled people have, has great potential to translate into artistic, cultural and social leadership. The move to a medical narrative of disability is unhelpful and tends to segregate a whole community, setting back gains that have previously been made. The language used needs to reflect a social model, and more consideration should be given to this in consultation and policy development going forward. Those with protected characteristics and lived experience also do not feel sufficiently represented or consulted.
- 4.3 It has become clear through our discussions over the past months that understanding of the extensive learning and participation activity right across the arts needs to be improved. There is significant overlap in and across this activity in and beyond dance and the arts more broadly. Participatory activity happens in a variety of contexts, forms an integral part of income generation and audience development, and contributes significantly to education, health and wellbeing, and social care. This presents clear challenges for the development of “Covid-secure” guidance of relevance to those working in our sector, and necessitates broader consultation on recovery plans for the performing arts and/or the cultural sector.
- 4.4 The physical infrastructure for both dance participation and performance is complex. Venues of different types and at different scales operate and are funded in very different ways. Some are subsidised and some operate commercially. Programming of work balances these factors and much of our sector will be affected by a backlog

of programmed and contracted work with opportunities for less commercial and more diverse creative work likely to be limited. Arms-length bodies are not always able to influence commercially run venues, and funded organisations without their own building are often subject to commercial pressures on the spaces they use.

5. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

Our sector is vibrant and diverse. Dance freelancers in particular are highly educated and skilled, passionate and persistent in achieving long-term goals, adaptable and resilient^v, and the sector itself has been entrepreneurial and resilient in adapting to changes in funding and policy, and diversifying income over the past decades. Our sector has responded to the recent crisis in creative and inventive ways, continuing to deliver activity wherever possible, and has embraced the digital realm. However, the crisis has highlighted the precarity of freelancers, and the fact that diversification of income streams has left many organisations even more susceptible to influences on earned income beyond their control. Dance is inherently a way to connect and share in a physical space. Connecting in the digital realm does not have the same resonance, and many digital platforms are not fully accessible. Progress on diversity and inclusion is at risk, and so is the considerable talent of the workforce. More targeted support will be needed to enable individuals and organisations alike to survive and thrive, alongside an appropriate and accessible model to capitalise on creative content and monetise its digital distribution effectively in a way that is equitable for artists.

5.1 Dance freelancers have welcomed direction from ACE for National Portfolio Organisations to prioritise paying freelancers, but this should also be extended to those organisations and projects outside of the National Portfolio to safeguard a fragile but vital part of our workforce. A shift in the power balance between freelancers and regularly funded organisations is needed. When project funds reopen it is likely to be much harder to find partners and match funding, and partners may have to come from beyond the pool of regularly funded organisations. Application processes and criteria may need to be amended with the requirement for regularly funded organisations to provide support to freelance applicants. New models of investment have already been proposed and will be needed in order to safeguard the future of the sector. Freelancers and portfolio working will form an integral part of any future model so need recognised status and dedicated support.

5.2 Accessibility of digital platforms needs to be addressed, and more comprehensive upskilling of individuals and organisations to develop and deliver high quality digital work is essential. Equipment, contracts and rights for this kind of work are complex and all members of the dance workforce need to be enabled to take full advantage of the opportunities the digital realm presents, whilst protecting artists and ensuring equitable outcomes for rightsholders. Diversity and inclusion need to be prioritised in publicly funded activity going forward, and specifically considered in order to safeguard diversity in dance and the dance workforce.

5.3 Whilst many may have been encouraged and enabled to participate in dance through increased provision of online activity, this mode of delivery often excludes those most in need, and physical delivery will remain important. Some children and young people are only able to participate through the limited opportunities the school curriculum offers, and there is likely to be pressure on schools and teachers to focus on delivering core curriculum to make up for lost teaching time. We need to ensure all children and young people continue to have the opportunity to take part in dance, but especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are not able to take advantage of private provision. Longevity and trust have been key to the successful delivery of adult participation, which has been maintained in the short term in most cases, but in the medium to long term targeted support will be needed for both live/physical and digital offers in order to maintain the authenticity and ethics behind what is being delivered. Participation in dance has multiple physical and mental health benefits which are needed now more than ever and must be an integral part of education policy through the recovery and well into the future.

5.4 Whilst there are many purpose-built spaces for dance, many of the spaces used for participation and performance are not fully accessible, and even a modest investment in improving access to physical spaces and digital platforms would have a long-lasting impact on the diversity of the workforce, participants and audiences.

ⁱ Office for National Statistics

ⁱⁱ (2019) The role and impact of Freelancers in the Dance Sector, Aujla, I. & Farrer, R., University of Bedfordshire

ⁱⁱⁱ Dance Sector Covid Impact Survey, April 2020

^{iv} (2019) The role and impact of Freelancers in the Dance Sector, Aujla, I. & Farrer, R., University of Bedfordshire

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