

9. Dance funding and structures internationally

A brief overview of dance development in other countries was undertaken, with a particular focus on interventions which have been made by funding agencies.

The key funding agencies in England, Scotland and New Zealand have each adopted policies or strategies specific to the dance sector in recent years. In Wales, a draft Dance Action Plan has also been produced. Many of the challenges identified during this analysis of the dance sector in Australia were echoed in the debates taking place in those countries:

- the need to provide continuing professional development beyond initial, pre-entry training for dancers
- the need to support proven choreographic and performance talent
- the importance of providing affordable accessible space for rehearsal and development
- the challenge of building and sustaining touring networks, including support for ‘safe houses’ which regularly present dance
- the problem of low remuneration for dance practitioners, and career insecurity.

In New Zealand in 2000 the newly-elected government announced a Cultural Recovery Package which included net additional funding of \$17.78 million for Creative NZ spread over three financial years 2000. A large part of Creative NZ’s additional funding (\$11.08 million to June 30, 2002) has been directed towards stabilising arts infrastructure, including increased funding levels for several dance companies and the provision of recurrent funding for a contemporary dance company, Black Grace Dance Company.

The Canada Council has recently announced the piloting of a funding initiative intended to encourage the presentation of dance, through creation-based partnerships between presenters and artists. The program aims to put resources into the hands of presenters in order to:

- enhance creation and visibility opportunities for professional Canadian dance artists and companies in Canada
- contribute to long-term relationships between artists and presenters and their public
- improve the conditions for creating dance by allowing artists more time in a single community, allowing them to reduce travel costs, develop in-depth relationships with a community, and focus on their work or share the intent of their work with a larger community
- recognise the costs to presenters of providing facilities to artists
- recognise and support the educational costs of in-depth outreach work associated with creation-based residency initiatives.

This holistic approach, evidently an antidote or alternative to the lack of impact and audience development which can result from a pattern of split-week touring, endeavours both to forge a partnership between the presenters and the producing companies, and to encourage longer-term commitments to audience development.

In other countries, the structure of funding and support for dance is often very different from that in Australia. In Germany, for example, some of the leading dance companies (including

leading contemporary companies) are tied in with the finances and corporate structure of Germany's unique network of opera houses.

In France, in the early 1980s, the Ministry of Culture determined that dance should be more equitably spread through the country, rather than being so heavily focused in Paris. To achieve this, the Government selected a range of the country's most dynamic young choreographers, and relocated them to regional centres, with generous funding, to enable them to establish companies, and to build both artistic and audience followings over time. This had the ancillary merit of attracting local and regional funding to supplement central funding. Appropriately dubbed 'D'implantation' this very directive policy is considered by many to have been successful in growing the audience and the industry infrastructure for dance. It is questionable whether such a top-down policy would be feasible in Australia.

Despite the structural differences, the scan of dance development and funding elsewhere did highlight some productive initiatives which merit consideration in an Australian context, including the current Canadian creative-partnerships model (as yet only a pilot) and several elements of the UK's dance infrastructure.

Stepping Forward was a seminal report on dance, published by the Arts Council of England in 1989. It informed the development of the dance sector in England throughout the 1990s and continues to provide the foundation for current dance infrastructure.

In setting the scene, the report's author, Graham Devlin referred to:

... a deeply demoralised and nervous profession. The concerns thus articulated resonate through every scale and almost every style of work—the belief that there is a creative crisis in British dance, for example, or that much contemporary work has lost contact with its audience

Faced with a daunting range of problems, Devlin drew attention to the concerted, long-term efforts that had been made in some other countries (France, the US, Holland, for example), and encouraged a broad-ranging approach to development of the sector, from education and training, through support for new work, to touring and other distribution. Among other things, the report recommended:

1. the establishment of a network of national dance agencies—nine of which were established and continue to operate³⁰
2. that the Dance Panel of the Arts Council of England adopt a more strategic role
3. that stronger emphasis be placed on an audience rather than artist-centred approach to resource allocation
4. that additional resources be secured to fund companies more appropriately; and in the absence of this, that one or two companies be defunded to fund the remaining companies more generously³¹
5. that substantial funding be provided to a Black Dance company (i.e. African dance)

³⁰ There are now a total of 24 national, regional and county dance agencies. Each varies in the precise range of services, but typically they provide support resources for professional dancers, present regular workshops for the community, run projects linking into the education system and, in some cases, entrepreneur professional performances.

³¹ A political firestorm followed, with the principal threatened company, Northern Ballet, generating a record quantity of lobbying correspondence to the Arts Council and the Minister, and forcing a 'retreat' from this recommendation

6. that non-Western dance be nurtured through the proposed regional dance agencies, and through dance training providers
7. that dialogue with the Department of Education should be advanced ‘to clarify the parameters of educational policy from both sides’

Much of the report was adopted and implemented, and the sector is now undeniably stronger, healthier, and in audience terms more popular, than it was 15 years ago³². A glance at the dance infrastructure in London alone gives a hint at what has been achieved. In London, there are now:

- more than 30 venues regularly presenting dance
- four ballet companies, 39 contemporary dance companies (at all levels of operation), six South Asian dance companies, seven African dance companies, 16 physical theatre companies, and seven student dance companies
- 16 organisations offering studio/rehearsal space
- 13 dance management organisations
- 31 organisations offering support or advice to the dance sector.

This is a long way from the ‘creative crisis’ which Devlin described earlier. Of course, not all the problems have been solved. A 2001 Arts Council of England report tells us:

Salaries, salary progression, working conditions and continuous professional development are major issues across dance. For an industry that is entirely dependent on people, the lack of regular, structural investment in its people is remarkable

The Report also refers to ‘a critical shortage of male dancers’, following years of under-investment in dance in schools and in vocational training provision.

Perhaps not all the problems can be solved. But what we can learn from this positive UK experience is that despite dance’s small audiences, and despite its reliance on public funding, with the right level of political will and administrative cooperation it is possible to affect very significant change for the better. That is the challenge.

³² A discussion paper prepared by Peter Alexander for the 1991 National Dance Summit (Directions for the Future of Dance in Australia), written shortly after Devlin’s report, highlighted a familiar list of concerns and issues for the dance sector: the need for stronger promotion, the benefits of residencies and animateurs, the need for dance development centres to support experimental work, and concerns about the adequacy of training provision.