

10. Summary of findings

The purpose of this section is to reiterate briefly those findings from the research which have most strongly influenced our recommendations.

10.1 The sector

The dance sector is small and its activity is largely generated by subsidised organisations. There is no commercial ‘paradigm’ for dance as there is in popular music or film, leaving dance more heavily dependent upon government subsidy than some other areas of artistic activity.

Australian dance and dancers are respected internationally. Demand is evidenced by the engagement of individual dancers, and by international touring of small and medium-scale companies, as well as by the MPAB companies as reported in the earlier Major Performing Arts Inquiry.

In addition to the programs of the major performing arts centres, there are a small number of contemporary performing arts centres which have established a track record for presenting dance. They lack resources, and in some cases physical infrastructure, to sustain a regular, well-promoted program. With the termination of the Australian Government’s Made to Move initiative, touring arrangements for dance are currently uncertain, with no alternative mechanism or circuit having been agreed.

Conclusion: strategic support for dance presenters is necessary to sustain and build the domestic market for contemporary dance.

10.2 The dancers and choreographers

A recent survey by Macquarie University indicated that dancers’ gross income from creative work during the 2001 financial year was a median of \$12,900 and a mean of \$16,700. Only 15% of those consulted thought they had made adequate arrangements for their financial future.

During interviews carried out for the present study, the majority of dancers and choreographers stated that they usually undertake unpaid work during the research and development stage of a project. On extended or major projects it appeared to be common that only a very small proportion of the time invested was remunerated. Several of the more experienced individuals referred to continuing low levels of pay, well into their careers.

Many of the interviewees referred to the need for practical support with administration and marketing. They felt over-stretched, referring to an unreasonable degree of multi-skilling required. Maintaining performance skills required a high level of investment—a significant difference from most other artforms (other than circus and physical theatre).

Independent choreographers referred to the frustration of investing a high level of time and effort into the development of a project, which then enjoyed only a handful of performances. Several indicated there is a need for more producers and production houses to provide an interface between the work being produced and the venues, presenters and audiences.

A significant number of those interviewed were either contemplating resigning or retraining, or had relocated overseas for extensive periods due to a lack of opportunity and lack of financial security in Australia.

More positively, the Dance Board's recent Project Workspace initiative (providing a large number of artists with access to modest grants to cover short-term space hire) was very positively regarded.

Conclusion 1: financial support for dance producers could address some of the administrative support needs of the independent choreographers, and create stronger linkages between the work and the presenters—potentially extending the life of the work.

Conclusion 2: modest financial encouragement could stimulate more frequent involvement in domestic dance creation by Australian dancers who have forged a career abroad.

Conclusion 3: Project Workspace and similar targeted initiatives are worth continuing or initiating in the future.

10.3 Dance training

The tertiary dance sector was reported to have become both more holistic in program content and more inter-disciplinary. Some concern was expressed about the lack of structured support for choreographers in their early years.

Some of the institutions offer graduates the option to periodically rejoin practical classes free of charge to assist them to keep in shape, with perceived benefits for current students through contact with graduates.

Several interviewees noted a shift away from duplication in Australian tertiary institutions. Some programs have been shut down or are being redesigned, with universities being under pressure to find a point of difference for their courses.

Greater cooperation between Australia Council and the tertiary sector was thought desirable. Another opportunity mentioned was a potential link with the professional sector through hire of facilities such as studios when not in use for teaching purposes.

Conclusion: more regular interaction between the Australia Council, the tertiary sector and the producing companies could benefit each of these parties and the sector as a whole.

10.4 The consistently-funded companies

Of 12 companies which have enjoyed consistent funding from the Australia Council in recent years, seven stated that they maintained ensembles. Of these, only one maintained year round employment for dancers. A traditional ensemble is currently the exception not the rule for these companies.

Production costs have decreased 19% over the period representing around 15% of total expenditure in 2002. When Chunky Move production expenditure is excluded, the remaining companies have reduced their production expenditure by a substantial 37%. It appears that reduced investment in production costs is being used to avert operating deficits.

64% was spent on salaries and wages in 2001— a steady increase over the period from 59% of total expenditure in 1996. This increase can largely be attributed to the increase in dancers' awards over the period and the superannuation levy guarantee increase (from 6% in 1996 to 9% in 2002).

While marketing and promotional costs have increased substantially in recent years such expenditure still comprises only 5–7% of total expenditure. Less than half of these companies have a part-time publicist, and only two have dedicated marketing positions. Three companies mentioned rising expectations of professionalism in marketing by both audiences and industry, but an inability for the companies to afford a proper response to this.

The tenure of general managers ranges from one month (at the time of interview) to 18 years, but if Expressions and Leigh Warren are excluded the maximum tenure reduces to five years. One third of general managers have been in post less than 12 months, and more than half for less than three years.

Despite the increase in number of works and performances, the 10 companies providing consistent audience data reported a decrease in paid attendances of 49% over the four years from 1998.

On a consolidated basis, the companies achieved a cumulative minor operating surplus over the seven years to 2002. However, the amount of the consolidated surplus only represents 1% of consolidated income, and several of the companies are in a very vulnerable financial position.

After inflation is taken into account, there has been a 23% real decrease in Australian Government funding and a 63% real increase in state government funding for the 12 companies during the seven years to 2002. With the exception of Chunky Move, the remaining 11 companies have reported a real decrease in overall funding over the seven years to 2002.

Conclusion 1: most of the companies need to rebuild their investment in production costs to maintain high standards; and need the resources and advice to strengthen their marketing and audience development function. Both of these developments should occur in the context of an agreed development plan for each company.

Conclusion 2: training and greater networking should be considered to support the executive staff and, in some cases, encourage longer tenure.

10.5 Other funded companies

These comprised a group of 13 companies, and two other organisations, which have received some funding from federal or state government during the last five years. Seven of these companies were being operated from a home base, yet eight of the 13 had been engaged in international touring. In addition to a relatively high level of international touring (16 international seasons, compared with 24 domestic seasons) the following were noted from a summary of the companies' 2001 activities:

- a low number of performances per company (average 9 over the year)
- a low number of performances per season (between 2 and 3)
- total audiences (including unpaid attendance, for eight companies) of 15,434 for the year, or 1,929 per company. One third of the audiences are accounted for by paid attendances.

Small audiences were attributed to a lack of expertise and resources. Greater investment was needed in marketing to stimulate consumer interest in the sector.

While all companies reported small surpluses, the reality is that these companies are heavily subsidised by their artistic directors. Only one full-time paid member of staff was recorded, with 159 contract staff (95 performers) and 93 unpaid staff (58 performers).

More than any other issue, the interviewees in this ‘project-based’ sample commented on the scarcity of funding, on the time and effort that was involved in the process of applying for funding, and on the de-motivating awareness that there was only a one-in-five chance of securing support.

Other concerns were the lack of affordable venues for rehearsal and performance, and a lack of festivals and contexts to showcase work, especially in Sydney. Presenting venues were reluctant to take risks, and able to provide little support with audience development.

The companies commented on the lack of producers in the dance sector; and on the lack of resources and ‘power’ to seek and secure partnerships with other sectors, including business, local government, venues, and festivals.

A national touring circuit or network was needed for smaller dance companies, and enhanced support for international touring. The overseas market was seen as essential to maintain the viability of dance.

Conclusion 1: the producer role mentioned with regard to independent choreographers would be of equal assistance to the small companies, both in marketing their work, in administration and in managing the funding application process.

Conclusion 2: greater continuity of funding would enable specific companies to develop their infrastructure, work and audiences. This may require more selective targeting of resources.

10.6 Producers

Producers echoed several of the concerns articulated by others, although rehearsal and performance venues, and supporting infrastructure were issues particularly mentioned by producers:

- the great diversity in the dance sector was cited as a strength, along with the number of young people involved in training
- the need for small-scale performance spaces, with support facilities for dancers (such as adequate showers)—because many of the venues which comprised current touring circuits were increasingly hesitant to take the risk in promoting contemporary dance
- the importance of rehearsal and development space to sustain independent choreographers
- the need for the independents to access administration and marketing support and advice.

Longevity of works produced, and continuity of working for the practitioners, were cause for concern.

Some producers referred to a crisis of confidence in the sector, with low morale and high levels of frustration. There was a perception that the Dance Board has less and less money to support the sector. Even the most experienced and accomplished dancers were struggling to secure backing for their projects.

Greater coordination between states, territories and the Australia Council was regarded as a necessary foundation for strengthening the sector, including coordinated support for specific projects. Within the Australia Council itself, greater interaction was needed between the boards, to keep pace with increasingly interdisciplinary arts practice.

Conclusion: producers have the potential to play a vital linking role, and to compensate for the low levels of administrative and marketing infrastructure in the micro-businesses which characterise the dance sector.

10.7 Dance funding

10.7.1 Australia Council

In 1992–93 overall Australia Council funding for dance (including MPAB) stood at \$9.44 million. By 2001–02 this had risen to \$11.52 million. Excluding funding of MPAB companies, funding for other dance stood at \$4.98 million in 1992–93, and at \$4.4 million in 2001–02. After adjusting for inflation this represents a decline in real terms of \$1.95 million between 1993 and 2002.

The Dance Board provides 26% of overall Council funding to the dance sector. 62% is routed through MPAB to the major companies, with the remainder routed through ATSIAB, AMD, CCDB and New Media Arts. The spread of dance funding, especially between the Dance, ATSIA and CCD Boards, raises the question of whether more institutionalised and frequent communications should be established between these boards to ensure they are working with common direction, where this is appropriate and advantageous to the sector.

The proportion of unsuccessful applications to the Dance Board by individuals is of concern. Many of the individual practitioners interviewed commented on the time and effort taken to apply for funding—and a significant number indicated that they were now discouraged from applying because of the poor chances of success. Most of these practitioners do not have access to an administrator, and may be constrained in their ability to spend time contacting and exploring possibilities with Australia Council officers.

Conclusion 1: with Dance Board funding representing a minority of Australia Council dance funding there is a need to enhance discussion on common directions and priorities between different areas of the Council to maximise the organisation's overall impact on the dance sector.

Conclusion 2: systems should be reviewed to identify whether the administrative burden of the application process can be simplified, especially for individual dancers and choreographers.

10.7.2 Playing Australia

The Australian Government also supports dance through Playing Australia, to assist with the costs of dance touring across the country. During the last five years, there has been a trend towards Playing Australia funding being allocated increasingly to the MPAB dance companies, with a decreasing proportion of funding being allocated to other dance companies.

10.7.3 Combined national funding

Consolidated dance funding from the Australia Council, states and territories and Playing Australia grew from \$17.61 million to \$23.68 million in the five years to 2002, a cash increase of 34%, and an inflation-adjusted increase of 19.3%.

When funding to MPAB companies is removed, combined dance funding is seen to have risen from \$9.1 million to \$11.4 million, a cash increase of 25%, and inflation-adjusted increase of 10.1% during this five-year period. However, since 2000 while total dance funding rose from

\$19.64 million to \$23.68 million, funding for non-MPAB companies (and individuals) increased from \$11.64 million to just \$11.82 million, a cash increase of \$180,000, and an inflation-adjusted *decline* of \$1.14 million³³:

Conclusion 1: with Australia Council funding of dance comprising approximately 50% of all federal, state and territory funding, there will be value in exploring common ground and common priorities between the Council and other funding agencies to identify areas where joint or coordinated action could benefit the dance sector.

Conclusion 2: there is a case for increasing investment in the non-MPAB dance companies, both within the Australia Council and more broadly, in order to address recent decline in real-terms funding, and to address specific needs identified in this report.

³³ CPI 126.2 in 2000, and 137.6 in 2002