

3. Overview of sector

3.1 Introduction

The infrastructure of the subsidised dance sector comprises primarily:

1. Funded companies
2. Independent choreographers and dancers
3. A small number of producers
4. The Ausdance network
5. Physical facilities—rehearsal and performance space

3.2 The funded companies

An ABS survey of performing arts in 1999-2000 included 21 subsidised (funded) and 17 non-subsidised producing dance organisations. Combined income of the subsidised organisations was reported at \$42.1 million and of the non-subsidised organisations \$1.5 million:

Chart 3.2a Subsidised vs. non-subsidised dance companies 1999-2000



Total employment in the subsidised organisations was 530, and in the non-subsidised organisations 90 (i.e. 85% of employment occurred in the subsidised organisations).

The dance sector is small and its activity is largely generated by subsidised organisations. Unlike some other sectors within the performing arts (music, film, publishing, and occasionally theatre) there are very few opportunities for dance companies and dance practitioners to exploit successful work on a commercial basis. There is no commercial 'paradigm' for dance as there is in popular music or film.

For this Analysis, combining data from the Australia Council with that from state and territory arts departments, a total of 58 funded dance companies have been identified.

The five MPAB dance companies are funded by both Australia Council and the states. They include:

- Australian Ballet
- Sydney Dance Company
- Bangarra Dance Theatre
- Queensland Ballet
- Western Australian Ballet.

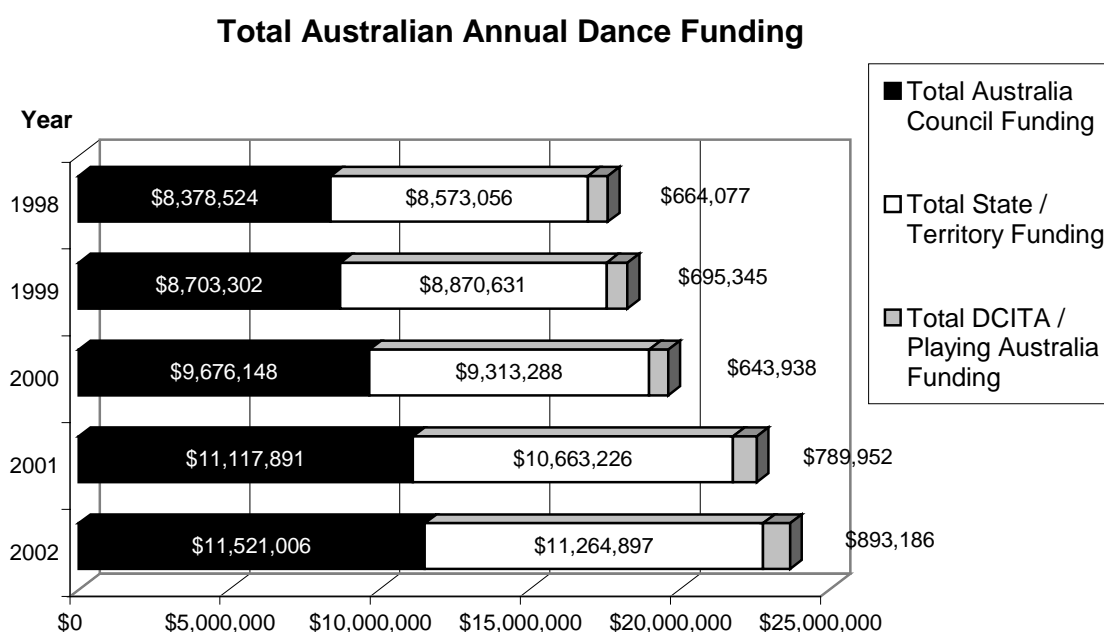
Of the remaining 53 dance companies:

- 12 were consistently funded by the Australia Council and state governments during the five years to 2001
- 9 dance companies received annual funding from their state
- 32 dance companies have been funded by their state or by the Australia Council for part of the five year period to 2001 for specific time-limited projects.

In summary, excluding the MPAB companies, the analysis includes 21 companies² which enjoy sustained or regular funding, supplemented by 32 companies which exist on a project basis—that is, they may be brought into existence temporarily to deliver specific projects.

The Australia Council’s overall support for dance in 2002 represented approximately 49% of total federal, state and territory dance funding:

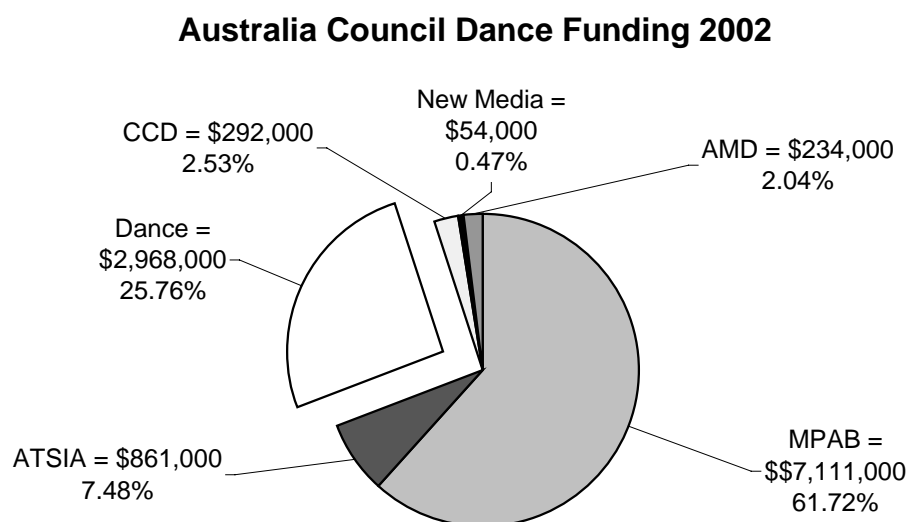
Chart 3.2b Total Australian Annual Dance Funding 1998–2002



While the Australia Council’s Dance Board is the ‘specialist’ body concerned with support for the dance sector, its grant distribution represents only a small proportion of the Australia Council’s total funding for dance:

² Excluding both Ausdance National and the Australian Choreographic Centre, which supports dance production, but is not a producing company

Chart 3.c Total Australia Council Dance Funding 2002



This study focuses on work funded by the Dance Board. For this reason, while no primary research has been undertaken with the MPAB companies for this report, earlier data from the Major Performing Arts Inquiry has been reviewed, alongside subsequent data gathered by the Australia Council.

Partly because of the scale of the work, the presentation of classical ballet is largely undertaken by the MPAB companies, supplemented by occasional visits from international companies. Most of the other small-to-medium scale companies subsidised by either Australia Council or state governments are engaged in the production of contemporary dance, and this therefore forms a primary (but not exclusive) focus of this analysis. The sector, however, includes a number of other types of practice:

- youth dance
- community dance
- Indigenous dance
- folkloric dance.

There are dance practices which cannot be adequately described by these shorthand terms, including cross-artform work which embraces new media and other means of expression, and work rooted in specific folkloric traditions but adapted through contemporary interpretation.

Regarding Indigenous dance, it is worth noting that, while organisations such as Woomera Aboriginal Corporation (Mornington Island Dancers) and the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre maintain and present traditional Aboriginal dance, Bangarra Dance Theatre is the only consistently funded company which fuses Indigenous culture with contemporary practice—this is different from theatre, where there are several contemporary Indigenous companies operating around the country³.

The Dance Board of the Australia Council has a focus on supporting contemporary practice, interpreted across a range of genres.

³ Contemporary Indigenous dance work has occurred on a project basis, e.g. though links between Dance North and Mornington Island Dancers

3.2.1 Choreographers and dancers

Based on a combination of ABS figures and other sources, Professor David Throsby has estimated a total of approximately 1250 dancers and choreographers were practising professionals in Australia in 2002. There are likely to be a further 2500–3000 individuals employed as dance teachers.

3.2.2 Producers

The term ‘producers’ tends to disguise the range of models and practice represented by even the small number of individuals interviewed, for example:

1. Strut (Gabrielle Sullivan)—an artist-led cooperative initiative in Perth, which has grown as a response to the lack of infrastructure support for independent practitioners
2. Performing Lines (Wendy Blacklock)—a leading agency engaged with touring performing arts work, but also providing development support for its ‘stable’ of artists
3. Keep Breathing (Jennifer Barry)—entrepreneuring a series of commissioned dance works, as well as providing advice and support to a number of independent dance artists and companies
4. One Extra (Amanda Card)—now focusing on support for a handful of experienced NSW artists, as well as supporting Reeldance, a film festival. One Extra is also extending from support confined to the development process to continuing support for touring, and extending the life of the work produced

3.2.3 Ausdance

Ausdance grew out of a 1977 conference in Melbourne, a response to a vision for a strong, diverse dance community, with an united voice on common concerns. A national committee was formed with representatives from each Australian state and territory.

After eight years of voluntary work to establish Ausdance, the Australia Council funded the national office in 1985, by then established in Canberra, and the same year Ausdance Victoria received the first state funding. Other state and territory funding followed over the next decade.

Ausdance National’s mission is to ‘facilitate, educate and inspire the dance community to reach its potential as a dynamic force within local, national and international communities’. Ausdance has a national office in the ACT, with a network of offices in each state and territory, except Tasmania. Each of the Ausdance offices receives financial support from their state or territory.

Ausdance National’s current aims include, among others:

- To provide a national voice in the development of dance and dance education in Australia.
- To establish a forum for exchange of information, ideas, expertise and resources in all areas of dance.
- To assist in the identification and promotion of all dance traditions which exist in Australia, in recognition of their cultural importance.
- To encourage awareness of, access to, and understanding of dance in communities throughout Australia.
- To relate with other organisations working in the arts, education and the communities.
- To establish opportunities for every child to have experience of dance.
- To work towards the development of curricula which would establish dance in the total arts program in education institutions.

- To promote and support tertiary dance programs.
- To promote and support programs providing for the certification of dancers and dance teachers intending to work in education institutions and related fields.

3.2.4 Spaces and presenters

Although Dancehouse in Melbourne and the Australian Choreographic Centre in Canberra have customised dance spaces there is no fully-resourced theatre space dedicated to and specifically designed for dance in Australia. The major performing arts centres include dance in their programs. The contribution of the MPAB companies to those programs was mapped during the Major Performing Arts Inquiry.

There are a number of other contemporary performing arts centres which have established a track record for presenting dance. These include:

- PICA, Perth
- The Performance Space, Sydney
- Sydney Opera House Studio
- Brisbane Powerhouse.